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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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BROADCASTING STORM WARNINGS

Wireless has revolutionized conditions of navigation in the South Seas, as it has done in other parts of the ocean. A token of the new era is the existence on many of the islands, including Samoa, Fiji and others, of radio stations which broadcast weather reports and storm warnings.

One of the most interesting of these installations is in the midst of the Coral Sea, off the east coast of Australia. Hurricanes are not uncommon in this region and they have caused great devastation of towns and shipping along the coast of Queensland. These storms are known locally as "willy-willies". Townsville, Queensland, was nearly destroyed by one of them in 1870, and several other places have suffered severely. In 1899 the pearling fleet was destroyed by a hurricane with a loss of 300 lives. In other cases large vessels have been sunk.

As most of these disturbances come from the eastward, the Australian government decided in 1921 to establish a storm-warning station off the coast. The project was fathered by Captain John K. Davis, of Antarctic exploring fame. The best site appeared to be Willis Island, a small islet about 250 miles from the mainland, but there was some uncertainty as to whether this spot would be habitable during a hurricane. In order to find out, Capt. Davis spent the months of a hurricane season on the island. His report was favorable, and accordingly the station which he established there was made permanent and it has functioned successfully ever since. It is equipped with radio and broadcasts reports of observations three times a day during the hurricane months.

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