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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE EYE OF THE STORM

One of the most remarkable features of the tropical cyclone is the "eye of the storm", described by Tennyson as "the whirlwind's heart of peace". It is rarely absent from a cyclone within the tropics, though it nearly always disappears when a storm of tropical origin passes into the temperate zone. Concerning this central calm area Prof. S. S. Visher writes:

"In most cyclones the calm is almost complete, but records reveal several instances in which light variable breezes or squalls occurred during the passage of the 'eye'. The waves of the sea are always high, confused and dangerous near the center of the storm because of the rapidly changing direction of the wind, and the meeting of waves from different directions."

The same writer says that, for the average storm, the duration of the calm, as the storm passes over a given place, is 20 to 40 minutes, but in many cases it amounts to an hour or more, and there is one record of a duration of eight hours. The size of the "eye" is very different in different storms, the average diameter being about 14 miles. In the central calm the rain ceases and the clouds almost disappear except for a thick bank around the horizon.

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