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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed February 4, 1929

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THE "LAW OF STORMS" IN COURT

Though the "law of storms", which sets forth the circulation of winds around cyclone centers, is not to be found in the statute books, it sometimes figures in legal proceedings. There was a case of this kind in the year 1881, when a marine court of inquiry was held at Singapore respecting the loss of the British steamer "Elgin". This vessel grounded on a shoal in the South China sea during a storm and was a total loss, though all but two of the persons on board escaped with their lives.

The evidence showed that the master, when the wind was blowing a gale from the north-northwest, kept his vessel headed north-northeast. He was thus carried across the front of the storm, not far from the center, when by heading south he would have soon passed beyond its influence. Part of the court's decision was as follows:

"We consider the loss of the vessel is due to the master's want of confidence in the recognized rules of the law of storms. . . . We are of the opinion that the master should be reprimanded for his want of judgment in persevering in his course of north-northeast, when he should have known that he was steering to the center or front of a cyclone."

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