

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed November 22, 1929.

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ADDISON AND THE "GREAT STORM"

Addison's poem "The Campaign," written in 1704 to celebrate Marlborough's victory at Blenheim, contains the following lines:

"So when an angel by divine command
With rising tempests shakes a guilty land,
Such as of late o'er pale Britannia pass'd,
Calm and serene he drives the furious blast:
And, pleas'd th' Almighty's orders to perform,
Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm."

The tempest that "o'er pale Britannia pass'd" occurred in the latter part of November, 1703, and lives in weather history as the Great Storm. It is supposed to have come nearer to equaling the violence of a tropical hurricane than any other tempest that ever visited the British Isles.

Macaulay, writing of the extraordinary effect produced by this comparison of the victorious general to an angel guiding the whirlwind, says it was due chiefly to the one line mentioning the disastrous storm that was then a vivid memory in the minds of the English people, and the recent book "Great Storms", by Laughton and Heddon, says:

"There can be little doubt that this passage, and particularly the one line in it, was the making of the poem, and, incidentally, of Addison. In the fashion of that age ... he was rewarded by an under-secretaryship of state; and as it seems unlikely that Addison's genius would have expanded in poverty as it did beneath the sunshine of fame and fortune, it may be held to be little if any exaggeration to say that it is thus to the Great Storm that we owe the 'Spectator'."

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