

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE "FLAREBACK"

The day before March 4, 1909, a cyclonic storm passed in a quite normal way across the eastern United States from Lake Erie to the Jersey coast and was apparently headed out to sea. The Weather Bureau forecaster in Washington predicted fair weather for President Taft's induction into office. The usual Inauguration Day crowds had flocked to the capital, and this official announcement was a cause of general rejoicing.

This was one of the cases--which occasionally occur, though rarely at so unfortunate a time--when the forecast is right but the weather is decidedly wrong. A well-regulated, decently behaved cyclone would have ^{proceeded.} along its course, and smiling skies would have followed in its wake when and where they were most wanted. This storm ignored the rules, stalled on the coast, and gave Washington a quasi-blizzard of wind and snow.

"It was a flareback," explained Professor Garriott, the unlucky forecaster; borrowing a term made familiar to the public by newspaper accounts of gun explosions on naval vessels; and the storm is still remembered under that nickname.

As Sir Napier Shaw, the former director of the British Meteorological Office, has recently written, "Every forecaster has his 'flarebacks.'" Shaw had one himself, though he made personally only three forecasts during his long term of office. He says:

"It had been raining in London for 48 hours and the forecaster came to tell me that in his view the map promised a continuance of the rain for another day. I said that continuous rain for three days was what Hume would have called a miracle, and he had better say it would stop raining. But it rained all the same."

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