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July 16, 1930

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed July 9, 1930

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WILLY-WILLIES

Tropical hurricanes, similar to those of the West Indian and Caribbean region, are rather frequent visitors to the northwest coast of Australia, where they are known as "willy-willies." They originate over the hot Timor Sea, and travel first to the southwest off the coast, sometimes causing heavy losses to the pearl fishers. Later they usually recurve to the southeast, and then the coast suffers. They generally strike inland between Condon and Fortescue and thence continue over the interior toward the Great Australian Bight. As is true of our American hurricanes, they rapidly lose their violence as they pass overland, and they are rather welcome in the interior on account of the rain they bring. They occur from November to April, being most numerous in January.

The most destructive willy-willy of recent times was the one that caused the loss of the S.S. "Koombana" with all her passengers and crew in March, 1912. This vessel left Hedland, Western Australia, on the morning of the 20th and probably ran into the worst of the storm a few hours later. Another vessel, the "Bullarra," which left the same port the same morning passed for half an hour through the calm center of the storm, where, the officers reported, there was not enough wind to blow out a match!

Two days before this storm was felt on the coast veteran pearl divers warned their employers that there were sudden changes of hot and cold water below the surface, which, together with a ground swell, they recognized as warnings of a blow. The storm was attended by torrential rain on the coast and for scores of miles inland.

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21st and B Sfs.,
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