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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"CYCLONE"

Any work on meteorology will tell you that a cyclone is a system of winds blowing around a center of low barometric pressure, regardless of whether the winds are violent or gentle. Many cyclones are, therefore, not storms. This is true even in the tropics, where mild or moderate cyclones are commoner than those cyclones that blow hard enough to be classed as hurricanes.

It so happens, however, that for some years after the word "cyclone" was coined (by H. Piddington in 1848) it was used mainly in connection with the dangerous revolving storms of the tropics. Thus it acquired the connotation of "severe storm" that it has had ever since in popular use, and the popular understanding of the term has so far influenced scientific usage that, as a British authority, W. Clement Ley, wrote more than forty years ago, "meteorologists have been disposed to apply the expressions 'cyclonic system' and 'cyclonic disturbance,' etc., to the gentler instances or stages of this kind of circulation, rather than the word 'cyclone' itself." At the time Ley wrote there had been a controversy over the word in the London Times. One objection raised to its use was that it terrified the ladies, but Ley remarks that "its equivalent, 'revolver,' would produce at least as alarming an effect."

At present British meteorologists have a strong preference for the word "depression," as applied to a cyclone of middle or high latitudes (an "extra-tropical" cyclone), while American meteorologists prefer the term "low," but stick to the absurd practice of writing it always in quotation marks or in small "caps."

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