

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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NEWSPAPER STORM WARNINGS

On February 14, 1877, the New York Herald sent the following cablegram to Europe: "Heavy gales may be expected about the 19th on the British and French coasts." This warning was based upon the fact that a storm had just left the shores of America headed east. The storm struck the coast of Ireland on the evening of the 19th and the center reached London the following morning. It caused much damage by land and sea.

Such was the auspicious beginning of a memorable enterprise. For two years the Herald continued to cable circumstantial warnings of storms expected to cross the Atlantic, and these were widely published in European newspapers as well as in bulletins of the official meteorological services. There was, however, a good deal of controversy about the value of such messages, and from what we now know about the erratic behavior of storms on the Atlantic it is evident that the enterprise was much too ambitious. An analysis of the results during the first eleven months of the undertaking, made by R. H. Scott in England, showed that only 45 per cent. of the predictions were fairly successful.

The project contained, however, the germ of an idea that was taken up in 1886 by the U. S. Signal Service, which then began sending daily cablegrams to London and Paris containing the results of meteorological observations at the American weather stations and reports of weather, storms, ice, derelicts, etc., on the western North Atlantic gathered from steamships arriving in New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

Today radio communication between ships and shore has made possible a vastly more efficient service of storm warnings for the North Atlantic and the western shores of Europe.

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