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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LORD ROBERTS' CYCLONE

During May 12-15, 1852, a cyclone traveled north from the middle of the Bay of Bengal, the center passing about 39 miles east of Calcutta. At the cantonment of Dum-Dum, a few miles from Calcutta, there was then stationed a young lieutenant of the Bengal Artillery, who was destined to become Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, one of Britain's greatest soldiers.

The storm came near cutting short Roberts' career. He was dining out the night it arrived, and started for home in intense darkness, attended by a native servant carrying a lantern, but the latter was blown out and the two men became separated. In his "Forty-One Years in India" Roberts tells of losing his way and eventually finding himself at the mess house, where windows and doors had been barred and where he was unable to attract the attention of those inside on account of the noise of the storm. He then sought his bungalow, half a mile away, and at last found shelter, after a hard struggle with the wind. There were many fallen trees along the road, and the flashes of lightning showed that "huge branches were being driven through the air like thistledown."

Next morning he found that "the native bazaar was completely wrecked, looking as if it had suffered a furious bombardment, and great havoc had been made amongst the European houses, not a single verandah or outside shutter being left in the station. As I walked to the mess, I found the road almost impassable from fallen trees, and dead birds, chiefly crows and kites, were so numerous that they had to be carried off in cartloads. How I had made my way to my bungalow without accident the night before was difficult to imagine."

Any one of the flying missiles that night might have deprived the world of "Bobs." And unnumbered are the storms that have been potential or actual shapers of human history.

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