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† WHY THE WEATHER †

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VALUABLE KNOWLEDGE FOR MARINERS

The "law of storms" is the term applied to the principle that tropical hurricanes and the widespread storms of other latitudes have both a progressive and a quasi-rotary motion, the winds turning counter-clockwise in the northern hemisphere and clockwise in the southern. It is also applied to the body of rules for the safe navigation of ships encountering such storms. The knowledge of this law, which became general among sailors in the middle of the last century, has saved a great number of vessels from destruction. Its value is indicated by the following episode, recorded in a recent British publication:

"Upon the 16th of September, 1782, one of the greatest marine disasters on record occurred as the result of a storm. A large convoy of naval and merchant ships, amounting to ninety-three sail, in about lat. 42 degrees N., long. 48 degrees W., encountered a storm, which increased rapidly from the east-southeast. The fleet, fully prepared for bad weather, hove to, but unfortunately on the starboard tack, which was the wrong one, for early the next day all the ships were caught aback by a shift of wind of terrific violence to north-northwest. Five of the six naval ships and a large proportion of the merchantmen were lost. Upwards of three thousand seamen perished - and all directly on account of lack of knowledge regarding 'storm sailing.' These and similar catastrophes of the period on a smaller scale go to show how vitally necessary it was for a law of storms to be evolved, in order that lives and property at sea might be reasonably safe-guarded."

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