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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

STORM-SAILING RULES

All big storms encountered by sailors are traveling whirlwinds, in which the winds are directed spirally around the center of low barometer--"counter-clockwise" in the northern hemisphere and "clockwise" in the southern. Hence certain rules for handling ships in a storm area in such a manner as to escape the worst of the blow. Nowadays no intelligent navigator doubts the value of these rules, but once many of them did. Thus the skipper in Conrad's tale "Typhoon," after reading the rules for storm-sailing, becomes "contemptuously angry with such a lot of words and with so much advice, all head-work and supposition," and says to his chief officer:

"If a fellow was to believe all that's in there he would be running most of his time all over the sea trying to get behind the weather."

A recent British writer records the experiences of two vessels caught in a tropical cyclone in the days when some mariners profited by storm-sailing rules while others ignored them. The ships "Henry Tanner" and "Sea Park", both bound for England, encountered bad weather to the southward of Mauritius on January 13, 1850. The former was loaded with sugar, and the latter had 200 troops aboard. In the log of the "Henry Tanner" no mention is made of a barometer. If one was aboard, apparently it was not consulted. The master sailed blindly into the worst of the storm, lost a large part of his cargo, and had to put back to Mauritius to repair heavy damages to the ship. On the other hand:

"The 'Sea Park,' noting a falling barometer with wind increasing fast from the northward, hove to on the port tack until the 15th of January, when the wind being southwest and decreasing, with a rising barometer, she resumed her voyage to England." She escaped damage and serious delay because her captain watched the weather and observed a few simple rules based on the "law of storms."

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21st and Constitution Ave.
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