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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed October 1, 1932

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KEEPING WATCH OF HURRICANES

Thanks to telegraphy, and especially to radiotelegraphy, no West India hurricane gets well started on its potentially destructive career without being reported to the weather forecasting centers at Washington, Havana, San Juan and elsewhere, and from the time it is reported it is kept almost continuously under observation. The cooperation of shipboard observers is especially valuable in this connection. Throughout the season of possible hurricanes -- from June 1 to November 30 -- from 25 to 100 ships plying the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico send weather reports, at fixed hours, twice a day, and when a hurricane develops additional reports are sent. All such reports are promptly charted at headquarters.

As these storms travel slowly, and their typical courses are known in a general way from past experience, the existing system of radio reports makes it possible to warn a threatened region long before the storm arrives; and though, in a good many cases, the warning proves to be a "false alarm," because of an unforeseen change in the direction of the storm's movement, it hardly ever happens that a storm strikes a region where no warning has been received. The one weak point in the system is that, as all vessels equipped with radio receive frequent bulletins of the storm's progress, shipmasters endeavor to give it as wide a berth as possible, and thus it often happens that there are no vessels at points where their reports would be most valuable.

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