

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE LOWEST BAROMETER READING

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Authority on Meteorology.

In the Journal Officiel of Madagascar for March 28, 1899, appeared an article describing a severe cyclone, as experienced at the town of Vohémar, written by the local administrator at that place, M. Faucon. The lowest reading of the author's barometer during the passage of the storm was stated as 628.9 millimeters (24.76 inches), which is decidedly lower than any other sea-level reading of a barometer ever reported in the world. This remarkable figure was quoted the same year in the Annales Hydrographiques (Paris) and eventually found its way into the Monthly Weather Review -- the official journal of the U.S. Weather Bureau -- for March, 1911.

Now more than 34 years after M. Faucon, who was an ex-naval officer and probably read his barometer correctly, published his account of the storm, I learn from the director of the meteorological service in Madagascar that the reading above quoted was a printer's error for 728.9 millimeters -- quite a different story!

More trustworthy is a reading of 665.1 millimeters (26.18 inches), observed aboard the Dutch steamship "Saparoea" while passing through the center of a typhoon 400 miles east of Luzon August 18, 1927. Probably this is a "world record." The ship had a barograph (an instrument that makes a continuous automatic record of pressure), but the record-sheet was not graduated for so low a reading. The pen passed off the sheet, and readings were then made from a mercurial barometer. The lowest was checked by several persons.

Even lower pressures doubtless occur in tornadoes, but they have never been measured.

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