

CHATS WITH THE WEATHER MAN.

Friday, October 31, 1930.

ANNOUNCEMENT: This is the time for our chat with the weather man. But don't start to shiver yet. Our old friend, Ob. Server, tells us there was nothing cold or chilling about his talk this week with one of the specialists of the United States Weather Bureau. The subject was a genial one, dealing with tropic isles and pleasant breezes ---- But you tell them, Mr. Ob. Server -----

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Before I take you down to the West Indies, I want you to meet Dr. Fassig. Dr. Oliver L. Fassig, as the new chief of the climatological division of the United States Weather Bureau. For the past fifteen years, he has been the big weather man of the West Indies, with headquarters at San Juan, Porto Rico.

His territory, you might say, extended three thousand miles East and West; and two thousand miles, North and South. It included the entire West Indies. Just a few months ago, he completed ten years of work as the representative of the U. S. Weather Bureau in organizing a rainfall reporting service in which six hundred stations of forty nationalities now cooperate. ---- but more about that later. -----

From what Dr. Fassig says, the tropics are not so hot; literally speaking.

He showed me, that it is really cooler in the West Indies in the summer time than it is in Washington, D. C. I say he "showed" me; because he had the temperature and wind day by day at San Juan and Washington charted, so you could see at a glance the exact picture of the two climates side by side.

There are more hot days in summer in Washington than in San Juan. There are also more cold days. The swing from hot to cold is bigger. In the tropics, the temperature is more even. There are not so many hot days, but more steady warm days.

That steady warmth, however, is relieved by the wind changes. The wind movement is greater in the tropics in the summer time than in middle-latitude places like Washington. The wind at Washington averages about

five miles an hour, in summer, while in Porto Rico, and other West Indian islands, the average is twelve to fourteen miles an hour. The humidity, Dr. Fassig admits, is greater in the tropic islands, but the wind also relieves a person of the inconvenience which he might otherwise feel on that score.

Another thing about the weather in the tropics, Dr. Fassig set me straight on, is the rainfall. I always thought there was a rainy season; but he says even the rainy season is not so rainy as many of us seem to think. There are very few umbrellas on the islands. When a shower comes up, the folks just step into a door-way or under a tree, and wait a few minutes, when it is all over and the sun is out again.

In Porto Rico, while they don't have any rainy season, they do have a wet and dry side to the island. One town on the dry side of the mountains has 35 inches of rainfall a year, while another town on the mountains only fifteen miles away has 125 inches of rainfall a year.

Of course, rainfall is important in the West Indies. In this year of the Big Drought in many of our States, we don't have to be reminded that rainfall is important to agriculture. In relatively undeveloped agricultural country like many of the West Indian islands, it is even more important to know about the rainfall than it is here.

Growing of crops is largely a matter of rainfall and rainfall distribution. That's true of sugar cane, for instance, in the cultivation of which millions of American capital is invested in Cuba.

Temperature is not so important as rainfall in determining the agricultural possibilities of the tropics, because the temperatures never get low enough to damage most crops. But the very constancy of temperature conditions in the West Indies, Dr. Fassig says, makes them a favorite hunting ground for weather scientists; especially those studying long period swings in weather conditions. Where conditions are more nearly uniform, any variation from the normal is more readily detected.

Then, too, the West Indies is the region over which tropical hurricanes pass on the way to our coast.

Up until ten years ago, anybody wanting information as to rainfall and temperatures as an aid to the solution of the thousand-and-one practical and theoretical weather problems involving conditions in the West Indies could not get it, without an immense amount of labor involving years of correspondence.

In 1919, the United States Weather Bureau set Dr. Fassig at work knitting together a complete system of rainfall reports to give the day by day picture of the weather conditions throughout the entire wide area including the West Indies islands, and the coasts of northern South America and eastern Central America. Dr. Fassig visited every island and secured the cooperation of officials of each of the forty nations which own territory in that vast and varied region. In the first preliminary survey of the field, every country involved promptly expressed approval of the plan.

Starting with sixty rainfall stations with headquarters in Porto Rico, the system has been extended until there are now six hundred stations reporting the daily rainfall to San Juan. Cuba has 100 stations; Jamaica 30; Haiti 50; San Domingo 75; the Bahamas 15 to 20; every island of the Lesser Antilles has at least one station. Our own little islands of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, of course, have rainfall stations. The Barbadoes have 25; St. Lucia 15, Guadalupe 15, Dominica 15. Trinidad, and the northern coast of South America down to British Guiana and Dutch Guiana and around to the Panama Canal Zone with 30 stations and others along the Central American coast.

The rainfall records reported by this great net-work of tropical stations, Dr. Fassig tells me, are gathered together and published each month at San Juan, Porto-Rico. Now for the first time, the actual daily rainfall of the West Indies is available to commercial interests and weather scientists interested in knowing conditions on these many tropic isles and surrounding seas and lands

Shortly before coming to Washington to take up his new duties, Dr. Fassig, made an inspection trip from San Juan to Dutch Guiana, South America, by airplane in five days. A few years ago, when this work was started that same trip took five weeks.

Since then Porto Rico has become a cross-roads for mail and passenger planes plying between the United States and South America.

But the airplane weather service of the San Juan station of the United States Weather Bureau is another story. Dr. Fassig was showing me a chart of the changes in the depths of the famous trade winds, as they affect flyers. Dr. Fassig is a great man for charts ----- but more about that some other time.

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ANNOUNCEMENT: Old Ob. Server has just told you about the recently completed rainfall reporting system of the West Indies as outlined to him by Dr. Oliver L. Fassig, chief of the climatological division of the United States Weather Bureau. This Station \_\_\_\_\_ will present another of these chats with the Weather Man two weeks from today.

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# **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

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