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? WHY THE WEATHER

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By Dr. Charles F. Brooks
of Clark University.

OIL DISASTERS BY LIGHTNING

The great oil fires near San Luis Obispo and Brea early in April, and at Bakersfield, California, late in the month were set by lightning. At Bakersfield there was such a downpour of rain that the protecting embankments about the oil tanks were gullied through and the whole district made so muddy that automobiles and men could not get at the fire. This does not sound like the right kind of weather for California, and, indeed, it is seldom experienced in this severity. According to Alexander, thunderstorms occurred in April at San Luis Obispo to the number of only 3 in 20 years, and at Fresno (the nearest Weather Bureau station to Bakersfield) 16 times. This April there were 5 to 10 times the average number. The first ones came with two intense cyclones. The wetness of the ground thereafter provided the atmosphere with abundant vapor, and local thunderstorms followed. Late in the month there was a particularly hot spell, the temperatures in Fresno running 90 or over for 5 consecutive days, and once reaching 98. Cold air aloft under such conditions produces the great overturnings that make thunderstorms.

The property loss of upwards of 20 million dollars in these fires establishes a new record for lightning damage to structures. A study by Covert of lightning fire damage in the United States for 1915-1922 reveals the fact that the losses from these lightning fires in California in April, 1926, were double the average annual loss for the entire United States. It appears that California's losses by lightning during the past ten or a dozen years now exceed those of Illinois and Texas, combined, heretofore the top-notchers.

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