

Released on receipt  
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July 6, 1928.

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed June 29, 1928.

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DROUGHT IN BRAZIL

This year's drought in northeastern Brazil is reported to have cost about 100 lives; a small toll of disaster compared with the records of several previous droughts in the same region. The area afflicted with these recurrent disasters embraces about 100,000 square miles just back of the coast in the "shoulder" of the country having Cape San Roque at its northeastern angle. The general rainfall of the district averages about 32 inches a year, mostly concentrated in a rainy season of six or seven months' duration. Every five or six years the amount falls far below the normal, and sometimes there are two or three dry years in succession. Whenever this happens the people abandon the rural districts and flock into the coast towns. In the worst cases hundreds or thousands die of hunger and thirst in attempting to escape, and the mortality of livestock is enormous.

Vast irrigation works have been planned for this region and some large reservoirs have been constructed, but the achievements in this line up to date are utterly inadequate to meet the situation.

The cause of these recurrent droughts is something of a meteorological puzzle. It is evidently connected with some large-scale deflection of air currents from their normal courses, the nature of which will be better understood when the upper-air soundings recently inaugurated in the region concerned have been carried on for several years.

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21st and B Sts.,  
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