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August 10, 1929

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed August 3, 1929.

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THE SCOURGE OF DROUGHT

With the doubtful exception of floods, droughts have, in the aggregate, cost more human lives and caused more misery and destruction than any other disasters of atmospheric origin. In their ultimate effects--as, for example, in provoking wars, migrations and social upheavals--they have undoubtedly played a much greater part in human affairs than have all other weather disasters combined.

The days of famines due to drought are by no means over. Russia and Persia have experienced them on a stupendous scale within the past decade. China, which suffers from them at frequent intervals, is enduring a terrible one now. In the past they were not only commonplace events, but were viewed complacently by philosophers and administrators, as a natural check on the growth of population.

Until England shouldered the white man's burden in India the droughts of that country took an enormous toll of life. In the years 917-18 there was a drought in Kashmir. A contemporary description of its effects says: "One could scarcely see the water in the Vitasta (Jhelum), entirely covered as the river was with corpses soaked and swollen by the water in which they had long been lying. The land became densely covered with bones in all directions, until it was like one great burying-ground, causing terror to all beings."

Nowadays Indian droughts are not destructive of human life, but they do vast material damage and impose huge expense upon the country for relief measures, to say nothing of the perennial cost of maintaining by far the largest system of irrigation works to be found anywhere in the world.

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21st and B Sts.,  
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