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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE PROBLEM OF ARIDITY

About one-third of the globe, with a rainfall averaging less than 10 inches a year, is actually desert, while another third, with less than 20 inches, is unfit or barely fit for agriculture. The existence of this vast area of unprofitable land is a thorn in the flesh of humanity, and there is an almost universal feeling, based partly on sentiment and partly on economic considerations, that more and more of it should be reclaimed and made fit for use and habitation. This feeling has found expression in the United States in the building of many costly dams, reservoirs and irrigation canals in selected regions of the arid and semi-arid West.

These elaborate installations appear, with some exceptions, to justify their existence on several grounds. They have brought extremely fertile soil under cultivation, they have permitted the raising on a large scale of crops that could not be so successfully raised, with or without irrigation, in other parts of the country, and, by making the land habitable, they have promoted the development of various industries and the utilization of natural resources that might otherwise have remained untouched.

Doubtless the conquest of the desert will go on, yet it seems likely that the next generation of Americans will devote an even larger share of attention to the task of protecting regions of abundant rainfall from the occasional disaster of drought than to attempt to eke out a normally scanty rainfall elsewhere. Western Europe has set us an admirable example in the irrigation of humid lands. Thus France, with a rainfall normally sufficient in all parts of the country for the needs of agriculture, irrigates more than six million acres of her soil, while Italy, another generally well-watered land, irrigates four and a half million.

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