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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed January 13, 1931

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

A RAINFALL MYTH

In many parts of the world the opinion popularly prevails that the rainfall has conspicuously diminished in comparatively recent times. One of these regions is South Africa. Droughts are frequent in some parts of that region and each severe drought brings forth bitter complaints on the part of the farmers and graziers concerning the alleged progressive desiccation of the country. A few years ago there was much talk of a scheme, promoted by the late Prof. E. H. L. Schwarz, to create great artificial lakes in the Kalahari Desert in the hope of increasing the rainfall.

Meteorological observations in the region concerned are too meager and cover too short a period to afford any positive evidence for or against the supposed change of climate. There has undoubtedly been a marked deterioration in the character of the country as related to farming and grazing, but the explanation appears to be found in a process that has operated in the same way in many parts of China, North America and other countries -- soil erosion.

The practice was once universal and is still common of driving sheep and goats every evening into walled enclosures or kraals, in order to protect them from jackals, wild dogs, leopards and other predatory animals. This practice of "kraaling," as it is called, has been a potent cause of erosion. A recent writer says: "The constant trampling loosened the soil, destroyed much of the bush, and created innumerable little paths. During the dry and hot periods much of the soil covering, reduced to dust, was blown away. When the rain came the surface became scored by small water-courses and a defined river system was formed where previously the surface drainage had merely spread in a thin film over the face of the country and irrigated it."

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