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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed August 6, 1931

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A THREE-YEAR DROUGHT

The great drought of last year in the United States has led meteorologists to review the history of previous American droughts, and a useful summary of information on this subject has recently been published by A. J. Henry of the Weather Bureau. Severe droughts occurred in 1854; 1856-57; 1860; 1863-64; 1870; 1881; 1893-95; 1901; 1911; 1916; and 1924. The one of 1860, we are told, was the most severe yet recorded in the United States. As to that of 1893-95 Prof. Henry says:

"This was one of the outstanding droughts of the nineteenth century as measured by its duration, the area involved and the shortage of rainfall. It was not particularly intense for any consecutive period, but may be characterized as being a three-year period of generally deficient rainfall throughout the country. Its manifestations began in the summer months of 1893; there was some relief from the shortage of rainfall in the autumn months, but as a whole the year was one of deficient rains except in New England, the Lake region and North Dakota. The summer months of 1894 were very dry, especially July and August; September, however, yielded substantial rains and soil moisture was held up by fairly ample precipitation in the winter months of 1894-95. The months of July and August, 1894, were especially dry in the Ohio valley, the South Atlantic states and Florida, the Gulf states, the Missouri valley and the middle and upper portions of the Mississippi valley. In 1895 the regions of greatest deficiency apparently were shifted to the middle and south Atlantic states, thus giving an apparent drift of the droughty conditions from west to east. Notwithstanding the great and widespread shortage in precipitation during 1894-95, the staple crops of those years did not fall much below the yield of a normal year."

The most striking economic effect of this drought was the collapse of the spectacular agricultural "boom" that had prevailed in the preceding years in Kansas and other Plains states.

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