A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
March 15, 1932

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed March 8, 1932

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OCEAN CURRENTS AND WEATHER

It is an interesting coincidence that while extravagant assertions concerning the part played by the Gulf Stream in shaping the character of the past winter in the eastern United States were going the rounds, and while scientific authorities were, quite properly, pointing out the fallacies involved in these assertions, an extraordinary weather event, plausibly ascribed to the effects of ocean currents, occurred in a distant part of the world.

Late last month press dispatches reported torrential rains on the so-called "rainless" coast of Peru. Such rains have happened before in that normally arid region. The most remarkable case was in 1925, when numerous downpours and resulting floods wrought immense damage in the coastal towns and villages. The proximate reason for these anomalies in Peruvian weather appears to be a weakening or shifting of the cold Humboldt Current, which usually washes the coast, and its temporary replacement by a warm current from the north, known as "El Niño." When the Humboldt Current is in its usual location, the winds along the coast blow from a relatively cool ocean to a warm land; their relative humidity is lowered, and they yield no rain. When the warm current displaces the cold one, the winds from the ocean are warm and any cooling they undergo on land, as a result of convection or otherwise, is likely to result in rain. Such, at least, is the best hypothesis on the subject now available.

Ocean currents unquestionably have important relations to weather, though these relations are by no means so simple and direct as the man in the street supposes.

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