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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed November 8, 1932

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Authority on Meteorology.

THE WORLD'S DESERTS

According to Prof. C.B. Fawcett, an English geographer, the deserts of the globe have a total area of some 22,000,000 square miles, which is nearly two-fifths of the whole land surface. This area includes "dry deserts," in which the rainfall is insufficient for agriculture, amounting to 12,000,000 square miles, and "cold deserts," in which heat is insufficient, amounting to 10,000,000 square miles. In the dry deserts it is estimated that only somewhere between 2 and 5 per cent. of the land can be made to support crops with the aid of irrigation. For climatic and other reasons about 40 per cent. of the land area of the earth is desert, 30 per cent. cultivable land and 30 per cent. poor grazing land, forest, marsh, waste and high mountain.

Rainfall, says this authority, is insufficient for agriculture in cool temperate lands if less than 8 inches a year, in warm temperate lands if less than 12 inches, and in hot lands if less than 18 inches.

There are some relatively small and scattered areas in which the land is uncultivable on account of excessive rainfall; i. e., more than 50 inches a year in cool temperate lands, more than 80 inches a year in warm temperate lands, and more than 100 inches a year in hot lands. The northwest margins of the British Isles illustrate the effects of excessive rainfall, with no dry season. Such a rainfall produces areas of peat bogs that are as much deserts as the sub-arctic tundra or the tropical Sahara.

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