

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt  
but intended for use  
March 8, 1933

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed March 1, 1933

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

IS ASIA DRYING UP?

The belief is widespread that Central Asia has been gradually drying up for ages. According to Chinese tradition, the sandy wastes of that region were once the bed of a great sea, called Han Hoi. Later a flourishing civilization occupied the same region. In Chinese Turkestan the vast desert of Takla Makan conceals rich cities and the remains of a highly cultured people, the destruction of which has been attributed to progressive desiccation.

In recent years a number of authorities have strongly controverted this belief and it is convincingly refuted in a recent article by a Russian, P.S. Nazaroff, who lived in Turkestan for many years. He says:

"The country became dry far back in its geological history. Since then the amount of atmospheric precipitation has varied periodically owing to various factors. L. Berg's observations on the level of the Sea of Aral have shown not only that that part of Asia is not drying up at the present time, but that the amount of precipitation is actually increasing. Central Asia has, in fact, been an arid region since the Tertiary Epoch. On three sides there rise the loftiest of mountain chains. These completely isolate the region from the atmospheric moisture that comes from the ocean.

"It is not the operation of nature that has ruined the land, but the acts of man himself. Nowhere else in the world, perhaps, is the fate of human life so completely dependent upon an artificial water supply as in Central Asia. Instances occur in Turkestan to this day of the transformation of a flourishing district into a desert or of a desert into a land of plenty by the destruction or construction of irrigation canals. The first act of the invader in Central Asia has always been to cut off the water supply and to destroy the canals. Then the towns and countryside become an easy prey. If the population is wiped out too, the locality is turned into a desert forever. It would be quite enough, for instance, to cut the canals of Bos Su and Zakh for the whole of the flourishing district of Tashkent to be converted into a sun-baked desert in the course of a year or two."

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

-----  
SCIENCE SERVICE  
21st and Constitution Ave.  
Washington, D.C.