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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DROUGHT ON THE PLAINS

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

"Under the glare of the hot sun or the blast of the hot winds the crops wither; slowly at first and only in the heat of the day. Toward evening they revive, and by morning they present themselves erect and courageous to another day. But as the days go by they droop more and more until finally the night fails to revive them, and they start the new day exhausted. The gardens go first; then the corn, and finally, if the drought continues, the sorghums and the cotton follow. Stock water runs low, the grasses parch up in the pastures and the cattle begin to suffer.

"It is a catastrophe that catches everybody in a net. The farmers have borrowed from the banker or run accounts with the merchants, who have borrowed from the banker. The cattleman has used the bank's money to finance his herd, hoping to fatten his 'stuff' and sell on a good market. A drought never produces a panic. It comes too insidiously and slowly. The disaster is never sudden but drawn out over days, weeks and months. The suffering is no less terrible because it is fraught with the persistent hope of rain. 'Every dry spell ends with a rain' is a folk-saying that none disputes. And the smallest cloud in the burnished sky offers hope -- until at last there is no room for hope."

Such is drought on the Plains -- where it is now raging -- as depicted by Prof. Walter Prescott Webb in his book "The Great Plains."

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21st and Constitution Ave.  
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