Clements on Drought Periods and Climatic Cycles

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Dr. Clements refers briefly to the work of Douglass in relating the annual rings of trees to rainfall and the sun-spot cycle as suggesting the possibility of using the latter for forecasting the rainfall from year to year.

He also adds, seemingly in confirmation of Douglass's work, the statement that "practically all the groups of trees studied gave a clear record of growth cycles corresponding closely to the sun-spot cycle. They confirmed the hypothesis that years of sun-spot maxima were generally marked by deficient rainfall, and those of sun-spot minima by rainfall above the normal."

A preliminary examination of the rainfall records of the States west of the Mississippi River showed that the two major drought periods of 1893-1895 and 1870-1873 coincided with sun-spot maxima. It was also evident that abundant precipitation had occurred frequently, if not regularly at times of sun-spot minima and from these facts the inference was drawn that the spot minimum of 1913 would be accompanied by an excess of rainfall and that the spot maximum of 1917 would likewise be associated with a deficit in the rainfall. Partial confirmation of these inferences led the author to make the following statements:

The most attractive and promising feature of the summer's work has been the checking and tracing of the course of the present climatic cycle. The second recorded absolute minimum of no sun spots occurred in 1913 and served as the focus of a period of exceptional rainfall in that year. The drought of the present summer is preceded from both the Western and Mountain States suggests the beginning of the dry phase of the cycle. Its effect upon the carrying capacity of the ranges and upon the production of dry forage has been critical. Whether it be followed by the fulfillment of several dry years or not, it has furnished further confirmation of the fact that all grazing and dry farming must be based upon the recurrence of dry periods; in both a scientific system of expansion and contraction must be devised to prevent disaster during dry years. If the next two or three years prove to be dry in harmony with the maximum of the sun-spot cycle, the possibility of anticipating dry seasons will be greatly enhanced. In the field of forestation much evidence has been obtained to show that planting is successful only during wet phases and that natural reproduction occurs practically only during such phases.

The investigations of climatic cycles has been continued from both the biological and astronomical approach. The former gains interest from the fact that the years 1916, 1917, and 1918 have in general been years of drought in the West and especially the Southwest. This was suggested as a probability upon the approach of the sun-spot maximum in 1916. The maximum was passed in 1917 and attention is now centered upon the expected increase of rainfall generally as the sun-spot minimum is approached during the next four or five years. It is proposed to follow the biological aspects as seen in growth, reproduction, and abundance as closely as possible and to correlate these with the climatic phases. Striking evidence of this effect has been obtained during the drouth of the past two years. By far the most important experiment, however, is the relation of the sun-spot cycle to the climatic and growth cycles. There appears to be little question that in the 60 years 1848-1907 there were more wet than dry years, a condition directly contrary to that which is the rule in the United States, but whether this condition is common to northern Europe is not at this time known.

The concluding chapters of Dr. Douglass's work are devoted to a discussion of "Methods of Periodic Analysis," "Cycles" with an appendix giving tables of mean tree growth extending back to 1306 B. C. The book should be read by all students of weather periodicities.

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