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EARTHQUAKE FORECASTS¹

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INTRODUCTION

THERE was a time when the weather belonged to the gods. Storms and drought were inflicted on man in punishment or for vengeance, man strove to avert them by sacrifice or prayer, and the priest was his intercessor. Now the weather belongs to nature, and the priestly robe has fallen on the Weather Bureau. Man's new agent, however, is not an intercessor; he does nothing to placate; he makes no attempt to control the course of nature; but inspired by science he foretells the coming changes so that his lay client may take warning and be prepared. The crops are harvested before the rain, the herds escape from the lowland before the flood, the ships reach harbor before the gale; and man chants a hymn of praise to science.

There was a time when the earthquake was equally enveloped in mystery, and was forecast in the enigmatic phrases of the astrologer and oracle; and now that it too has passed from the shadow of the occult to the light of knowledge, the people of the civilized earth—the lay clients of the seismologist—would be glad to know whether the time has yet come for a scientific forecast of the impending tremor. The outlook for earthquake forecasting is my theme to-day.

As you are aware, I am not a seismologist. My point of view is that of the geologist and general geographer. I speak as

¹ Presidential address to the American Association of Geographers, read at Baltimore, Md., January 1, 1909.

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