

SUNSPOTS AND RADIO

Compasses went wild and transatlantic radio reception was impossible for hours during the last week-end, and all because spots appeared on the sun, 93,000,000 miles away. No doubt mariners must have noted the occasional strange behavior of their compass needles long before Galileo discovered spots on the sun; but it was not until the telegraph, the transatlantic cable and radio were introduced that sunspots began to interfere with the lives of business men. The reason for the interference became clear enough when it was discovered that sunspots are vast electrical tornados and that they bombard the earth with electrons. Sensitive measuring instruments quiver in a hundred magnetic observatories whenever these solar storms rage. Terrestrial magnetism also varies and thus testifies to the fact that the earth and sun are linked not only by gravitation but by electricity.

Sunspots invariably make news in these days of radio. They also revive belief that the sun controls human destiny. A recent study made at Harvard leaves no doubt that despite the advance of science a goodly number of supposedly enlightened Americans are convinced that the positions of the planets are not to be ignored when the house is to be painted, vacations planned or Susie and Bill are sent to school. Even some scientists are not quite immune to this kind of fatalism. Their attempts to correlate sunspots with events on this earth have an air of specious objectivity. Correlated statistics have their place in accounting for the present and predicting the future. But when the honest statistician is asked to juggle a hundred variables, which include the rising tide of insanity, a shortage of aluminum and the health of some dictator, he simply throws up his hands and decides that beyond affecting the earth's magnetism, creating more magnificent auroral displays and affecting electrical communication, sunspots can be ignored.