

PROGRAM.....

RELEASE.....

Chats by the Weather Man.

Wed. Dec. 15, 1926.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Do you believe in signs? Do you think it means a long, cold winter when the squirrels lay in a heavy store of nuts? And does it spell an early snowfall to you when the geese fly South earlier than usual? Doubtless you're among the millions of folks who DO believe in signs. But the Weather Man says some signs don't mean much. And in his Chat this evening, he's going to tell you why. So hitch your chairs up 'round the fire and listen.

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The seasoned skipper of a trim coasting schooner -- which plied along the North Atlantic coast -- believed in signs. And although he depended greatly on the Weather Bureau for information, he often compared the official weather forecasts with predictions of his own, based on signs he'd used for years. One day he confessed to a weather man how he knew when an "Easterly" was coming.

"I always know when an 'Easterly' is coming because the loons along the coast line holler louder than usual", he said.

He said another good sign of an east wind was when the sun burnt the back of his neck.

One day, the passenger steamer, "Bay State", was lying at the wharf in Portland, Maine, while the Captain waited for news regarding a bad storm which was reported along the North Atlantic coast. As the "Bay State" rocked peacefully, the impatient passenger confessed to one another that if the Captain had the courage of his bold father, he'd start out and get them to their destination without further delay. As the passengers thus bitterly gossiped, the Captain sat locked in his cabin -- declining to talk to any more angry passengers.

The passengers grew more and more impatient. The Captain more and more determined to stay snugly in harbor until it was safe to sail. The Weather Bureau sent in warnings that a storm of great intensity was howling and whirling off Cape Cod, moving northeast. The Captain said he would not sail under the circumstances.

All night long the storm raged. In the morning news came to the "Bay State" that the steamship, "Portland", was wrecked by the storm. Everyone on board was lost. The "Portland" ran alternate trips with the "Bay State."

Then came the impatient passengers to see the Captain whose trust in scientific signs had saved their lives. Lining up on the deck, they praised the skipper for his good judgment. Then they complimented the Weather Bureau on its accurate, everyday services to those who sail the sea.

For there are signs and signs, you see. The skipper trusts to a burnt neck to advise him of the coming of an "Easterly". Another lies at anchor -- while his passengers fume and scold -- because the Weather Bureau advises him to sit tight until it's safe to lift anchor and merrily steam away.

Scientific weather forecasting is only about 75 years old, you know. While Benjamin Franklin knew some of the fundamental principles on which modern forecasting is based, folks in Franklin's day depended mostly on a vast quantity of weather lore that has no more scientific backing than the "Charleston".

One of the most popular weather fallacies is that the moon has a great influence on the weather. Folks who take stock in the moon theory, often forget that the moon sheds its beams impartially on all the rest of mother earth, as well as on their own particular community. So, if fair weather comes with the changing of the moon, there must be fair weather in all the vast territory lighted by the changing moon. Well, it's clear that it can't be fair weather everywhere at once. It's very likely that the moon has influenced the prevailing systems of courtship more than it has the precipitation that falls on the lovers' heads.

Another popular fallacy -- a more recent one, by the way -- is that the cutting down of the forests has reduced the rainfall. Our weather men in different sections of the West report that the belief is very popular in these areas.

Well, most folks know that the main source -- and about the only material source -- of moisture on the earth is the sea. This moisture is carried inland only by the winds. Mountains that lift themselves in the path of these moisture-laden winds, have well-watered slopes on their seaward side. But the valleys on the leeward side are comparatively dry.

Now, the force and direction of the winds is regulated, not by the forests, but by the distribution of air pressure over great areas -- often a thousand and miles away. These areas may be thousands of miles in diameter. Since this is the case, the forces that produce rainfall may have their start a thousand miles from the place where the rain actually occurs.

It's true that wide, sweeping forests once covered parts of Arizona and New Mexico. The thousands of petrified tree trunks there prove that. Well, these sections are now almost rainless. But they are rainless not because man

cut down these forests. The forests were dead half a million years before man came to those parts. The forests died because the moisture failed. Why the moisture failed, I don't know.

Many people believe:

That a long, cold winter is heralded when the squirrels lay up a heavy store of nuts;

That the season will be a wet one when the musk rat builds his house at a higher elevation than usual;

That it's a sign of an early winter when the wild geese fly honking Southward, earlier in the season than usual;

An that thick corn husks indicate a cold winter.

In other words, many people give the corn plant greater power to predict the weather than they, themselves, possess. I wouldn't like it to be thought that a musk rat is wiser than I, would you?

Investigations into these signs have shown that they have no foundation in fact. The squirrels lay up a bountiful supply of nuts when there are lots of nuts to be had. The musk rat determines the elevation of his mound by the height of the water at the time he begins to build his mound. If the water's high, the musk rat builds his mound high. An early storm may send the wild geese flying steadily to the South -- but it might clear up after they go! Corn husks are thick or thin according to the weather that prevailed while the husks were growing. It's pretty well established that the weather for 1927 can't be foretold by the state of the weather in 1926.

It's said that the word got about in a certain section that all the signs pointed to a hard, hard winter. The corn husks were thick. The geese had flown South. And so on. So the hardware dealers laid in a heavy stock of blow torches. They expected to have a big business in thawing out pipes. Well, the winter came. And it was the mildest in 36 years. That probably shook their faith in long range sign reading.

Of course, some of the well worn weather sayings have a lot of truth in them. For instance, this one: "Rainbow in the morning, sailor take warning. Rainbow at night, sailor's delight", has probably set a lot of sails in the past and sent countless ships a sailing. It can be proved that there's considerable truth in this saying.

And here's another that the sailors know: "Mackerel sky and mare's tails make lofty ships carry low sails". That's how it goes. Now "mackerel sky and

mare's tails" mean that cirro-cumulus clouds are present in the sky. And these clouds usually mean rain and high wind. Every sailor knows enough to furl some, or all, of the sails when a high wind's threatened.

But there's no reason to suppose that if "It rains on St. Swithin's Day, it will rain for 40 days", or that "the moon and the weather change together". I used to believe that when I was a small boy. But I was often disappointed when the signs failed to come true. Or glad that they didn't, as the case may be.

And I'd like to say that there's a lot of truth in Bacon's famous saying, that "every wind has it's weather". Generally, in this latitude, a wind from the East means that a storm is on the way. A wind from the West may mean that a storm's past and gone.

The Weather Bureau is very anxious to extend its forecasts to a month or a season in advance. But it will not do so until there's sound, scientific basis for such a system of forecasting. The Weather Bureau has no use for popular weather fallacies and has no intention of basing its forecasts on goose-bone and ground-hog weather signs.

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ANNOUNCEMENT: This concludes the Weather Man's regular weekly Chat, released by the U. S. Department of Agriculture through this Station. Next Wednesday evening, he will continue the series of talks on the oldest thing in the world. If you have any questions you want taken up in these talks --- or any pet signs you'd like to have considered -- send them in.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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