

CHATS BY THE WEATHER MAN

Wed., Nov. 30/27

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

ANNOUNCEMENT: Folks have all sorts of queer notions about the weather. Some of them are scientific, some humorous. In today's CHATS BY THE WEATHER MAN, that hard-working individual is going to tell the radio audience of Station ___ about some Popular Weather Fallacies. Incidentally, he's going to mention common weather sayings some of which are almost as old as civilization itself. So please stand by ---

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Almost 3000 years ago, Solomon was saying:

"The north wind driveth away rain".

Another great Biblical character, Job, had said:

"Fair weather cometh out of the north".

Still another ancient weather observer cautioned his followers that:

"He that observeth the wind shall not sow;
And he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap".

The Phoenician who sailed the sea in boats long before Rome was built on her seven hills, had learned to see certain kinds of storms in the clouds above and the shepherds on the hills of the ancient world had learned to read storm signs in the heavens and in nature.

Weather, of course, is the oldest thing in the world. Long before so much as a spear of grass adorned the face of the earth, frost and sunshine were alternating in the work of breaking up the heavy rocks into particles of soil. Then the winds and the rain busied themselves in spreading as a carpet, this soil which the elements had made. And ever since man first wandered on the face of the earth, he has smiled through the periods of sunshine and cowered in his caves and houses in fear of the resistless power of the elements. It was natural that man would try to find some secrets of the weather --- some method by which he could know what was coming in the future.

And so, as the weather was always an absorbing and vital subject to man, he naturally made it a favorite subject for conversation in the tent, at the gate, in the market place, in the ship. The weather wisdom of countless generations has been handed down from mouth to mouth. Many of the popular weather sayings of today are three thousand years old. Some of these sayings are polished gems of weather lore, and upheld by the later discoveries of science.

Christ's words in rebuking the Pharisees and the Sadducees:

"When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather:
For the sky is red;
And in the morning, it will be foul weather today:
For the sky is red and lowering"

has been modernised into the sailors' popular verse:

"Red night,
Sailors' delight;
Red morning,
Sailors take warning".

The beasts, birds, fishes, insects, leaves, flowers, and stem --- the sun, moon, stars, and the comets --- the days, hours, months, and seasons have all been called on to furnish endless sayings to predict the coming weather.

"Where the wind is on Candlemas Day,
There it will stick till the end of May"

is one of the popular ones, but erroneous.

Now in spite of the great age of the study of meteorology, such sayings as these have been almost the only dependence of man in anticipating weather conditions and preparing for them --- right up to fairly recent years. While the study of meteorology has made great progress in recent years, some of these sayings still are useful, because they are true.

But some of these omens were not good. Early man --- and later man as well --- looked to many false prophets to predict his weather for him. There was the moon, for example.

One of the earliest and most popular weather fallacies is that the moon has a great influence on the weather. It would be interesting to know for sure just how this queer notion began, but the fact that the moon undergoes marked changes in position and phase, led primitive man to believe that it has something to do with the changing phases of the weather. Those who held to the theory that the moon makes the weather, apparently forgot that the moon sheds its beams on the rest of mother earth as well as on their own small locality and that many kinds of weather may favor the earth, or even a fairly small section of it, on the same day or night. Modern man has rather lost faith in the moon as a reliable weather forecaster. Nevertheless many people believe that a "change" in the moon means a change in the weather, even to this day.

The direction and force of the winds is regulated, not by the forests, but by the distribution of air pressure over vast areas --- sometimes thousands of miles in diameter. This being the case, the forces that produce rainfall over a certain locality may have their beginning a thousand miles from the place where the rain actually falls.

Some folks think that animals have the ability to look into the future and see the kind of weather coming along. Our grandfathers used to say that when the squirrels lay in a large supply of nuts we are going to get a hard winter and that when the muskrat builds his house at a higher level than usual we're in for a wet season. Another old belief has to do with the southern flight of wild ducks and geese. If the ducks and geese fly southward earlier than usual, that means an early winter -- so watch out! The corn planters even said that when the corn husks are thicker than usual, a cold, hard winter is in store.

There isn't much in these beliefs. If the squirrels lay in a large nut supply, it's probably because there has been a generous crop of nuts. Corn husks are thick or thin according to the kind of weather that has prevailed during the growing season. If man has to make friends with science and the laws of science in order to predict the weather even for a day ahead, surely the corn plant cannot be expected to know in advance what the coming winter has in store!

Wild geese and other birds time their departure to warmer climes by the kind of weather they're having in the place from which they start. If a sudden, early cold spell should happen to strike their country in advance of the normal season, the birds will probably see in this, reasons for an early flight to warmer quarters. But their flight has no bearing on the kind of weather coming up, in the regions over which they fly. They seem to migrate for food, not temperature.

As the people grow more familiar with the laws that govern weather and weather forecasting, these old weather fallacies will be thrown aside and more reliable signs will be adopted in their place. In another generation or two, most of the fallacious weather sayings will be considered in the class of the goose-bone and ground-hog folk lore. Those that are well founded will, we hope, be wider known and better understood.

Anyhow, it has long been the goal of meteorologists to predict the weather a month, a season, a year in advance. Such forecasts, if accurate, and definite as to time and place would be of tremendous value. Using the laws of meteorology as they are understood today, the Weather Bureau is trying to give the American people accurate and trustworthy day-to-day forecasts. The Bureau is anxious to extend its forecasts to a month or a season in advance, and will do so as soon as a sound, scientific basis for such a system of forecasting is worked out.

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ANNOUNCEMENT: This concludes today's CHATS BY THE WEATHER MAN, prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture, Weather Bureau and Radio Service cooperating. Another talk will be broadcast by this Station on Wednesday, December 14.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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