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OF AGRICULTURE

**Radio
Service**

OFFICE OF
INFORMATION

OUTDOORS WITH THE SCIENTIST

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NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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ANNOUNCEMENT: In 2 previous radio chats broadcast by Station _____, weather men in the United States Department of Agriculture have told you about rain and hurricanes. We want to introduce the Weather Man again today. He's going to talk about Weather Signs and Weather Fallacies. Folks have all sorts of queer ideas about the weather. And if the Weather Man explodes some of these notions today, it isn't our fault. But if you like fallacy explosions, you'll probably enjoy this chat which comes as this week's Department of Agriculture OUTDOORS WITH THE SCIENTIST radio program.

--ooOoo--

A friend of mine thinks that the moon has a most powerful influence on the marriage rate and on the WEATHER....

"Young men who are drunk on moonlight," my friend says, "will pop the question pronto. But if they waited till the cold light of morning, they might think twice before doing the same thing."

Maybe the moon is the best friend of the man who issues the marriage licenses.

But if my friend thinks that the moon makes the weather, he's moon-struck himself. This idea that a change in the moon means fair weather has about as much scientific backing as the ancient belief that if you put a handful of hairs from a horse's tail in water, they'll turn into eels.

The moon, you know, plays no favorites. When good old Luna sheds her silver beams on your chicken coop, in the United States, she'll do the same favor as soon as the earth turns a little, for a Chinaman's bamboo hut on the other side of the world. Now, then--- if fair weather comes with the changing of the moon--- fair weather must come at the same time in all the vast territory which is bathed in the light of the moon. Now you know that that's quite a bit of ground. It's the whole earth and then some. And it's clear that you can't have fair weather everywhere at the same time.

A lot of weather signs that man has been trusting throughout the ages, however, are pretty good.

The Phoenicians, who sailed the seas in their red-eyed boats long before Rome was built on her 7 hills, learned to read certain kinds of storms in the clouds above. The shepherds on the hills of the ancient world could predict, with a fair degree of accuracy, from storm signs in the heavens and in Nature.

THE NORTH WIND DRIVETH AWAY RAIN,

said Solomon some 3,000 years ago--- and

FAIR WEATHER COMETH OUT OF THE NORTH

said Job. 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.

A number of these aged weather sayings are true. Hundreds of years of observation and experience are back of them. 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. And these sayings have been handed down from one generation to the next. A popular one today---

RED NIGHT,
SAILORS' DELIGHT;
RED MORNING,
SAILORS TAKE WARNING.

has parentage in Christ's words which he used to rebuke the Pharisees and Sadducees. He said,

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.

Modern science, in studying the weather, has replaced the rhyming dictionary with the barometer, anemometer, the wind and rain gauge. Meteorology, which is the science of the weather, is a very old study. But right up to fairly recent years, such weather sayings as I have quoted were the main dependence of man in anticipating weather conditions and in preparing for them. Meteorology has made great progress in recent years, but some of the old-fashioned sayings are still useful--- because they're true.

Some of the omens, however, aren't so good. Early man looked to many false prophets to predict his weather for him. Later man, even now, hangs on to some of these false signs too. I've already mentioned the moon. Other weather fallacies are just as far from the mark,

Take the animals, for example. Some people think that animals have the ability to look into the future and see what kind of weather's coming along. Our grandfathers used to say that when the squirrels lay in a goodly supply of nuts, we're going to have a tough Winter and that when the muskrat builds his house at a higher level than usual, we're in for a very wet season. Another old belief has to do with the southward migration of wild ducks and geese. If the ducks and geese fly South earlier than usual, that means an early Winter--- so better watch out! Some growers say that when the corn husks are thicker than usual, a cold, long Winter is in store.

Well, there probably isn't much truth in these notions. If the squirrels store away a generous supply of nuts, it's doubtless because nuts are plentiful and easy to get. Corn husks are thick or thin according to the kind of weather that has prevailed during the growing season--- not in the season that's coming after harvest.

My mother used to say that when her nose itched, it was going to rain. And sometimes it did. But I still have a sneaking idea that my mother would have a hard time finding scientists who would support her belief with cold facts.

As for the wild geese and ducks. An early storm may send them flying southward, full speed ahead. But it might clear up the day after they leave. In other words, wild geese and other birds, time their departure to warmer climes by the kind of weather they're having in the place they start from. Their flight has no bearing on the kind of weather in store for those in the regions over which they fly. They seem to migrate for food--- not temperature.

It's told that word got about in a certain community that all the signs read, A Hard, Cold Winter. The corn husks were thick. The geese had flown South post haste. Squirrels had been extra busy gathering nuts. And so on. So the local hardware dealers laid in a heavy stock of blow torches. They expected to do a land office business thawing out pipes when Winter came on. Well, Winter came as winters will. And it was the **MILDEST IN 36 YEARS!** That probably shook their faith in corn husks, wild birds, and squirrels as long-range weather forecasters...

As the people get more friendly with the laws that govern weather and weather forecasting, these moth-eaten weather FALLACIES will be thrown aside and more reliable notions will take their place. In another generation or two, it's likely that most of the fallacious weather ideas will be considered in the same class with goose-bone, ground-hog, and rabbit's-foot folk lore. Proud man won't like to have it said that a ground hog or a

wild goose knows more about the elements than he does. But weather signs that are founded on sound facts and experience will, we hope, be better 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. Meanwhile, the Weather Bureau of the United States Department of Agriculture, using the laws of meteorology as they are understood today, is trying to give the American people accurate and trustworthy day-to-day forecasts. And it is doing this at a cost to each person in the United States that does not exceed the price of a 2-cent stamp. The Weather Bureau is anxious to extend its forecasts to a month or a season in advance. It will do this as soon as sound, scientific basis for such a system of forecasting is worked out.

But the Bureau is not looking to corn husks and muskrats to lead the way.....

--ooOoo--

ANNOUNCEMENT: This concludes today's OUTDOORS WITH THE SCIENTIST radio chat from the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Next Tuesday's SCIENTIST talk will deal with Wild Life, and the Forest Service. Station _____ will broadcast the talk and you are invited to hear it.

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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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