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CHATS WITH THE WEATHER MAN

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ANNOUNCEMENT: Our Weather Man is back today with another of his chats about the weather. Some of you older folks---and younger folks, too, for that matter---will be interested in his story about our changing climate. Are the winters getting colder---or warmer? ---Or, are they changing at all? Well, we'll see what the Weather Man thinks---

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I hustled across the streets and parks of Washington a week ago last Monday to see my friends in the United States Weather Bureau.

Monday before last was January 23, you remember.

January 23 should smack a bit of winter---even in Washington. Of course, you may not find snow at that time. Washington's snows are usually rather few and far between. Neither will you necessarily find especially cold weather on that date. For our capital city's climate is really very mild. Nevertheless, you usually find enough snap in the air on the 23d of January to let you know winter is still officially with us.

But, as I hurried along toward the Weather Bureau, Old Man Winter seemed to have packed up his snow and frost machinery and beat a full retreat toward the North Pole.

The air was as warm as the first day of May.

I noticed two or three small children rolling around on the grass.

Maids and housewives wheeled baby carriages ~~through the parks~~ or stood in small groups exchanging bits of news.

The postman trudged along the walk with his blue coat over his arm.

"Well," I thought to myself, "this is rather odd---all of this spring weather right here in the middle of January. ---Especially odd coming on top of all the rest of the warm, mild weather we've been having lately. I'll see what the weather men have to say about it." So, I scooted up the steps to the division in the Weather Bureau that keeps tab on this mysterious climate of ours.

I found J. B. Kincer, the chief, looking over a long list of figures.

I said, "Good morning, Mr. Kincer. Fine spring weather we're having."

Kincer replied, "Spring weather indeed. In fact, I see from our records here that the temperature during the past 24 hours has averaged 60 degrees---or the average normal weather for the first week in May."

I remarked, "Almost like Florida weather."

Kincer ran his finger down the long list of figures. He replied, "Florida weather is right. The normal average temperature for Jacksonville at this time of year is 56 degrees, while the temperature for Miami is 66 degrees. So, Washington with its temperature of 60 degrees for the past 24 hours lies somewhere between Jacksonville and Miami, climatically speaking."

"What about other northern cities? What kind of weather are they having?"

"Much the same kind. The weather throughout the northern and central parts of the country has been much warmer than the normal temperature for the past five weeks. Five consecutive weeks of warm weather is an unusual record for winter conditions."

"Last winter was also much warmer than usual, wasn't it?"

"Yes, the winter of '31-'32 over much of the country was the warmest on record."

Well, I thought I at last was on the track of a big story. Kincer had just told me last winter was the warmest winter on record. This winter also seemed about to turn out mild. The old folks may be right after all. Perhaps we don't have the winters they had when Grandfather was a boy. Maybe our climate is actually changing.

I expressed some such possibility to Kincer.

Kincer smiled. "Well sir," he said, "I'll grant you our winters over the past several years have been rather mild. But that doesn't mean that they will keep getting milder and milder indefinitely---or that the entire United States will some day be warm and sunshiny the year around. The present period of warm winters is probably just part of a series of cycles---cycles in which we have a bunch of warm years, then some few moderate years, followed by cold years. For, you see, centuries have their cycles, or seasons, just like individual years. We may have a few years somewhat colder than normal; they make up the winter of the century. Next, come some rather moderate years; they are the spring. Next, a few warm years like we're having now; they are the summer. Then, a few moderate, or fall, years. And, finally, cold, or winter years again.

"Of course, I don't mean every year in the warm part, or summer, of the century will necessarily be warm. You may have a cold year sandwiched in between some warmer years just like you have cool days in July or August. But if you follow the average temperatures over periods of 20 years, you find them rising and falling, rising and falling, just like you do from winter to summer, and summer to winter.

"For instance, just look at this chart."

Kincer unrolled a big chart showing the trend in weather conditions, or climate at St. Paul, St. Louis, Washington, and Albany over the past 113 years---or, since about 1820. The changes in climate at all four cities seemed to have followed about the same course.

He said, "You'll notice that from about 1820 to 1840, the years were gradually getting colder. In other words, we were passing through the last August or early

September of the century. By 1840, the average temperature over a period of 20 years had fallen below normal. The average kept dropping for about 20 years and hit the lowest point along during the '60's. Many folks will remember those extremely cold winters we had along about the close of the Civil War. You might call the years from 1865 to '70 the winter, or December and January, of the century. After about 1870, the years began to get warm again. By about 1900, the average temperature was back above normal. We were passing from spring to summer. The average temperature ever since has been rising and rising.

"Of course, bear in mind I'm talking about average temperatures---averages over a period of 20 years. During those 20 years you will find some colder years just as you sometimes may have a cool Fourth of July. For example, I expect a great many folks will recall that bitter cold winter of 1917-18. But the average temperature "snapped right out of it" after that cold year and began to climb again. We are still in the summer of the century."

I immediately asked how long this present summer is going to last. How long before we will start having cold winters again---the kind they had when Grandfather was a boy?

Well, Kincer wouldn't risk an answer to that question.

He said, "I'm not at all sure that a chart of weather cycles in the past is a reliable guide of what will happen in the future. But, even if it were, this chart of mine doesn't cover a long enough time to be of any use. You see, my chart starts at the end of the summer that closed along about 1820. It goes through the winter years of the '60's and '70's and on up to the summer years of the present time. When the present summer will end, I don't know. So, I probably haven't charted out even as much as one year of the century's seasons as yet. "Until I pass the 'one-year' mark, so to speak, I won't know just how long these summers of the centuries last and when the years will begin to get colder again."

Well, that brought another question to my mind. When we pass through this present cycle of warm years, just what will happen? Will the winters, alone, get colder? Or, will the springs, and summers, and falls also show a drop in average temperature?

Kincer again turned to his charts.

"You'll notice from those charts that winter is the most irregular and changeable of all the seasons. During the past 100 years we've had three seasons, or cycles, of cool winters. We had several cool winters during the latter part of the '30's. Then came that series of extremely cold winters along about the close of the Civil War. After the Civil War, our winters began to get warmer. They hit a third rather cool spell along from 1900 to 1910. And then they began to get warmer again.

"The other seasons have had their ups and downs just the same as winter. However, they haven't followed quite the same course.

"Fall, in particular, has changed more or less independently of the other seasons. We had our longest and most intense period of cool falls about a hundred years ago---along during the late '30's. After that the falls began to get warmer.

They cooled off a little during that spell of cold winters in the '60's. But, generally speaking, the fall season has been gradually getting warmer over the past 100 years."

Well, I still had one important question. What's the reason for those changes in the seasons over the years?

Kincer doesn't know. Folks have offered many theories. Some say the earth may tilt a little on its axis. But we have no evidence that the position of the axis has changed. Others say dust from volcanic eruptions may shut the earth off from the sun from time to time. But that doesn't account for the 40 or 50 year swings in temperature.

So we must simply say: Our warm years come in bunches, and our cold years come in bunches. But as yet we don't know why.

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ANNOUNCEMENT: And that concludes another of our Chats With the Weather Man, brought to you through the cooperation of the United States Weather Bureau. We will have another Chat for you at this same time two weeks from today.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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