

No. 367

A Science Service Feature

July 15

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Dr. Charles F. Brooks,  
of Clark University,  
discusses:

ST. SWITHIN'S DAY

"St. Swithin's Day, if thou dost rain,  
For forty days it will remain."

From folk lore has come the superstition that if it rains on St. Swithin's Day, July 15, it will rain every day afterwards for 40 days. According to tradition, St. Swithin, an ecclesiastic of the ninth century, desired to be buried close by his church, that the water from the eaves might drip upon his grave. When, later, his body was removed to another place, the saint was said to have caused rain to fall for 40 days in token of his displeasure.

This belief, like the groundhog day tradition, attempts to base a forecast for several weeks in advance on the weather of a single day, an obvious absurdity. The St. Swithin's Day saying, like some other of our weather proverbs, has suffered from transplantation from the place of its origin. A forty day rain is still more improbable in the northeastern United States than in the British Isles. Applied in California the proverb would be a complete misfit. At London, England, a wet St. Swithin's Day is followed by other rainy days to the average number of 17 out of the following 40. In North America, as great a frequency can be expected only in the Appalachian highlands, the middle and east Gulf and south Atlantic coasts, and on the higher ranges of the Rocky Mountains, while in most of California even one rainy day in forty at this time of year is a novelty.

-----  
(Tomorrow: The Whirlwind Tornado)

All rights reserved by Science Service

Science Service,  
B and 21st Sts.,  
Washington, D.C.