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A Science Service Feature

May 11

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE ICE SAINTS

Unseasonable frosts in May have long attracted attention in Europe. Indeed since the Middle Ages it has been a popular tradition that a killing frost is likely to occur from May 11 to 13 or May 12 to 14. The saints to which these days are dedicated in the ecclesiastical calendar are known as the "ice saints", "ice men" or "vigorous gentlemen". Mamertus, Pancras, Servatius and Boniface are the saints thus held responsible for the cold weather.

In France, also, the full moon of late April or early May is associated with killing frosts and is known as the "russet moon" probably because it is supposed to turn young vegetation brown. Perhaps the frosts of early May receive special attention because they occur at a critical period for plant growth.

We are not without such visitations in North America, but we do not have them associated with any particular dates. These returns of cold in the spring are in much the same category as the returns of warmth or Indian Summer in autumn. Each brings the suggestion of the season just past, and each may come at any time. They are most notable, of course, in late autumn and late spring, when their temperatures stand in greatest contrast to the general level.

(Tomorrow: The Northeastern High)

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