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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

By Dr. Charles F. Brooks,
of Clark University.

SNOW AND HEAT PROSTRATIONS

While deaths from the heat in the northern and northeastern states and southern Canada were mounting into the hundreds, we felt the contrast of persistent reports of cold and snow in the mountain and plateau region of the west. On June 4, for example, Great Falls, Montana, on the plains, was reported as having 4 inches of snow. Easterners found it hard to visualize, even though but the week before snow had fallen widespread in southern Canada and the northeastern states. How can such contrasts be? The immediate cause is very easily found when one examines a set of weather maps for the period. For days and days while a great southwesterly wind was flowing northward on the hot side of the previously cold high in the southeast, a large northerly current of air was pouring steadily from the western American Arctic. Between the two was a trough of low pressure which remained practically stationary for a time long enough to allow air in the east to go thousands of miles northward and northeastward and for other air in the west to come equal distances southward. With local modifications, therefore, the east and the west were being treated to tropical and polar weather simultaneously. This condition appears to have been the result of the great draining off of the eastern cold air 10 days earlier, which thereby temporarily gave the northwest the polar dominance usually claimed by the northeast at this season.

(Tomorrow: Rolling of Thunder)

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