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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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HOW COLD CHECKS FLOODS

It is fortunate that spring melting seldom continues long without interruption by cold spells. In many ways these intervals of freezing furnish protection against snow floods. When the temperature drops, rain stops. Melting at the top of the snow bank also stops, but the flow of water from the bottom of the snow cover may continue. Much water thereby gets away quietly before the next general thaw starts another rush.

During a cold period, shallow water in fields, the overflow from streams, freezes over and is held in check. Cold snaps after a thaw are not always helpful, however, for they may favor an ice gorge, or dam, in a river full of moving ice. Such an ice gorge held for some weeks this spring at Oil City, Pennsylvania, despite heroic efforts to blast it to pieces. After causing destructive floods, it began to move when weakened by a few days of warm weather. Unfortunately, warm weather will bring down rivers of snow water faster than it will weaken an ice dam of this sort.

Even when melting progresses virtually unchecked, snow floods do not necessarily result. If a thick snow cover remains on the ground unseasonably long, as in the springs of 1916, or 1923 in New England, the ground thaws beneath, the snow melts from the bottom, and the snow water sinks into the ground. In 1916 such melting at top and bottom day after day, removed a large snow cover without the aid of storms and without making damaging floods. A late snow cover is itself a partial protection against heavy rains and strong warm winds, for it favors cool air and high pressure. Lows, or storms, tend to avoid the snow-covered area or are weakened in crossing it.

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