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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

VAGUE WEATHER SIGNS

Given sufficient vagueness in a weather sign or weather proverb, it can hardly fail to come true. This feature of popular weather lore is discussed by Sir Napier Shaw in his recent "Manual of Meteorology." He says:

"If one takes the red sky in the evening as a sign of fine weather and in the morning as a sign of wet, we are not at all clear as to what a red sky means. Does it mean clouds overhead, or nearly so, suffused with red light from the west or from the east, as the case may be? Or does it mean clouds fringed with red or with fiery yellow on the western or eastern horizon?

"Or again with the changes of the moon there is quite a pleasureable vagueness. Is new moon the middle day of no moon? Or is it, as some authors seem to suggest, the period of seven days between the last sight of the old moon and the first sight of the new? So first quarter is from three days before to three days after the semicircle, and so on."

In other words, the popular conception of the moon's phases is so elastic that they correspond rather to the four weeks of the lunation than to definite moments of time, and on this basis every weather event is bound to happen "when the moon changes."

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SCIENCE SERVICE,
21st and B Sts.,
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