

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE BORROWING DAYS

In the folklore of the Old World there are several stories and proverbs about the "borrowing days", said to have been borrowed by March from April and supposed to be especially stormy. The days in question were the last three in March according to the Julian calendar. As we do not know, even approximately, when the tradition concerning them first became current we do not know to what extent the Julian calendar had then fallen into error; hence we cannot say just where these days belong in our present calendar, except that it is some time in early April.

Sir Walter Scott has recorded the tradition. He says:

"The last three days of March (old style) are called the borrowing days; for, as they are remarked to be unusually stormy, it is feigned that March borrowed them from April to extend the sphere of his rougher sway."

A Scotch rhyme puts it thus:

"March borrowit from April
Three days, and they were ill;
The first was frost, the second was snaw,
The third was cauld as ever't could blaw."

An English version makes April a borrower, too:

"March borrowed of April, April borrowed of May,
Three days, they say;
One rained, and one snaw,
And the other was the worst day that ever blew."

The Spanish story about the borrowing days is that a shepherd promised March a lamb if he would temper the winds to suit his flocks; but after gaining his point the shepherd refused to pay over the lamb. In revenge, March borrowed three days from April, in which fiercer winds than ever blew and thus punished the deceiver.

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