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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SPRING'S FITFUL PROGRESS

As average for a period of years, the progress of springtime warmth over any region in the temperate zone is a fairly steady movement, but in any individual year there are many oscillations to and fro, which may be compared to the advancing and retreating waves on a beach accompanying a general rise of the tide. These oscillations are sometimes very extensive, causing spells of unseasonably warm or cold weather over large areas. The cold spells bring night frosts, which often do much damage in fields and orchards and thus attract general attention.

In the Old World frosty spells in spring have long been popularly supposed to recur on about the same dates from year to year, and this idea has given rise to a great deal of inconclusive scientific discussion. In England a chilly period is expected early in April and is known as the "blackthorn winter," because it is supposed to come when the blackthorn is in blossom. This notion is reflected in American weather lore by the belief, current in some localities, that a touch of winter accompanied the blossoming of the snowball, the dogwood or the redbud.

The most famous, however, of the traditional cold spells in spring is that of the "ice saints", said to occur on the days of Sts. Mamertus, Pancras and Servatius (May 11, 12 and 13), or, in south-central Europe, Sts. Pancras, Servatius and Boniface (May 12, 13 and 14).

In Germany a chilly period popularly supposed to occur in June is called the "sheep cold" (Schafkälte), because it is dangerous to newly shorn sheep.

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