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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"BUCHAN SPELLS"

From an analysis of weather records at five places in Scotland for the ten years 1857-66 the Scottish meteorologist Alexander Buchan concluded that there was a tendency for unseasonably warm or cold weather to occur each year at certain times. He found evidence of six recurrent cold periods, viz, Feb. 7-14, April 11-14, May 9-14, June 29- July 4, August 6-11 and November 6-13; also of three recurrent warm periods, viz, July 12-15, August 12-15 and December 3-14. Many more or less similar "recurrences" are reputed to be characteristic of other parts of the world, though they are all involved in a good deal of uncertainty. The "January thaw," the "ice saints" in May and Indian summer are familiar examples.

Recently newspaper weather prophets in Great Britain have revived Buchan's ideas on this subject, and attempts have been made to predict the weather for London in accordance therewith. In a current English journal Dr. C.E.P. Brooks, of the Meteorological Office, says: "No scientific value whatever attaches to the so-called 'Buchan spells.' To discover whether similar periods occurred in London, observations have been made at Kew for more than thirty years past. The results do not give the slightest support to the idea that there is any abiding tendency for any part of the year to be either cold or warm for the season. The famous 'Buchan cold spells' are abnormally warm as often as they are abnormally cold."

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