

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

THE CALLING OF THE SEA

On British coasts a murmuring or roaring noise of the ocean sometimes heard several miles inland during a calm is known as "the calling of the sea" and is generally regarded as a sign of windy or stormy weather, though opinions as to its meaning apparently differ from one locality to another. Probably this is the sound to which Tennyson alludes when, in describing the death of Enoch Arden, he says:

"There came so loud a calling of the sea
That all the houses in the haven rang."

In his recently published book about sailors' superstitions, Dr. Angelo S. Rappoport brings together a number of similar notions about sea sounds and their supposed significance as weather prognostics. He says:

"In Brittany when the sea is singing on the shore or at the foot of the cliffs they say that it is braying like an ass; fishermen listen attentively to the sound of the waves and pretend that from it they can predict the weather a week ahead. At St. Malo when the sea emits a ringing sound it is supposed to predict the approach of northeast winds. Scottish fishermen say that if the song of the sea is heard from the west it is a sign of fine weather. English sailors call the plaintive sound coming from the sea 'the calling of the sea,' and when it is quite clear it is supposed to predict bad weather. Fishermen on the Moray Firth call the sound of the waves 'the song of the sea,' and pretend that if this song comes from the east it is a sure sign that an east or southeast wind will soon begin to blow. If a long sound comes from the bar of Banff it is a sign that an east wind is coming."

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21st and B Sts.,
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