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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed April 17, 1931

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BLACKTHORN WINTER

A recent novel by John Collier, "His Monkey Wife," makes mention of "blackthorn winter;" a traditional period in the meteorological calendar, familiar in the British Isles though not on our side of the Atlantic. The popular belief over there is that unseasonably cold weather comes with the blooming of the blackthorn, or sloe (*Prunus spinosa*). White, of Selborne, says: "Blackthorn usually blossoms while cold northeast winds blow; so that the harsh rugged weather obtaining at this season is called by the country people blackthorn winter." The average time of blooming of blackthorn in the British Isles is early April. Wright's "English Dialect Dictionary" records the expression "sloe-hatching time" as applied in Suffolk to the same traditionally recurrent cold spell.

In Great Britain, as in many other parts of the world, more than one miniature "winter" is popularly supposed to occur normally each spring. Thus in Hampshire people look for a "whitethorn winter" of eight days when the whitethorn, or hawthorn, blooms; around the middle of May. This notion is embodied in the passage of "Lycidas" where the poet refers to the killing effect of frost upon

"flowers that their gay wardrobe wear
When first the whitethorn blows."

In America we hear of "redbud," "dogwood" and occasionally other "winters."

Cold spells generally occur in spring, but the belief in their occurrence about the same dates year after year is, so far as meteorologists have been able to determine, a delusion.

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