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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE LONG SEASON IN MAY

In southern Virginia, according to Dr. James H. Kimball, there is a well-established belief that during each May there is a long spell of rainy weather. This period is known as the "long season in May," and is considered by many to mark the change from spring to summer. With its passage there was a practice, on many old-time plantations, of gathering up the winter clothes from the "quarters" and giving out clothing for summer wear. A closely related custom is still observed in many households, the youngsters being divested of their winter flannels when the May rains have passed.

Dr. Kimball has gone to some pains to collect information bearing on the history of this idea. Apparently the belief in the "long season" arose in the area around Jamestown among the tobacco planters, who looked forward to the coming of a succession of cool days and light showers in spring, as providing ideal conditions for transplanting the tobacco plants from seed beds to open fields, and with the spread of tobacco cultivation, now centered at Danville, the belief also spread.

In northern Virginia, he says, where the lambing season is in May, the country people expect an unwelcome period of cold rainy weather, known as the "sheep rains." This notion recalls the belief current in Germany that a cold period, unfavorable for sheep-shearing, tends to recur in June. It is called the "Schafkaelte" (sheep cold).

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