A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
November 26, 1931

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed November 19, 1931

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

THE GOOSEBONE

While the turkey is the chief item on the Thanksgiving Day bill-of-fare in a majority of American households, the goose is the favorite dish on all festal occasions among the Pennsylvania Germans, and it is generally the breastbone from the goose eaten at the Thanksgiving dinner that is supposed to furnish information about the character of the coming winter. According to the original German tradition, the bird from which the prophetic bone was taken must be eaten on Martinmas Eve (November 10).

There are several rules for predicting winter weather from the "goosebone." After the bone is picked clean, it is held up to the light. White marks betoken snow; dark marks, cold weather. The front part of the bone foretells the weather before Christmas; the hinder part the weather after Christmas. The most familiar form of the legend in this country, however, lays special stress on the thickness of the bone. A thick goosebone is said to mean a hard winter; a thin one, a mild winter.

All these notions are, of course, pure superstitions, closely akin to the "doctrine of signatures" that once prevailed in medicine, according to which plants with heart-shaped leaves were good for heart disease, the bloodstone for hemorrhage, etc.

Apparently the goosebone superstition was comparatively unfamiliar in the United States except among the Pennsylvania Germans until about 25 years ago, when it attained nation-wide celebrity through the writings of A.N. Burkholder, of Reading, Pa., relating to the alleged predictions of a local weather oracle named Elias Hartz.

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