

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt  
but intended for use  
October 17, 1933

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed October 10, 1933

INDIAN SUMMER AND ITS KIN

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The tradition that an Indian summer occurs every autumn is but one of several notions prevalent in different parts of the world concerning the occurrence of unseasonably warm and cold periods at different times of the year. Corresponding to our Indian summer is the "St. Martin's summer" that, according to the folklore of England and western continental Europe comes about St. Martin's day (November 11). Another English tradition relates to "St. Luke's little summer" about October 18. Shakespeare mentions "All-hallown summer," i.e., a summer about All Saints' day. In continental Europe there are traditions relating to fully a dozen other autumnal "summers."

Our American winters include, according to New England tradition, the "January thaw." Our springs are supposed to include the "dogwood winter," the "snowball winter" and others. The English expect the "blackthorn winter" when the blackthorn blossoms in April. Elsewhere in Europe the most famous of the supposedly recurrent cold spells of spring is that of the "ice saints" toward the middle of May. According to German weather lore, a chilly period dangerous to newly shorn sheep comes every June. It is called the Schafkälte ("sheep-cold"). In the United States and Canada a brief "squaw winter," with gray skies and snow flurries, is supposed to precede Indian summer.

The truth back of all these notions is that the temperature curve of the year is never a smooth one but always a series of ups and downs. Warm spells alternate with cold spells but there is no regularity about their occurrence. The belief that some of them are definitely recurrent events in the calendar is not borne out by weather statistics.

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