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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE ICE SAINTS

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Over a considerable part of continental Europe it has been popularly believed since the middle ages that destructive frosts are likely to occur at a certain period in May, and with the elaboration of the ecclesiastical calendar these frosts became definitely associated with the days dedicated to Saints Mamertus, Pancras and Servatius (May 11, 12 and 13), or, in south-central Europe, Saints Pancras, Servatius and Boniface (May 12, 13 and 14); hence known as the Ice Saints. According to a French proverb:

"Saint Mamert, Saint Pancrace
Et Saint Servais,
Sans froid ces Saints de Glace
Ne vont jamais."

Several well-known meteorologists of the last century so far accepted the popular belief in the reality of this cold spell as a normal feature of the spring temperature curve that they went to great lengths in attempting to explain it. One suggestion was that the atmosphere was cooled at this season because a great amount of solar heat became "latent" in the process of melting the snow and ice of high latitudes. Another hypothesis ascribed the alleged cooling to the passage of a periodic meteor shower between the earth and the sun, and still another to the large-scale evaporation of moisture from newly expanded foliage.

Nobody has ever proved, however, that there is any definite tendency anywhere in the world for the weather to be unseasonably cold on the dates in question. Of course every spring brings a number of cold spells, and it sometimes happens that one of them coincides with the days of the Ice Saints. A few such coincidences suffice to keep the tradition alive.

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