

PSYCHOLOGY

Blame the Weather

Japanese Scientist Offers You a New Excuse For Forgetfulness; Bad Weather Makes You Absent-Minded

By EMILY C. DAVIS

LOOK out! Absent-minded weather ahead!"

A ridiculous idea, predicting absent-mindedness? And hooking it up with weather, too?

Apparently not. For scientific experiments now reveal that you are more apt to walk off and leave your parcels and other belongings on certain kinds of days. Those certain days, troublesome and exasperating, are the days when humidity suddenly rises, and clouds threaten rain. That's absent-minded weather.

You can see, now, why there are so many jokes about day-dreaming professors who go about losing umbrellas. Absent-minded weather is umbrella-carrying weather. And professors—but more about that sort of person later.

A Japanese scientist, K. Hisazuka, has demonstrated the connection between weather and this particular form of forgetfulness. He had the clever idea of counting the thousands of articles lost on street cars in a year in Tokyo and Yokohama.

In Tokyo—Japan's New York—a million and a half daily riders leave 200 of their belongings a day—just an average street car rider's day—for the car company employees to gather up. It looks even more impressive added up to 73,000 articles a year. But the lost-and-found department does not do the same steady business in books, parasols, and packages day in and day out. The rate, compared to the number of riders, rises and falls. Why?

Humidity

The Japanese meteorologist put his 365-day score of lost articles beside the year's weather record. He looked to see if heat or cold made people forget their property. He checked up on humidity. There it was—humidity.

On days when the air suddenly becomes laden with a high per cent. of water vapor, housewives, business men, and school children suffer from a sudden outbreak of forgetting things.

Humid days are notoriously oppressive. Everybody complains of them. Per-

haps they lower human energy, so that attention lags. Then, three hours later comes the sudden cry: "Where could I have left that birthday cake? I certainly started home with it!"

Damp, sticky weather often goes before rain. So, it may be, too, that the extra equipment people hang on themselves for doubtful weather is an aid to forgetting. Obviously, umbrella and raincoat are handicaps in the game of coming home with everything you are supposed to bring. And if rain actually falls, and garments drip, there is added distraction. On a day like that, most people could lose a bass drum and never miss it.

Several Causes

Explaining exactly why weather can provoke absent-mindedness is not easy. There are probably a number of contributing causes, such as those just suggested.

With the customary brevity of weather men, M. Hisazuka merely announces the relationship between mind and weather, which his statistics reveal.

Reporting to the Meteorological Soci-

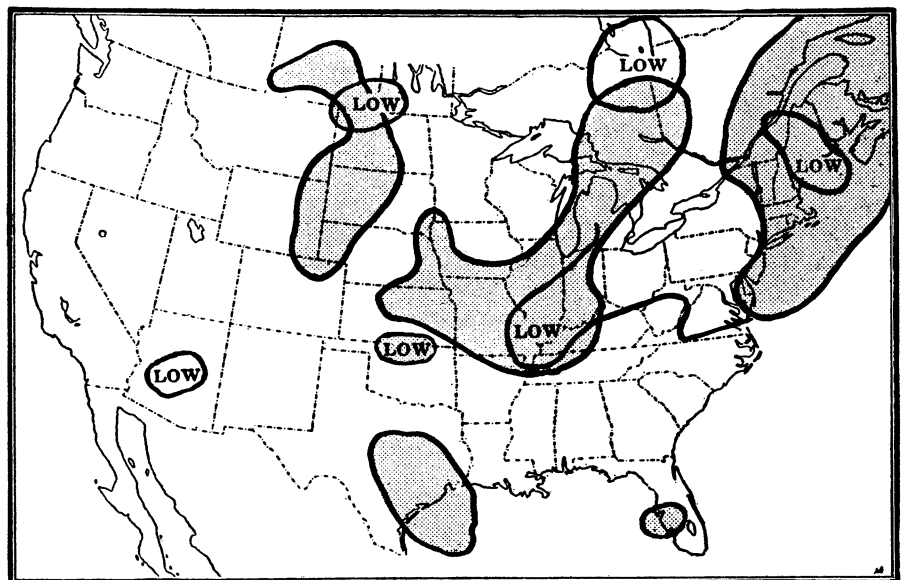
ety of Japan, he says: "Sudden increase of humidity and the decrease of the atmospheric pressure generally precede an increase in forgetfulness."

The second factor that he mentions—lowering of pressure in the gas we breathe as "air"—is a symptom of stormy weather which often goes along with humidity. On United States weather maps the areas of low pressure, which winds generally carry from west to east, are the stormy weather warnings. You can read them also as warnings of brain "storms" of forgetfulness, judging by the Japanese weather man's findings.

New Usefulness

His study of absent-mindedness opens up a new usefulness for weather forecasts. When you scan the weather news for the day, and learn that it will be cloudy and perhaps wet, and the barometer is falling, that is the time to take extra precautions against forgetting.

It may sound fantastic to suggest that. But in recent years weather warnings have been put to many a novel use and found valuable, from showing merchants the psychological time to advertise galoshes, to helping women decide when to have their hair curled. When marcel waves made by curling irons were the height of



AREA OF ABSENT-MINDEDNESS

The weather man's "lows"—low pressure areas—are warnings usually of stormy weather and also of brain "storms" of absent-mindedness. On the day represented here, rain was falling in wide areas, as shown by the shading.



LEFT BEHIND

Even the baby's bottle can be forgotten. Not to mention false teeth, and a load of baseball bats. But umbrellas make the most conspicuous show at the lost and found office of the National Capital's street car company—and in most other exhibits of the consequences of human absent-mindedness.

fashion, weather stations received frequent calls for advice on this subject.

In absent-minded weather, it might be well, for example, to arrange to have parcels sent, rather than haul them home. It might be safer, too, to jot down notes of errands and engagements, not trusting to memory alone to get you there.

How much would a breakfast-time warning actually help to prevent mishaps?

A good deal, judging by rules and suggestions which one European physician gives his patients who suffer from acute absent-mindedness or defective memory.

Absent-mindedness and forgetfulness can be guarded against, to some extent at least, is the view of this physician, Dr. Arnold Lorand, of Carlsbad, Czechoslovakia. He has devoted an entire book to these mental problems, drawing helpful ideas from the cases of famous persons and from his own experience with patients.

Lack of Attention

Absent-mindedness is "not paying attention." This is the simple definition he offers. The absent-minded man lets his thoughts drift off to his hobby or his worries, or whatever else he is absorbed in. He is so engrossed in his day-dreaming that he pays too little attention to where he is putting an important paper, or

what time his wife is patiently saying she will meet him for dinner, or to what strange neighborhood the bus driver is rapidly carrying him.

Says Dr. Lorand: "The automatic pursuit of activities, forgetful of self, as it were, may bring the absent-minded man into all kinds of amazing situations."

Absent-mindedness is a special kind of forgetfulness. Other kinds of forgetful people may have trouble recalling some fact they once learned, and learned well. The absent-minded forgetter never really takes the fact into his mind. His specialty is forgetting things in the present or future, not the distant past.

Wool-Gathering

And it is all due to his wandering wool-gathering wits. Some people suffer seriously from this weak-willed attention. Most people get overtaken by it, unawares, once in a while.

Here are summed up some practical ways of warding off the troubles of absent-mindedness and other kinds of forgetting, suggested by Dr. Lorand:

1. Notes are "necessary crutches" for people who have any difficulties of this sort. But, careful, don't be like Leonardo da Vinci. He took notes on everything he read and thought. But he always mislaid the notes, he was so disorderly.

2. Tying knots—the French call them

"asses' knots"—in your handkerchief is good, if the rite is properly done. Tying the knot is no magic. You must concentrate on the point to be remembered while tying the knot, and even a minute or two after. And it is helpful to repeat aloud the name or number, or whatever you want to remember. Do that 10 or 15 times.

3. Just before going to sleep is the best time to tie knots or otherwise fix matters in the memory.

4. Putting your hat over, or under, an umbrella or other likely-to-be-forgotten object is a good idea. It is a very absent-minded person indeed who goes off without his hat.

Pay Attention

And, of course, it goes without saying that the first and foremost rule is to work at the job of paying attention and fixing whatever needs to be understood, firmly in your mental filing system.

The absent-minded professor or the absent-minded genius gets into ridiculous situations, which go down in history, all because he fails to do this. He is so engrossed in his beloved subject, that everyday matters, however important, simply fail to "get in."

Sigmund Freud, expounder of psychoanalysis, tells of one noted German chemist who forgot the hour of his wedding, and calmly went to his laboratory to work instead of meeting his bride at the church. He considered this a warning that he was not destined for a very happy domestic life, and "wisely" according to Freud, he lived unmarried until he died at a ripe old age.

Did Work Twice

Prof. Michael Faraday, great chemist and physicist, worked six weeks on a series of experiments and got negative results. Then, a trifle late, it occurred to him to look up his research notes, for Faraday knew his own absent-mindedness and kept notes. He discovered to his dismay that he had done the same experiments, with the same fruitless results, less than a year before. In his busy mind, the problem he was trying to solve and the principles involved were clear enough. But the mere mechanics of an unsuccessful experiment could keep his hands and some part of his mind busy for six weeks without making any lasting imprint on his memory. Men of this type can easily forget to eat, forget their own weddings, and are fated to cut a strange figure wherever they go.

The average person, whose absent-mindedness is confined to an occasional lapse of attention, may think he has little in common with the acutely absent-

minded person. But the exaggerated case serves to show up absent-mindedness, with all its curious traits, just as a picture thrown on a large screen is easier to study.

Moreover, the average person struck once in a while by absent-mindedness does just as strange things as the genius.

The street car company in the National Capital of the United States, where riders include Congressmen, tourists, government clerks, job seekers, wives and school children, gathers in 12,000 to 15,000 lost articles a year. The assortment includes anything and everything from babies' bottles and bird cages to false teeth.

"Oh, yes," nods the young woman in charge, "people do take teeth out when they hurt, and lay them down on the car seat, and walk right off without them."

Children Too

School children are particularly absent-minded and can lose things that would do credit to any genius' record. A dozen baseball bats were abandoned by one young ball team, and never even called for.

The Japanese weather man's study shedding light on the weather's role in promoting forgetfulness is not the first scientific attempt to link weather with human conduct. Some years ago, Dr. Edwin G. Dexter made a series of statistical studies, comparing weather reports against police records, against banking clerks' errors, against children's behavior in school. The weather, as he had suspected, does tip the scales in favor of one line of conduct or another. His curves and charts showed it.

Humidity Causes Errors

Dr. Dexter put his surprising discoveries into a book "Weather Influences," now out of print but still often quoted. He became a physician in the U. S. Veterans' Bureau at Washington, and abandoned his inquiries into what the weather does to nerves, efficiency, energy, and emotions.

To his work, done thirty years ago, the new investigation in Japan adds confirmation of the weather's power to help or hinder. Dr. Dexter found, for example, that bank clerks make more mistakes in their calculations on humid days than on dry ones. Cloudy and rainy weather also yielded a harvest of errors. The strategic factor, he concluded to be attention. The clerk bending over his accounts has trouble in bad weather to keep his mind on his work, just as the wife returning home from shopping is now shown to be extra-likely to lose her head, figuratively, and her umbrella or purse, literally.

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ENTOMOLOGY

3300 Ants in Single Colony Are Part Male, Part Female

SEX mixups of a most fantastic kind, involving at least one-fourth of the population of a large colony of ants, were described by the noted American entomologist, Prof. William Morton Wheeler of Harvard University, before the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

The colony was discovered on the British-owned island of Trinidad last spring, by Dr. N. A. Weber, and was studied jointly by Dr. Wheeler and himself. Formal publication of their results will be made in the United States at an early date.

The mixed-up condition consists in each affected insect's being partly male and partly worker-female or "neuter." In many, the front part of the body looks like that of a male and the back part has a female appearance. In others, "islands" of femaleness appear in the midst of male areas, and vice versa. No two of the insects thus far examined are alike in either the degree or distribution of their assorted sexualities.

In the particular species to which this colony belonged, Dr. Wheeler explained, the males have longer legs than the fe-

males. Some of the "sex-assorted" ants had male legs on one side and female legs on the other. The result was that they could travel only in circles, like the famous but fabulous "side-hill gouger" of Western myth.

In all, Dr. Weber has counted some 3300 of these peculiar ants, all of them being offspring of the same queen ant, who was herself apparently normal in every respect. It is the only instance on record of anything like so large a proportion of "mixed-sex" ants in a colony. In fact, during the past 80 years, only 75 such ants have been found among all the hundreds of thousands of specimens that have been examined by entomologists. Only one other instance in the history of modern science can be compared with it, the discovery of a similar phenomenon in a colony of bees near Lake Constance, by the famous German scientist von Siebold in 1864.

Insects and other animals that display such a patchwork of sex characters are known to science as "gynandromorphs." Taken to pieces, this tough-looking Greek word means "female-male-forms."

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SEISMOLOGY

Deep Earthquakes Show Flaws 62 to 180 Miles Below Crust

DEEP-focus earthquakes occurring hundreds of miles inside the earth instead of merely in the comparatively thin upper crust of rock are being intensively studied by seismological scientists, Dr. F. J. W. Whipple of Kew Observatory, Richmond, Surrey, told the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Most earthquakes recorded at the seismological stations throughout the world originate, Dr. Whipple said, less than 31 miles below the earth's surface. Quakes at deep foci start many times deeper than this.

In Japan, especially, he pointed out, studies show that these deep quakes are distributed in a very remarkable way, indicating that there exist well-defined flaws in the earth at depths of from 62

to 180 miles and far below the level of isostatic compensation.

Such new findings are among the most spectacular of recent advances, Dr. Whipple stated. The reason is that present beliefs tend to picture the solid rocky crust of the earth as floating on a denser semi-plastic material lower down. As one part of the crust sank down into the material, there was a compensating uplifting somewhere else on the earth. Mountain ranges such as the Himalayas appear still to be undergoing this lifting process.

That the underlying semi-plastic material might itself have well-defined flaws still lower was hardly considered until the recent discoveries based on the way earthquake waves are transmitted through the earth.

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