

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE MOST DRAMATIC MIRAGE

Mirage has more than once played a striking part in human affairs -- as, for example, when it caused the suspension of battles on the plains of Mesopotamia during the World War -- but surely it has never staged a more dramatic performance than it did in January, 1913, off the shore of McMurdo Sound in the Antarctic, where the surviving members of Scott's expedition were anxiously awaiting the return of their ship, the "Terra Nova," that was to take them back to civilization.

"About noon on January 17th," writes H. G. Ponting, the expedition photographer, "I was sweeping the north with the glass, when suddenly the masts of a ship came into the field of view. For a moment I could scarcely believe my eyes; but there could be no doubt about it. They were the masts of a barque; but presenting an extraordinary appearance, for they towered unnaturally high above the sky-line. Then I saw that what I was looking at was but a mirage. The real ship was hull-down below the horizon, and only the masts were visible. Above them a wonderful mirage of the entire vessel, hull and all, appeared inverted; and over this first reflection there was a second image of the ship, upright. It was the upper image that I had seen first. It was a remarkable illusion; but the 'Terra Nova' was undoubtedly there -- about thirty miles away."

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