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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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FATA MORGANA IN SCOTLAND

The type of mirage called "fata morgana," which involves weird distortions of images over a large area of landscape or seascape and also rapid changes in their appearance, far from being peculiar to the Strait of Messina, its traditional home, is encountered more or less all over the world. Here is an account of an example seen many years ago in the Firth of Forth, as reported in the "Scotsman":

"The most extraordinary illusions were those presented by the Isle of May, which, from being a mere speck on the water, suddenly shot up in the form of a huge perpendicular wall, apparently 800 or 900 feet high, with a smooth and unbroken front to the sea. On the east side lay a long low range of rocks, apparently detached from the island at various points, and it was on these that the most fantastic exhibitions took place. Besides assuming the most diversified and fantastic shapes, the rocks were constantly changing their positions, now moving off and again approaching each other. At one time a beautiful columnar circle appeared on the outermost rock. Presently this figure changed to a clump of trees. By and by the clump of trees increased to a large plantation, which gradually approached the main portion of the island until within 300 or 400 feet, when the intervening space was spanned by a beautiful arch. Another and another arch was afterward formed in the same way. At a later period the phenomena, which were constantly changing, showed huge jagged rifts and ravines in the face of the high wall, through which the light came and went as they opened and shut, while trees and towers, columns and arches, sprang up and disappeared as if by magic. It is a singular fact that during the four hours the mirage lasted the lighthouse, usually the most prominent object from the south side of the firth, was wholly invisible."

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