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July 19, 1935

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed July 12, 1935

USEFUL "LOOMING"

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As a result of abnormal refraction the apparent elevation of distant objects is sometimes much greater than usual and these objects are then said to "loom." This variety of mirage is quite familiar to sailors. One of its effects is to bring into view objects ordinarily below the horizon and another is to make distant objects seem -- mainly because we associate a certain apparent altitude with a certain distance -- nearer than they really are.

Captain Scott, Borchgrevink and other polar explorers have at times found looming a useful means of locating both land and ice fields lying beyond the normal range of vision. Toward the close of the eighteenth century, while the Napoleonic wars were in progress, an English philosopher, Dr. Vince, suggested posting lookouts along the coast to watch for the loom of approaching French warships. About the same period popular interest was aroused by the claims of a Frenchman named Bottineau, residing in Mauritius, who was said to be able to detect vessels at a distance of hundreds of miles by means of peculiar appearances in the sky. It is probable, however, that Bottineau's so-called art of "nauscropy" was either humbug or a case of self-delusion and had nothing to do with atmospheric refraction.

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