

June, 1912

## ICEBERGS AND SEARCHLIGHTS

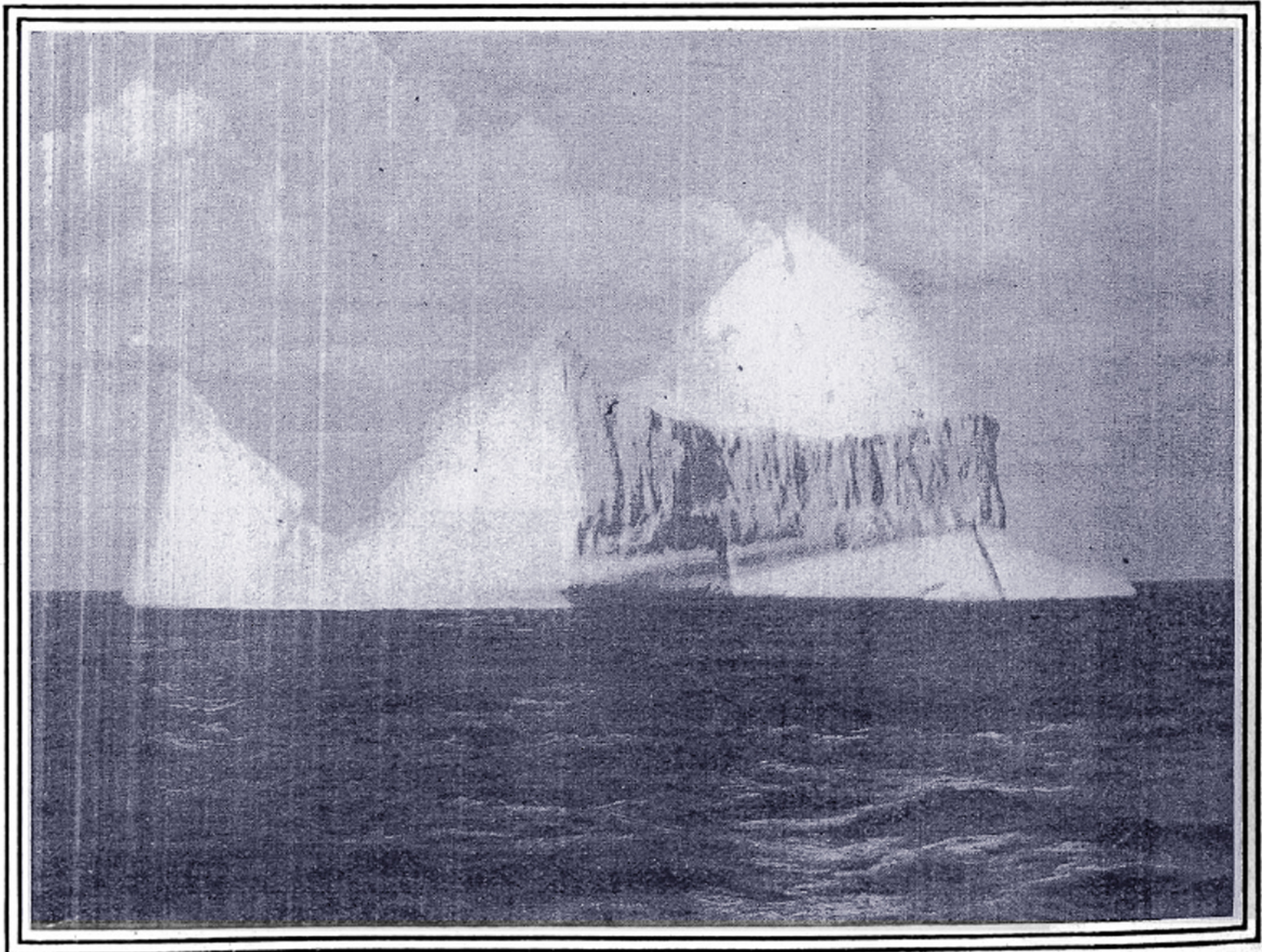
AMONG the various suggestions of a preventive nature arising out of the lamentable *Titanic* disaster, one that has attracted considerable attention has been that to use searchlights to detect the presence of icebergs. On such a proposal no opinion could be more valuable than that of Rear-Admiral Robert E. Peary, whose views have been ascertained by the *Army and Navy Journal*, and appear in its issue of April 27 last. The Admiral believes that

A powerful searchlight would be of great assistance in determining the presence of icebergs in a ship's course in clear weather. In dense fog it

would be useless except at such short range as to be of no value. There is no reason why a searchlight on a transatlantic liner should not be equally as effective in determining the presence of icebergs or field ice in any direction, as the searchlight on a battleship or cruiser in determining the presence of torpedo boats or other craft. And the same conditions which would affect the usefulness of the searchlight in the one case would also affect it in the other.

The large bergs, being most easily located and avoided, are "the least dangerous of all," and

under certain atmospheric conditions the presence of these bergs can be detected even while below the



A NORTH ATLANTIC ICEBERG

## ICEBERGS AND SEARCHLIGHTS

horizon, sometimes by the reflection upon the sky above them, sometimes by the little cloud of condensed moisture hovering over them.

At closer range air temperatures, water temperatures, the whistle and megaphone, the sound of breaking seas and the searchlight may all be of assistance in detecting the danger, and, on the other hand, under adverse conditions all these may be useless in giving warning in sufficient time to prevent disaster.

But, as the Admiral remarks—and the *Titanic* catastrophe furnished appalling testimony to the truth of the observation—"the value of all these methods is largely vitiated by the high speed at which modern steamships travel."

What in the shape of an iceberg a steamer has most to dread is thus described by Admiral Peary:

The most dangerous ice menace to a steamer is the last remaining fragment of a berg, usually a mass of dense translucent ice, hard as rock, almost entirely submerged, absorbing the color of the surrounding water, and almost invisible, even in broad daylight, until close aboard. These masses of ice present no surface to the air to affect its temperature, to cause condensation, to catch the eye, to send back an echo, or to form a sea. Nor is the size of the mass sufficient to affect the temperature of the surrounding water to any distance. I know of no way of detecting them except by the eye, and, as noted, even that is often difficult, even under favorable conditions.

These dangerous fragments of bergs we know in the Arctic regions as "growlers."

The Admiral relates an experience of his own with one of these "growlers."

I recall one occasion in Melville Bay when my second mate in broad light, with no other iceberg or fragment of ice in sight from the crow nest, smashed the ship full speed on to one of these submerged ice rocks with a force which carried away the cabin table, broke some of the couplings in the engine room and nearly sent the topmasts overboard.

The stout little wooden ship, with her solid bow and elastic sides, caromed off it like a billiard ball without injury. A steel ship would have had her bilge torn open from bow to quarter. For our huge modern steel steamships, traveling at high speed and intensely vulnerable to puncture, there is no certain protection against icebergs except to give the region where they may occur the widest berth.

In his northern work, with his "snug, strong little wooden ship, the *Roosevelt*, minding its helm quickly and going at moderate speed," icebergs never gave Explorer Peary and his party much concern. The danger they most feared, and from which they had some narrow escapes, was that "of being smashed under by a huge mass of ice breaking off from a berg alongside and falling on the deck."

And, strangely as the statement reads, there were occasions when icebergs proved themselves friends and not foes.

At times the icebergs were eagerly sought for shelter and protection. The wake of a berg or group of bergs often enabled us to hold our position against the drift of large fields of floe ice. And in Robeson and Kennedy Channels grounded icebergs frequently offered us a partially protected position between them and the rocks of the shore against the onset of heavy floes of field ice.