

JOSEPH PENNELLS
PICTURES
OF THE
PANAMA CANAL



J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY



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**JOSEPH PENNELL'S PICTURES
OF THE PANAMA CANAL**

FOURTH EDITION

Life of James McNeill Whistler

BY ELIZABETH R. AND JOSEPH PENNELL

THE Pennells have thoroughly revised the material in their Authorized Life and added much new matter, which for lack of space they were unable to incorporate in the elaborate two-volume edition now out of print. Fully illustrated with 96 plates reproduced from Whistler's works, more than half reproduced for first time.

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JOSEPH PENNELL'S PICTURES OF THE PANAMA CANAL

REPRODUCTIONS OF A SERIES OF
LITHOGRAPHS MADE BY HIM ON THE
ISTHMUS OF PANAMA, JANUARY—MARCH,
1912, TOGETHER WITH IMPRESSIONS
AND NOTES BY THE ARTIST



PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1913

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TO

J. B. BISHOP

SECRETARY OF THE ISTHMIAN
CANAL COMMISSION

WHO

MADE IT POSSIBLE
FOR ME TO DRAW
THESE LITHOGRAPHS

AND

WHO WAS ALSO GOOD
ENOUGH TO ACCEDE
TO MY REQUEST AND
READ AND CORRECT
THE PROOFS FOR ME

INTRODUCTION—MY LITHOGRAPHS OF THE PANAMA CANAL

THE idea of going to Panama to make lithographs of the Canal was mine. I suggested it, and the *Century Magazine* and *Illustrated London News* offered to print some of the drawings I might make.

Though I suggested the scheme a couple of years ago, it was not until January, 1912, that I was able to go—and then I was afraid it was too late—afraid the work was finished and that there would be nothing to see, for photographs taken a year or eighteen months before, showed some of the locks built and their gates partly in place.

Still I started, and after nearly three weeks of voyaging found, one January morning, the Isthmus of Panama ahead of the steamer, a mountainous country, showing deep valleys filled with mist, like snow fields, as I have often seen them from Montepulciano looking over Lake Thrasymene, in Italy. Beyond were higher peaks, strange yet familiar, Japanese prints, and as we came into the harbor the near hills and distant mountains were silhouetted with Japanese trees and even the houses were Japanese, and when we at length landed, the town was full of character reminiscent of Spain, yet the local character came out in the Cathedral, the tower of which—a pyramid—was covered with a shimmering, glittering mosaic of pearl oyster shells. The people, not Americans, were primitive, and the children, mostly as in Spain, were not bothered with clothes.

I followed my instinct, which took me at once to the great swamp near the town of Mount Hope, where so many of De Lesseps' plans lie buried. Here are locomotives, dredges, lock-gates, huge bulks of iron, great wheels, nameless, shapeless masses—half under water, half covered with vines—the end of a great work. I came back to Colon by the side of the French Canal, completed and working up to, I believe, Gatun Lock and Dam, and spent the afternoon in the American town, every house Japanese in feeling, French or American in construction, screened with black wire gauze, divided by white wood lines—most decorative—and all shaded by a forest of palms. Through these wandered well-made roads, and on them were walking and driving well-made Americans. There were no mosqui-

toes, no flies, no smells, none of the usual adjuncts of a tropical town.

At the end of the town was a monument, a nondescript Columbus, facing nowhere, at his feet an Indian; but it seemed to me, if any monument was wanted at Colon, it should be a great light-house or a great statue towering aloft in the harbor, a memorial to the men who, French and American, have made the Canal.

Next day I started across the Continent to Panama, for I learned the Government headquarters were there, and, until I had seen the officials, I did not know if I should be allowed to work or even stay on the Isthmus. But at Gatun I got off the train, determining to do all I could before I was stopped—as I was quite sure I should be. I saw the tops of the locks only a few hundred yards away, and, turning my back on the stunning town piled up on the hillside, walked over to them; from a bridge bearing a sign that all who used it did so at their own risk I looked down into a yawning gulf stretching to right and left, the bottom filled with crowds of tiny men and tiny trains—all in a maze of work; to the right the gulf reached to a lake, to the left to mighty gates which mounted from the bottom to my feet. Overhead, huge iron buckets flew to and fro, great cranes raised or lowered huge masses of material. As I looked, a bell rang, the men dropped their tools, and lines of little figures marched away, or climbed wooden stairs and iron ladders to the surface. The engines whistled, the buckets paused, everything stopped instantly, save that from the depths a long chain came quickly up, and clinging to the end of it, as Cellini would have grouped them, were a dozen men—a living design—the most decorative motive I have ever seen in the Wonder of Work. I could not have imagined it, and in all the time I was on the Isthmus I never saw it but once again. For a second only they were posed, and then the huge crane swung the group to ground and the design fell to pieces as they dropped off.

Across the bridge was a telephone station and beyond and below it the great approaches to the locks along which electric locomotives will draw the ships that pass through. There was a subject, and I tackled it at once. In the distance the already filling lake—among islands, but the highland still above the water, dotting it, crowned with palms and strange trees; dredgers slowly moved, native

canoes paddled rapidly, over all hovered great birds. To the right was the long line of the French Canal, almost submerged, stretching to the distance, against which, blue and misty and flat, were strange-shaped mountains, outlined with strange-shaped trees. Bridges like those of Hiroshigi connected island with island or with the mainland. It was perfect, the apotheosis of the Wonder of Work, and as I looked the whole rocked as with an earthquake—and then another. I was dragged into the hut as showers of stones rattled on the roof as blast after blast went off near by. Soon people in authority came up—I supposed to stop me; instead it was only to show pleasure that I found their work worth drawing. These men were all Americans, all so proud of their part in the Canal, and so strong and healthy—most of them trained and educated, I knew as soon as they opened their mouths—the greatest contrast to the crowd on the steamer, who now were all tamely following a guide and listening to what they could neither understand nor see during their only day ashore. These engineers and workmen are the sort of Americans worth knowing, and yet I did not see any golf links at Gatun. The day was spent in that telephone box and on the Spillway of the Dam—a semicircle of cyclopean concrete, backed by a bridge finer than Hokusai ever imagined, yet built to carry the huge engines that drag the long trains of dirt and rock across it, to make the dam. The dam, to me, was too big and too vague to draw. And all this is the work of my countrymen, and they are so proud of their work. Yet the men who have done this great work will tell you that we owe much to the French, and that if the engineers and the Commission at Panama had not the Government, with unlimited men and money, behind them, and the discoveries in sanitary science of which the French were ignorant, we, too, would have failed. They tell you, and show you how, the French worked on the Canal right across the Isthmus, and we are carrying out the great project they were unable to complete. And we have won the admiration of the world.

The sanitary problem is solved, but they tell you under the French, fever carried off a man for every tie that was laid on the Panama Railroad. This is a legend, but a true story is, that the French cared so little for their lives that with every shipload of

machinery came boxes of champagne, and those who received them asked their friends to dinner—finished the bottles—and were buried in the empty box in the morning. Now there is no fever in the Canal Zone, but there is plenty of drink in and outside of it, but, I am told, “indulged in with wonderful moderation.” I certainly never saw an American under the influence of it.

In the evening a ride of two hours took me over the thirty miles to Panama—one of the last passengers over the old line of the Panama Railway, now buried under the waters of the growing lake. From the railroad I saw for the first time the primeval forest, the tropical jungle, which I had never believed in, never believed that it could not be penetrated save with an axe or a machete; but it is so, and the richness of it, the riot of it, the variety of it, is incredible and endless. The train puffed along, in that time-taking fashion of the tropics I should soon be familiar with, passing points of view I made notes of, for first impressions are for me always the best, and one trip like this gives me more ideas than days of personal pointing out. Finally Panama was reached in the dark; all I saw was a great hill lit up with rows of lights, one above the other, in the night.

The day had not been hot, the sky was not blue or black—it was white, and filled with white clouds, though they were dark against it. There was no glare—and I had forgotten my sketching umbrella; but I never needed it. So far as I know, there is always a breeze—it is never really hot in the day—and as soon as the sun sets the trade wind rises—if it has not been blowing all day—and I could always sleep at night. It is all so unlike other hot countries—but, then, Panama is unlike other places: the sun rises and sets in the Pacific, and the city of Panama, though on the Pacific, is east of Colon, on the Atlantic.

There was not a smell, or a mosquito, or a fly on Ancon Hill, but over it all was the odor of petroleum, with which the streams and marshes of the whole zone are sprayed almost daily; and this has made the Canal and saved the workers.

Next morning I went to the Administration Building and presented my letters, though I did not know if I should be allowed to

draw. But it seemed that everything had been arranged for me by the Commission, who, it also seemed, had been doing nothing for weeks but waiting my coming. I was clothed, fed, taken about in motor cars and steam launches, given passes on the railroad, and finally turned loose to go where I wanted and draw what I liked—and if anything happened or did not happen I was just to telephone to headquarters.

The following day, donning my khaki, which I wore only once, and pocketing my pass and some oranges, I started for the locks at Pedro Miguel—pronounced, in American, Peter Megil, just as Miraflores is called Millflowers. We were all down, had breakfast, and off in the train—a jim-crow one—before the sun was up, and at Pedro Miguel station I found myself one of a horde of niggers, Greeks, Hindoos, Slovaks, Spaniards, Americans and engineers, bound for the lock, half a mile away. Here I went down to the bottom to get a drawing of the great walls that lead up to the great gates, now nearly finished. I had come at exactly the right time. These walls are surmounted with great arches and buttresses—the most decorative subject, the most stupendous motive I have ever seen—almost too great to draw. Unlike my experiences of a lifetime at other Government works, I was asked for no permit. I was allowed to go where I wanted, draw what I liked; when any attention was paid to me, it was to ask what I was working for—give me a glass of ice water—precious, out of the breeze at the bottom of a lock—offer to get me a photograph or make one, to suggest points of view, or tell me to clear out when a blast was to be fired. And the interest of these Americans in my work and in their work was something I had never seen before. A man in huge boots, overalls and ragged shirt, an apology for a hat, his sleeves up to his shoulders, proved himself in a minute a graduate of a great school of engineering, and proved as well his understanding of the importance of the work I was trying to do, and his regret that most painters could not see the splendid motives all about; and the greatest compliment I ever received came from one of these men, who told me my drawings “would work.”

Day after day it was the same—everything, including government

hotels and labor trains, open to mè. The only things to look out for were the blasts, the slips of dirt in the cut, and the trains, which rushed and switched about without any reference to those who might get in front of them. If one got run over, as was not usual; or blown up, which was unusual; or malaria, which few escaped among the workmen, there were plenty of hospitals, lots of nurses and sufficient doctors. Each railroad switch was attended by a little darkey with a big flag; of one of whom it was said he was seen to be asleep, with his head on the rails one day. The engineer of an approaching dirt train actually pulled up, and he was kicked awake and asked why he was taking a nap there. The boy replied he was "'terminated no train go by, boss, widout me knowin' it"; and of another who, awaking suddenly and seeing half a train past his switch, pulled it open and wrecked all the trains, tracks and switches within a quarter of a mile; or the third, a Jamaican, a new hand, who, being told he was not to let a train go by, promptly signalled a locomotive to come on, and when he was hauled up, smilingly said: "Dat wan't no train wat yer tole me to stop; dat's a engine."

Drawing had other interesting episodes connected with it, as when I sat at work in Culebra Cut the leading man of a file of niggers, carrying on his head a wooden box, would approach, stop beside me and look at the drawing. As I happened to look up I would notice the box was labelled, *Explosives, Highly dangerous*. Then, with his hands in his pockets, he and the rest of the gang would stumble along over the half-laid ties, slippery boulders and through the mud, trying to avoid the endless trains and balance the boxes on their heads at the same time. I must say, when I read the legend on the box the sensation was peculiar. They tell you, too, that when President Taft came down to the Cut all dynamiting gangs were ordered out; but one gang of blacks was forgotten, and as the train with the President and Colonel Goethals in it passed, the leader cheered so hard that he dropped his box, which somehow didn't go off. It was interesting, too, when one had been working steadily for some time, to find oneself surrounded, on getting up, by little flags, to announce that the whole place had been mined and should not be approached; or to find oneself entangled in a network of live wires ready to touch off

the blasts from hundreds of yards away, and to remember that I was behind a boulder about to be blown to pieces, and might be overlooked; or to be told I had better get out, as they were ready to blast, after a white man had got done chucking from one rock, to a black man on another, sticks of melanite, as the easiest way of getting them to him; or ramming in, with long poles, charges so big that trains, steam shovels and tracks had to be moved to keep them from being "shot up." I always kept out of the way as far as possible after the day at Bas Obispo when, standing some hundreds of yards from a blast watching the effect of showers of rocks falling like shells in the river, I heard wild yells, and, looking up, saw a rock as big as a foot-ball sailing toward me. I have heard one can see shells coming and dodge them. I know now that this is so, though I had to drop everything and roll to do it. But I don't like it; and accidents do happen, and there are hospitals all across the Isthmus with men, to whom accidents have happened, in them. But nothing happened to me. I did not get malaria or fever, or bitten or run over. I was very well all the time—and I walked in the sun and worked in the sun, and sat in the swamps and the bottoms of locks and at the edge of the dam, and nothing but drawings happened; but I should not advise others to try these things, nor to get too near steam shovels, which "pick up anything, from an elephant to a red-bug," but sometimes drop a ton rock; nor play around near track-lifters and dirt-train emptiers—for the things are small respecters of persons. But most people do not get hurt, and I never met anyone who wanted to leave; and I believe the threat to send the men home broke the only strike on the Canal.

I did not go to Panama to study engineering—which I know nothing about; or social problems—which I had not time to master; or Central American politics—which we are in for; but to draw the Canal as it is, and the drawings are done.

I was there at the psychological moment, and am glad I went. It is not my business to answer the question: When will the Canal be opened?—though they say it will be open within a year.

Will the dam stand? Those who have built it say so.

Which is better, a sea level or a lock? The lock canal is built.

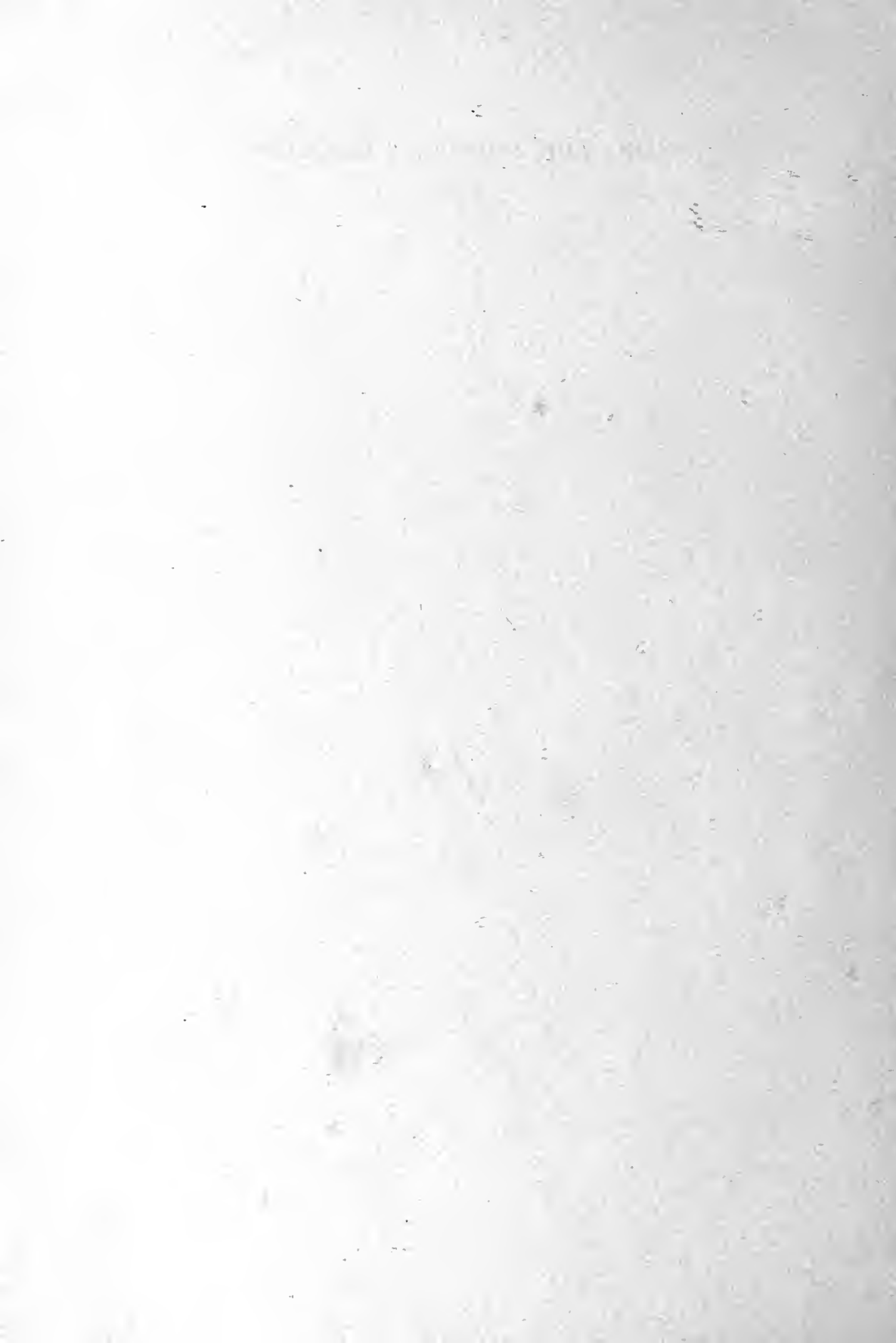
I did not bother myself about these things, nor about lengths and breadths and heights and depths. I went to see and draw the Canal, and during all the time I was there I was afforded every facility for seeing the construction of the Panama Canal, and from my point of view it is the most wonderful thing in the world; and I have tried to express this in my drawings at the moment before it was opened, for when it is opened, and the water turned in, half the amazing masses of masonry will be beneath the waters on one side and filled in with earth on the other, and the picturesqueness will have vanished. The Culebra Cut will be finer, and from great steamers passing through the gorge, worth going 15,000 miles, as I have done, to see. But I saw it at the right time, and have tried to show what I saw. And it is American—the work of my countrymen.

JOSEPH PENNELL

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I

COLON: THE AMERICAN QUARTER

I COLON: THE AMERICAN QUARTER

THE city of Colon is divided into two quarters—the native, or Panamanian, and the American. The former is picturesque, but has nothing to do with the Canal and is some distance from it. The Canal cannot be seen from the city. The American quarter, in which the Canal employees live, stands on the sea shore, and is made up of bungalows, shops, hotels, hospitals—all that goes to make up a city—save saloons. All are built of wood, painted white, and completely screened with wire gauze, rusted black by the dampness, a protection from mosquitoes and other beasts, bugs and vermin. Raised on concrete supports mostly with long, gently sloping roofs, and buried in a forest of palms, the town, the first the visitor will see, seems absolutely Japanese, is very pictorial and full of character. The design, I believe, of the houses was made by the American engineers or architects.

Very few of the higher Canal officers live at Colon, which is the Atlantic seaport of the Isthmus, the eastern mouth of the Canal, though Colon is west of Panama—such is the geography of the country.

The mouth of the Canal will be fortified; breakwaters and light-houses are being built.

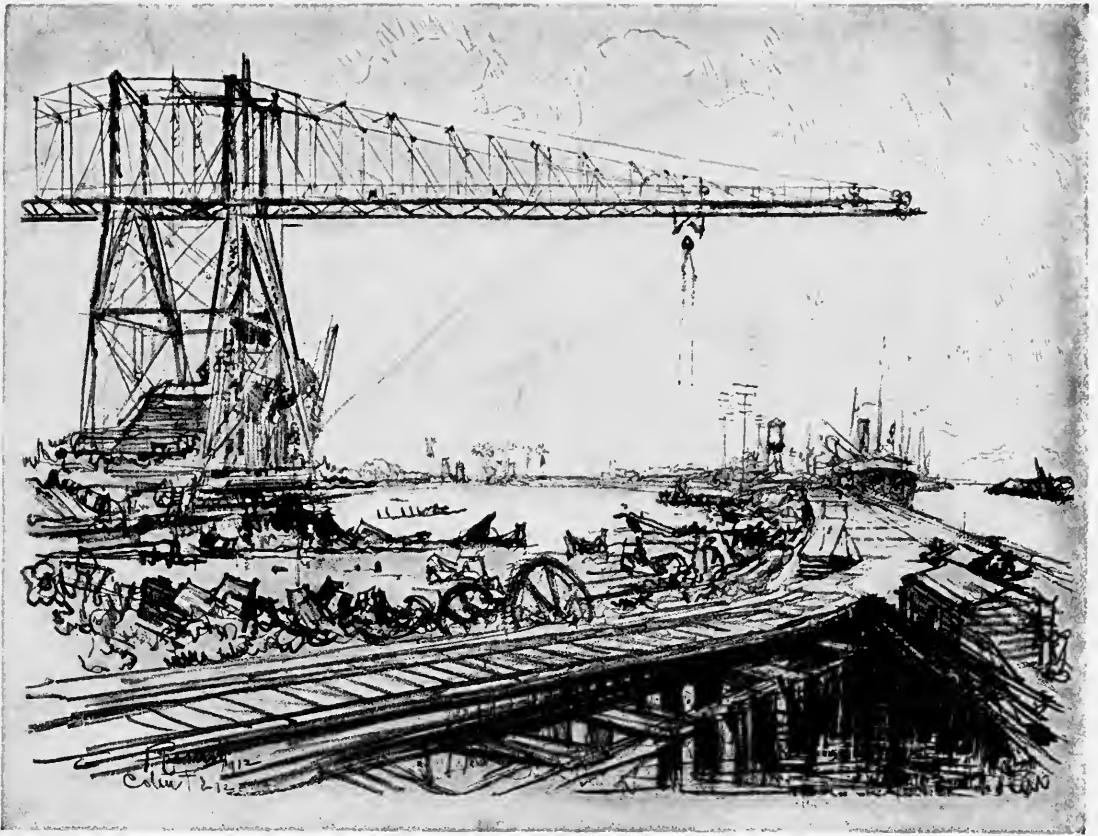
For authorities on fortification it may be interesting to state that the forts will be so situated that the locks will be completely out of range of an enemy's guns. Personally I am not a believer in wars or navies. If my theories were practised there would be no need for fortifications.

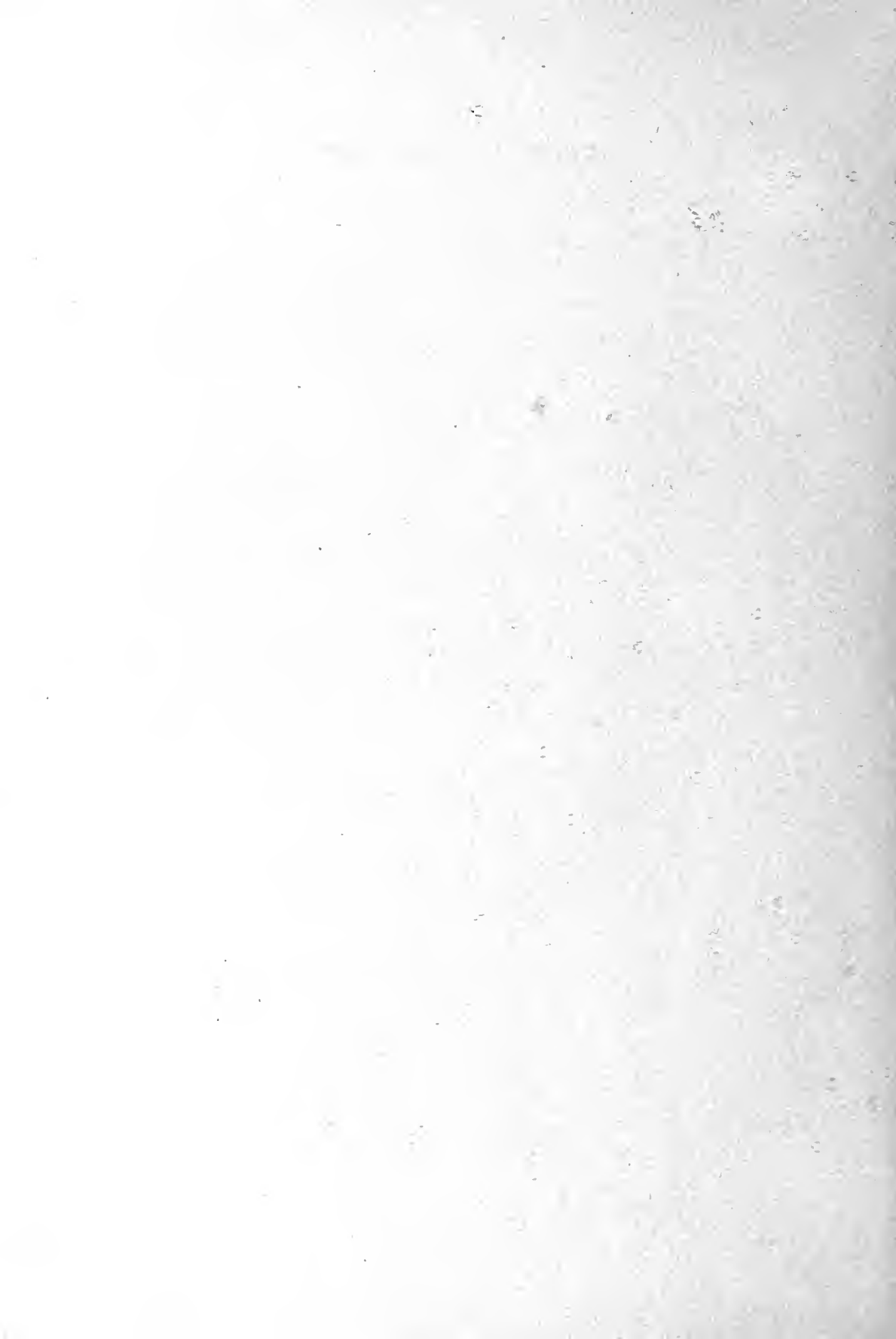


II
MOUNT HOPE

II MOUNT HOPE

NEAR Mount Hope, which—for the French—should be called the Slough of Despond, or the Lake of Despair, is a huge swamp about a mile or so from Colon, on the left bank of the French Canal, seen on the right of the lithograph. This swamp is now filled with all sorts of abandoned French machinery. Dredges, locomotives, and even what seem to be lock gates, show amid the palms in the distance. Huge American cranes for raising this French material—which the American engineers have made use of—and discharging cargo from the ships in the French Canal—which is here finished and in use—loom over the swamp, the banks of which are lined with piers and workshops full of life—a curious contrast to the dead swamp in which not a mosquito lives, nor a smell breathes.



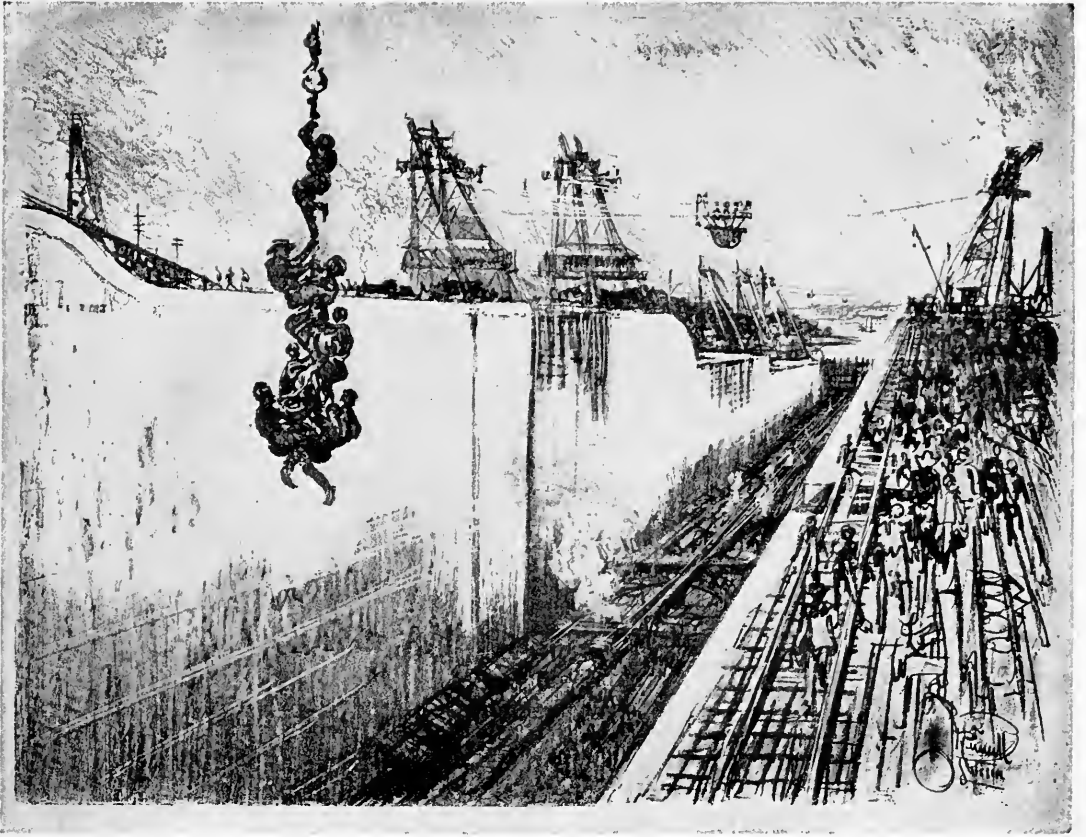


III

GATUN: DINNER TIME

III GATUN: DINNER TIME

BETWEEN Mount Hope and Gatun is much more of the swamp and much more abandoned machinery, but the Canal is not to be seen from the railroad, or any evidence of it, till the train stops at the station of Old Gatun, with its workmen's dwellings crowning the hillside. I regret I made no drawing of these, so picturesquely perched. At the station of Gatun—the first time I stopped—I saw the workmen—in decorative fashion—coming to the surface for dinner. The lithograph was made from a temporary bridge spanning the locks and looking toward Colon. The great machines on each side of the locks are for mixing and carrying to their place, in huge buckets, the cement and concrete, of which the locks are built. The French Canal is in the extreme distance, now used by our engineers.

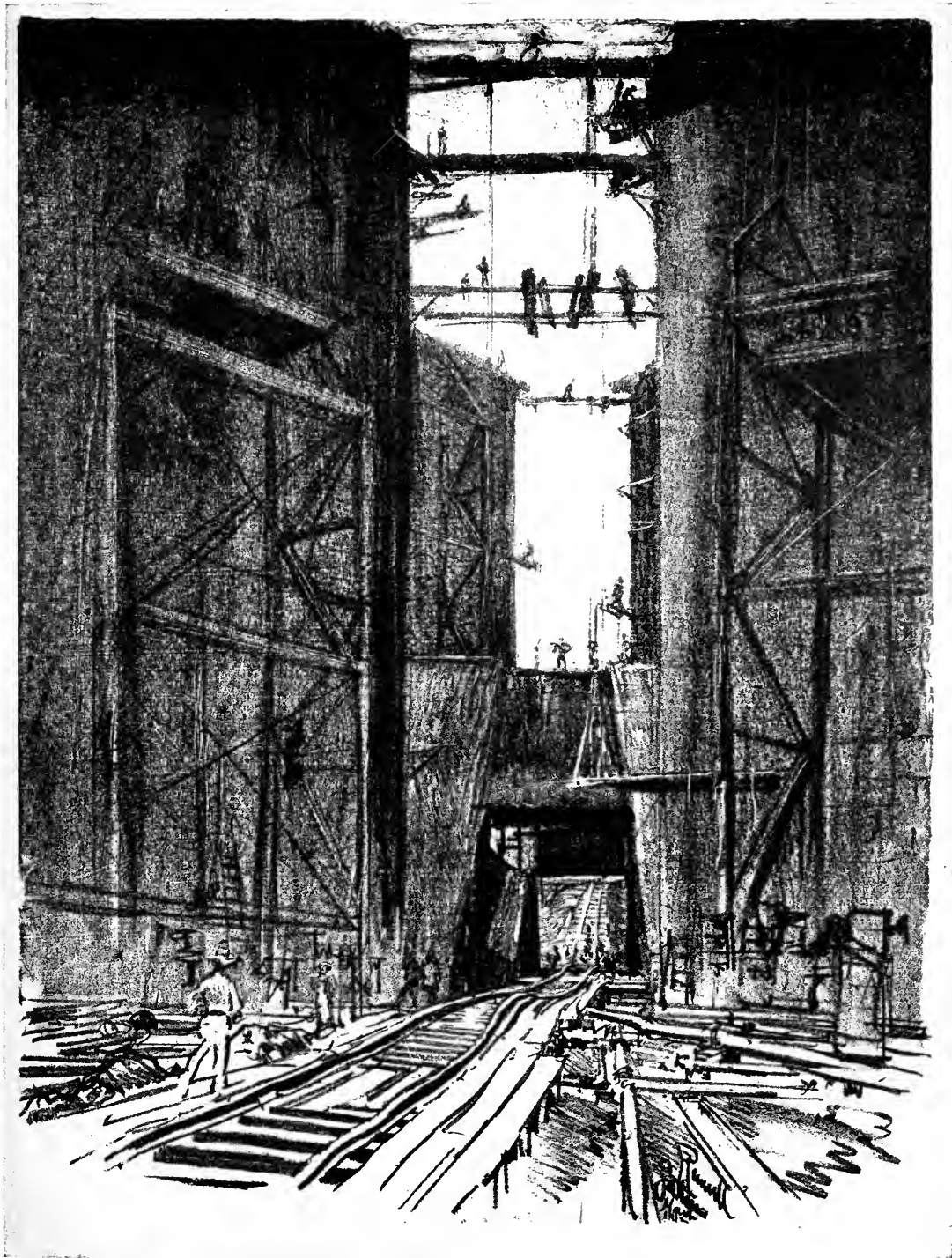


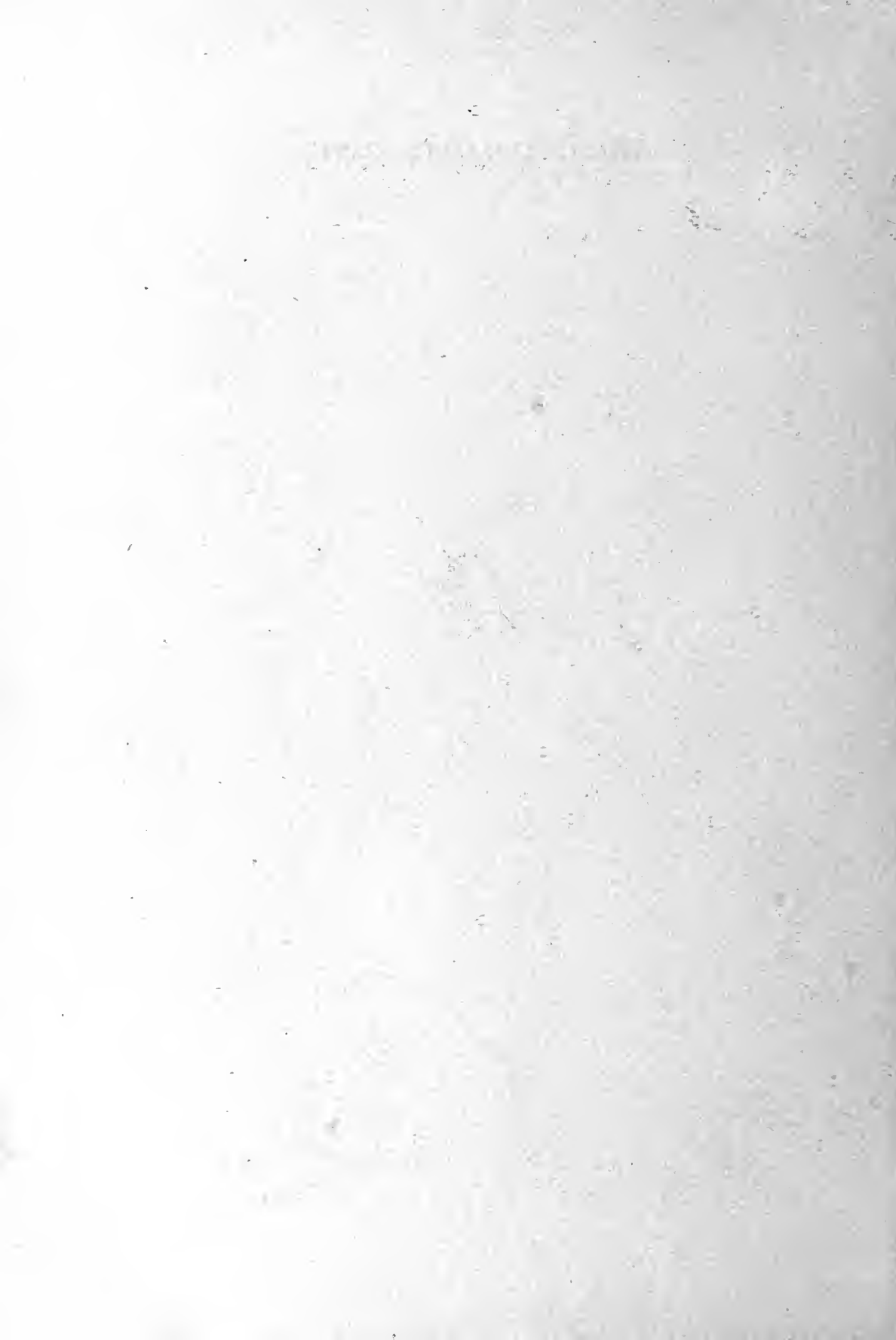
IV
AT THE BOTTOM OF GATUN LOCK

IV AT THE BOTTOM OF GATUN LOCK

THERE is a flight of three double locks at Gatun by which ships will be raised eighty-five feet to the level of Gatun Lake. From the gates of the upper lock—the nearest to the Pacific—they will sail across the now-forming lake some miles (about twenty, I believe) to the Culebra Cut; through this, nine miles long, they will pass, and then descend by three other flights of locks, at Pedro Miguel and Miraflores, to the Pacific, which is twenty feet higher, I believe, than the Atlantic. The great height, eighty-five feet, was agreed upon so as to save excavation in the Cut and time in completion—one of those magnificent labor-saving devices of the moment—which I, not being an engineer, see no necessity for—having waited four hundred years for the Canal, we might, as an outsider, it seems to me, have waited four more years and got rid of a number of the locks, even if it cost more money.

The lithograph made in the middle lock shows the gates towering on either side. These gates were covered, when I made the drawing, with their armor plates. The lower parts, I was told, are to be filled with air, and the gates, worked by electricity, will virtually float. The scaffolding is only temporary, and so is the opening at the bottom and the railroad tracks, which were filled up and discarded while I was there. So huge are the locks—the three, I think, a mile long, each one thousand feet between the gates, and about ninety feet deep—that, until the men knock off, there scarce seems anyone around.



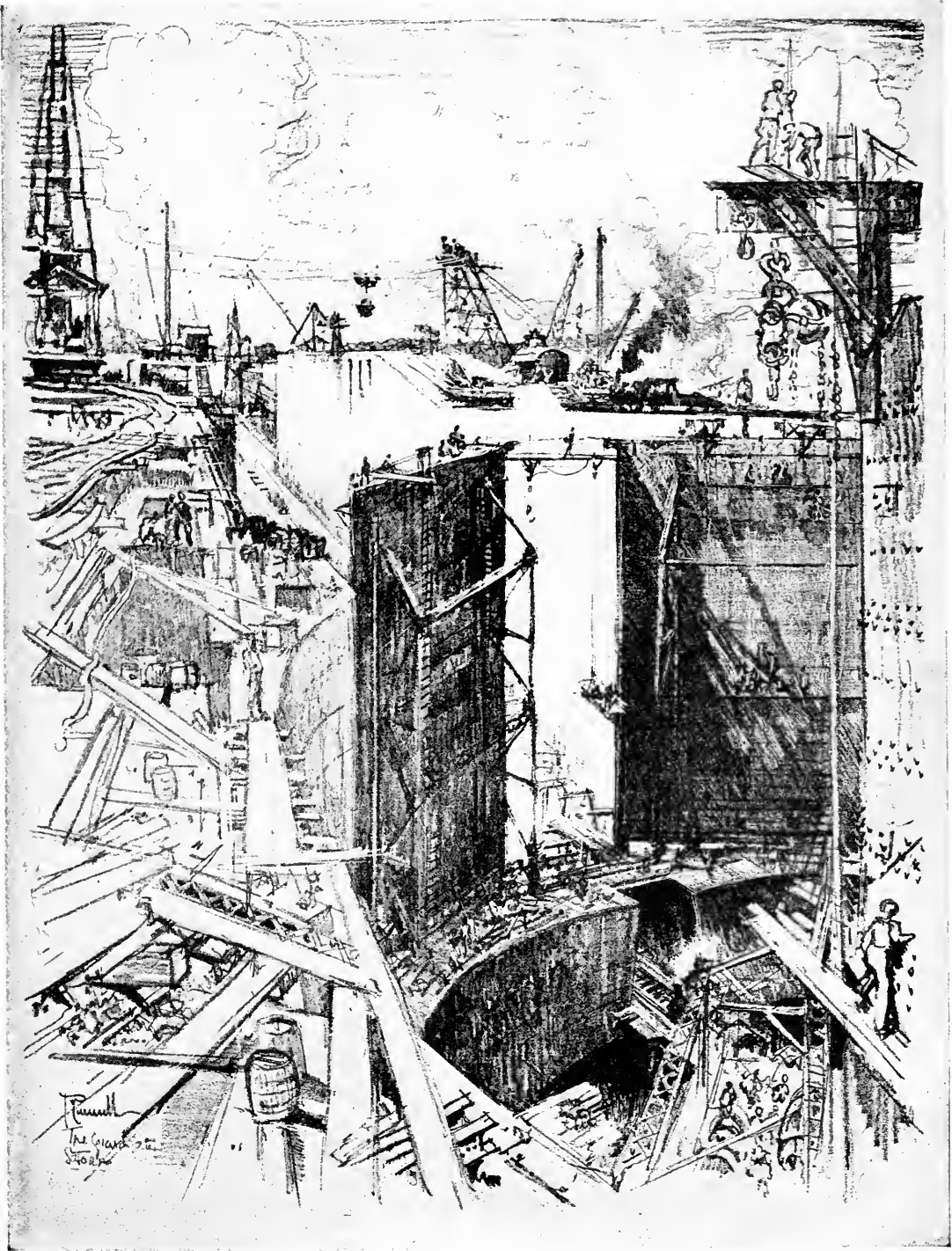


V

THE GUARD GATE, GATUN

V THE GUARD GATE, GATUN

THERE is a safety gate in each lock, to protect, in case of accident, the main lock gate, just suggested, with the figures working at the armor-plate facing, on the extreme right. Beyond are the outer walls and approaches of the upper lock, and beyond these, but unseen, the lake. At the bottom is the railroad and the temporary opening shown in the previous drawing. The scale, the immensity of the whole may be judged by the size of the engines and figures. I have never seen such a magnificent arrangement of line, light and mass, and yet those were the last things the engineers thought of. But great work is great art, and always was and will be. This is the Wonder of Work.



Furnell
The Great ...
1848

