

A Plea for the Monitor in Coast Defence

How a Naval Officer of High Rank Regards the Claims of the Little Battleships Whose Fame Was First Established by the Civil War—Why He Thinks That the Monitor Is Peculiarly Adapted to the Requirements of a Nation with Extended Coasts and Many Harbors.

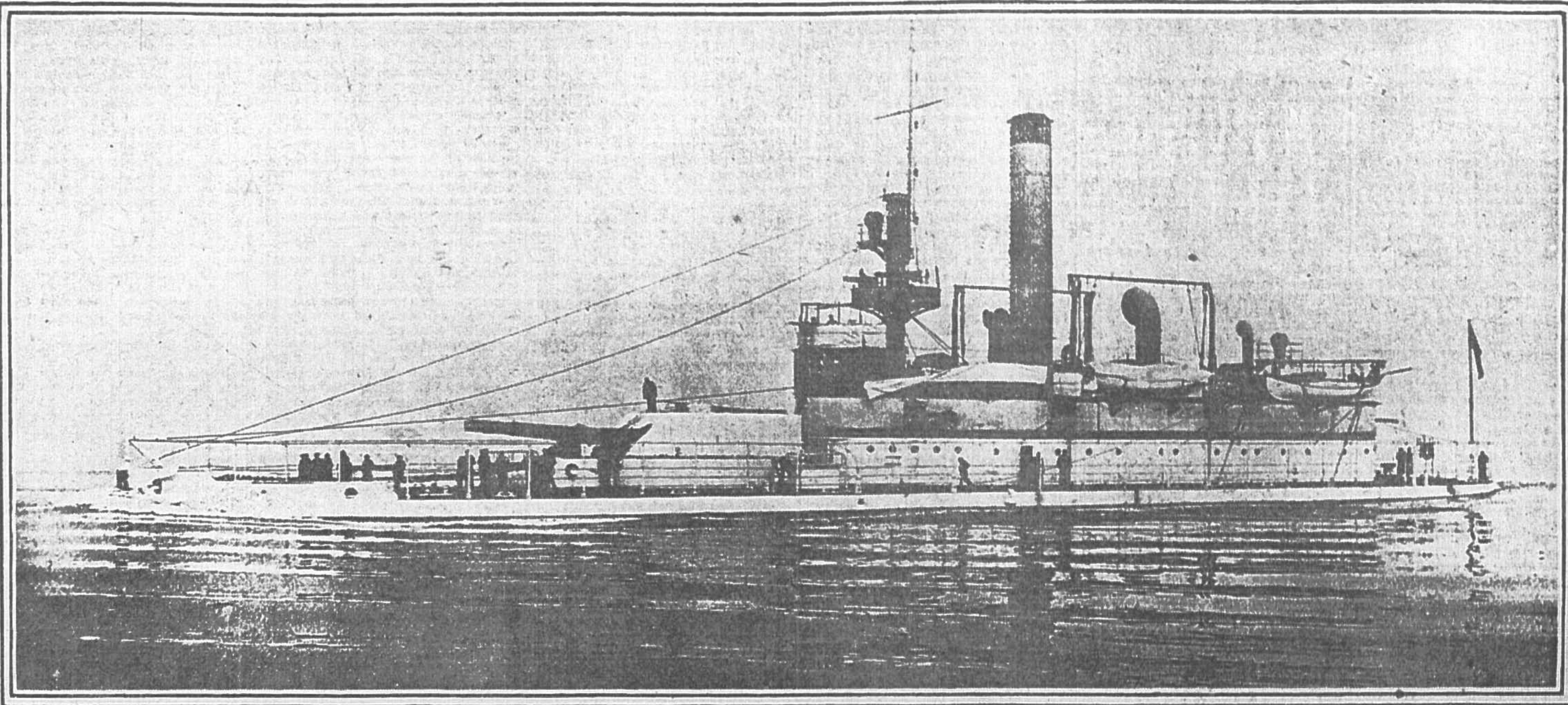
By Rene Bache.

FROM the standpoint of 'preparedness,' the most colossal blunder ever made by the maritime branch of our government was the virtual abandonment of the 'monitor' type of warship," said a naval officer of high rank the other day.

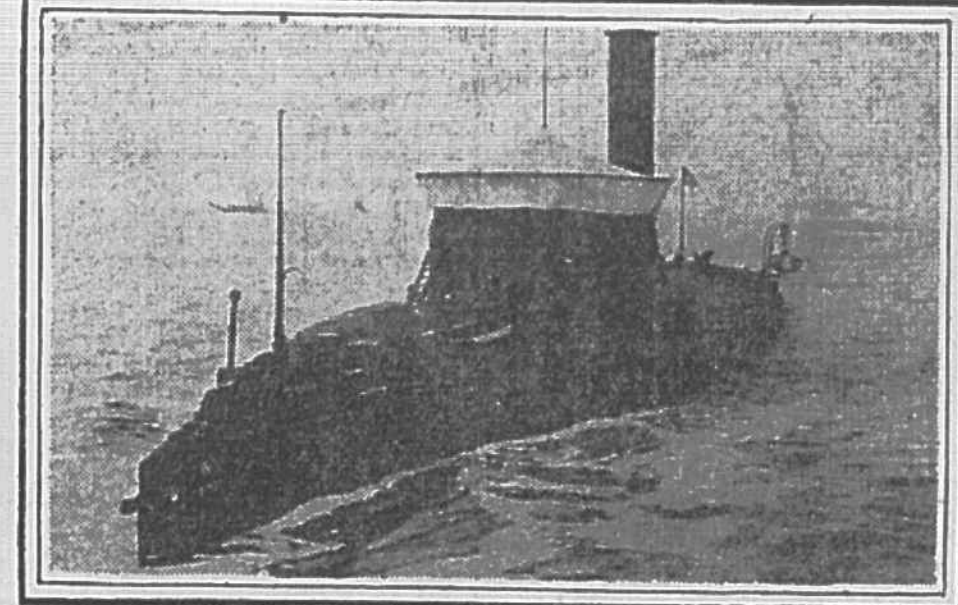
"That type of vessel was originally, of course, an American invention. We had such faith in it that we kept on building monitors of improved patterns until quite recently, the last two, the Tonopah and Tallahassee, being first commissioned in 1903. But suddenly the navy department made up its mind that they were back numbers, and, though nine of them are still on our naval list, practically dropped them. The newest four (including the two I have mentioned) are now doing duty as submarine tenders.

"If it were a question of open sea fighting the monitors might well be declared useless under the conditions of modern warfare. With a speed of only 10 or 11 knots, they would be at the mercy of swift battleships, and they could not keep up with a fleet. But this means only that they would not be serviceable in the first line of defence. It does not signify that they would be less useful in the second line—in other words, for defending the coast.

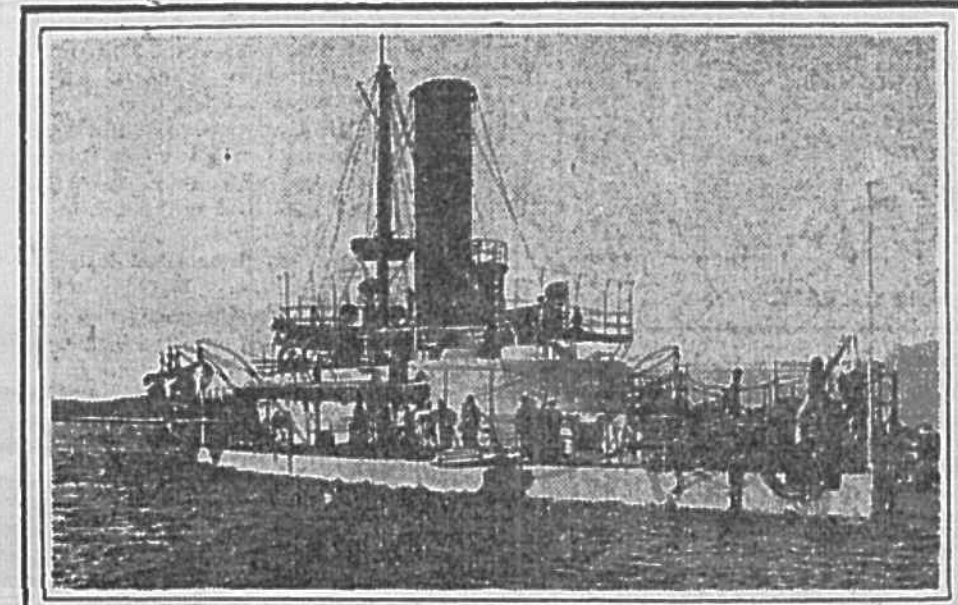
"The war problem now confronting us that gives our government the most anxiety is the defence of our harbors and river mouths, in



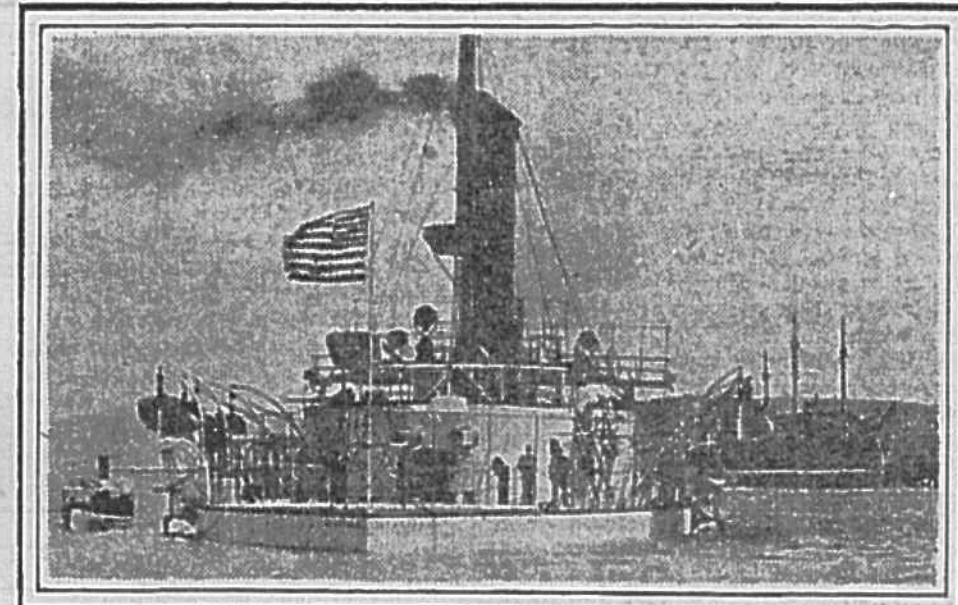
An Interesting Profile of the Tallahassee, Formerly Named the Florida.



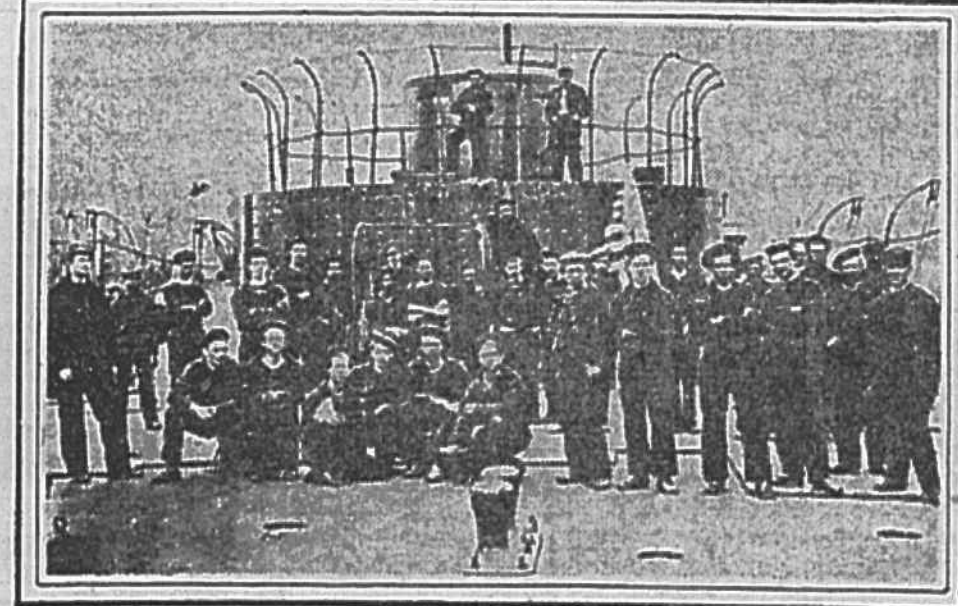
The Canonicus, an Old Civil War Monitor, Patterned Closely After the Original Type.



The Amphitrite.



The Monterey.



A Monitor and Her Crew in the Civil War.

case the fleet is smashed. The principal harbors and some of the river mouths are protected, more or less by forts. But it has been clearly shown that enemy battleships could steam along out of range of the forts defending New York, and with their high explosive shells destroy the whole business section of the metropolis. They could attack other seacoast cities with equally disastrous results.

Monitors Best Coast Defence.

"If, however, we had an adequate number of floating, sea-going forts, mobile and heavily gunned—in other words, monitors of the modern, improved type—no such peril would exist. Our coast cities would be safe against attack by sea. Their billions of dollars' worth of property would not be in danger, and there would be no further occasion for alarm lest our seaports be laid under contribution by even the most formidable foe.

"For the protection of harbors and river mouths these vessels are most admirably adapted. None of those we have carries more than four big guns, but these can be of the largest calibre and longest range. Consider the Monterey, for example. Her main deck being only 30 inches above the level of the water, she cannot be seen from a distance of three miles (which is about the minimum battle range in the naval warfare of today), and to strike her with a projectile from that distance would be as difficult as to hit the edge of a visiting card at 50 paces with a pistol bullet.

"A battleship towers 25 or 30 feet above the water, nearly as high as an ordinary house, and is an easy target at a range of eight or ten miles. A craft like the Monterey presents no target worth mentioning, and her guns could 'plug' the high-freeboard vessel at leisure, and with reasonable certainty of aim long before the latter was able to get within sight of her. For this purpose she could lie outside the river mouth or harbor, into which, in case of necessity, she would withdraw.

"The monitor draws only 15 to 17 feet of water as against 30 feet for the average battleship. Thus, in case the enemy's dreadnoughts ventured into the harbor or river mouth, such a craft would have a great advantage, being able to choose her own tactical position and manoeuvre at will; whereas the foe would be obliged to keep to the channel. How useful even two or three ships of this type would be in supplementing with their powerful mobile batteries the guns of forts on the land is sufficiently manifest.

Now Used as Tenders.

"Of the nine monitors now on the naval list, the four oldest are the Amphitrite, Miantonomoh, Monadnock and Terror. These are sister boats, quadruplets, each of them being 263 feet long and of 3990 tons displacement, and carrying four 10-inch breech-loading rifles. The Monadnock is at Manila. The Terror and Miantonomoh are at the navy yard near Philadelphia, and the Amphitrite is in use at New Or-

leans by the Louisiana naval militia. "The Monterey (now stationed at Manila) is of a newer type and of slightly greater displacement. She carries two 12-inch guns and two of 10-inch calibre. The remaining four—the Cheyenne, Ozark, Tallahassee and Tonopah—are the latest built, and were first commissioned in 1902 and 1903. They are quadruplets, each of them being of 3225 tons and 255 feet long, and carrying two 12-inch breech-loaders.

"In our naval service one tender is provided for each group of five submarines. Such a vessel is fitted up as a floating machine shop, equipped for making all ordinary repairs that submarine boats may require. She has dynamos for charging the electric batteries of the submarines, and carries stores and supplies of all kinds likely to be needed. To such base uses have our four newest monitors been reduced.

"We did have, however, one much bigger monitor, the Puritan, first commissioned in 1896. She was of 6000 tons displacement, and carried four 12-inch rifles. But so esteemed that not long ago she was purposely destroyed, being used as a target for testing the efficiency of high explosive shells. At last accounts she was lying on the bottom of the Potomac river—a dead loss to the government of about \$2,000,000.

Stanchest of Floating Craft.

"Seven first-class monitors can be built for the cost of a modern dreadnought. If we had 40 or 50 of them our seaboard cities would be safe from attack. There should be at least half a dozen—preferably eight or nine, perhaps—in New York harbor. Each of them should have four 14-inch guns, supplemented by a battery of quick-firers mounted on the turrets and on a steel flying deck fitted between the turrets.

"The monitor is the stanchest type of craft that floats, and nothing, short of a mine or torpedo, can sink it. It is armored over its entire length, whereas even the most formidable battleship has unprotected ends, only her 'vitals' being defended by armor. The monitor's light draft enables her to run into and out of any port of importance, along our coasts. South of the Chesapeake there is no Atlantic harbor that is accessible to a battleship at all stages of tide. On the Pacific side such a vessel can enter only the Golden Gate, Puget sound, and, under exceptionally favorable conditions, the Columbia river.

"The suggestion that monitors could not sight their guns in a seaway is wholly absurd. On one occasion, many years ago, Admiral Bunce took the Monterey out into the ocean with the deliberate purpose of looking for a storm. The ship went through two big gales, and floated, as he said, 'like a duck on the water.' She was perfectly manageable under conditions which would have rendered it impossible for battleships to use their guns. It was found that she could pass the Columbia river bar at a time when merchant steamers did not dare make the attempt. "The monitor is an unequalled floating gun platform. Perhaps you

have seen a pine chip and a hickory chip floating together. The pine chip bobs about on the crest of every wave, but the heavy hickory chip is comparatively undisturbed by the waves that break over it. The monitor corresponds to the hickory chip, though waves break over it, no trouble results. It is an air tank hermetically sealed—which is the reason why it cannot sink. There is no possibility of its 'turning turtle' and going to the bottom, like a battleship.

"From first to last we have built no fewer than 54 monitors, begin-

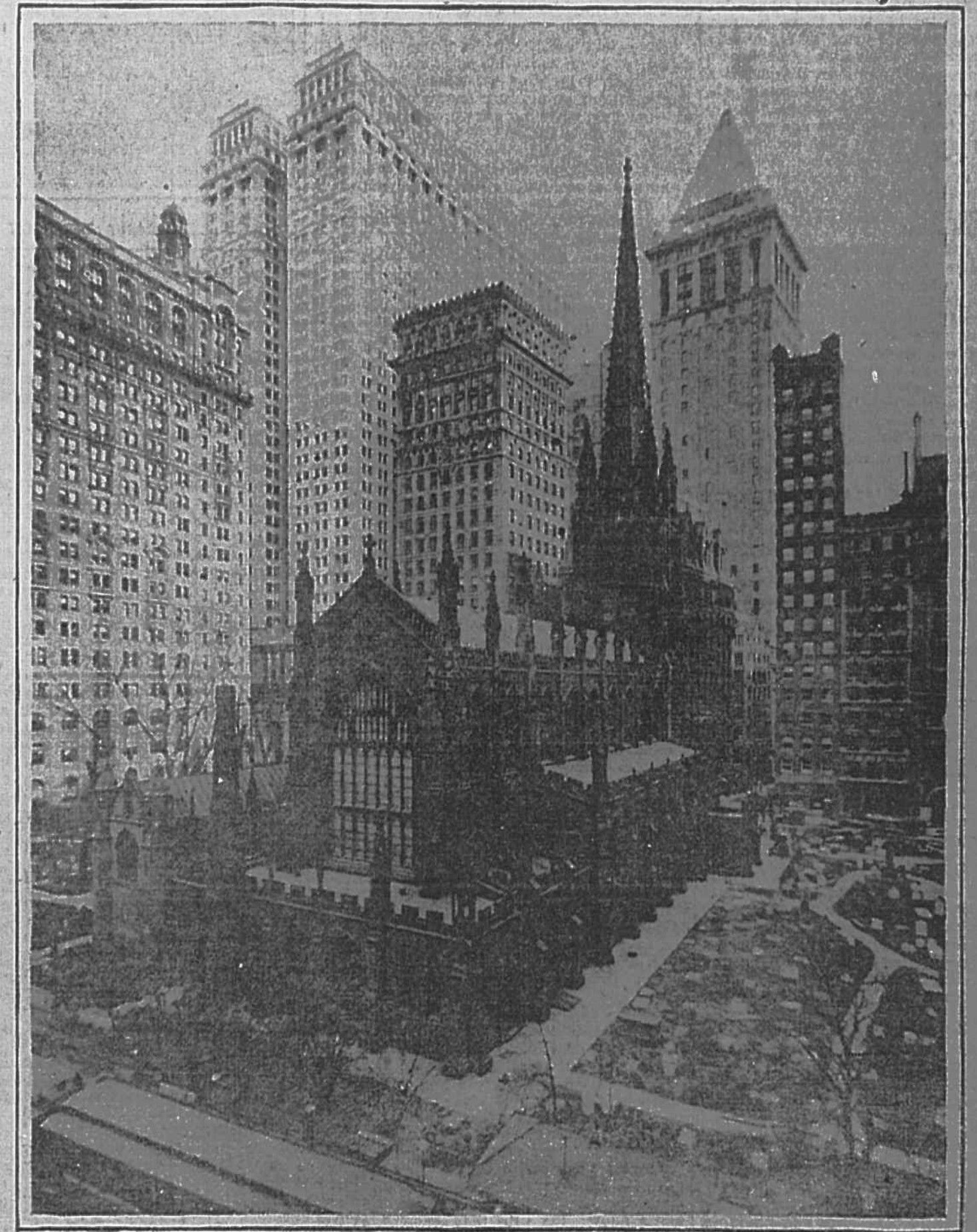
ning with the Merrimac's famous antagonist (sunk during the civil war in a storm off Cape Hatteras), and winding up with the Tonopah quadruplets, which went into commission only a dozen years ago. The persistence with which our government went on with the construction of vessels of this type is only less remarkable than the suddenness with which it condemned and dropped them.

"In the course of time every warship must become obsolete and use-

less. But my contention is that such a description does not in the least apply, as yet, to monitors of the modern type. These steel vessels, adequately armored, and carrying big breech-loading rifles, are admirably adapted, under the war conditions of today, for serving as floating forts. Being mobile, they would be likely to prove more effective for harbor defence than the most formidable shore batteries.

"Instead of 'scrapping' the monitors we now possess, we should build many more of them, making them bigger—say, of the size of the destroyed Puritan—and arming them with guns of 14-inch calibre."

"Seeing New York" When It Was Different



There was a time when the New Yorker and his cousin from out of town climbed into Army steeple to see the city. From a confined space above the belfry the metropolis was revealed as from no other point. The photograph on this page shows what time has done to the venerable church at the head of Wall street. It is still possible to see New York from the old steeple, but scarcely more of it than from the vantage point in the grave yard below.

