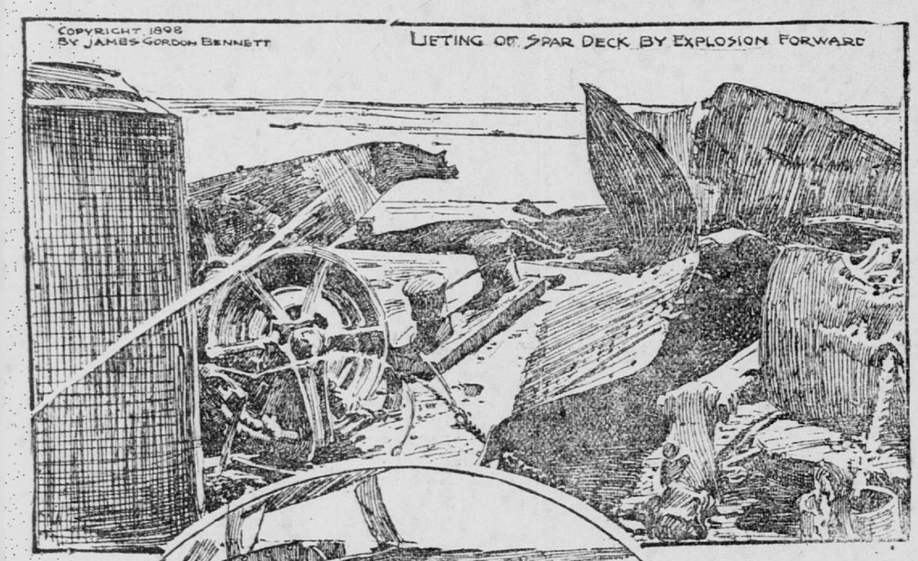
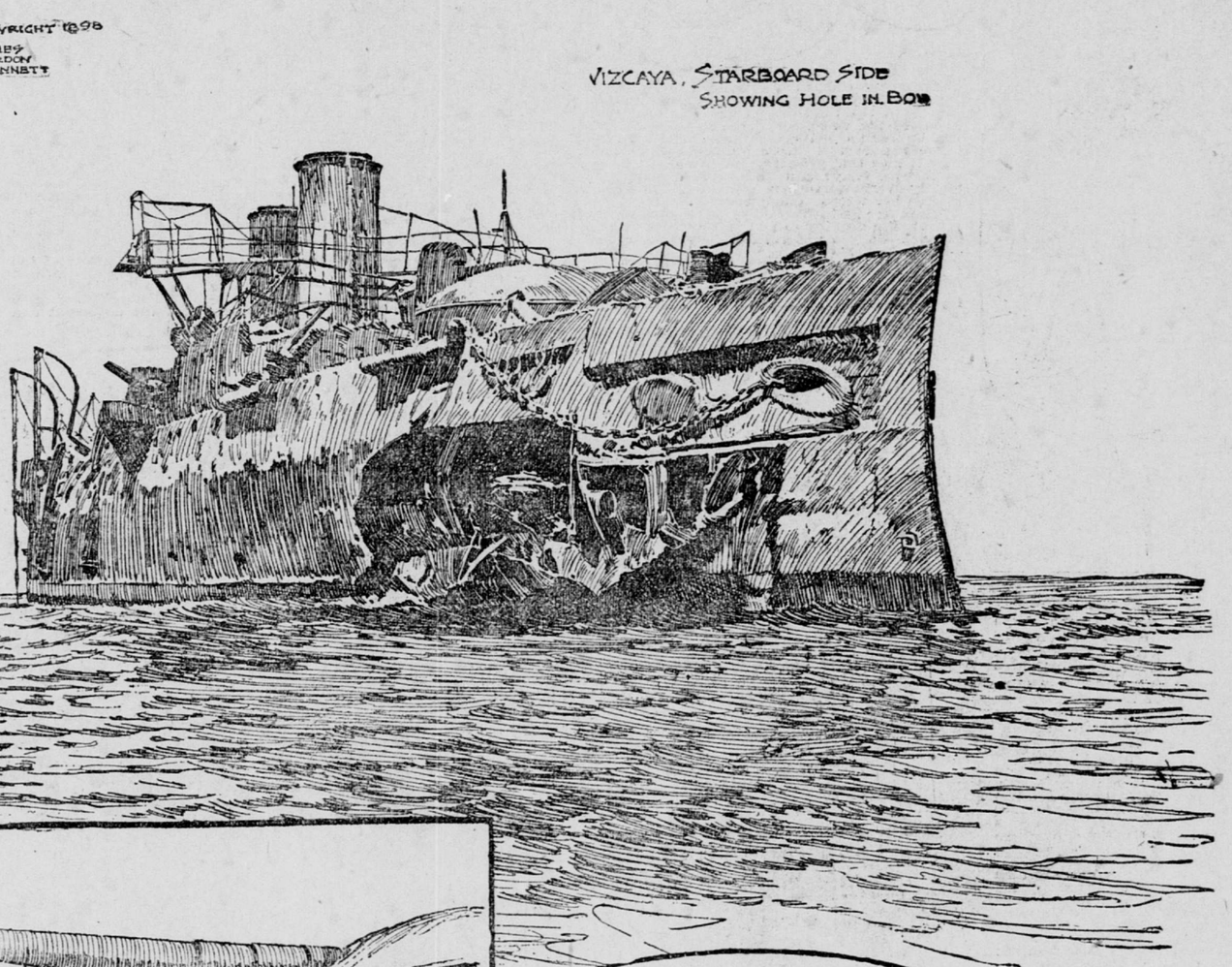
Battleships as Told by Special Photographs - - -

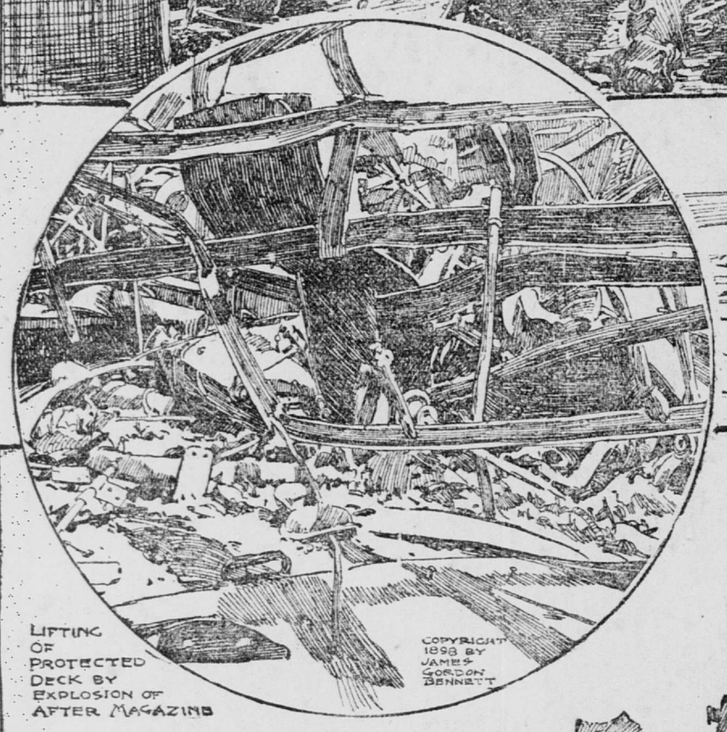
WRECK OF SPAIN'S CRACK BATTLESHIP, THE VIZCAYA.

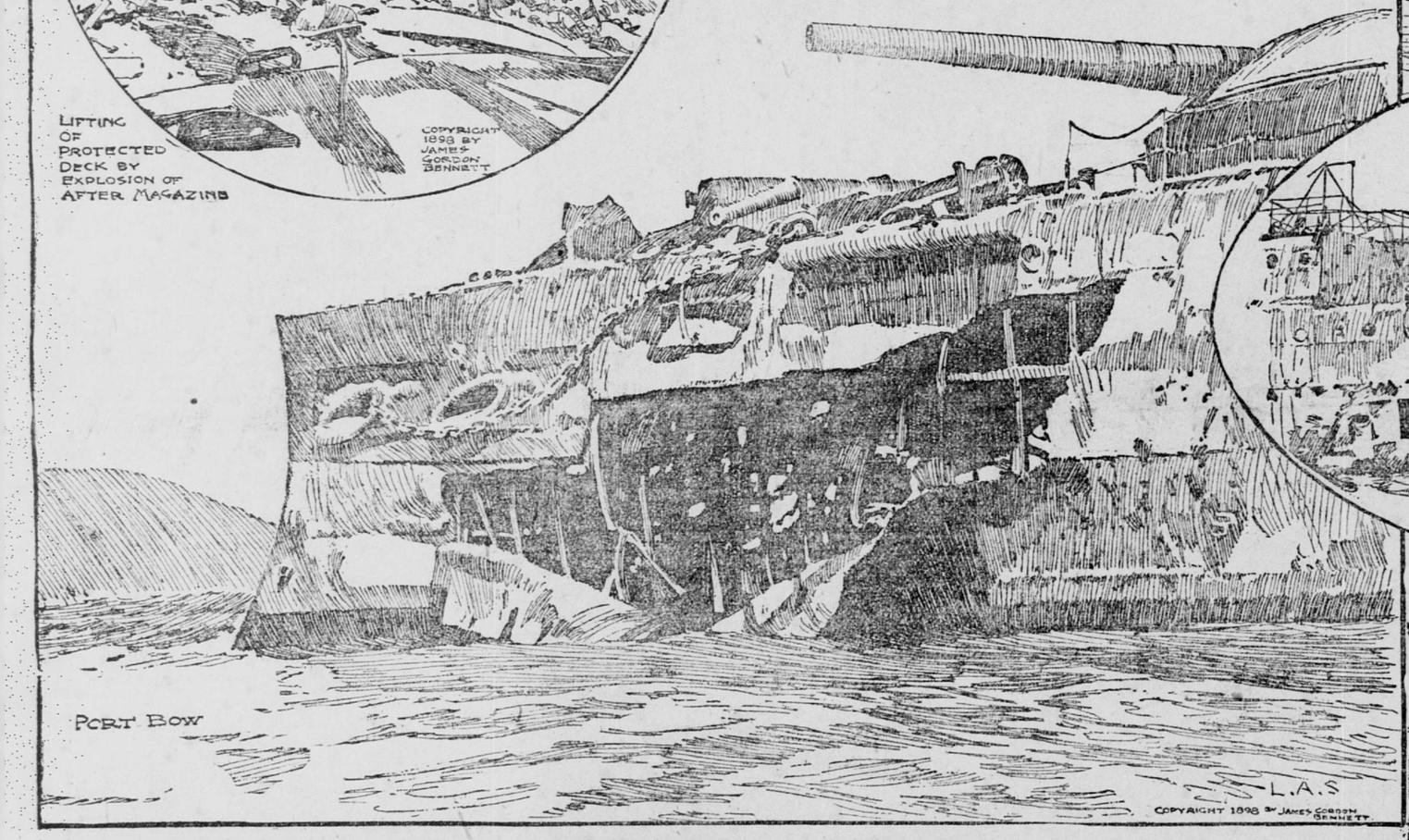
From Photographs Taken Specially for the Sunday Call.

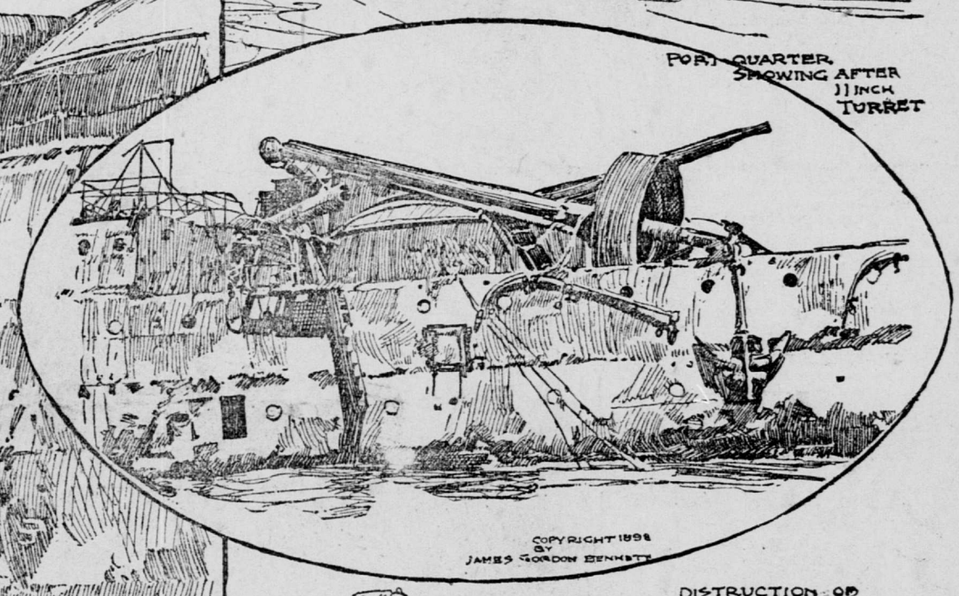
No Words Could So Eloquently Convey the Effects of a Heavy Storm of Modern Naval Projectiles as These Photographs of the Splendid Ship That Was Once Spain's and Now Is Ours by Right of Conquest. All the Pictures on This Page Are Different Aspects of the Same Ship.

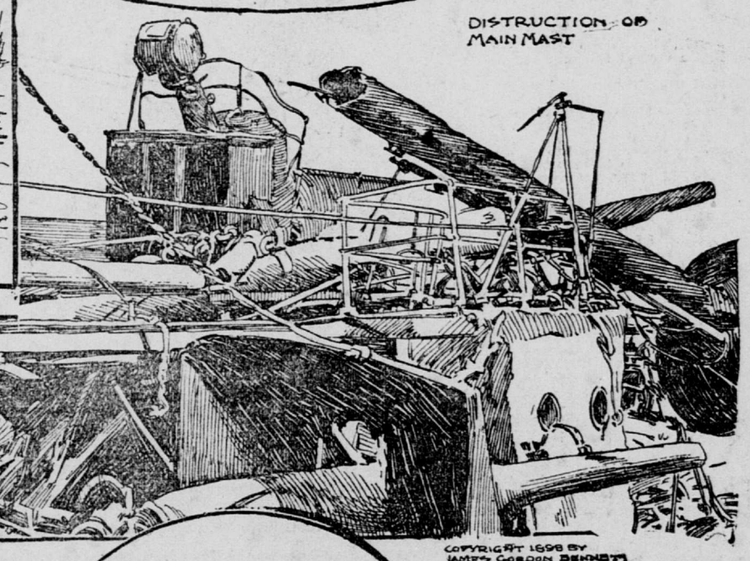


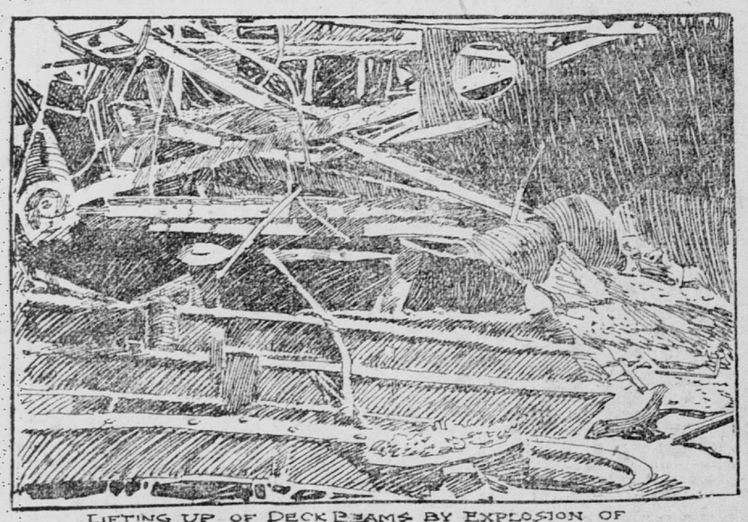


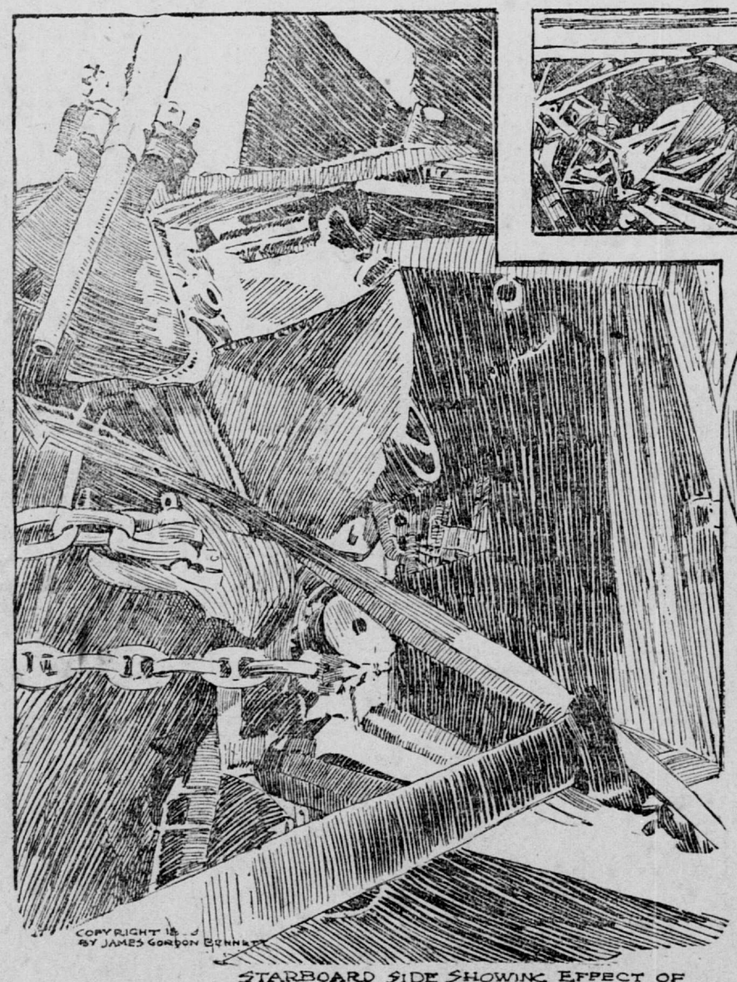


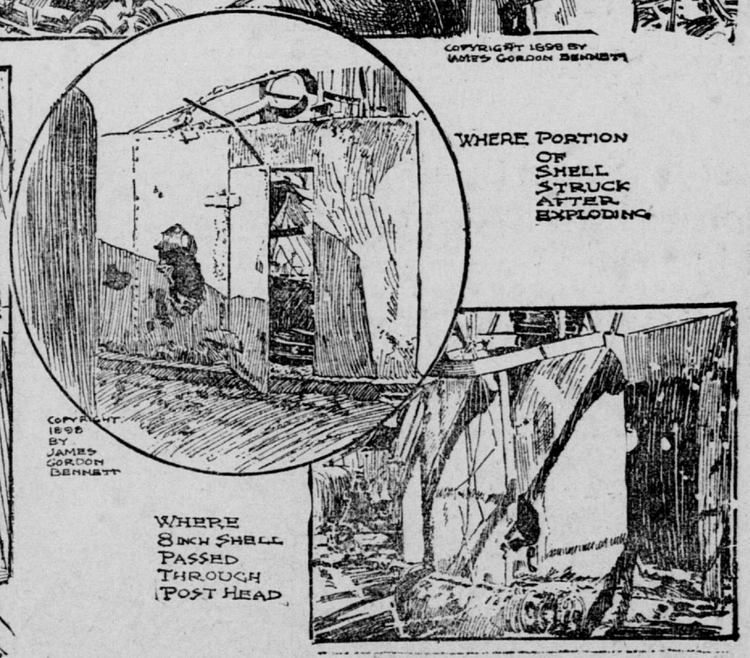












Spanish crews to cheat us out of them by opening the sea valves after the white flag of surrender was flying shall not succeed."

To those who are familiar with the sea and its ways, the task confronting the wrecking company in the case of the Cristobal Colon and Maria Teresa is stupendous. The latter, lying on an even keel in shallow water, presents fewer difficulties, but the crack ship of Cervera's squadron, the fleet Colon, is situated about as badly as can be imagined. She lies on her beam ends on a sloping part of the Cuban coast, some forty-eight miles from Santiago. It will be necessary to right her and then, supported by pontoons, to tow the hull to Santiago.

Soundings already taken show that her position is such that a sudden storm from the south will have a tendency to drive her farther up on the beach, a contingency that will render the work of wrecking her almost if not quite impossible. There are able men engaged on the task, however—men who have confronted such problems before—and at this present time of writing the odds are even that the Cristobal Colon will sail under the American flag in due course of time.

The plan formulated by Naval Constructor Hobson, and heartily approved by the wrecking company holding the contract, calls for the use of pontoons of great lifting capacity and a number of air bags. The latter are to be placed empty within the hull and then inflated. The air bag idea is comparatively new, but the use of pontoons is an old story. The outfit now at work on the Spanish warships includes a number of strongly built pontoons, several powerful tugs and a large floating crane.

The first duty to be attended to in a case like that of the Colon is to lighten her of everything movable. When this is accomplished the real labor begins. The pontoons are towed alongside and placed in positions equally divided on each side of the wreck. Heavy chains must now be passed under the hull, and to do this it is necessary to proceed first with what is technically known as a sweep chain or "messenger." This is a small chain which is sawed through the mud and debris at the bottom to a point under the keel, where the main lifting chains are passed from pontoon to pontoon.

A number of chains of increasing thickness are then drawn under, until the heavy chain which is to do the work is in position. Chain after chain follows, until there are a sufficient number to answer the purpose. This preliminary task is by no means easy, as the masses of debris which naturally accumulate under the hull retard progress and often call for the services of several divers. The chains, when finally in place, pass up through the pontoon wells to the pontoon decks, where there are certain toggles arranged for controlling them. These chains are immense affairs, and the utmost care is taken in their manufacture. Cases have occurred where defective links have been the means of undoing in one moment the work of weeks.

In righting vessels on their beam ends the process known as parbuckling is generally used. The chains are passed from the pontoons vertically downward and completely under the side of the hull which touches the shoal. Then they pass upward by the keel, are led over the opposite side, and are then attached to some object on the wreck, such as the mast or superstructure. When the tide is out the slack on the chains is taken in, and the ends are securely fastened to the pontoons. If everything works well, if the chains safely stand the strain, if the mast or superstructure does not give way, then the rise of the tide will cause the hull to be gradually lifted until she stands on an even keel.

This much accomplished, preparations are made to float the wreck. In the case of the Colon, divers will be utilized to place the empty air bags in the lower decks. Each bag is supposed to be capable of lifting thirteen tons. As the Spaniard was a heavy ship, a great number of these, in addition to the pontoons, will be needed. The placing of the bags is not a difficult task as a rule, but due attention must be paid to the tide on the Cuban coast and to the fact that the spot is entirely open to the sea and the sweep of the southern winds.

A better understanding of the work necessary in raising the Colon can be obtained from a description of the wrecking of the Wells City, an English steamer of 2000 tons, which was sent to the bottom of the North River by a collision with the American steamer Guyandotte. The same company now working on the Spanish warships raised the Wells City, and the same system of pontoons was used. The three pairs of pontoons employed then had a greater raising capacity than the tonnage of the steamer. This was rendered necessary by the fact that there was eight feet of water over her deck, and a considerable amount of debris and sediment which had accumulated by the action of the river's current.

Powerful chains of three-inch thickness were used on the pontoons. When the chains were in place the pontoons were pumped full, then, as the latter sank the slack of the chains was hauled in and made fast. The moment the pumping out began the lifting power of the pontoons became apparent, and the buoyancy of the six pontoons slowly but surely overcame the wreck's weight.

In 1884 the wrecking company now engaged on the Spanish vessels raised the United States steamship Tallapoosa, sunk by a coal schooner in Long Island Sound. Pontoons were used, and in a remarkably short space of time the old gunboat was lifted, pumped free from sand and water and sent under her own steam to the Brooklyn navy-yard.