

THE NEW GOLD DISCOVERIES ON THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA.

BY F. M. OTIS, M.D.,

SURGEON OF THE STEAMSHIP "Moses Taylor."

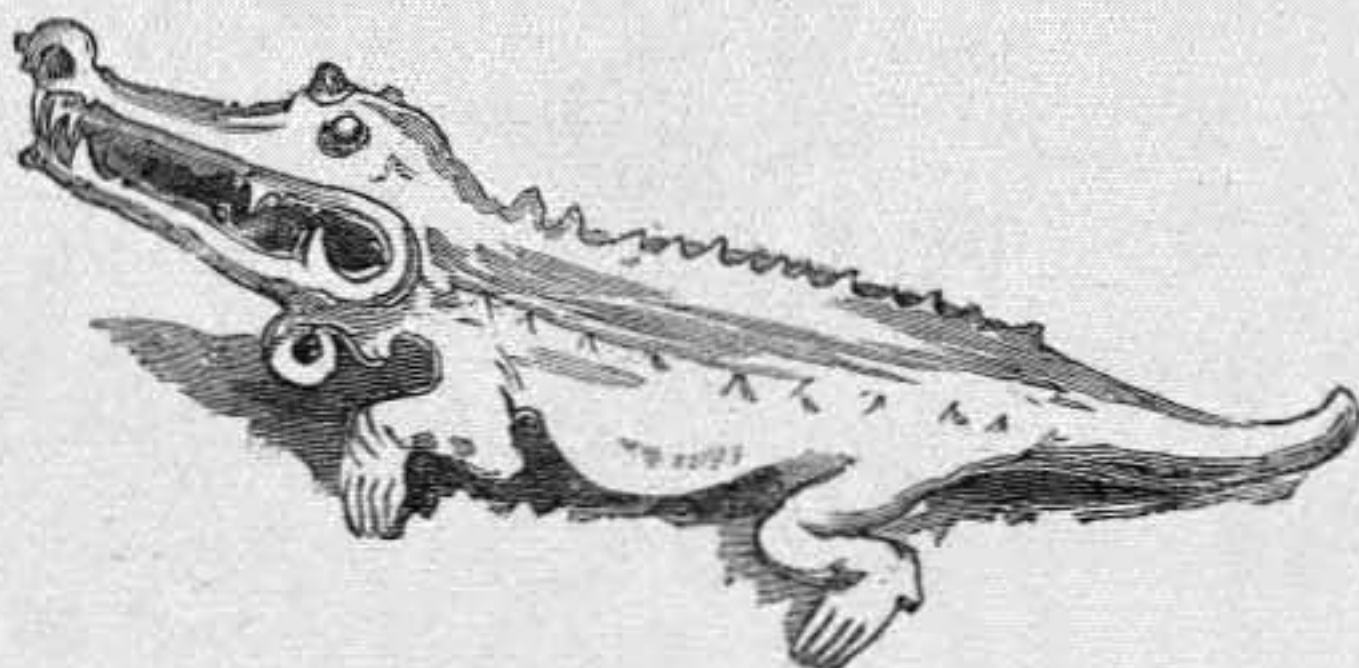
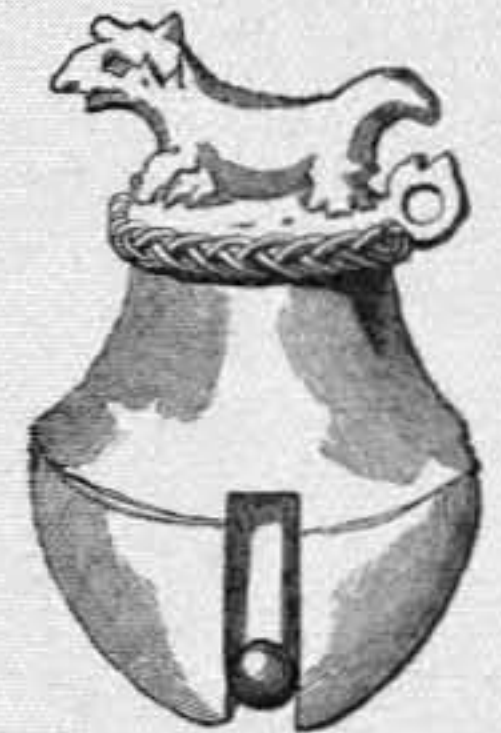
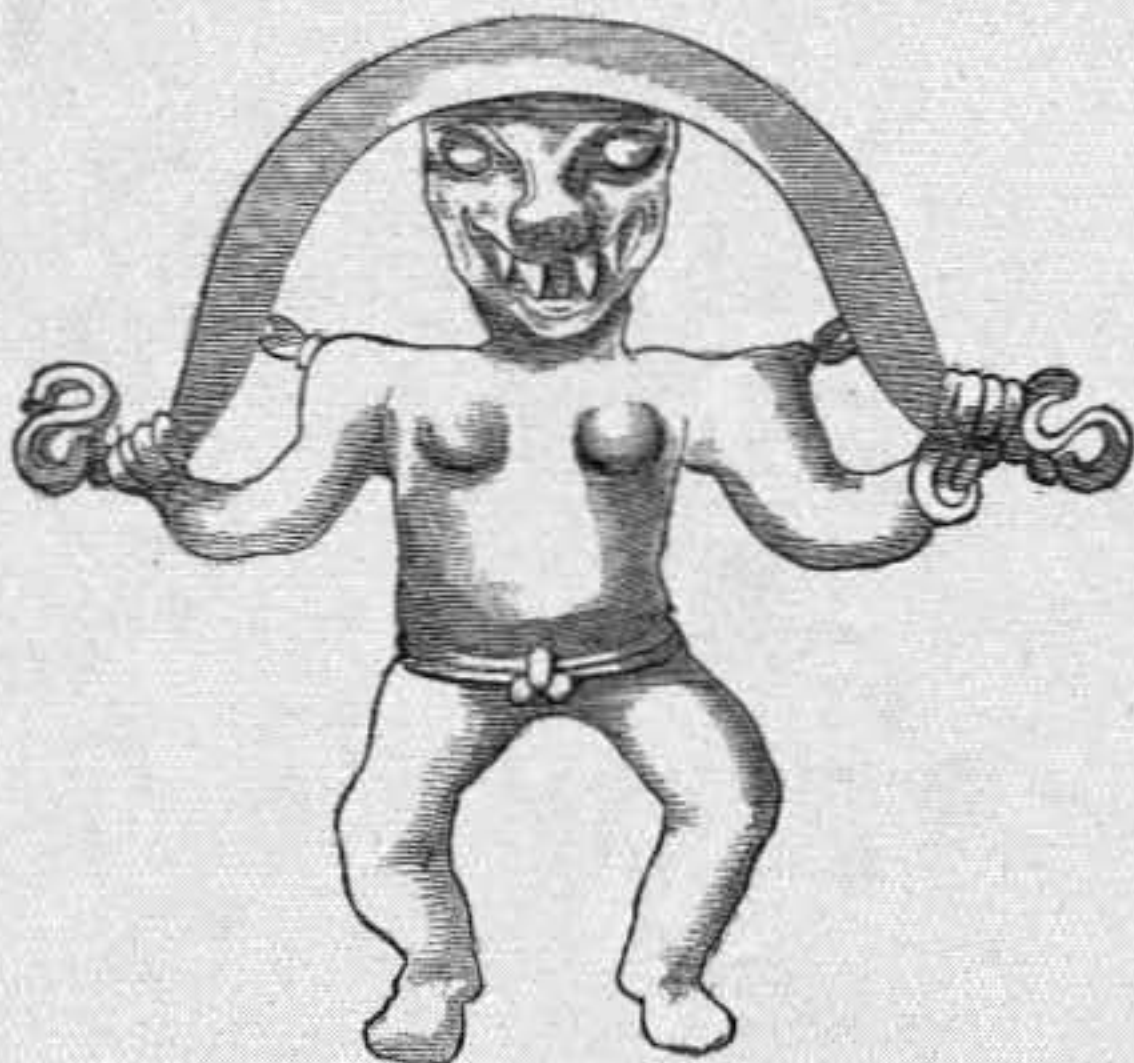
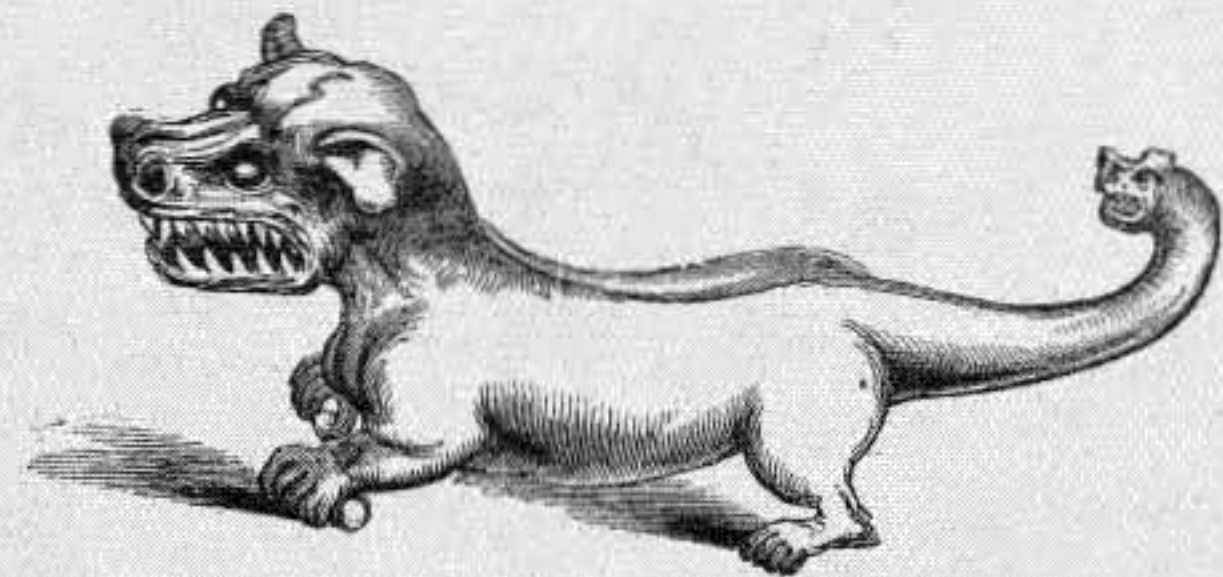
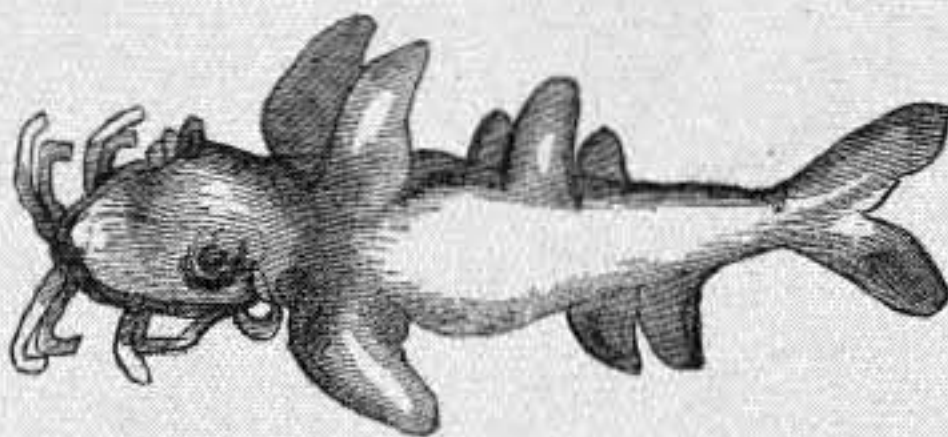
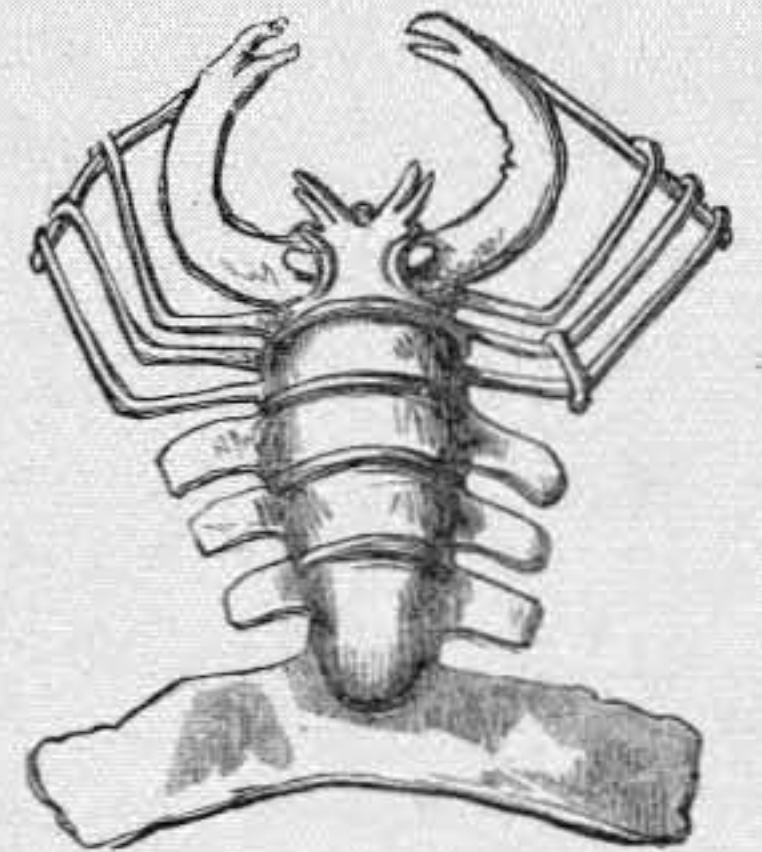
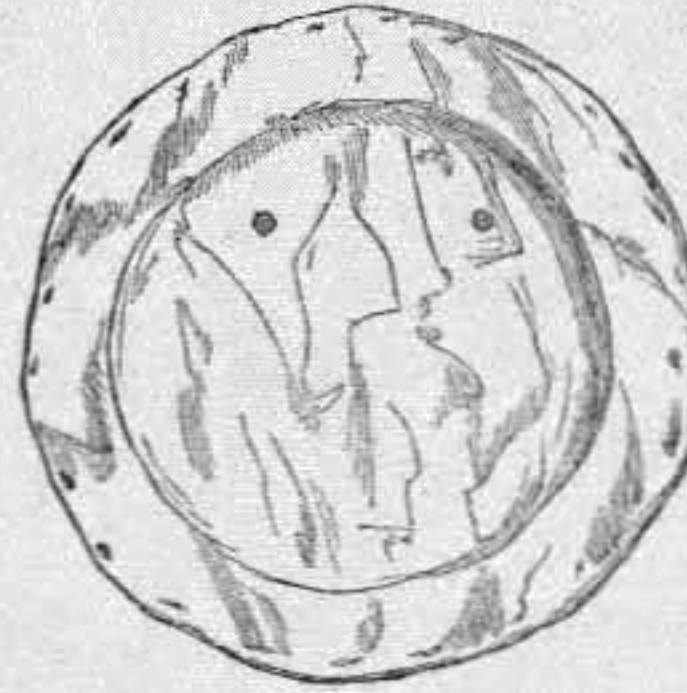
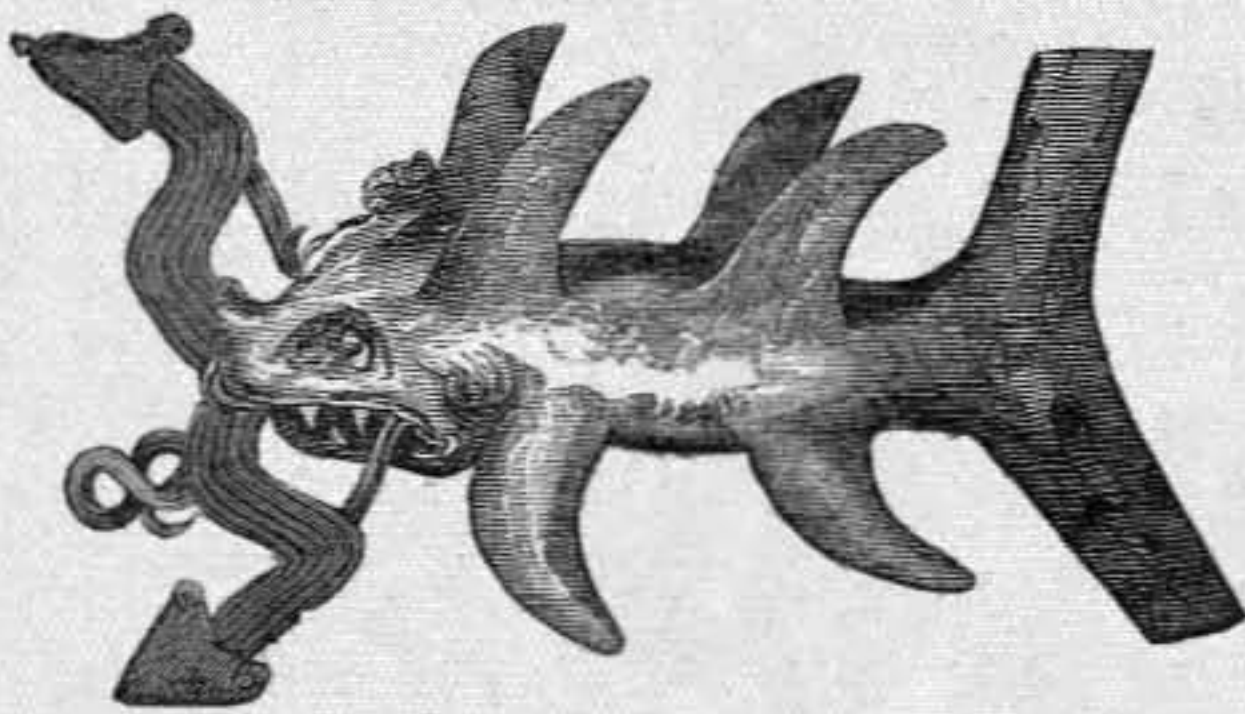
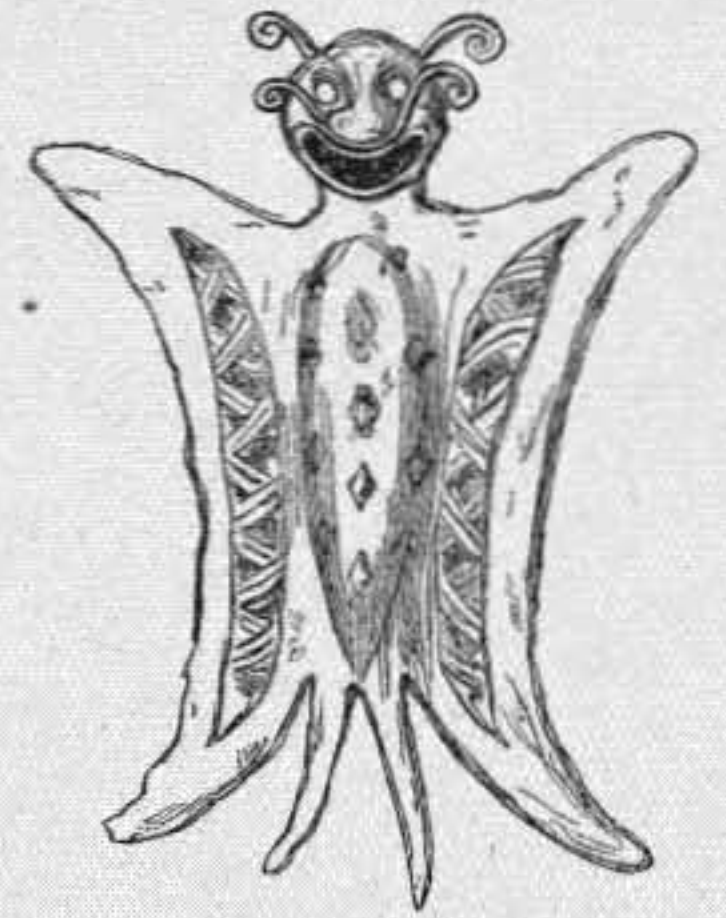
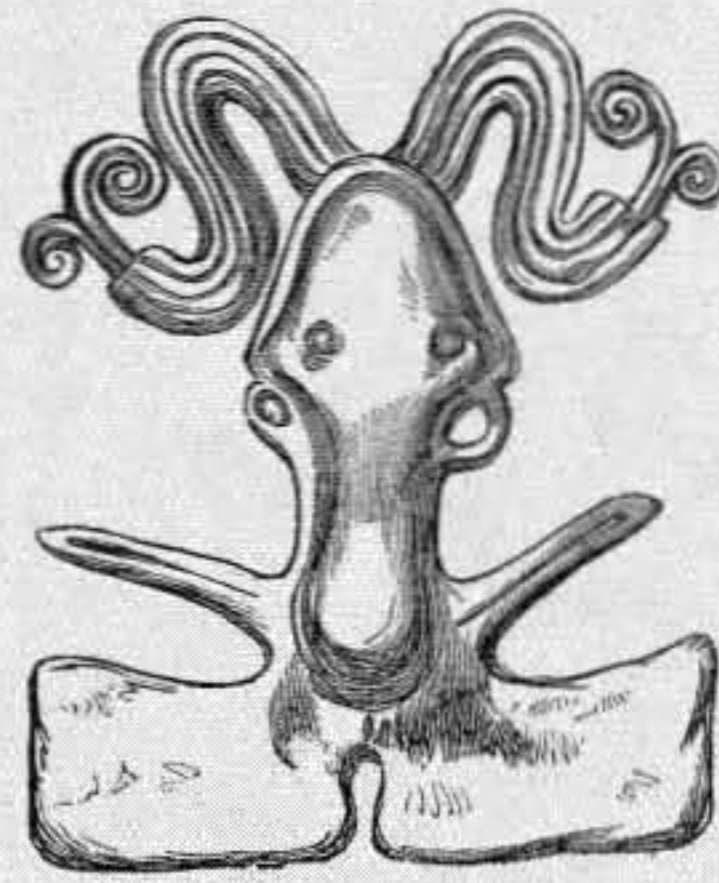
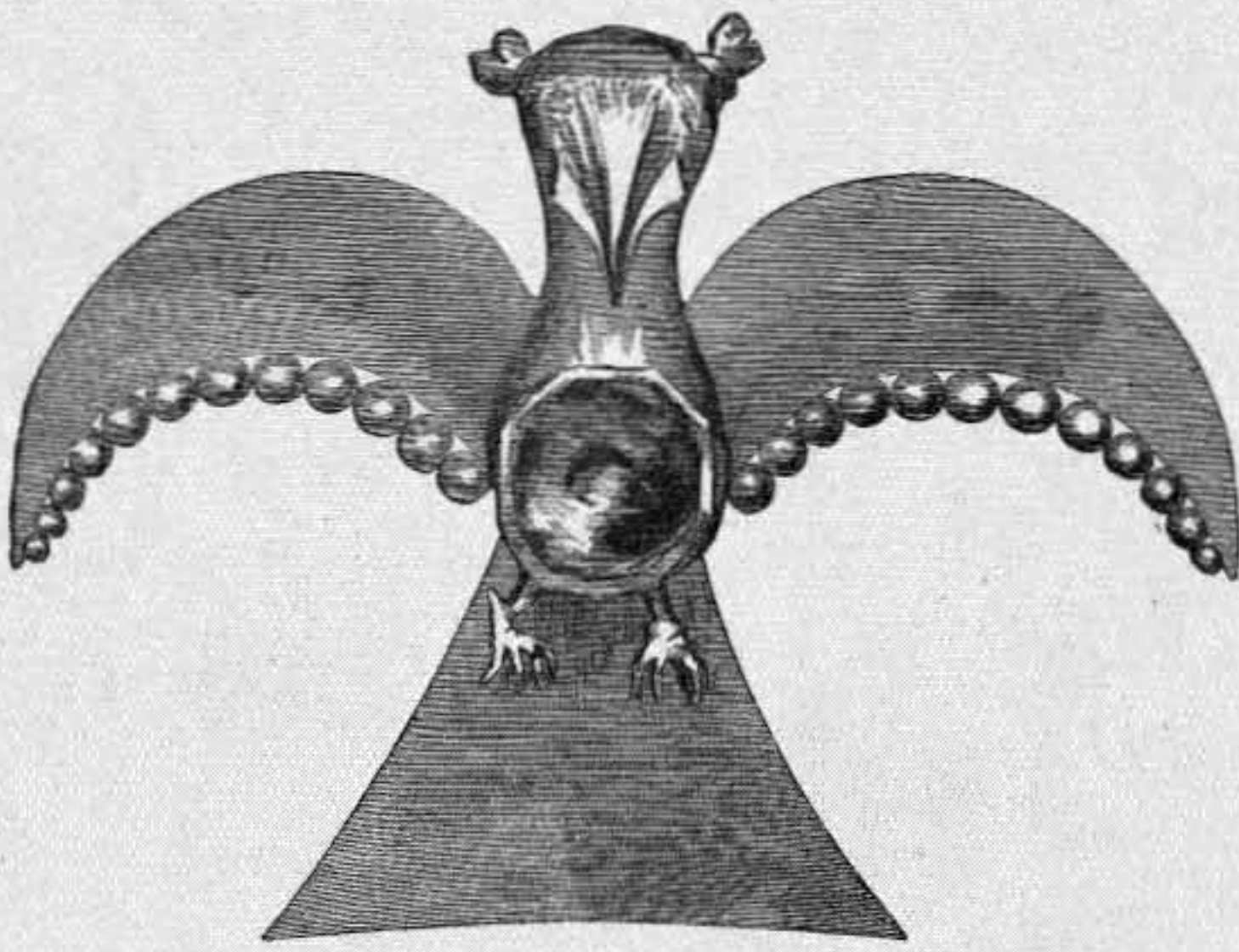
TRULY this period in which we live may be counted the Age of Gold. The time seems to have arrived when the riches of all the earth are to be disclosed and yielded up. Turn where we will the golden mountain woe us to delve into its pregnant bowels, or the golden river to wash out its yellow sands.

The last, though perhaps not the least interesting, of the great gold discoveries of this gold-discovering age, has just occurred on the Isthmus of Panama. On a day in the latter part of June last a native of Bugalita—a small town in the district of Boqueron, in the province of Chiriqui (New Granada)—while wandering through the forest in the vicinity of his cabin, encountered a tree which had been prostrated by a recent tempest, and underneath its upturned roots he espied a small earthen jar. Upon examination this proved to contain, wrapped in swathing of half-decayed cloth, divers images of curious and fantastic shape, and of so yellow and shining a metal that he at once suspected them to be *gold*. Knowing himself to be in the midst of an ancient Indian "Huaca," or burial-ground, he immediately commenced an exploration of the little burial mounds which were on every side, very shrewdly suspecting that they also might contain treasures of a like character. The result was, that in a very short time (three or four days) he succeeded in exhuming no less than *seventy-five pounds' weight* of these images.* Not exactly confident, however, of the quality and value of the metal, he disclosed to his neighbors his discovery; and in less than a fortnight over a thousand people were at work, having dug up "more than nine arrobas" (225 pounds' weight) of images, most of which proved to be of the finest gold. This is the substance of the information, in regard to the discovery of these ancient relics, brought to the City of Panama by two natives of Bugalita, who substantiated their statements by bringing also with them, in their canoe, seventy-five pounds' weight of golden images for sale. They also reported that there had been so great excitement among the inhabitants for many miles around the huacas, that towns and flourishing estates were wholly deserted; and that, in consequence of so great and unexpected an influx into that region, there had already come to be a great dearth of provisions, and that considerable suffering had been the consequence.

The reports of the natives were confirmed by many letters received by parties in Panama from the City of David, the capital of the province of Chiriqui, which is distant about thirty miles from Bugalita, and two leagues distant from the Pacific Ocean. Among these was one to the Governor of Panama from the Governor of Chiriqui, in which he stated that considerably more than \$100,000 worth of images had been taken up; that over four thousand graves had been rifled; and that as there were innumerable graves in the vicinity still untouched, there was little doubt but that immense wealth would be eventually realized therefrom. That portion of the treasure which had been received at Panama consisted of small images of gold, which had evidently first been cast in clay moulds, and afterward hammered to the requisite degree of smoothness. The workmanship of many exhibited no little mechanical ingenuity and skill. Quite a large proportion were of virgin gold, while others varied in purity from fifteen to twenty carats fine, owing undoubtedly to the artificers being ignorant of the art of separating the baser metals from the gold in its native state. The most frequent alloy was of copper. In size these images varied from three pennyweights to six ounces—representing wild beasts, birds, fish, reptiles, and semi-human monsters hideous to the last degree; in very many, if not all the graves were found three plates of gold, from three to twelve inches in diameter, each pierced near the centre by two holes. The accompanying sketches were drawn with care from the originals in the possession of Messrs. —, of the French bazar in the city of Panama, who courteously offered every convenience and facility for their execution. But little reliable information could be gathered as to the condition in which the graves and their contents were found, except that on the left hand side of every grave, looking toward the East, were the jars containing one or more golden images. It is reserved for some intelligent visitor to that interesting region to observe and communicate to the scientific world any data which may tend to throw light upon the probable antiquity of these sepulchral remains. That they date back to a very early period there seems but little doubt, not only from the fact that the present Indian tribes of Central America have no knowledge of these huacas which abound throughout the whole country, nor of the art of making the images which are found therein, but in the "History of New Granada," by Colonel Jea-

* A large number of these images are on exhibition at Messrs. Hall, Black, & Co.'s, corner Broadway and Murray Street.

GOLDEN IMAGES FOUND IN INDIAN GRAVES IN THE PROVINCE OF CHIRIQUI, NEW GRANADA.



chim Acosta, mention is made of a discovery by the Spaniards as far back as the fifteenth century of similar treasures at Zenu, in the Province of Antiochia, New Granada. After speaking of the discovery of the riches in the Indian burial-grounds at Zenu, the historian proceeds with the following description: "The cemetery of Zenu was composed of an indefinite number of mounds of earth, some of a conical form and others more or less square. When an Indian died it was the custom to dig a hole capable of containing his arms and jewels, which were placed on the left hand side of his grave, looking toward the east, and around these were placed earthen vases containing *chichi* and other fermented drinks; also Indian corn and stones to pound the same; also his wives and slaves (if he was a principal man), which last thoroughly intoxicated themselves previously to their interment; and then the whole was covered over with a species of red earth brought from a distance. Then the mourning commenced, which lasted as long as there remained anything to drink, and in the mean while the mourners continued to throw earth upon the grave; thus it was elevated according to the ability of the individual or family to provide a greater or less quantity of liquor. . . . Jewels of gold in large or small quantities were found in all the tombs. In some were golden figures representing every class of animals from man to the ant, and sometimes in amount to the value

of ten, twenty, and even thirty thousand dollars." It appears not improbable from the above extract that the mode of Indian burial at the time of the Conquest was almost if not quite identical with that of those recently discovered; so that these relics may not date more than four or five hundred years anterior to the present day. In appearance, however, they are sufficiently antique to have been the handiwork of old Tubal Cain himself. The immense quantity of golden ornaments in the possession of the people whose sepulchres are now being so unceremoniously ransacked would lead us to believe in the existence of rich mines of the precious metal in this vicinity. It is said that the Spaniards formerly worked several exceedingly rich gold mines near the ancient city of Cartajo in the adjoining province, but that the hostility of the Indians compelled them to abandon both the mines and the city; and notwithstanding that many efforts have since been made to discover the site of the city and its mines, they are still unknown. These recent discoveries of gold will undoubtedly induce fresh exploration, and may soon lead to the discovery of auriferous deposits of great value. The district of Boqueron, in which the huacas now being opened are situated, is between 82° and 83° west longitude, and 8° and 9° north latitude, and about 180 miles southwest of the city of Panama.