

A MOUNTAIN OF MARBLE IN THE ISLE OF PINES.*

How a Search for Gold Disclosed Marble and a Search for Flowers a Gold Vein.

Specially written for THE CUBA REVIEW BY S. G. KEENAN.

The immense marble deposits of the Isle of Pines have remained practically untouched, owing, chiefly, to political conditions.

It was not until 1834, three hundred and forty years after Columbus discovered the Isle, that a French chemist and geologist, M. Chueaux, exploring the West Indies in quest of gold found here instead a mountain of marble. This is the Sierra de Caballos, 1600 feet in height, situated at nearly equal distance (about two miles) from Columbo Bay on the east, the little port of Nueva Gerona, the capital, on the north, and the las Casas river on the west, at the point where it is joined by the Brazo Fuerte.

Caballos, like all the other mountains of the Isle, rises abruptly from an almost level plain. It is honeycombed with curious caverns, which have been only partially explored, and covered with a great variety of tropical trees and plants, except a cliff, near

its western summit, about a hundred feet in height.

The first blow of the geologist's hammer disclosed the fact that the dark gray surface was the weather-stain of ages upon pure white marble, such as is to be found without and within the famous quarries of Carrara.

Abandoning the quest for gold, M. Chueaux at once took steps to secure from the Spanish government the right to work the quarry. In this connection he obtained, besides, the land on both sides of the Brazo Fuerte to its mouth, in order to avail himself of its water power in working up the rough blocks into marketable shapes. The Brazo Fuerte (Strong Arm) is a stream of crystal water, less than a mile in length, which gushes from a spring, the overflow from a subterranean lake directly beneath Mount Caballos, and runs swiftly into las Casas river. All lay ready

* See October cover page for illustration of this marble mountain.



A distant view of the Mountain of Marble on the Isle of Pines.

to the capable hand of M. Chueaux, and by the following year his ox-teams were hauling blocks of marble down the gentle slope of the plain to the mill near the mouth of the Brazo Fuerte. Schooners ascended the river to this point, where a wharf was constructed substantially faced with brick and made on the spot from the clay underfoot. Thence the finished product was shipped to Cuba and elsewhere. The water impregnated with iron and magnesia first filtered through the rifts and caves of the marble mountain, then, emerging from the hidden lake as a swift little stream, served to cut and polish the blocks, and finally, joining the Casas river, helped to bear the finished product to a market.

The exceptional advantages of natural situation, at the command of a capable and energetic man, made the work profitable from the outset. The marble like that of Carrara was found to be of three grades, viz.: dense snow-white, statuary; the second class used for interior building, and the coarse-grained, gray product used for paving.

Having found marble when he sought for gold, M. Chueaux found gold when he sought flowers. He had created a beautiful garden in the plantation of Brazo Fuerte, importing trees and plants from many countries. It was while botanizing in search of rare specimens that he came upon a lead of gold-bearing quartz, which he believed to be so rich that he determined to file his claim immediately. Yellow fever raged in Havana, but, fearful of being forestalled, he hurried thither to "denounce" the mine, was stricken with the disease in its most virulent form, and died within three days.

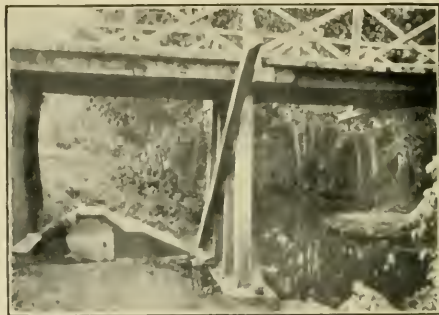
With him died the secret of the gold, like that of other treasure already mined and minted, and believed to have been hidden by the Buccaneers in this, their ancient rendezvous.

Quarries, machinery and tropical garden stood, neglected for five years after Chueaux's death. In 1841, O'Donnell, then Captain-General of Cuba, bought the marble mountain and formed a company to exploit the product.

A great mill was erected at the quarries, equipped with American machinery, quarters for superintendent, guards, and the prisoners, whose unpaid labor was to make the promoters rich.

A lime kiln was built for burning the refuse, and extensive docks at Columbo Bay, the nearest point on the sea and the only deep water on the north coast.

The Spanish government (or the military officer in charge) reaped a profit of one real (ten cents) per day for the labor of each prisoner, political or criminal, and he might be worked at the discretion of the contractor. Old shackles and chains at Brazo Fuerte show how this



Famous mineral springs at Santa Fe on Isle of Pines.

discretion was exercised, and tallies scratched upon the walls of the curiously segregated prisons at the ruined mill still bear witness how wistfully the exiles counted the days.

The first block of marble O'Donnell's company took out, was wrought into a baptismal font and presented with religious solemnities to the Church of the Blessed Virgin, the only one on the island, and is still in use.

The company's officers were chiefly personal or political friends of O'Donnell magnificently salaried but almost as ignorant of the work as were their unpaid toilers. Even so, the business was successful until enemies of O'Donnell procured the imposition of a tax upon the sea sand used in cutting the marble blocks. This additional handicap brought about the collapse of the company in 1849.

Some years later, Major Sardá, a noted Spanish engineer, acquired Caballas, Brazo Fuerte and Columbo. He continued at Brazo Fuerte the manufacture of bricks and tiles, but did not attempt to operate the abandoned quarries, where palms and bananas grew in the roofless quarters, and thrust through the rusting machinery. The product of his brickyard went largely to join the slabs of marble in Havana, paving parts of Morro Castle as well as numberless lesser structures public and private.

Sardá was the builder of the Havana market and other important government works, and was understood to cherish ambitious plans for the future when he died, not long before the outbreak of the last Spanish-Cuban war.

From his widow and children, Caballos, Columbo and Brazo Fuerte were bought, in 1901, by T. J. Keenan, of Pittsburg. At the latter plantation, Mr. Keenan has established his winter home, and is gradually restoring its wasted beauties. Owing to unsettled conditions, the quarries have lain idle, as during the tormented half-century that followed the day of O'Donnell.



LEADING FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN CUBA. Exterior of the Havana branch of the Royal Bank of Canada. The bank has branches in Cienfuegos, Manzanillo, Matanzas, Cardenas, Camaguey, Santiago de Cuba, and has just established another branch at Mayari, the center of the iron mining district of Cuba.

QUOTATIONS FOR CUBAN SECURITIES.

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	Bid	Asked
Republic of Cuba 5% Bonds	99	100
Republic of Cuba 6% Bonds	99	100
Republic of Cuba 5% Internal Bonds.....	85	87
Havana City 1st Mortgage 6% Bonds.....	104	106
Havana City 2d Mortgage 5% Bonds	102	104
Cuba R. R. 1st Mortgage 5% Bonds.....	87	94
Cuba R. R. Preferred Stock	25	40
Cuba Company 6% Debentures		Nominal
Havana Electric Cons. Mortgage 5% Bonds.....	80	85
Havana Electric Preferred Stock		Nominal
Havana Electric Common Stock	20	24