

“The Quarries of Carrara”

(Italy)

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“The marble used by most of the sculptors in Italy, and preferred to any other by artists the world over, comes from the famous quarries of Carrara, Italy. A correspondent in the *Baltimore Sun* gives the following interesting account of his visit to the quarries. He spent several days at Carrara, and, according to his statement, there are some 6,000 men at work in the quarries, and there are 100 studios of sculpture at Carrara, 65 sawmills, and 25 polishing wheels, which brighten dull marble and smooth the slight fortunes of some 400 plodding workers. The hewing of rough rocks, huge in their proportions, is something approaching the marvelous here. The men are hoisted to the height of some 700 feet above the level of the quarry, and up aloft excavate colossal lumps of marble. Each gang, or the foreman of the gang, goes down with and on the lump as it is swung by derrick ropes out into the air and swiftly brought to mother earth.

“One of these Italians will sing in lusty tones, ‘Viva, viva Garibaldi,’ from his dizzy eminence, and suddenly appear below where you are standing, his bright, big black eyes full of unequaled expressiveness and his white teeth glittering between unapproachable smiles – the inalienable gifts of these people – and say, ‘Ah, signore, will you go up with me again?’ just as if it were a perfectly ordinary feat. The free, easy, and primitive style of this Carrara flying-trapeze work makes it appear doubly dangerous. Hundreds of accidents occur each year.

“Children scarcely out of their swaddling clothes work amid the glare and dust of this lovely white marble, and die with sore eyes and stifled lungs. The food is dry bread, a raw onion, and dirty water. It is the only place in Italy where wine is not drunk. Worn out by incessant, severe toil, these people, insufficiently fed, fall into dissipation, violence, and crime, dying like dogs, and leaving on the white marble the sweat of their wretched lives. We see none of all this under the hand of art.

“Fully \$800,000 worth of marble goes out annually from these quarries, the bulk of it to France. The price of it varies according to its beauty. The first quality is priced at \$60 to \$80 per square meter at the seaport. This is what we term statuary marble. The second quality is priced \$45 to \$62, and the spotted at \$30 to \$59. Then comes pure white, but not statuary marble. The price is \$50 per square meter. The second quality is \$35, and the third is \$30. The veined marble brings on the second quality \$50, and the second quality \$35. Violet-hued marble brings \$70 to \$100 per square meter. These are the ordinary tariffs, and on them the profits are absurdly high before the marble leaves the quarry.

