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### Uncle Sam's Valuable but Little Known Islands

(Continued from Seventh Page)

than with us, a fairly good animal costing about \$18. The Vieques stock growers are more enterprising than those of Porto Rico. They have some imported stock, Durhams and Herefords being not uncommon. A few weeks ago several cows were given to the soldiers of Company I of the Eleventh Infantry. They proved to be very good, producing rich milk and cream.

#### No Land for Sale.

I have made inquiries as to prices of land here, but am told there is none for sale. The island is owned by a few people, who are well satisfied with their condition. Among the largest owners are the sugar planters, some of whom make as high as 5,000 bags of sugar a year. Their plantations are scattered over the lowlands. There is but little good timber on Vieques, most of it having been cut off. The climate is said to be excellent. There is no sickness whatever, and such epidemics as attack Porto Rico do not seem to come here.

There are quite a number of Protestants in Vieques, and among them a blind preacher who lived for a long time in South Carolina. He is a negro, who went from South Carolina to St. Thomas, and then

island can be easily reached by small boats from Mayaguez, although at present it is inhabited only by a stray fisherman or so who come for a time and then go back to Porto Rico.

#### Fortunes in Phosphates.

This matter of phosphates is one that will pay careful investigation. I am told that nearly all of the numerous small islands about Porto Rico have phosphatic deposits. The most of them have not been worked and many have not been prospected. Every now and then I hear of some new place containing phosphates. One of the most remarkable stories is concerning an island which lies eleven miles south of Guayama and some distance east of the Caja de Muertos. This island has about 400 acres, which is underlaid with phosphate rock. The rock lies in veins, like the phosphate rock of South Carolina. When analyzed it shows 61 per cent of phosphate of lime, 5 per cent of water and 5 per cent of clay. It is easily mined, but a small dock and a tunnel will have to be made before it can be gotten out to the ships.

One of the army officials who is interested in this property tells me that the company expects to ship the product to Hamburg. This same man says that he knows of another place where there are 3,000,000 tons of phosphate in sight, which, when in Hamburg, will sell for \$17 a ton.

I believe that there are also valuable fertilizers on the mainland of Porto Rico. Some parts of it contain phosphates, and



STREET IN ISABELLA SEGUNDA.

came here. He has been a resident of Vieques for many years.

Next to Vieques, the two most valuable of Uncle Sam's new islands about Porto Rico are Mona Island and the Caja de Muertos, or "Chest of the Dead." I will treat of the Dead Man's Chest first.

The Caja de Muertos lies south of Porto Rico. It was at one time a hospital island to which incurables were transported to die, and from this fact came its name. It lies about four miles from Ponce. It is about a mile long and half a mile wide. You can see it from the Ponce harbor, for it rises abruptly from the sea and has a lighthouse upon it. It has some good pasture lands, but this is a small part of its value.

The treasures of the Dead Man's Chest are in the phosphates which are found in its caves and in the soil a little back from the shore. In one of the caves I am told there are probably more than 100,000 tons of valuable phosphates. They are of two kinds. One is a pure lime phosphate and the other a phosphate much like our South Carolina rock. They are earth phosphates which have been enriched by the manure of the millions of birds and bats which live in the caves.

This island is now owned by a Porto Rican who had a concession from the Spanish government for working the phosphate and this has, I am told, been confirmed by our government. The property is said to be valuable, its owners claiming that the phosphates, after paying all expenses of mining and shipment to Hamburg, will net \$7 a ton there and that there is a demand for all that can be exported.

#### The Island of Mona.

I saw something of the island of Mona in going about the western end of Porto Rico to Ponce. Our government transports land first at San Juan and thence steam around the eastern end of Porto Rico through the Mona passage. This is the name of a broad channel in the ocean flowing between Porto Rico and Santo Domingo. It is one of the highways of travel, but is not frequented as much as some of the other channels into the Caribbean sea.

Mona Island lies just west of the city of Mayaguez. It is of volcanic origin, with craters rising perpendicularly to a great height above sea level. Some of its shores are bounded with white cliffs in which are numberless grottoes or caves. This is especially so along the east coast, where, from a map recently published by the War department, there are large caverns marked as "positively unknown." Other parts of Mona Island are good for grazing and a small part of it is wooded.

Mona Island once contained large deposits of phosphates, which were mined and sent to Hamburg. One of the men interested in the industry was the same Porto Rican who now owns half the phosphates of the Caja de Muertos. It may be that a re-exploration of Mona Island will result in additional discoveries of fertilizers. The

in my rides over the mountains I have passed square miles of stone which seems to be almost pure lime. They have here some kinds of limestone which are as solid as marble, and which can be polished like Italian marble. The marble crops out in different places all over the island. It is ragged on top, but further down it lies in solid blocks, and could be made into fine building material. Another kind of limestone is very soft. All you need to do is to put it into an oven and fire it, and you have excellent lime.

There is a cement which might be of value which is found in many parts of Porto Rico. It crops out much like limestone, and when crushed it looks not unlike Portland cement. It has great adhesive power, and in the houses where it has been used for building it stands up in ridges after the bricks have worn away. This is especially so in the pavements which are cemented with it. I asked the secretary of state of Porto Rico about it. He tells me that it is fairly good, but not as good as foreign cement.

#### The Caves of Porto Rico.

Porto Rico is full of natural wonders. Nearly all of the islands which I have described in this letter have caves which are worth exploration. There are wonderful caves in Porto Rico proper. On the north coast, about seven miles southeast of Arecibo, there is a rock over 300 feet high, which is almost perpendicular. About one-third the way up from the bottom is a grotto, which has a number of caverns and arches. It has stalactites and other curiosities, which are said to equal the famous caves of Luray in Virginia. The entrance to these caves is about five feet high and nine feet in width; it is now covered with brambles.

Another remarkable cave is not far from the center of the island, near Aguas Buenas. I have not visited this cave, but some soldiers who have been there describe it as one of the wonders of the world. It may, indeed, be called "the mammoth cave" of the West Indies. You go through a narrow passage about 300 feet long and fifteen feet high, when you enter a series of large chambers which are fairly alive with bats. It is necessary to use torches to dispel the darkness, and the bats fly in myriads this way and that, now striking you in the face and making a rushing noise that is terrifying in the darkness. Now and then you come to a deep hole, in which you can cast a stone and hear it thump, thump, thump, as it goes downward to unknown depths.

These caverns go on and on, one opening into another, for a long distance. They form, in fact, a natural catacomb, only a part of which has ever been explored. Enough is known, however, to be sure that they are one of the greatest of natural wonders and well worthy of a survey by our government scientists.

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