



Marmara Island (Proconessus). The Marble Quarry.

II

The Proconessian quarries cover the southern extremity of the modern Marmara Island between Istanbul and the Dardanelles opposite Erdek. The centre of life is the battered, formerly Greek village of Palatya, which is set into a well-protected bay and is one of several villages or hamlets in the area. It can be reached by jeep over hill tracks and more easily by sea, although this is usually rough even when the water off the northern tourist coast is dead calm. The site is large, for the marble has been quarried almost at random for thousands of years. The present track leads up the hillside past giant, overgrown blocks which



Marmara Island (Proconessus). Plato back to back with Socrates.

relate to those at Palmyra and Baalbek, where three 2nd-century monsters measure 62 x 11 ft. and weigh 600 tons;⁷ but these were quarried locally: the blocks at Marmara had to be shipped in stouter boats than the *takkas* which ply the route from Palatya to Istanbul today.

15 years ago, the owner of a small quarry opened a new section in an area unworked since Hellenic times. He came upon an unfinished column and a transom with Sophocles carved on one side and Plato on the other. Thus they were worked to an advanced stage in the quarry where conditions were sufficiently bad to reduce a man's average working life to ten years: hence the use of slave or