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A Parisian in Brazil

The Travel Account
of a Frenchwoman in
Nineteenth-Century
Rio de Janeiro

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PART III

A Fazenda

A change of air having been ordered me for a sort of slow fever of which I could not get rid, a Brazilian, whose acquaintance my husband had recently made, offered to take us to his fazenda and to stay a month, which we accepted most heartily, desirous as we were to visit a little the interior of the country, and to learn its customs.

The fazenda, as you doubtlessly know, is a plantation where particularly are cultivated rice, coffee, sugar-cane, feijoes, and maniocas. There are some of these plantations which measure fifteen to twenty miles in length. The one to which we were invited was situated near a town called Mana, and was called the plantation of Sao Joze [São José]. To get there we had to begin with crossing in a steamer the beautiful bay of Rio, strewn with charming islands, among which one remarks that of the Governador (governor), and the other, called Paquetá, which is charming with its luxuriant vegetation, and emerges out of the midst of the sea like an immense bouquet of flowers. It took us three hours to cross the bay in all its length, and I must say that the passengers which we had for travelling companions were not the fine flower of first blossoms. The ones, fat Portuguese vendeiros (grocers), would take off their shoes, and scratch their feet during the trip; the others were stretched on the settees, half dressed, and snoring, without trouble about their companions; some negroes, dirty and bad smelling, carrying baskets and merchandise of all kinds, encumbered the steamer, so that we were very well satisfied to leave this
charming society at Piedade. That was a sorry-looking port at that time. Only one habitation could be found,—a kind of large building whose immense sheds were used as warehouses for the city's merchandise, and also that of the interior. There stop all the fazendeiros, the mascates [mascates] (carriers), and the tropeiros (mule-drivers).

To all these people rooms are let whose beds must be occupied, I assure you; food is also given. Under the rancho are ranged, fell-nell, mules, horses, sheep, and pigs. It was there that our saddle-beasts had to await us. I was shown to a room, so that I could, at my ease, put on my riding-habit. The filth of this place cannot be described. Never, do I believe, had a broom visited it! I did not know where to lay the garments which I took off, neither those I was to put on; the chairs were covered with dust, and the beds were still more dirty; so that I turned around for more than a quarter of an hour before I could decide to dress. I had finally just gotten into my riding-habit when the Senhor P.— came to tell us that his page was awaiting us with our saddle-beasts. With that word "page," my thoughts immediately pictured a cherubim. I pictured to myself a young and fair boy in silken stockings and doublet of velvet. But, alas! instead of the ideal page, I beheld a blubber-lipped negro, with flat nose, sheep's wool for hair, and who had been dressed up in a large red livery, whose faded lace gave its history, and which had, without doubt, formerly figured at the Théâtre Français, and successively at all the other theatres in Paris before coming to ornament the shoulders of the poor African, who wore with it trousers of coarse linen, and enormous silver spurs, which were held by a leather strap over his ugly bare feet. Such was the page who awaited us. I was taken, when I beheld him, with a desire to laugh outrageously, which cost me much pain to suppress during my whole journey. Whenever my eyes would be cast over his garb, I would be reminded of the fantastical lucubrations [laborious studies] of Chicard. His master saluted him with these words: "O senhor patife!" (O stupid man!) "O burro!" (O donkey!) and this continued, in the same tone, during the whole time that he harnessed the horses.

Finally we started, I, on horseback, at the side of the do illustrissimo senhor fazendeiro; then my husband beside my eldest son, who was hardly seven, and yet held himself well in the saddle. The route in leaving Piedade is, to begin with, very unsightly, almost without vegetation for at least a few miles. The horses walk in sand, which seems to prove that the sea formerly covered this part of the country. Little by little trees appear, and finally one skirts the virgin forest, where the cries of the monkeys and parrots come to remind you that you are in Brazil.

We had to ascend every now and then little mountains with such narrow paths that, having met other riders, who crossed us, we were obliged, to allow them to pass, to stand our horses on the very wall of the rock, and another time, having found myself, on the contrary, on the outside of the precipice, I will acknowledge that I had a certain fear, for a single movement of my horse would have precipitated me into the ravine. After this the way becomes a delight. One sees only convolvulus and creeping plants encircling the large trees. It is a frame-work of leaves, flowers, fruits, more charming than all that man arranges, or, more correctly speaking, disarranges. I could not become tired of admiring it. We suffered a little by the heat; but in Brazil there is always a breath of air, which revives you. When the country breezes have finished blowing, the sea breezes begin in their turn. They are called in this country, the one the terral, and the other the viração. It is owing to these benevolent breezes that one becomes able to stand a heat of ninety degrees in the shade.

With what pleasure I recall my horseback rides, when the wind blew through my hair and sent me the perfume of magnolias and orange blossoms! I acknowledge that nature gave me grand pleasures in Brazil, and it was always with an immense
feeling of happiness that I found myself on horseback galloping in the midst of this wild country.

After three hours of travel, we had arrived at the fazenda Sao Joze. It was six o'clock in the evening, and the sun was beginning to set. The cattle were returning from all parts, led by the shepherds, and had grouped themselves near the stiles which surrounded the habitation, waiting to have them opened. To enter, we should be obliged to pass through la boiada, which is to say, a herd of a hundred oxen, cows, and bulls, which were in our way. At the sight of those threatening horns, I declared to my host that I did not feel the courage to advance. He smilingly reassured me, and told me to follow him without fear. Follow him I did, but without fear I would not affirm. All those beasts vied in bellowing around us; but the Senhor P—— assured me those were only demonstrations of joy at the return of our horses, their companions. He called the shepherd, a little mulatto of about eleven years, and whose dress consisted of a large linen bag held around his hips by a cord, and raised in front like a pair of underdrawers. The boy called his beasts, and we could at last pass through the boiada, not without heart-beating on my part. I could never get myself habituated to this thing. Each time in coming or going that I found myself in the midst of all these horned beasts, there was always a certain emotion (enough cause, besides); for, one day when we were about to start, a furious bull sprang toward the horse on which my son was seated. I uttered a cry, and the herder, who fortunately was near, immediately threw the lasso over the neck of the beast, which stopped short and fell on its knees.

Nothing [is] more curious than to see the negroes throw the lasso; it is done with such dexterity that one is stupefied. It is in this manner that one takes in the meadows the horses or mules that one wishes to ride, and when, having returned, after having given them a handful of oats, the saddle is removed, they return to the pasture without giving them further care until the day that one requires their service again. They receive no rations but on the day when they are ridden. The Sao Joze fazenda had only twenty-five [approximately one hundred and twenty] negroes and negresses to do the plantation work. Hardly had we stepped in when we were led to our rooms, where a bath â la cachaca (molasses brandy) was awaiting us, destined for regaining our strength. The fazendeiro, upon arriving, had completely changed face; his countenance, usually so amiable during the whole trip, had suddenly become severe and hard; he hardly said, “How do you do?” to a Frenchwoman who was his housekeeper, and scarcely answered the slaves of the plantation, who pressed around him to ask for his benediction or blessing. Our bath taken, the bell rang for dinner, and we then appeared in the dining-room, with its old, blackened walls, opening on an inner court, dirty enough. This room, long and narrow, had for furniture nothing but a large square table, around which wooden benches were ranged. On the table was seen the traditional feijoada, dishes filled with manioc, a large platter of rice, and two chickens, as well as bananas and oranges. This is about the usual Brazilian dinner to be found in the interior, where fresh meat is a rare thing.

We had brought from the city white bread for two or three days, after which we had therefore to do without it until the following Saturday, when a negro was sent on horseback to a little neighboring place called Santo Aleixo, which possessed a baker who kindly baked once a week.

Dinner over, the host called his feitor (foreman), an old negro called Ventura, whom I yet can see with his good face, honest and grave. He came escorted by two other large darkies, who were his aides; all three had for clothing nothing but a coarse linen shirt, worn over their trousers, made of sailcloth. Over their shoulders were thrown some sort of tatters, which, in by-gone days, might have been coats or overcoats. In one hand they rolled their hats of coarse straw, while the other was ornamented by a long, stout stick, and Ventura held the obiote (whip), insignia of his command. Besides, each one carried an
immense cutlass (a kind of little sword), with which the slaves
help themselves to cut sugar-cane, or make their way through
the woods. They placed themselves, all three, standing before
their master, in an angle of the room, which was scarcely lit up
by two candles burning in glass panes placed on the large
silver chandelier. This scene has remained present in my
memory in its minutest details, for to a Parisienne it did not
lack strangeness.

These are the questions which were set by the master, in a
short and hard tone, and the answers of the slaves, pronounced
in a humble and frightened manner:

“What has been planted this week?”
“Rice, senhor.”
“Begun to cut the sugar-cane?”
“Yes, master; but the rio (the river) “has overflowed, and
we must repair the canals.”
“Send twenty negroes over there to-morrow morning.
What more?”

“Henriques has escaped.”
“The cachorro (the dog)! “Has he been caught?”
“Sim” (yes), “senhor, he is in the tronco” (in irons).
“Give him twenty blows with the lash, and put the iron
collar around his neck.”
“Yes, senhor. A troop of porcas do mato” (wild boars) “are
ravaging all the batatas plantation, and a jaguar has been seen
yesterday near the torrent: we ought to have guns.”
“You shall have three this evening. Is this all?”
“Yes, senhor.”
“L’engenho [O engenho]” (mill in which the manioc flour
and sugar are made) “is to begin work to-morrow: is it in
condition?”
“Yes, senhor.”
“Very well. Call the negroes now for prayer.”

We then all proceeded to the parlor, a room ordinarily
placed in the middle of the house, lighted only by three large
doors leading onto the veranda, which is in some way the real
drawing-room of the hot countries.

The master rang a heavy bell, then called, in a formidable
voice, “Salta para a resa [reza]!” (Hurry up for prayer).

Night had almost come. Oxen and horses
were sleeping in the meadows. Before the house, and
all around it, ranged in circle, were the suzales [senzalas] (negro cabins), to
the number of seventy about.

At the master’s call, one saw rising up out of
the dusk these sort of phantoms; each one came
out of their cabin, a sort of hut made of clay and mud,
with dried banana leaves for roofing, a gloomy
abode, where the water penetrates when it rains,
where the wind blows from everywhere, and from where a most dreadful smoke arises
at the hour when the negro gets his supper, for the cabin has
neither chimney nor window, so that the fire is made with a
fagot, oftentimes green, which is lighted in the centre of the
cabin.

The negroes cross the meadow and ascend one by one the
two flights of stairs to the veranda, where a sort of cupboard
had been opened, forming an altar in one of the corners. Here
it was that the miseries of slavery appeared to me in all their
horror and hideousness. Negresses covered in rags, others
half naked, having as covering only a handkerchief fastened
behind their back and over their bosoms, which scarcely veiled their throats, and a calico skirt, through whose rents could be seen their poor, scraggy bodies; some negroes, with tawny or besotted looks, came and kneeled down on the marble slabs of the veranda. The majority carried on their shoulders the marks of scars which the lash had inflicted; several were affected with horrible maladies, such as elephantiasis, or leprosy. All this was dirty, repulsive, hideous. Fear or hate, that is what could be read on all these faces, which I never have seen smile.

Four candles were lighted, and the two subordinate overseers placed themselves on the steps of the altar, where the Christ appeared, in the centre of four vases. These two negroes officiated after their own fashion; they had retained a smattering of Latin, which a chaplain, formerly at the plantation, had taught them, and then added their own most picturesquely, which served as a beginning to the litany of saints. After the Kyrie eleison they begin to sing in unison, Santa Maria, mai de Deus, ora pro nobis! Then all the saints in paradise followed, to whom they thought fit to add this, Santa Pè de cana, ora pro nobis! (Holy Foot, made of sugar-cane, pray for us!) Finally their singing ended with this heart-rending cry, which they all gave, prostrating themselves, their faces on the ground, Miserere nobis! This cry touched me to the inmost recesses of my heart, and tears streamed silently from my eyes, while, after the devotions, the negroes filed past us one by one in asking our benediction, to which each white person must reply, “I bless thee.”

Prayers were held every Saturday evening. I could never listen to it without remaining profoundly impressed. The aspect of these miseries and these sufferings, and that cry of despair, which seemed to me to rise way up to God,—all this was striking, and of a horrible beauty, even from the artistic point of view.

The following day scenes not less sad awaited me. Having been awakened at four o’clock in the morning by the great bell in the veranda, which the feitor was ringing for the rising

up of the negroes, I wished to witness these proceedings, and jumped out of my bed.

Day was scarcely dawning in the horizon, a soft and melancholy color was enveloping the landscape. From the summit of the mountain, in the rear of the fazenda, a beautiful cascade was unrolling its sheets of silvery water, and this mountain was covered with wild woods, where fruits and flowers interlaced each other in charming confusion.

From the other side, in front of the house, immense pastures could be seen, where more than a hundred head of cattle were collected. The oxen were still sleeping.

Some of the negroes began to come out of their cabins. If one of them was late in appearing, old Ventura would shake his big whip in crying out, “O Patife! puxa para fora!” (O good-for-nothing, get out!)

Then three gangs, each of about twenty-five negroes and negresses, were formed: one was under the direction of Ventura, and took the way to the matto (woods); the second proceeded to the plantations with one of the subordinate superintendents; and the third drove immense wagons with wheels of solid wood, yoked by four oxen, and was getting ready to cut the sugar-cane, which the wagons were to carry back. One of the little shepherds in his turn collected all the oxen, the second followed him with a flock of sheep; the field gates were opened, and all this human live stock started with the rest for work.

Four dairy cows alone were left for the needs of the house, and at six o’clock we were served to a bowl of milk, the like of which I have never drunk anywhere, on account of the exquisite perfume which is given it by the Indian pears, pitangas, mangoes, and above all the aromatic plants of which the cows are very fond, and with which they feed themselves in the woods. This is what our animals know nothing of. When, sometimes, they are let loose in our pastures, hardly can they find a bit of grass; while nothing is funnier to see in Brazil than a cow plucking fruit from the tree whose branches she bends.
Many a time while out horseback riding have we met them in this occupation, while the mares and colts in freedom were chasing each other through the fields, executing the most grace-ful of leaps.

The *moleque* (darky) who enjoys the best health at the *fazenda* is, without question, the *vaqueiro* (cow-keeper), because he does not forget himself, and milks the cows for his proper [own] benefit far from the eye of his master. It has also happened sometimes that with four cows there would hardly be the necessary milk for the house, the negroes awarding themselves a little too much, and the cow-keeper would be punished; yet when one would see the food given these poor unfortunates, one could not blame them for trying to make up.

At nine o'clock the bell would ring again; it was rung for the negroes’ breakfast, and I had the curiosity to be present at the distribution of the rations. There are always two cooks at a plantation,—one for the whites and one for the blacks,—and there are even two kitchens. I repaired to the large smoky room which served for the darkies’ kitchen, and there I saw two negroes having before them two immense caldrons, one of them containing *feijões* and the other *angú* (a dough made of manioca flour and boiling water). Each slave soon arrived, gourd in hand. The cook would pour in a large ladleful of *feijões*, adding a little piece of *carne seca* of the poorest quality, as also a little manioca flour sprinkled over all; the other one distributed the *angú* to the old men and children. The poor slaves would leave with this, murmuring in a low tone that the meat was rotten, and that there was not enough.

Our dogs would certainly not have eaten such food. The little darkies of three or four years, entirely naked, were returning with their rations of *feijões*, which their delicate stomachs could hardly digest; also did they nearly all have large stomachs, enormous heads, and lank arms and legs,—in short, all the signs of the rickets. It caused pity to see them; and I never understood, from a speculative stand-point even, that these merchants of human flesh did not take better care of their merchandise. Happily, I was assured that it was not thus everywhere, and that in several plantations the slaves were very well treated. I wish to believe it; for myself, I tell what I have seen.

One day while I was out walking a little far out in the plantation, I was accosted by a very young negress who came to ask me to intercede for her to her master, so that she might be freed of the chain she was carrying. In saying this, she lifted up her coarse linen skirt, and showed me a ring riveted around her ankle, to which was attached a heavy chain carried from her waist. Here is the conversation I had with her, I immediately wrote down textually:—

“I am very willing,” said I to the poor slave, “to ask your pardon, but what bad action have you committed to have deserved this punishment? Did you steal?”

“No, senhora, I did not.”

“And why did you flee?”

“Because the slave must flee from slavery always.”

“And if your chain is taken from you, then you will flee again?”

“No, because I see that the white man is always stronger than we are, and that I would again be caught and martyried. This chain breaks me down.”

“Then you promise me that if I obtain your pardon, you will never attempt to fly?”

“I promise it,” replied the poor African woman, in a low tone.

“How old are you?”

“I do not know.”

“What! more or less, you do not know how old you are?”

“No.”
“Is it long since you were brought to Brazil?”
“Sugar-cane has been cut five times since then.”
“Do you remember your country?”
“Always!” she replied, with a wild and passionate accent.
“You did not work in your native land?”
“No: when I had pounded the rice for the repasts, I danced and sang the rest of the day.”
“Do you remember the dances of your country?”
“Do I remember them? Every night, after the superintendents sleep, we get up and dance our dances till morning.”
“And if some one bought you, to give you your liberty, you would return to Africa?”
“Yes, if I can find the way, for one must cross much water to get there.”
“Have hope, my child; you will have better days.”

I came home that day feeling sad, and did not have much trouble in obtaining the pardon of the young negress; for a Brazilian never refuses a pardon asked for a slave, especially if it is asked by a woman, and that woman happens to be the madrinhã (godmother) of one of his children; the title of godfather and godmother being nearly a tie of relationship in Brazil. Also, when I took leave to make a year’s travel in France, Senhor P——, who accompanied us to the steamer, asked me what he could do to make himself agreeable to his comadre.*

“Not to beat your slaves any more,” I answered him.
He promised it to me, and during a year religiously kept his promise; only he begged me, upon my return, never to ask him such a thing again, because his slaves would be lost for evermore.

Among all my horseback rides through the interior of the country one has remained engravened in my memory. Our friend, the fazendeiro, P——, wished to take us one day to a cotton mill which an American from the North had just established in a little place called Santo Aleixo, hardly six miles distant from the Sao Jozé plantation. This was a complete novelty for the Brazilians to see a factory in their country. As for me, the factory did not interest me, but the excursion through the woods enchanted me.

We started at eight o’clock in the morning, I mounting the horse of the senhora, as the horse was called, and which had but a slight defect, that of freeing himself of her who mounted him, when he felt a woman’s long skirt on his side, so that when he was passing near a ravine he would make a little side movement, in the intention of throwing his rider, if she was not firm in the saddle. Knowing he had this little trick, I was in the habit of holding him strongly in check during these delicate occasions; seeing this, he lost, day by day, his roughish idea, and we were the best friends in the world. My husband mounted a large red horse, called the horse of the cidade (of the city). Why? I ignore it. [I don’t know.] This horse had such a hard trot that he was never given to a woman. As to the proprietor, he always had his gray mule, on which he seemed to sit as in his arm-chair. Holding in his right hand a large umbrella to shield him from the sun, he scarcely deigned to hold the reins. Finally, my son came riding a little pony, which had been given him, sitting more solidly in his saddle than any of us, and enduring six hours’ riding without flinching.

To begin with, we had to cross a wood where myriads of birds flew off at our approach, and where the monkeys’ sharp cries were heard. How enchanting was this road. The Senhor P—— suddenly called to me, however,—“Stop your horse: a serpent crosses the road!”

In reality we saw a little serpent of changeable red color, which was warming itself in the sun, and disappeared at the sound of our approach.

“He hasn’t a very wicked look, your little serpent,” I said to our host.

*Co-mother, or godmother as viewed by the godchild’s parents—Ed.
“It is the coral serpent,” he replied: “one of those whose sting is most dangerous.”

We continued on our way, and finally arrived before a little river.

“We are going to cross it,” said our host.

“How?” I replied. “I don’t see any bridge.”

“Why, simply on our horses: gather up well your riding-skirt, lift your left limb over your saddle in tailor-fashion, give the reins to your horse,—don’t be frightened,—and follow my mule, who will find her way.”

It was done in this manner: our horses began to get into the water up to their bodies, then to their chests, and finally, in a moment, they lost their footing and swam a few seconds with their riders on their back.

I was not greatly reassured. The horses, to cut the current at a certain point where it was very rapid, were always going sideways, and it seemed to me as if the opposite shore was disappearing, instead of getting nearer to us.

This lasted about six minutes at the most, yet it seemed long to me; but I have kept a charming souvenir of it,—this little river, bordered by plants and trees of all kinds, with its limpid and flowing water, that sky so beautifully blue, and the warm sun over our heads, in the midst of all this, our little caravan crossing the rio on horseback. I see it all again, and am happy to have passed through these little experiences and contemplating such splendid landscapes.

Senhor P—— having begged us (my husband and I) to be godfather and godmother of his last child, this gave place—after the ceremony of baptism, which was held by a chaplain of the neighborhood—to one of the strangest feasts, which I will endeavor to describe.

We desired that the poor slaves should have their share in the day’s festivities, and their master permitted us to treat them to a small keg of cachaca, authorizing them after this, at my request, to dance in the evening on the meadow.

It was a day of intermission of their labors. I will allow you to think whether they were happy and came to thank us.

The overseer then made the distribution of the cachaca, giving each one but a small glass at a time, and then the batuco [battue] (negro’s dance, accompanied with the clapping of hands) began. I wish I could give my readers an idea of this strange scene and of this wild dance. Let me try.

Large fires had been lit in the middle of the meadow. A negro of high stature, formerly king in his native country, soon appeared, armed with a long white wand,—sign apparent, to them, of his command. His head was ornamented with feathers of all colors, and little bells were fastened around his legs. Every one bowed himself down before him with respect, while he gravely walked about, dressed in this manner, filled with a supreme majesty. Near the king stood the two musicians who were to lead the batuco; one carried a kind of immense calabash, which contained six or seven of different sizes, over which were placed a very thin little board. With the aid of little sticks, which he manoeuvred with great dexterity, the negro obtained dull sounds, the monotony of which seemed sooner to provoke sleep than anything else. The second musician, squatted on his heels, had before him a piece of the hollow trunk of a tree, over which a dried lambskin was stretched. He was beating in a melancholy way on this primitive drum to re-enforce the singing. Three or four groups of dancers soon came to place themselves in the centre of the circle, which was formed by all their companions. The negroes walked harmoniously, keeping time in waving their handkerchiefs and in giving themselves up to a most accentuated movement of the hips, while their dark partners were turning around them, skipping upon one foot with the most grotesque contortions, and the old musician was walking from one group to another, speaking and singing, while shaking his sticks with frenzy. He seemed, by his expressions, desirous of exciting them for the dance, while the assistants accompanied the batuco with clapping of
hands, which accentuated the rhythm in a strange manner, and the king was promenading in a grave manner while shaking his bells.

The negroes were dripping, and yet the musicians did not cease running from one to the other and exciting them still more. The dance had arrived at such a degree of strange over-excitement, when suddenly calling was heard from the house: “Feitor, let all fires be extinguished, that all noise ceases, and that all the negroes return to their cabins!”

There was some murmuring among the poor slaves, but the overseer, armed with his whip and followed by his two assistants, soon restored order everywhere.

Not knowing to what to attribute this sudden disturbance in the festival, I hastily ascended to the house, where I found the proprietor perfectly pale, and having barricaded windows and doors around him. He seemed to me laboring under a certain excitement, whose cause I asked him.

He then told me that, while his comrades were dancing, a negro had entered the house, with drunken face, and vociferating threats against his master, who immediately had him laid hold of, but who had understood that if his negroes became more excited by the *cachaca* and their national dance, his life might be in danger.

We were, in the number of whites, at the house, only Senhor P———, my husband, I, and a sort of housekeeper, who held the middle place between hostess and servant. What could we have done against one hundred and twenty infuriated negroes? I, a young wife without any experience then, who had the conscience of never having done but good to these unfortunates, did not understand the danger, and could not help myself laughing at the frightened face of the proprietor. Later on, in reflecting, I found his terror justified.

These national dances excite to such a degree these poor slaves, that they have been prohibited to them in the city. In spite of all this, however, they take place. At the risk of being cruelly beaten, the negroes go at night, when the whites are asleep, to dance on the beach in the moonlight. They assemble in groups of the same nationality, either Congo, Mozambique, or Minas; then, in dancing and singing, they forget their ills and servitude, and only remember their native country and the time that they were free.

Sometimes it has happened to me, having need of the services of my *mucama* (lady's-maid) in the night, to search for her in vain all over the house: she had gone to rejoin her brethren at the dance. Our doors, however, had been carefully locked. Little did it concern her: she passed through the window.

One of the strangest types on the plantation, assuredly, was the *feiteiro* (sorcerer). This is how I made his acquaintance: I was sitting one morning in the veranda, lost in that region of thought which vast horizons plunge you into, when I saw returning from the wood one of the wagons which usually did not come back until the decline of day. I was yet more surprised that it had for its only load two negroes, one of whom was the overseer.

“O Ventura?" immediately called our host to him, “why do you return with Luiz?”

“Senhor, Luiz has been bitten by a serpent while cutting sugar-cane, and is vomiting blood.”

“Has the sorcerer been called?”

“Yes, senhor: there he comes.”

In effect [in fact], we soon saw a negro of very high stature appear, with frizzled white hair, who, it was said, was more than ninety years old, but who, however, still held himself firmly and straight. He was draped in a striped covering, carried a sort of hanging wallet at his side, and held a stick in his hand. His face was grave and pensive.

He went straight to the infirmary, where the sick negro had been put, closeted himself with him, made him drink a preparation of herbs of which he alone had the secret, and affirmed that he would cure the negro, on condition, never-
theless, that no woman must be allowed to enter the room of him whom he nursed, for seven days. Without this, he would not be responsible for him, he said; therefore, one was careful to send the negro's food only by men. The prescriptions of the sorcerer were carried out to the letter, and the negro was completely cured. Thereupon I wished to talk with the old sorcerer; and after having given him a few pennies for coffee and sugar, I asked him what were the plants he had made use of to cure the sting of the _javaraça_, one of the most dangerous serpents of Brazil.

"It is my secret," he said.

"Why don't you give it to the others?"

"I nurse them when they are ill: it is enough."

"But when you die?"

"All the worse for them. If they were good to me, I would gladly tell them the secrets I know; but they shun me, and teach their children to be afraid of me. I will take my secrets with me."

This was all that I could get. He was still called another time, for an ox who had _bicharia_ (a bag full of worms).

The sorcerer approached the ox, which was lying down, applied to him, without doubt, also, some pulverized plant on the sick spot: the bag of worms fell almost instantly, and the animal was cured.

There was not a negro of the _fazenda_ then who did not repeat that the sorcerer had only need to recite a few magical words, and immediately after the cure had been made.

The old negro had been right: in return for his science he reaped only ingratitude and abandonment; all shunned him, in almost crossing themselves, and the little mulattoes pressed against each other when he passed, whispering in each other's ears, "_Toma sentido! O feitiçario_!" (Take care: there goes the sorcerer!)

As for me, it was always with pleasure that I conversed with him, and I regret sincerely to-day that I did not write down these original conversations, so simple and so instructive all at once; for the old darky, who had seen the reign of Dom João VI, knew many things although he had not learned to read and to write. It was in the grand book of nature that he had studied. What became of him?

He has died, without doubt all alone, in a corner of the forest, taking with him all the science so laboriously gathered in eighty-six years of existence.

Speaking of serpents also reminds me of an adventure which was the talk of Rio at this time.

One of the richest stock brokers of the country one day told at the stock exchange what had just happened to him.

For some time his little three-year-old daughter, who slept in the room next her parents, would wake up during the night in crying, and when she would be questioned as to the cause of her tears would cry, "_O bicho! O bicho!_" (the animal). One thought of nightmares; but the child grew pale, and would say from time to time, "_O bicho frio! frio!_ [cold]" finally they became alarmed at the child's persistence in speaking of the _bicho_, so one night the father, armed with a pistol, placed himself upon duty, without light, near the child's bed. Towards midnight the little one began to move, and the father then perceived a serpent of the most dangerous kind lying next his child. He was careful not to frighten it, else it would sting the little one. The father rapidly carried off the child, and almost immediately killed the serpent. Since then the child has regained its bright color, and no longer says, "The beast is cold!"

When four years later, I returned for the second time to the Sao Jozé plantation, this time without the escort of our host, and starting with our two children, Paul and Maurice, the elder being twelve years old, and the younger scarcely sixteen months old, whom I still was nursing, we carried him, *Dom João VI, regent and then king of Portugal, who moved to Rio with his court when Napoleon's armies invaded Portugal and who ruled the Portuguese empire from Brazil from 1808 to 1821.—Ed.*
each in turn, in our saddles, my husband and I; and most frequently it was our mulatto Fernando (one of the most successful types, who played the guitar, and perfumed himself from head to feet with cologne when called for my service) who carried him on his shoulders, in following on foot. On this account we journeyed very slowly; and when the day was beginning to decline, the page declared to us that we were still three hours distant from the plantation, and that we must cross, to get there, a kind of swamp, most dangerous at night.

Then I thought of the serpents, of the onças,* and became frightened to find myself journeying at night with my two children. I told my husband that I thought it imprudent to continue our journey under such conditions, and as for me I decided to stop in a rancho (a kind of shelter with a roof, with a manger for animals) sooner than to expose my sons to so many dangers. The page then told me that in going a little out of our way we would come within a half-hour to a plantation where we probably could pass the night. I accepted this suggestion with eagerness.

We quickened our pace, and in a very short time indeed we reached the plantation of the viscondeza de P------------ G--------. It was time, for obscurity [darkness] was enveloping us from everywhere.

Having arrived at the entrance of the plantation, we asked to see the superintendent, who was a white man, who really sooner was called the administrador.

He soon arrived, and we told him of our embarrassment, in asking for hospitality for the night. He eagerly accorded it to us in the name of his masters, who for years had not inhabited their fazenda. We therefore alighted, after having thanked him heartily. He then gave orders to have the guest chamber put in order for us, where I finally had the joy of seeing my two sons asleep, each in a separate bed, instead of being exposed in the forest to all kinds of dangers.

The senhor administrador, who had a smattering of knowledge, was charmed to see strangers who brought him news from the city, came and conversed with us while we ate our travelling supplies; then, towards eleven o’clock, he left us.

I had asked the negress who had attended to my room if she could get me a night-lamp. This was an unknown thing at the plantation, where oil for lighting had never entered. That which was brought me in its stead was a kind of rosin taper, the smoke of which would have suffocated us if we had not left all the inner doors of the apartment wide open. This taper, disagreeable as it was, however, did me great service, for hardly had I gotten in bed, worn out with fatigue, when I heard a little moving about the room. “They are mice,” said I to myself; “in frightening them a little, they’ll go away.” So I knocked against the bed and the wall, hoping thus to get rid of them. Ah! well, yes! The moment I laid my head upon my pillow the noise increased, and I’ll let you imagine what became of me when I saw, instead of mice, enormous rats (about the size of small cats), ornamented with long mustaches, which were crossing the room in gangs of eight or ten, to nibble the leavings of our supper.

I awakened my husband, to tell him of my fright.

“What do you want?” he replied, half asleep.

“This room has not been occupied for a long time, and the chicken and pâté have attracted all the rats of the place over here.”

“What to do about it? Try not to think about it, and get asleep.”

Get myself asleep in the midst of these horrid creatures! I didn’t even think of it. I was afraid they’d get into our beds and bite my children; so I passed the whole night sitting up in my bed, knocking to frighten them away every time when I would see them coming towards us.

*Onça, any of various wildcats, pumas, or cougars—Ed.
That was the manner in which I rested after a day of great fatigue.

It was not until the dawn of day that they kindly left, and scarcely allowed me an hour’s rest, for at five o’clock we were all up, so as to avoid the great heat.

I had noticed, the evening before, a young woman, white, or rather yellow, with large eyes darkly circled, badly combed hair, who walked barefooted, dressed in a miserable skirt, and a child at one hand, another in arms, and I had suspected that it might well be the wife of the administrador, who, however, had himself fine linen, a proper suit of clothes, and a certain varnish of books and science.

I had communicated my suspicions to my husband, who, like all the husbands in the world, did not give it credence, and had even plagued me of that mania all women have, of seeing romances and dramas in everything.

Well, before leaving I wished to have a clear conscience about it. I asked for some bowls of milk, and it was this woman, accompanied by the two children, who served them to us. I resolved thereupon to satisfy my curiosity; and while my children were eating and our horses were being saddled, noticing on her face the traces of great suffering, “You seem sad, madam,” I said to her.

“I am very unhappy, senhora,” she replied.

“Are you not the wife of the administrador?”

“To my sorrow.”

“How?”

“He treats me badly. Those are his mulattresses,” she continued, in pointing towards one, “who are the real senhoras of the plantation; for them my husband overwhelms me with outrages.”

“How can you live with him? Leave him.”

She looked at me in utter astonishment.

“Leave my husband!” she uttered. “And by what should I live?”

“You will work.”

“I do not know how to earn money; and my children?”

“The father will be obliged to bring them up; but you can leave them no longer with such a sight under their eyes: a mother cannot allow herself to be outraged before her children. If they are to respect you, make yourself respected.”

The poor woman listened to me with all ears, trying to understand, and opening wide her large eyes.

“That’s all very well for you Frenchwomen, who know how to earn your bread,” she finally said; “but we, to whom nothing has been taught, we are obliged to be the servants of our husbands.”

“Well, do what you like; but when you will have suffered enough, and find yourself at the end of your strength, remember the Frenchwoman who passed a night at the plantation, and come to her: she will give you the means of living by your work. Here is my address.”

Thereupon I jumped into the saddle. The wife of the superintendent thanked me by look, and accompanied me to the gate of the plantation; she remained there, looking after me fixedly as long as she could see something of me.

I could well see that I had enlightened this soul, and opened new longings before her.

Daybreak was appearing and began to lighten a little the dark foliage of the woods; nature awakened, still enveloped in the mist, and the dew was sprinkled over the ground. The senhor administrador came to give us his adieu, in wishing us God-speed. I involuntarily looked back. After what I knew, he gave me the horrors.

When we arrived on the borders of the fazenda, we found the mulattresses of the day before looking haughty and cynical, who wished to see in broad daylight the French lady and her husband.

They gave me, for a last adieu, a look full of hate, yet bowing all the same when I passed; and I, from my side,
acknowledged it by an easy bow, into which I put all the disdain and disgust which they inspired."

Then, taking a little gallop, we started towards the Sao Joze plantation, at which we arrived two hours later.

Three months later, my door-bell rang. It was the Senhora Maria, the wife of the administrador, who came, with one of her children on her arm, asking me to fulfil the promise I had made her; so I took her into my home as house-keeper, to over-look the negro servants, and to take charge of the household linen.

To say that in the end she repaid me with the most profound ingratitude teaches nothing new to my readers. What matters it? My end had been gained: I had developed in her soul the sentiment of human dignity, and had taught her how to earn her daily bread; I had raised her up morally, and cured her physically. The Senhora Maria has never been able to forget me, this I am sure of.

*This English translation by Adèle Toussaint-Samson's daughter Emma omits the earlier paragraph in which Adèle describes those mulattas as trying to attract her husband the previous night—Ed.*