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BRAZIL

The Land of the Future

AS SEEN THROUGH SWISS EYES

By HEDY BLESSLEY

(Conclusion)

Rio is cut out of the tropical jungle — sky-scrapers and jungle — luxury side-by-side with extreme poverty. Behind rows of royal palms you will see the slums, known as "Favelas", which cluster around and within the city. These settlements have no floors except the earth, their rusted roofs are of corrugated iron, the walls are flattened petrol-cans, the furniture old packing-cases; pathways of red earth serve as drains and there is no tap water supply — they fetch water from a communal pump. The national dish is "Feijoada" — a stew of beans with sausages or pork. As soon as evening falls, a few yards away from the sky-scrapers of Rio de Janeiro, music and black magic start in the "Favelas". "Makumbas" are in full swing every night till early in the morning. Even today there are over 20,000 Makumba meetings in Brazil, where millions of people seek and find salvation in trance or dancing, chasing the demon out of their souls, believing even to find health in a magic spell.

In contrast, the spacious squares of Rio are a blaze of colour, with unusual serpentine mosaic paving, famed the world over. The central streets are crowded with men in cotton suits, negresses, pretty mulatto girls with swaying hips, enormously fat women, here and there a negress with bleached hair, the wealthier women sitting in shiny limousines. Dance tunes, samba and tango, blare from the radio and gramophone shops.

Carbos Sampo ordered hills to be moved and dumped into the Bay, thus creating more building ground. By such innovation it was possible to establish the Santos-Dumont Airport in the very centre of this passionate city. Whenever friends meet, they go into a cafe to drink tiny cups of thick black coffee with an inch of sugar on the bottom — I preferred the freshly pressed juice from the sugar cane with lemon juice — a delicious cheap drink.

Niteroi, with its English colony, is an elegant residential section facing Rio across Guanabara Bay.

Air transport from Rio to Sao Paulo, a distance of 250 miles, costs only ten dollars return. From Rio to Belo Horizonte and Brasilia, round trip only 30 dollars — a luxurious flight of 2,000 km. A two-hour air journey in the best plane for less than £2! Long distance Express Bus Service, a seven-hour air-conditioned drive from Sao Paulo to Rio with some breath-taking scenery, for 2.50 dollars. Consider that a fortnight in Brazil costs you less than a week in Miami or New York. This is no error, it is really true!

Rio de Janeiro is no longer Brazil's Capital; Brasilia, a 180-million-pound city in the State of Goyaz is the centre of the future, thanks to the last President of the Republic — Jusceline Kubitschek — and the great architects, Lucio Costa and his former pupil Oscar Niemeyer, Jr. Brasilia is one of the ultra-modern architectural wonders of the world, a symbol of the nation's drive towards new horizons. It is common knowledge that Brazil's wealth has hardly been scratched on the surface.

Petropolis, about 40 miles from Rio, along an excellent scenic mountain road, is a living link between Brazil of the old Empire days and the contemporary Republican era. This Brazilian landscape, with the beautiful Organ Mountains in the background and the Atlantic in the distance, is fabulous. Dr. Guinle's orchid collection, the Imperial Museum, with the magnificent park, and the very famous Quitandine Hotel, are in a grandiose setting.

We went by car to Barbacena, and on Sunday morning we reached Conconhas da Campo, a small hill town 2,842 feet above sea level, just in time for the procession to the great pilgrimage church of Bom Jesus. The terraces command a wide view of the lovely country — twelve prophets with very expressive features are carved in soapstone on the terrace and steps; below are six small chapels set in beautifully arranged sloping gardens. The church and the statues on the terrace are famous for the works of Aleijadinho, also for the Rooms of Miracles. The astounding Churrigueresque carvings in cedarwood and soapstone by the Sculptor Lisboa (nicknamed Aleijadinho, "The Little Cripple", because his hands were maimed through leprosy) are masterpieces. Lisboa (1724-1784) was the son of a Portuguese architect, Manuel Francisco Lisboa, and a negress. Congonhas is a heavenly place and has an excellent hotel.

The Williamsburg of Brazil is Ouro Preto — an extraordinarily beautiful town. It is preserved as a National Monument. Houses of hand-made tiles, carved doorways, patios, and ornate churches, make it utterly fascinating. The Church of Saint Francis of Assisi is one of the most gracious of all, and owes its plan and the sculpture of its façade to the famous mulatto, Lisboa. Ouro Preto (Black Gold), the former Capital of the State Minas Gerais, has a population of 9,247, mostly miners of gold and iron. There is a famous School of Mines and a splendid Museum of Mineralogy and precious stones. The city, built on rocky ground 3,500 feet above sea level, is a remarkable treasure of colonial and baroque architecture and painting. Monumental fountains, baroque churches, enchanting vistas of terraced gardens, ruins, towers shining with coloured tiles, all blend together to maintain an exquisite 18th-century atmosphere. The Grand Hotel is modern and first class.

Marianna is another old mining city of churches and quaint streets in wonderful mountainous surroundings, with palms planted by my brother. It has the second largest gold-mine in the state and is also a National Monument.

My brother and his family live at Belo Horizonte (Beautiful Horizon), the second most important inland city in Brazil (2,700 feet). The city, and especially the surroundings, are as its name implies, and the climate is invigorating. Before breakfast I collected huge avocado pears lying about on the ground. Belo Horizonte has numbers of Italian, German and Swiss settlers; it is the centre of important mining as well as of diamond-cutting. There are sky-scrapers and beautiful avenues of fig trees pruned and trained for shade. On the artificial lake

Pampulha is a glass and marble Casino. The much-criticised small church — Sao Francisco — is most interesting. Both are by the famous architect, Oscar Niemeyer. The ecclesiastical authorities refused to consecrate the church because of the extremely futuristic interior mural paintings and exterior design by Candido Portinari.

Mostly over coffee plantations and the Spa Araxa, I flew to Uberaba, where I met my second brother. He and his wife took me to Riberon Preto (1,930 feet), the centre of a rich coffee-growing district 262 miles from Sao Paulo. Twenty-five years ago one could not find accommodation here; now, through the Coffee King, it has developed into a lovely modern town, with splendid hotels.

Sao Paulo is quite another kind of city, the centre of one of the largest coffee-growing districts in the world. The famous Butantan Snake Farm is not only one of the major attractions of the Paulista Capital, but one of the world's leading scientific institutions in the field of serum and anti-poison research. They receive about 20,000 snakes annually, for experimental and breeding purposes. Within an estate of 500 acres, a special free hospital is maintained for the treatment of people who have become victims of bites or infection.

The Museum Paulista, in the suburbs of Ipiranga, is a huge palace set in a beautiful park, with coloured fountains and statuary gardens. Here is the famous Ipiranga Monument to commemorate the Declaration of Independence from Portugal. Sao Paulo has a magnificent Opera House. In honour of President Senor G. Gronchi, they gave a Gala Performance of the opera, "Lo Schiave" (The Slave), with music by Carlos Gomes. I still hear it and the terrific applause! Never have I seen a scene without a

single person in it which was so beautifully done. This represented a sunrise (as I experienced in my ship when crossing the Equator) with magnificent colours and lighting effects — just like the real thing, plus heavenly music.

The drive or cograil trip from Sao Paulo to Santos, about 39 miles good highway run, is unique, exciting and most interesting. This, one of the most notable engineering feats in the world, was built by the British in 1860. This vital link between the city and the sea tunnels and winds its way down the 2,600-foot escarpment of the Serra Do Mar to Santos, the world's largest coffee port — and the commercial heart of Brazil. The beautiful landscape is dominated by the Monte Serrat and there are wonderful views in every direction. On the summit is a semaphore station which reports the arrival of all ships in Santos Harbour. The magnificent beaches are set in tropical splendour. I realised that I was 5,375 miles from London (Tilbury Docks). At Santos they sea-bathe in the winter, while in the summer nearly everyone escapes the heat and moves up to Joa de Campos (1,750 metres).

I must mention the beautiful Orchid Gardens at Guarujá and the Santa Terezinha hill, known as the Santos Switzerland, from where an enchanting view of Santos can be obtained.

Thanks to my two brothers, I have seen more of Brazil than many who have been there for years. Richer for the experience, grateful for all the beauty I so much enjoyed, I cannot help being homesick for the very friendly people and a winter like our best summer (1959) and even richer with colour. No wonder I fell in love with everything!

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