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NATURE AND MAN IN EASTERN PARÁ, BRAZIL

By EMILIE SNETHLAGE
Museu Goeldi, Pará

Colonel Roosevelt's remarkable and hazardous journey in 1914 brought home to many a realization of the fact that large expanses of territory in South America are still unknown. Among these the largest are in the Amazon Basin; and, strange to say, they are located in the middle and lower rather than in the upper sections of the basin. The reason is that the upper part of the basin is a vast lowland in which the rivers flow with little change in gradient and are navigable for steamers or launches almost up to their headwaters, where there is connection, by well-known trails, to the dense populations of the Andean plateaus and the trade routes of the Pacific. By contrast the lowland area in the lower, or eastern, part of the basin is restricted by the close approach of the Guiana and Brazilian Highlands, which leave only the extreme lower courses of the tributaries of the Amazon open to steam navigation, while their upper courses are interrupted by rapids and falls. Many of the main rivers have been visited by scientific explorers only within the last twenty-five or thirty years: in the north, the Trombetas by Coudreau in 1899, and the Jary and the Parú by Crevaux in 1877-79; in the south, the Tapajoz by Coudreau in 1895-96, the Xingú by von den Steinen in 1884, and the Araguaya and Tocantins by Ehrenreich in 1888. But the spaces between the rivers have remained to a great extent *terra incognita.* The cross-country exploration of Farabee[1] in the hinterland of British Guiana and between the Tapajoz and the Xingú is the latest piece of pioneer exploration in eastern South America and is worthy of comparison with the best of the earlier expeditions.

A good illustration of how little is known about the interior of northern Brazil even near centers of population is the region immediately to the east of Belem, or Pará, a city of more than 100,000 inhabitants, the terminus of the only railway in the state of Pará, and a sea-port of the first rank, where the trade and navigation of the whole enormous Amazon Basin are concentrated. We have frequently been asked by naturalists, who were in receipt of botanical or zoölogical specimens from this region, about the location of the places mentioned on the labels of the specimens, "because we cannot find them on any map." In fact, though some of these places are quite considerable, not even the official map of the state, re-edited at great cost in 1908, shows them. Take for instance the region east of Pará, traversed by the Pará-Bragança railway. Not even the names of all the stations are given. The coast is the region best known and in consequence

[1] See the February *Review* (Vol. 3, 1917), p. 149.—EDIT. NOTE.

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best represented. Nearly all the small coastal rivers have their courses fairly well marked. To the south, however, the map is less explicit. The names are also given of the larger affluents of the Guamá, the main artery draining the hinterland, but as to the tributaries, only a few of which are delineated, the map becomes silent; and with the exception of the small cities and market-places on the coast, some of the railway stations, and about half a dozen *povações* on the Guamá and the Caeté, the name of no locality is given. Yet the region between the coast and the Guamá, divided by the railway into two parts of about equal size, is fairly well populated and is considered to be one of the most advanced and best cultivated of the state. It is interesting in many respects to the scientist also, forming, so to speak, a compound of nearly all the most important features, ethnographical as well as geographical, of Amazonia. Besides persons of mixed descent, of all shades and colors, full-blooded representatives of each of the principal three races that make the modern Brazilian are quite commonly seen, and in remote places representatives of the Indian component are still living in their old haunts.

Even now by far the greater part of the country is covered with majestic and interminable virgin forests. It contains, however, vast *campos* in its eastern part, where stock-raising flourishes. Near the coast and along the larger rivers one meets large wooded swamps, *igapós,* while away from the latter the gradually rising land, the never swampy *terra firme,* occasionally even forms insignificant hills and ridges.

To the naturalist the difference between the highland forest, the *matta virgem da terra firme,* and the swamp woods, the *igapó* (of which the *várzea,* the country swampy in winter only, is an important variety) is of great significance, and it is my conviction, after a ten years' stay in the country, that it serves even better than the more generally known difference between forest and *campos* to elucidate the question of local races and geographical subspecies in the animal world.

If you take the train at Belem for Bragança, you will not see much of the virgin forest, at least in the first half of the 180-mile journey, and nothing at all of the *campos.* For in the beginning the railroad is bordered principally by *capoéira* and only occasionally passes through insignificant patches of wood, *igapó* most of it, near the rivers. The *capoéira,* appearing generally as a sort of low, extremely tangled shrubwood, invades the abandoned *roças* (plantations) in a very short time, the latter being cultivated, after the Brazilian fashion, for several years only, or as long as the soil retains its natural fertility. Then the impoverished land is left to itself and produces a characteristic shrub-vegetation, presenting in its dwarfed and somewhat meager though tangled appearance the greatest imaginable contrast to the giant, majestic growth of the *matta virgem da terra firme* or the tropical exuberance of the *igapó.* In these *capoéira*-covered stretches the plantations themselves no longer play a conspicuous part, as was the

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Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 1—The Franciscan mission of São Antonio do Prata, about one hundred miles distant from Pará, Brazil. (Photo by E. Snethlage.)

Fig. 2—Hut of a half-breed Indian hidden among banana trees. (Photo by E. Snethlage.)

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case ten years ago, the land near the railroad having been cultivated first and being now abandoned and overgrown with shrubs.

From the station Igarapé-assú onward—about halfway between Pará and Bragança—the country takes on a more picturesque look, the road leading alternately through *terra firme* and extensive swamps, both richly wooded. The *campos* remain hidden to the left. They are most extensive on both sides of the little coast river Quatipurú, but separated from the railway by a girdle of forest land of more or less considerable width. They are interrupted by wooded stretches of land, called *tesos,* and by gallery-woods bordering the rivers, representing a special forest-formation, related, however, to the *igapó.*

I wish, however, to introduce the reader to the typical virgin forest, and so we leave the train at Igarapé-assú and turn southward to the water-shed between the coast rivers and the affluents of the Guamá, whose head-waters intermingle in a very complicated and curious way. About 12 miles to the south, at the confluence of the Maracanã, one of the more considerable coast rivers, and the Rio do Prata (which is not to be found on any map), an Indian mission was founded some twenty years ago by devoted and hard-working Franciscan monks and nuns of the order of Santa Clara. The tribe whose conversion was to be undertaken is a branch of the Tembé Indians, who though remote from the settlements of white men had lived in quite good relations with them for some generations, as their semi-barbarian kindred in the Capim and Guamá districts do even to this day. The mission, however, soon also became the center of a considerable colony of Cearenses, inhabitants of the state of Ceará, who had fled from that terrible scourge, the *secca,* or drought, so impressively described by Herbert H. Smith.[2] The mission and colony of São Antonio do Prata, as it is called, presents quite an agreeable aspect, with its little church in the Italian style (the monks are most of them Italians, while the nuns are all of Brazilian descent), its stately convent, and the attractive building which the monks constructed for themselves only a few years ago. The erection of the buildings is in fact all their own work, as is the laying-out of the fields and the cultivation of many of the plantations and orchards. In recent years the mission, like all enterprises in Amazonia, has suffered considerably from the rubber crisis, though the government subsidizes the institution and does its best to help the devoted monks to get on with their useful educational work. The mission now serves partly as an orphanage; more than sixty children are being educated there, the number having been much larger formerly.

When I first came to Prata, ten years ago, the nuns' house had only just been finished. Services were held in one of its rooms, and the monks lived with their pupils in rather primitive sheds. Large and beautifully kept plantations surrounded the place on all sides, and there was a hopeful and

[2] Brazil: The Amazons and the Coast. Scribner, New York, 1879: Chapter XIII, "Ceará and the Drought."

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prosperous look about everything. Now the new and stately buildings of the church and monastery rise from the middle of the *capoéira,* the former plantations having long since been abandoned. This gives the place a somewhat desolate appearance at first, well in accord with the nearly universal depression caused by the crisis. Yet, on close examination, the case of São Antonio do Prata is not at all hopeless, and I trust it may prove to be a first instance of the better future that awaits the Amazonian region when the crisis has passed. Following the newly laid-out roads, lined in part with beautiful, shady mango trees, we come, after a quarter or half an hour's walk, to the new plantations, and find that, beside the old inhabitants, a number of new agricultural colonists have settled there, each having built his *barraca* (hut), in the middle of a large, newly planted *roça.* Rice, Indian corn, sugar-cane, beans, etc., are producing rich crops, which are brought to market by means of a small field-railway, constructed by the monks, but now run by the government as a branch of the E. F. B. (Estrada de Ferro de Bragança).

The virgin forest, which some years ago still surrounded the place quite closely, has now retreated a good deal. To the northwest, where the *igapó* of the Rio do Prata and the hills of the watershed make farming impossible, the forest may be reached in a twenty-minute walk, and from there it stretches away almost indefinitely, covering hills and valleys with its deep green shade. Wandering, as we safely may, thanks to the compass we have with us, the whole day long under its leafy vault, we are impressed anew with wonder at the enormous expanse of the Amazon forest. Weeks and months may be spent in this same interminable woodland, on the banks of the Tocantins, and in the region between the Xingú and the Madeira, from which its green waves still sweep on to the west, surging up and covering the first chains of the Andes, only to be stopped by the bleak winds of the *páramo.*

As for scenery, the cultivated land and even the *capoéira* have their beauty, too, especially as they are generally intersected with remains of the high forest and lovely little valleys, abounding in palms and traversed by clear brooks. The picturesque *barracas* of the colonists or the indigenous Tembés are hidden under large-leaved bananas, and the crimson flowers of the beautiful hibiscus, which the *caboclos* like to plant in their little gardens, inject a vivid element into the flood of green which is the characteristic of the virgin forest as well as of the *capoéira* and the plantations.

But perhaps its loveliest sights the Amazonian forest reserves to the canoe traveler in the upper courses of the small coastal rivers or of the Guamá affluents. All the showy plants which, to the inhabitant of temperate climates, appear as the incarnation of tropical beauty and exuberance, are crowded together here. They receive just enough light to force them to arrange their foliage to the greatest advantage—which, at the same time, means greatest perfection of outward appearance, as almost always

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in nature. There are delicate ferns and large-leaved aroids, spreading their brilliant green shields around the overhanging stems in the most artistic manner possible. Palms lift their graceful heads on slender stems or curve over the brown-golden waters, their feathery crowns forming the centerpiece of a bewitching picture, set off by the tangled mass of vegetation behind. Every bend of the river (and its bends are innumerable) discloses a new view of ever like, yet ever changing beauty. Animal life, apart from the tiny or noiseless creatures that escape the eye of the non-zoölogist, is not so abundant near the river banks as is the vegetation. Kingfishers of different species, noisy and showy birds, play the most conspicuous part. Flocks of parrots and parakeets settle screaming on the top of some fruit-bearing tree, and occasionally a humming-bird darts rapidly from shore to shore. The gorgeous *Topaza pella* is not at all infrequent on the Maracanã and its affluents, though it rarely appears in the full glory of its glittering array of golden green, purple, and ruby, these colors only flashing out under special conditions of light and shade. Occasionally a band of capuchin monkeys may be heard chattering in the distance, or the pretty little squirrel-monkey skips along the tree-tops bordering the banks. Sloths are to be met with, too, climbing or feeding lazily among the leaves. But nearly all the larger inhabitants of the woods, the *anta* (tapir), the wild hogs, the larger felines, etc., have disappeared long ago or become extremely shy and rare.

When the mission was founded, the region between the headwaters of the Maracanã and its affluents, the Rio do Prata and the Rio Jejú, was inhabited by Indians of the Tembé tribe, and to them in that time the work of the mission was exclusively addressed. The monks and nuns soon won the confidence of the peaceful Indians, and nearly all the principal people among them sent their children to be educated at Prata. I have often been struck, not only in this case but in others, with the response which the temperament of the Indian makes to the monotonous regularity, combined with the brilliant outward show, of Catholic religious life in such places as these. The children apparently enjoy the ever-repeated walks to church for prayer and the glorious spectacle of the mass. The altar, covered with costly embroidered linen, decked with artificial flowers and shining images and vessels, never fails to impress them. However, the children's life in the monastery is not wholly taken up by religious practices. After the regular school work, which occupies the morning, the girls are taught all sorts of house- and needlework. Under the guidance of specially trained nuns they provide for the *gallinhéiro* (poultry-yard) and the garden, where beans, Indian corn, sugar-cane, and batatas are grown. Thus their education is many-sided and practical.

It is the same with the boys. Under the monks' supervision they till the land and plant it, bring in the harvest, and help to prepare it for home consumption and market. The planting of rice—wholly neglected in Ama-

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zonia for a long period, as were most of the other purely agricultural practices, in consequence of the more profitable rubber-gathering—has again been taken up here in Prata. The first modern machines for threshing and cleaning the grain were set up and worked, and thus a wholesome impulse was imparted to the whole country around. Cattle were introduced and throve much better than in most other places, apart from the *campos*. The work of the *religiosos do Prata* has proved really advantageous to the whole region, and it is to be hoped that the relatively insignificant means for its successful continuance may always be forthcoming.

There are still a number of full-blooded or nearly unmixed Tembés living near Prata, their center being now the headwaters of the little Rio Jejú, an affluent of the upper Maracanã. In 1905, on the occasion of my first stay at Prata, I was formally invited to visit the *tushaua's maloca,* which was to be reached only after many hours' walk through woods and swamps, with the help of a guide. These half-civilized Indians still cling to the thoroughly Amazonian custom of hiding the approach to their houses in a most elaborate manner, by making the footpaths nearly invisible (at least to the non-Indian eye), by introducing unexpected turnings just at the least conspicuous part of the road, and sometimes even by inserting a gap of forest, so that the exit may be found only by the initiated. The *tushaua,* Capitão Joaquim Braz, received me cordially. His spacious *maloca* was thatched with palm straw, and the walls of the one perfectly closed room in the otherwise open building consisted of the same material. *Farinha*-making was just going on, and I was shown the process. The manioc root is first soaked in running water in a special recess of the little brook near the house, then peeled and triturated on a special instrument, the *raladór.* The yellowish mass resulting from this is then put into a *tipity,* a long, tightly plaited basket of palm fibers, which is slung to a beam of the roof and stretched to its utmost possibility by a stone suspended on its free end. The pressure thus produced draws out the poisonous juice still contained in the mass and helps to dry it. Several hours' roasting over a slow fire in a large metal basin with continual stirring completes the process, whose final product is the white or yellowish *farinha d'agua,* the principal and most necessary food of the Paraense, be he Indian or Brazilian. Standing for hours near the fire roasting *farinha* is no easy work in this hot climate. No wonder that the Tembé, though long accustomed to clothing, throws off every dispensable garment on this occasion—as on many others.

In recent times, and principally through the influence and example of the monks, many other cereals and vegetables have been introduced, especially rice and *feijão* (beans). To the original Tembé—who is now fast disappearing—however, the manioc field was and is the chief resource, and so it never is far from his palm-straw hut. There is a marked difference, characteristic of the racial temperament, between the surroundings of the indigenous Indian hut and of that of the Cearense colonist. The latter

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likes to build his house in an open place, right in the middle of his *roça*, or in front of it, beside the road. The Indian, however, prefers to have it in the woods, making his *roça* at some distance, even on the opposite shore if he lives on a river bank. Part of the *roça* is nearly always planted with *iniam, batata doce* (sweet potato), *macacheira*, and other indigenous roots; and some Indian corn and sugar-cane as a rule are cultivated, the latter being pressed in a rather primitive machine, with the help of a large wooden wheel, and the juice turned to *garapa*. Bananas are scarcely ever lacking, but they are generally planted in the vicinity of the huts. They are, to my mind, among the greatest beautifiers of the tropical landscape and, with the dense crowns of the *pupunha* palms *(Guilielma speciosa)*, whose orange-colored fruits are likewise edible, the large acanthus-shaped leaves of the *mamão* tree *(Carica papaya)*, and the feathery *assahy* palms *(Euterpe oleracea)* near the brooklet in the background, help to make a charming picture of many an Indian home. There is besides the beautiful *miriti* palm *(Mauritia flexuosa)*, whose enormous, fan-shaped leaves overhang the washing-place where the good Indian housewife cleans the family linen, in rather primitive fashion, to be sure, leaving the brunt of the work to the bleaching power of the sun.

I wonder whether the drinking of *cashiri*, that unappetizing but most general of Indian beverages, is still in vogue in any remote district among the Tembés. I have found no trace of it among these Jejú Indians. They seem to be quite a sober race, the famous *assahy* wine, drunk here as in the whole Amazonian region, containing no alcohol.

Hunting still furnishes the Tembé part of his animal food. Though the tapir has become very rare in these parts and the two species of peccary are disappearing, many a *veado* (roe) still comes in the hunter's way, and harelike *cutias* (agutis) abound, while the rarer *pacas* and *tatús* (armadillos) form a more delicate article of fare. Even the sloth is not at all disdained by the indigenous. Fishing gives good results in many of the small rivers and is still largely practiced by means of the Indian *cacury*. Most of the river-fishes like to enter the smallest affluents, the *igarapés*, at high water. These affluents are then shut off from the main river by a deeply implanted wooden fence that cannot be passed by the returning fish, which are caught by the Indians when they want them. Small and rather shallow dugouts are used by the Tembés. They are of a more elaborate and elegant make than the *ubás* of the more western rivers, being pointed at each end, and they contrast favorably with the heavy and clumsy boats of the colonists. The rivers being shallow during the greater part of the year, these boats are generally pushed forward by means of the *vara*, a long pole, while a large paddle is used for piloting. Paddles, however, are used at high water and in winter. They are rather short, but long-bladed, as compared with the rudder and with the small round-bladed paddles used on the Amazon.

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Of the domestic animals kept by the Tembés, a peculiar race of lean, short-haired dogs deserve to be mentioned first, as they are extremely noisy and sure to give the first welcome, most often in a rather hostile manner, to any stranger approaching the *maloca*. Then there are fowls and ducks and turkeys and pigs, bred from time out of mind, that is, before the mission was founded and time acquired a meaning for these children of the forest.

Clothing, too, was already known to these Indians when the monks appeared, and the national *tanga* and the pretty feather ornaments had already vanished. Instead of the bow and arrow the *musquetão,* a muzzle-loader, was in vogue (incidentally, that antiquated weapon is still beloved and preferred to the modern rifle by many a *caboclo* of the interior), and the Iron Age, with its *terçado* (large wooden knife) and *machado* (axe) had already succeeded the Stone Age. I do not know whether pottery ever has played an important part in the lives of these Indians, as it has with many of the tribes living on the larger rivers, where clay is abundant. The vessel of indigenous manufacture most largely in use at present is the *cúya,* made in all sizes and sorts—large ones from the shell of the *cuiero* fruit, small ones from several sorts of gourds. Baskets and mats also are remains of indigenous handicraft, and many of the hammocks are even today of the old Indian make, knitted from palm-fibers.

The Tembé language is still spoken by most of the adult Indians and by some of the younger generation, too, but it is disappearing. It is a dialect of the widely spread Tupy-Guarany, from which the *língua gerál* is derived. Though it is but natural that the ethnographer's attention today is chiefly concentrated on the fast-vanishing tribes in a completely wild state, it seems a pity that these semi-civilized tribes are not more intimately studied.

Only the naturalist who has lived for years in the country and come into intimate contact with all classes and races and knows the conditions of life in Brazil can appreciate the multitude and the importance of the cultural and racial problems that still require solution. The curious blending of three races has left deep traces, not only on the outward appearance of the people, but also on their costumes, plays, and folk-lore. I spent part of June, 1915, in Prata. Every Sunday and holiday, at night, a peculiar musical noise (it hardly could be termed music in our sense of the word), drumming and trumpeting on strange instruments, interrupted by monotonous chanting, was heard, and a curious procession of men and boys clad in fantastic costumes with hats of flowers or crowns of feathers, some of them painted black or red, marched around, leading about a rather coarse imitation of an ox and from time to time performing a sort of pantomime that invariably ended with the killing of the ox *(matando o boi)*. That was the famous *boi-bumba,* the popular summer entertainment of the Amazonians. Even in the capital, the *boi-bumba* is a favorite spectacle with the lower classes, and its noise is often enough heard from afar in

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the main streets and open places of the suburbs. But as it is rather looked down upon and proclaimed as shocking by the educated people, it really has somewhat degenerated, and the opportunity to study it is not very favorable. In the country, however, it still has the character of a legitimate popular festival, most interesting from the point of view just mentioned, as showing elements evidently belonging to all three Brazilian races. I shall not attempt here to give a thorough history or explanation of the play, which indeed has never been tried, so far as I am aware. However, relics of Indian and negro superstitions are distinctly traceable in it, and the whole has been modified, as is so often the case, by the highest of the three races. This may be inferred from the time at which the pantomime is performed, being St. John's day in Amazonia, and the Epiphany in the south of Brazil.

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