

THE BRAZILS—PIRA PORA.



WE have received the following letter from an English clergyman staying at San Paulo, Brazil, who, under date of August 10, 1871, kindly writes :—

“ I send you a very hurried sketch of my visit to Pira Pora I wrote late last night, after the fatigues of the day, and the post leaves in ten minutes. If you think it suitable, kindly insert it in the South American Missionary Society’s publication. I trust it will interest your readers, and excite interest in the cause of the South American Missionary Society.

“Pira Pora is a village about nine leagues (thirty-six miles) from the city of Sao Paulo, in the interior of the province of the same name, and is celebrated for possessing an image which is said to have worked many miracles, and so is held in great veneration by the superstitious Brazilians. Where the image came from no one knows, but it is said to have floated down the river Parahyba, on which Pira Pora stands, and to have been picked up there by some of the inhabitants. When found they endeavoured to carry it to the village of Parahyba, named after the river about ten miles distant, but, in consequence of its weight, they could not do this in one day, but were obliged to rest on the way at night. Whenever they did this, the image of its own accord returned to Pira Pora ; and so, after several unsuccessful endeavours to convey it to its intended destination, they decided to let it remain where it wished to stay. Accordingly a church was built there in its honour, and it was placed over the high altar in it. Since it has been there, it is said to have performed many miracles, cured the sick, released prisoners who were unjustly accused, &c. It was found on the 6th of August ; so its grand festa (festival) is always held on that and the following days. Then thousands flock to the place from every part of the Empire to worship it, pay their vows, or implore its assistance, Of course there is no accommodation in the village for such a multitude, so they build little huts of palm leaves on the hill sides, where they live during the festa. I had heard so much of it that I was anxious to see it for myself ; and I trust that a short account of what I did see will interest your readers, make them value their own privileges in Christian England, and awaken in them a deeper sense of the great necessity there is for missionary labour in this part of South America. As the 6th

unfortunately fell this year on a Sunday, I was not able to be present at the principal day of the festa, but started on horseback at 5.30 on Monday morning, accompanied by a friend and a 'comarado,' to take care of the horses. I can give your readers but little idea of the country we rode over—it was beautiful and wild in the extreme. The road (?) was only a narrow track, along which we were obliged to ride in Indian file. All the way we were scrambling up and down steep hills ; at times so steep and difficult that it was with great difficulty the horses could keep their footing at all ; indeed, I often wonder how they managed to do so. Now we would be at the top of the hills, with most extensive grand views all round—hill rising behind hill, till lost in the haze of the distance ; while here and there a thin curl of smoke, rising from some spot or other, would point out a Fagenda ; now we were going through dense woods, with almost tropical growth, enclosing us on every side ; now we would ford the stream at the bottom of the valley, then toil up the other side to reach the summit of another hill, again admire the view, and again descend. Then we followed the banks of a river : on our way we crossed two, the Tiebe and the Parahyba ; and so we journeyed for eight hours, reaching Pira Pora at 1.30. On our way we passed many groups of 'pilgrims' returning from the festa, and a very picturesque appearance they presented, nearly all riding upon mules, the women with bright-coloured kerchiefs upon their heads, and the men with equally brightly-coloured sashes round their waists. To see such a troop of twenty or thirty wind along the path was a very pretty sight, and I think none of us regretted that we were a day too late, and so were able to see them.

“ We had our first sight of Pira Pora from the top of a hill, and saw it lying at our feet, very prettily situated by the side of the river, which here runs very rapidly, dashing and foaming among the rocks, its sides covered with trees, and embracing many prettily wooded little islands. In half an hour after catching our first sight of it, we were in it, and then saw that it consisted of one row of very poor mud cottages, and a very large whitewashed church. Although many 'pilgrims' had left, there were still a great many there. Indeed, the place seemed to be quite full of them, as they thronged round the door of the church, or crowded the one street. Although it was mid-day, rockets were being continually sent up, and bombs exploded in a way that was very terrifying to our horses. Having found some quarters in the '*Campas Hotel*'—a mud cottage, with mud walls,

mud floor, and without any windows—we then turned our steps towards the church. Here we found mass was being continually sung by relays of priests. It was quite full of worshippers, kneeling on the floor. Oh, that we had but the boldness and power of St. Paul to speak to this multitude of that Saviour who came to save them, and who tells us that God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth! Sad at heart, we turned away from that altar blazing with candles, the officiating priests in their gorgeous vestments, and the kneeling crowd, to sit down by the river and admire the works of God. We had not been there long before a fresh explosion of bombs and rockets, and an increased hum of voices, told us that something particular was going on; so we retraced our steps, and found ourselves in time to see the grand procession of the image. First came a goodly array of choristers and acolytes, chanting; then the priests in their vestments; then the image, carried up aloft on men's shoulders. Following it came another image of the Virgin Mary, and then a large crowd of the pilgrims following bareheaded. Whenever the image stopped, many knelt down, and stretched out their hands in prayer to it. Among those who followed, we noticed some carrying lighted candles; others with large stones on their heads; while one man, I was informed, walked after it in chains.

“The image itself is called the ‘Bon Jesus,’ and is, I presume, supposed to be a likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, sent down from heaven. It has the appearance of an Indian boy, small, swarthy, with long black hair falling in ringlets down its neck. The features are not agreeable, but rather repulsive.

“After having been thus carried round the city, it was again taken into the church, where it remained for adoration. We saw many kissing its toe, and one woman *crawled* painfully up the whole church to do so. Again there was service, more fireworks, bombs, and bands of music. When we walked out in the evening, we found the village given up to *universal* gambling. All during the night sleep was rendered quite impossible by the fighting of the drunken devotees, and it was with a very heavy heart that we turned our horses' heads away towards Sao Paulo next morning. During our long ride we had plenty of time for meditation. Oh, what a field for labour was there here! Here, thousands of souls perishing for lack of knowledge, what inestimable good even a few tracts distributed might have done. We had had none, and, as we could not speak Portuguese at all fluently, were obliged to be silent witnesses of the sad scene. Oh, that God may be pleased to send forth labourers into his harvest! The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few.

“A. A. WELBY, *Rector of Tollerton, Notts.*”

The Rev. A. A. Welby is making a temporary stay at San Paulo on account of his health, and is kindly ministering to the English residents there on behalf of the Society.