



Spiritist Group of New York
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Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes Cavalcanti

Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes Cavalcanti was born in the old neighborhood of Freguesia do Riacho de Sangue (Stream of Blood), today Solonopole, in Ceara, Brazil, on August 29th, 1831. He died in Rio de Janeiro, on April 11th, 1900.

In the year of 1838, Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes Cavalcanti, started studying at the public school of the Friar's Villa, where in only ten months he sufficiently prepared himself to reach the degree of knowledge of his master, who was responsible to guide his first educational phase. At a very early age, he revealed to be extremely intelligent. When he was eleven years old he was able to commence the course on Humanities. At thirteen he knew Latin so well that he not only gave classes to his colleagues, but also was called to replace his teacher every time he had to be absent.

His father, Antonio Bezerra de Menezes, was captain of the old militias and lieutenant - colonel of the National Guard; he was a stern man, extremely honest and of irreproachable character. His wealth was derived from his cattle's farm. He spent large sums of money in politics and in the assistance of friends and relatives, because of his good-natured heart. Those people, however, only looked for him in order to exploit his charitable feelings, and he ended up compromising his fortune. Upon realizing that his debts equaled his possessions, he expressed to his creditors his intention of giving them everything that he owned, in order to pay off the debt. The creditors, being his friend, refused to accept such a proposal, replying that he could pay them when and how he wanted.

In spite of the insistence of the elderly honest man, his creditors didn't change their minds. Mr. Antonio Bezerra de Menezes proposed them to remain as the administrator of what one day was his fortune, only using from it the strictly necessary for the maintenance of his family, who changed from a previous comfortable condition to a life of privations.

Encouraged by the firm purpose of being guided by his father's honest character, Bezerra de Menezes, with a reduced amount of money, given to him by his relatives, was taken by the firm purpose of overcoming all obstacles and headed to Rio de Janeiro in order to follow the career that his vocation inspired him to pursue: Medicine.

In November of 1852, he entered as intern resident at the Mercy Hospital. He graduated from the College of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro, in 1856, presenting a doctorate thesis about: "Diagnosis of Cancer." It was when he started to sign only Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes. On April 27th, 1857, he applied for a position of titular member of the Imperial Academy of Medicine, presenting the work: "Some Considerations on Cancer under its treatment perspective." The designated reporter, Academic José Pereira Rego, read the result on May 11th, 1857, and the election took place on May 18th of the same year, and he assumed the position in June 1st. In 1858 he applied to a position, as substitute, in the Area of Surgery in the College of Medicine. Due to the recommendation given by his teacher Manoel Feliciano Pereira de Carvalho, at the time Chief Surgeon of the Army, Bezerra de Menezes was named his assistant, assuming the position of Surgeon - Lieutenant.

In 1861 Bezerra de Menezes was elected the municipal representative of the Liberal Party, however the conservative chief, Haddock Lobo, under the allegation of him being a military doctor, refuted his indication. With the purpose of serving his Party, that needed him in order to obtain majority in the Camera, Bezerra de Menezes decided to retire from the Army. In 1867, he was elected General Deputy, and he was still present in three other lists for a position in the Senate.

During his political career, injurious rumors and accusations were acclaimed against him. As it happens with all honest politicians, a torrent of offenses covered his name with insults. However, the test of purity of his soul was given, when, abandoning the public life, he decided to live for the poor, distributing with the needful the little that he possessed.

He was always ready to assist the need ones; wherever there was an illness to combat, he would take to the afflicted the comfort of his kind words, the resource of the doctor's science and the aid of his scarce but yet generous purse.

Temporarily retired from the political activity, he dedicated himself to entrepreneurial issues, creating the Company of Railroad Macae Campos, in Rio de Janeiro. Later, he dedicated to the construction of the railroad of S. Antonio of Padua, a necessary stage to his, not succeeded desire, to make it reach the Rio Doce. He was one of the directors of the Architectural Company that in 1872 opened the "Boulevard September 28," in the then neighborhood of Vila Isabel, whose name was given to render homage to Princess Isabel. In 1875, he was president of Company Carril S. Cristovão.

Returning to politics, he was elected municipal representative in 1876, exercising the mandate up to 1880. He was also president of the Chamber and General Deputy for the County of Rio de Janeiro, in the year of 1880.

Dr. Carlos Travassos had undertaken the task of translating Allan Kardec's works, reaching a good result with the Portuguese version of "The Spirits' Book." As soon as the translation was published he gave a copy of the book to the deputy Bezerra de Menezes - with a special dedication. The fact was described by the future "Doctor of the Poor" as follows: "He gave me the book in the city, and I lived in Tijuca, about an hour away from streetcar. I was carrying the book with me and since I did not have anything else to read during the trip I said, well, why not! I will certainly not go to hell for reading this... And after all, it will be embarrassing to have to declare myself ignorant regarding this philosophy, when I have been dedicating myself to the study of all philosophical schools. With this thought, I opened the book and I immediately became fascinated by it - in the same way that happened to me when I read the Bible. I kept on reading, but I couldn't find anything that was new for my Spirit. However, all that was new for me!... I had already read or heard everything that was in the "The Spirits' Book." I was quite amazed with that wonderful fact and I said to myself: it seems that I was a spiritist without knowing it, or as people usually say, I was born a spiritist."

On August 16th, 1886, an audience of about two thousand of the finest people in town filled the room of honor of the Old Guard, in the Old Guard Street, current May 13th Avenue, in Rio de Janeiro, to hear in silence, excited, amazed, the wise word of the eminent politician, the eminent doctor, the eminent citizen, the eminent Catholic, Dr. Bezerra de Menezes proclaiming his decision to become Spiritist.

Bezerra was a religious person in the highest sense. His pen, from that point on, from the first signed article in January of 1887, was put to the service of the religious

aspect of Spiritism. He demonstrated his literary ability in the philosophical and religious aspect, either through excerpts or through evangelical studies. Because of that, the Commission of Dissemination of the Spiritist Union of Brazil, assigned him to write every Sunday in the newspaper "O Paiz," the series of "Philosophical Studies," under the title "Spiritism." Senator Quintino Bocaiúva, director of this most read newspaper in Brazil became sympathetic with Spiritism.

The articles of Max, pseudonym of Bezerra de Menezes, marked the golden time of the spiritist dissemination in Brazil. From November 1886 to December 1893, he wrote enthusiastically and continuously.

The bibliography of Bezerra de Menezes, before and after his change to Spiritism, is consisted of the following works: " The Slavery in Brazil and the measures that are deem to take for its extinction - without damage for the Nation," "Brief considerations on the droughts of the North," "The Haunted House," "Madness under a New Prism," "Spiritism as a Teogonic Philosophy," "Marriage and Shroud," "Black Pearl," "Lazarus--the Leper," "History of a Dream," and "Gospel of the Future." He also wrote several biographies of famous men, such as the Viscount of Uruguay, the Viscount of Carvalas, etc. He was one of the editors of "The Reform," a liberal organ of the Court, and editor of the newspaper "Sentry of Freedom."

Bezerra de Menezes referred to the medical activity with the highest regard, "A doctor is not entitled to finish a meal, nor to ask if it is far or near, when an afflicted person knocks on the door. Those who do not help because they are entertaining guests or because they have worked long hours and are tired, or because it is too late at night, bad road or bad weather, because is far or is on the top of the hill, or above all, those who ask for a car for those who have not even resources to pay for the prescription, or that say to those who are crying at their door to seek for another doctor -- those are not doctors, but rather medicine dealers, who work for the income and to pay off their college debts. Those are unfortunates who send to others the angel of charity that came to pay them a visit and that brought to them the only source that could satiate their thirsty of Spiritual wealth, the only that will never get lost in the sways of life."

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In 1883, a dispersive atmosphere prevailed in the core of the Brazilian Spiritism and those who directed the spiritist nuclei in Rio de Janeiro felt the need of a better-structured union, and for this very reason a stronger one.

The Spiritist Centers worked in an autonomous way. Each one of them exercised its activity in a certain way, without having knowledge of the activities developed by the others. This feeling led them to the foundation of the Brazilian Spiritist Federation.

At those days the number of Spiritist Centers were already expressive, but the only ones that maintained the hegemony of direction were four: "Academic," "Fraternity," "Spiritist Union of Brazil," and "Brazilian Spiritist Federation," however, soon appeared among them alive discords.

Under the auspices of Bezerra de Menezes, and accepting the "instructions" received from the spiritual plane by the medium Frederico Junior, the famous "Spiritist Center" was founded. This, however, didn't hinder Bezerra to continue collaborating with all other institutions. The Spiritists' enthusiasm soon faded, and the old worker saw

himself abandoned by his companions, reaching the point of being the only participant of the Center. The quarrels were deep among the so-called "mystics" and "scientific," that is to say, Spiritists who only accepted Spiritism in its religious aspect, and those who only accepted its scientific and philosophical aspect.

In 1893, the convulsion provoked in Brazil by the Revolt of the Army, resulted in the closing of all spiritist societies or other societies. At Christmas time of that same year, Bezerra ended the series of "Philosophical Studies" that he had been publishing in the "O Paiz."

In 1894, signs of improvement could be seen and the name of Bezerra de Menezes was reminded as the only one capable of uniting the spiritist movement. The tireless worker, with 63 years of age, assumed the presidency of the Brazilian Spiritist Federation, position that he occupied until his death.

The year of 1900 was just beginning and Bezerra de Menezes suffered a strong brain stroke that kept him in bed, from where he would never recover.

A true pilgrimage of visitors went to his house. Sometimes, rich people were seemed there, other times poor individuals; he was visited by the opulent as well as by those who possessed nothing.

Nobody ignored the tremendous struggle lived by the great apostle's of Spiritism family. Everyone knew of his financial difficulties, but no one would have the courage to offer any assistance, in a direct way. Because of that, the visitors deposited their contribution, daintily, under his pillow. The following day, a person that was changing his pillowcase was surprised in seeing there the money of the poor and the large notes of the wealthy!...

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Upon his death, a true pilgrimage went to his residence in order to pay him homage.

On April 17th, under the initiative of Leopoldo Cirne, a group of Bezerra's friends gathered in order to decide what would be the best way to assist Bezerra's family. They decided to form a commission directed by senator Quintino Bocaiuva's, to promote shows and concerts, in benefit of the family of the one who deserved the cognomen of "Brazilian" Kardec.

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Worthy of mentioning is something that occurred to Dr. Bezerra de Menezes, when he was still a student of Medicine. He was facing serious financial difficulties, needing fifty thousand reis (old Brazilian currency), to pay his college tuition, his rent and other important expenses. His landlord was threatening to evict him without any further consideration.

Desperate -- one of the rare times in which Bezerra felt despair -- yet filled with faith, he raised his eyes to the on High and appealed to God.

Few days after someone knocked at his door. It was a nice and refined young man who intended to hire him for some private Mathematics lessons.

At first, Bezerra refused alleging that Mat was the subject that he disliked most, but the visitor insisted and finally, upon thinking about his desperate situation he agreed.

The young man expressed his desire to pay for the classes in advance, and although Bezerra was reluctant to accept, he ended up agreeing with that. The young man gave him the amount of fifty thousand reis. They agreed on the day and hour for the beginning of the classes, and the visitor left - leaving Bezerra very happy and relieved, because he would be able to pay his rent and college tuition. Bezerra looked for books in the public library to prepare himself for the classes, but the young man never returned for the lessons.

In the year of 1894, in face of the disagreements prevailing in the core of the Brazilian Spiritism, some companions, headed by Dr. Bittencourt Sampaio, decided to invite Bezerra to assume the presidency of the Brazilian Spiritist Federation.

Bezerra was very reluctant to accept that thorny responsibility, and the following conversation took place:

--They want me to go back to the Federation. As you all know that old society is without president and totally disoriented. Instead of engaging in the systematic study of Spiritism or the Gospel, it lives to discuss Byzantine thesis and to feed the spirit of hegemony.

--The worker of the vineyard, Bittencourt Sampaio said, is always assisted. The Federation can be wrong regarding its doctrinal ways, but it is engaged in the work of assistance to the needful, that is reason enough for it to attract the sympathy of the Lord's servants.

--I agree. But the work of assistance to the needful is adopting exclusively Homeopathy in the treatment of the sick ones, a therapeutic that me and my family follow and that I also recommend to friends, and I am not a homeopathic doctor. This in fact has been creating serious difficulties in my career, turning me into an useless doctor, one that doesn't believe in the official medicine and that tells others to follow the Spirits' advices, which hinder my right to exercise my profession.

--And why don't you become a homeopathic doctor? Bittencourt asked.

--I have no knowledge of Homeopathy. I utilize the one of the Spirits and not that of the doctors.

At that point, the spiritual medium Frederico Junior, channeling the Spirit of Saint Augustine, said:

--It is better this way. It will be easier for us to help you in the treatment of our siblings.

--How, kind Spirit? Are you suggesting that I make my living out of Spiritism?

--Of course not! You will live of your profession, giving to your patients the fruit of your human knowledge, studying Homeopathy as our friend Bittencourt suggested. We will help you in another way: Bringing you, whenever you need, new pupils of Mathematics...

Translated by Jussara Korngold