JOHN LE GAY BRERETON IN THE ILLAWARRA

Brereton, a friend and contemporary of Henry Lawson and collaborator in poetry with Christopher Brennan, was widely regarded in Australia as a poet. Since his death in 1930, his poetic reputation has been eclipsed. Nevertheless, although there is little merit still to be found within his verses, his prose remains of considerable interest, particularly to historians of the Illawarra.

In 1899, Brereton produced a marvelous record of a walking tour of the Illawarra and the Blue Mountains entitled Landlopers. The IHS Bulletin will reproduce sections of this work relating to the Illawarra during the coming months.

By way of introduction to this material, I have decided to republish some of Brereton’s 1930 reflections on what time and technology have done to the Illawarra.

Brereton worked as a teacher, clerk and librarian before becoming Professor of English at Sydney University. Like all really important people, he of course kept a holiday cottage at Thirroul. This vital fact, however, has only recently come to the attention of your Bulletin editor. Back in my undergraduate days, I had cause to consult Brereton’s manuscript notes because of his interest in the Elizabethan dramatist, poet and novelist, Robert Greene - a writer whose poetry still holds considerable charm despite being known to few.

What will impress most readers, however, is Brereton’s credentials as a conservationist. Even in 1930, he could look back fondly to his walking trip in the Illawarra of the 1890s and see how tragically the ‘garden of the colony’ had been violated.

Joseph Davis

TRAV’LIN by PROFESSOR J. LE GAY BRERETON (1871 - 1933)

If you have only a little time to spare, and would like to travel through country where there is a greater variety and tenderer charm of scenery, I advise you to saunter down through the Illawarra and Shoalhaven districts. Tourists and manufacturers and other go-ahead people will have the place spoiled before long, so you had better go now. There you will find broad panoramic views as bright as ever painter dared to put on canvas - long stretches of coast with dazzling white lines of foam between a brilliant sea and beaches like golden sickles, and a series of headlands growing dim and more dim till the most distant fades into purple mist where the sea-line and the sky are blent in a region of dreams. You will see broad flat meadows with sleek dairy cattle luxuriously chewing the cud; green rounded foothills where the sunlight and shadow play over brown furrows, and chase each other across young crops that blaze like sheets of green fire. And on the higher slopes are the thick tangles of semi-tropical jungle, with cool shadows and drip-dropping water, and graceful ferns and palms and festooned creepers, and fresh and sudden gushes of song from birds that flit like happy spirits through the fragrant dusk.

If you have more time, go northward along the coast, to the rivers that water some of the most beautiful valleys in the world. Do not waste your time and mine by getting me to babble about it. Find out for yourself..