

## 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 foot-hills 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..

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Whenever the spring arrives the hunger of the trav'ler is upon me. Bricks and mortar are offensive, and yet certain bonds keep us tethered to the city, and I cannot drift away through the moist haze into the outer regions of "the track". I feel my chrysalis cracking down the back to let me out with quicker nerves for the new life. But what is to be must be. As I lie on the edge of a field to pencil down these few inconsecutive and lazy notes, I watch the illumination of the crimson leaves of some buckwheat which the frost has failed to kill (a branch of bush-apple overhung and protected the soft, sappy growth). A kind of wild bee or fly hovers motionless with triangular blurs in the place of wings - makes a horizontal dart of several inches, and again halts. Many spiders creep about under the shade of the weeds, and just now I had to flick away a scorpion which seemed determined to take refuge under my arm. I can hear a spine-bill singing in the bush; and a wagtail is chattering everlasting compliments to his mate - "*Sweet pretty creature - sweet pretty little creature - pretty little, pretty little creature.*" Across the horse-paddock a pair of Jacky Winters are calling to each other. A few hundred yards away there is, I know, a yellow robin's nest, containing three eggs, dull green speckled with brown. In the morning the swallows, which have built their mud homes under the veranda, sing like canaries about my window. As I think of all this - and of how much more! - a final crack of my shell follows on a vigorous wrench, and I stretch my wings to fly for the bush. Old clothes, familiar swag and nose-bag, battered billy and longing heart - to-morrow the open road!

So I wrote in the first year of the Commonwealth. Since then, an age of high-pressure and disastrous hurry has made many of our youth almost incapable of genuine indolence. Instead of enjoying happiness, the crowds are madly pursuing pleasures in the strange belief that they can be accumulated and that the sum of them will be abiding joy. The wayfarer can no longer slouch comfortably along the open road, but has to be on the alert and ready to jump from the course of swerving motor-cars. But the motor-car is a curse to its user as well as to the furtive pedestrian. Motorists believe that they have special advantages for seeing the country, and this strange deception persists till its victims become blind to everything but broad effects and mere dashes of colour. From a car, all the intimate detail of the landscape is obliterated, and the friendliness, the feeling of close kinship with what is gathered by the senses, is dulled and gradually lost. The loveliness of a tuft of grass, or the delicate mottling of a post with lichen, or the inverted depth of blue sky in a watery rut enters unbidden the consciousness of the man afoot, but is ignored by the motorist, to whom the passing beauty is a smudge. A road, to please the staring votaries of speed, must be black or grey and glassily polished by innumerable tyres. The old roads, which here were brown and there might be an earthy red that harmonized restfully with the green grass at its edges, must give way to the long unlovely streaks which are constructed without the slightest effort to meet the demand of the soul for what is beautiful.

It is impossible to saunter in a motor-car. Nobody in a car is free. I sit jammed between people for whom a general motion in any direction is insanely regarded as desirable progress. For a moment I see a clear stream with mossy rocks and smooth foam-fringed little falls, and I should like to follow it up in the deep shadows of overhanging shrubs, and rejoice with the ferns whose eager life is evident in the flush of uncoiling fronds. I see soft-looking leaves that I should

like to touch lovingly. I want to bathe all my senses in what is flashing back from our inhuman machine - to smell the warm moist earth, let the lapping water flow over naked limbs, put my tongue against cool aromatic growths, remain still to watch the birds and hear their songs. I could merge myself in this environment, and become a part of it. Phut! It's gone. We are aliens.

Where are we to find rest? The car penetrates everywhere. The fastnesses of the hills are invaded. The stillness of the valley is desecrated. The haunts of meditative fancy are bestrewn with tins and paper. Vulgarity is rampant in the sullen bush, and every quiet solitude has been transformed to a wilderness of monkeys.

from Knocking Round

1930