

## ROAD REVERIES

### BULLI PASS, BY THE OLD RED ROAD

The old red Cumberland road, that I rattled over in my village cart before the days of motor-cars, is now a section of the Prince's Highway.

The old red road along which we run so smoothly to-day has long forgotten those grey prisoners who carried it, with curses, over primitive country in new days.

On grassy eminences still stand the cottages of pioneer settlers, stained by time, and quaint in early style of architecture. Low-roofed, surrounded by wide verandahs their porches overgrown by wistaria and honeysuckle, they have calmly weathered years that elsewhere knew the turmoil of wars and revolutions.

Along this road, in days gone by, marched the redcoats of King George, while laden bullock-drays were plodding its miles slowly. Here, when the moon was marking shadows, bushrangers, with their muskets primed and loaded, waited in the scrub for lumbering provincial coaches which ante-dated Australian days of steam. Here, too, in due course, their unshrouded bodies swung from wayside limbs in warning to evil-doers.

Along this road gold-seekers travelled towards their Eldorados; by it some of them left their bones. Its dust has soaked the blood of murdered men, whose ghosts our grandfathers dreaded to find sitting by the mile-stones.

Like other roads, it has had its wedding corteges and its funeral processions — its ladies in silk, and its damsels in dimity.

It was new when pumps and knee-breeches, powder and patches, were going out of fashion, and in its heyday of travel when hoop petticoats came in. Ah! Time, Robber! Full well knowest thou that the ruts of Roman carriage-wheels are still visible on the streets of Pompeii!

The road opens before us; winding on and away into blue hills, a red thread lost in a skein of fancies — ours to follow and unravel at pleasure.

As the hours pass, changing winds come over seas like sighing lovers to kiss the gylsea flowers on their scarlet mouths. Western winds, born of the sunbeams, do tender violence to white eucalypti blossoms; southern winds, forgetting Antarctic snows, at earth's hot touch, grow warm and passionate.

Lizards dart along the fences; crimson-headed finches twitter on the twigs; peewits run among the grass; rosellas rise from the cultivation paddocks, and seek the timber with diving flight. The parroquets, hanging head down, noisily exploit the gum flowers. Pulsating nature expresses herself in forms, perfumes, colours and voices till the traveller, with quickened sense and clearer vision, sees how good — how very good — it is to live.

Those who come from Nor'ward along the old red road towards Bulli will suddenly find themselves on the edge of a mountain wall.

Under them, sheer 500 feet, fall the mountains of Bulli, and, as far as their eyes reach, rolls the Illawarra, "Garden of Australia," a vision of perfume and palm, conceived by Nature in a moment of inspiration — her favourite daughter, for whose bridal apparelling she has rifled all the green storehouses of her invention.

It is a Halcyon land of vine and fern, and fruitfulness.

From its eastern length of beaches and gentle promontories, where surf drones ever the Pacific curves away and loses itself in water miles.

Looking out over the mighty curve, one sees, with actual vision, how the earth is round. On the other hand, the hills, clothed yet in virgin jungle, doze dreamily.

The Cambewarra hills beckon from their purple remoteness, as the Vale of Tempe beckoned rapt Hellenes, as the plains of Palestine called the tribes across the desert.

The traveller can look down upon a land of promise— even as the spies of Moses looked over Jordan.

Just below glimmers a fairy garden of interlocking foliage, so dense that, in its many acres, not a foot of bare earth may be seen.

Out of a billowed sea of creepers rise tall palms, whose feathered leaves, like ostrich plumes, sway rhythmically where the south wind dallies in dainty metres. Here, too, quiver leaves of bangalow, their long fingers caressing the sunlight, gauzy locusts chirping on their fibred trunks.

Up from this glade of palm and vine — a thing, once seen, no love of natural beauty may ever forget — towers, in the right season of the year, an Illawarra flame tree, a burning mass of flower, without leaf or limb to break its scarlet symmetry. Rising 80 feet in height, this regal growth claims at once chief homage — a splendid central figure in a land-scape of unending splendour. Tongues of floral flame glow along the hills, where other flame trees scatter their crimson bells in showers over the ferns.

Still and quiet is this enchanted country to look down upon; the only sounds are the silken rustle of palms, the swaying of silver-leaved musk, and the quaint cry of a whip bird in the undergrowth.

So still and quiet, with its mining villages and maize paddocks, its wooded brushes and open pastures, its fences, which run like lines on a map, its dark brushes and clumps of palm, that one speaks gently, lest it be sacrilege to break their spell.

The Lake of Illawarra, like a hero's shield covered by his lady's veil, shines mistily in the south. Beyond it, the dark mountains gradually hide their distant outlines with the coming of night.

This land of fertility and wonder looks even more majestic in the moonlight from Bulli Pass.

Between the ocean and a castellated wall of hills, as the photographic image grows on a negative, this thrice-enchanted garden of Illawarra grows in the light of a full moon, until it seems to the watchers upon the mountain-top that they are witnessing some celestial phenomenon taking place upon another world — a world of dreams and dear ideals, where grief is not, and pain an unknown meaning.

The clustered lights of villages and the lamps of solitary farmhouses dim and die out again; the silver highways of the waters widen into one grand road, marked by a snowy sail, to which the southern beaches, singing love songs of the Lorelei, offer white bosoms evermore.

About the dark battlements of creepers flying foxes scream and fire-flies scintillate.

The maize fields dream in frosted quiet, the slender sofghum trembles at the kisses of the moon, and fingers of light, straying nervously among the foliage, find the sleeping tree-ferns, and fondle their drooping fronds of Valenciennes, on which the bangalows and feathered palms look down.

Over salt lagoons, where curlews call, hangs a mist faint and grey. Off the Five Islands one sees the lights of an ocean liner bound up coast, her battle with the three oceans all but done. A black tail of smoke trails behind her, and as she rises and falls into the trough, her red port light blinks like a demon's eye. . . .

The travellers' road dips over the edge of the Pass through a crowded maze of glorious sub-tropical vegetation.

Cedars bow before them as Bedouin chiefs who welcome strangers to their lands, and tree-ferns wave salutations from dense foliage.

Along the roadside fences, hedging depths of jungle, English blackberries twine with wild Australian raspberries in suggestive union. Leaves of cabbage palms, sere and dry, rustle upon ringed trunks. Sister palms show curious makings, like decorations on the pilasters of an Indian temple.

High up on the bloodwood and gum grow epiphytal ferns, "Staghorns" and "pheasants' nests" Mistletoes droop over the road, their glutinous berries the spoil of birds.

Giant nettles offer leaves of treacherous beauty; sassafras oozes scented sap, shrubs of tropical and temperate nature are tied by trailing tendrils.

Clinging vines, having killed straight trees with their caresses, cover them now with a shroud of green, so that Love, feeding on Death, seems beautiful.

Flocks of wild pigeons, gluttled with figs, sometimes pass over. In the bushes a lyre bird may be heard imitating, in chuckling whispers, the laugh of the Great Kingfisher.

Clear streams sing down the hillside, scattering diamonds among the moss, and showering pearls upon the ferns. Steeply falls the road, and ever nearer comes the murmur of the sea.

*E. J. Brady*

The Princes Highway  
(not dated, circa 1930's ?)