

## **PHILIP LORIMER - THE SADDEST OF AUSTRALIAN POETS**

In the forthcoming July issue of the Bulletin an article entitled 'Philip Lorimer - in the Illawarra' will be printed. To serve as an introduction in this issue we print some of Lorimer's Illawarra poems and an obituary taken from an undated and unidentified newspaper clipping from the Wollongong Library Local Studies Collection.

### **PHILIP LORIMER**

#### **An Australian Tramp-Poet**

#### **Ends His Days in an Asylum**

Poor old Phil Lorimer has gone the way of all flesh! His end was in the asylum at Rookwood for the aged, as sad and lonely as has been his remarkable career. For many years past he had been an identity in every rural town in New South Wales, and was Well known in Victoria and Queensland. Wherever a country paper round existence there Phil was sure of a friend and a helping hand. Perhaps his was a misspent life and the flowers of his existence waisted their fragrance

on the desert air. Maybe, under other circumstances, he would have lived

#### TO BE HONOURED

with his name emblazoned on the scroll of fame as one of the few poets of Australia. But he chose his own course and was seemingly happy in following it. He had his weakness, which he doubt directed his onward course, and though he never travelled downward he made no effort to raise himself from the lonely groove into which he had fallen. Indeed, he would not have been happy in any other sphere of life.

Tramp though Phil was, he had a warm heart, and though an outcast, he saw all that was good in Nature in her naked wildness. Everything was a poem to him, and he never lost an opportunity of turning an incident into verse. Sometimes it was a cooling gentle love theme, bursting out into

#### A TORRENT OF PASSION

such only as a strong deep nature could realise; or it was a happily constructed ode, or descriptive verse, singing of the grandeur of nature's vastness. The glory The glory attendant upon the drawing aside from the Eastern heavens to herald the uprising of the morning sun, the glow in the west as the fiery orb sank peacefully to rest a bubbling brook, a roaring torrent leaping into a stupendous chasm, a mountain gorge, the verdure of spring, or the grizzly cold of winter - all to him were poems, glad, or sad, or wild, as the mood found him. Yet with all he was a tramp, grimy, roadstained, and tired. With his swag upon his back he was ever moving a restless spirit, content nowhere,

#### TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP,

always alone; living everywhere, in solitude, and having no fixed place of abode. He seemed to draw his inspiration from his lonely nature, and to gather his sentiments from the dusty roads. He wrote much, and a great deal of it was worthy of being placed on record. Some few scraps from his harvest of poems found their way into the country newspaper; many never saw the light of day; but nothing delighted Phil more than to recite by the hour his burning love poems, and his descriptive items, grandiloquent, in their praise of Nature as he found it. Still he never sought publicity, and made no effort to bring himself before the world in the light of anything more than a bush poet. A great deal of mystery surrounded his life and antecedents. On the road he was a plain tramp -

#### A SUNDOWNER ON THE WALLABY,

with blackened billy and neatly-rolled swag; in the office of some country editor, with his hat off, he was an enigma. To the great majority of people his identity was a blank. Reticent always about himself, there were very few who knew, or even surmised, that he received his education at the Edinburgh University, and but for the force of fate might have occupied an enviable position in the world of men of learning. He was well acquainted with both Gordon and Kendall, and was more than an acquaintance of the clever Victorian writer Mona Maria, at whose shrine he worshipped. Like Gordon and Kendall he chose to make his own career what it pleased the world to regard a failure. It is related that

#### KENDALL AND LORIMER MET GORDON

one day in Melbourne. After sharing their fortunes they parted, Gordon went out to Brighton, while Lorimer and Kendall adjourned to pass the night in the

Dandenong Cemetery. That night Kendall wrote 'Voices Through the Oaks'. Next morning they were surprised to hear the newsboys crying "Death of Gordon, the Poet". A day or two after a letter came for Gordon, stating that he had, been left £30,000.

Advancing age and increasing wants, pitiless enemies to the brightest of poets, forced Philip Lorimer some months ago to seek

#### THE UNCONGENIAL SHELTER

of the asylum at Rookwood. And there he ended his days, almost unknown, but mourned by thousands with whom he came in contact in the country districts, and who could recognise the worth of the jewel hidden beneath his rough exterior. Poor old Phil! He chose his own destination, and found pleasure in following it to the bitter end, content to live and enjoy the glories of Nature as they presented themselves to him in his isolation from the great, busy world.

#### Macquarie Pass

On waving slopes that spread from base of mountains,  
 Where yet their awful majesty is heard —  
 Through strains that come in torrents from the fountains,  
 That teach the song of freedom to the bird;  
 There is response to morning a voice arising  
 From all that love the beauty of the day,  
 To welcome now another new and sweet surprising  
 Held in the brightness of the summer's ray —  
 Here it would seem that loveliness is resting  
 Ere she ascends to be the mountsin's bride,  
 Her seat is there — for it — there's no contesting,  
 Enough — she knows, it claims her as its pride;  
 But ere she lays aside her bridal veiling —  
 She hears the majesty of glory's call;  
 And with desire to crown Jehovah's hailing,  
 She enters then attired in Beauty's Hall.  
 Tongarra wakes — and fast adorns her tresses,  
 With the brilliant hue of flame-tree flowers;  
 And lilies twine around her their caresses  
 And honied are her gladsome morning hours —  
 Nigh to the Pass she stand, and with her stately bending,  
 She meets the kiss of Light with maiden grace,  
 That beam to her own loveliness is lending  
 A charm that dignifies her comely face:  
 And to the notes — the call of lourie's praising —  
 She turns her ear so sweetly glad for song,  
 And with the mighty mountain's cheer-upraising,  
 Her voice is highest — loudest in that throng —  
 O'eararched with ferns and palm trees spreading branches  
 The steep ascent o'er shelves of rock is made,  
 O'er stray bold heads, where grand the water launches

Down to the chasms dark — where all is shade —  
Here is the home the fairy seeks when telling  
Of those strange stories oft we hear in years,  
When yet the face of man, knew not his dwelling —  
And dreams were long undreamt that gathered tears.  
The tufted knots of grass, and roots, empowering  
The poet's fingers as they lightly stray  
Upon his harp, are softened by the flowering  
Of Christmas Bells, in Austra's azure day —  
Rock after rock — and then in lofty musing  
Comes there a song to ears that tells of home —  
'Tis the Goburra choir — they are amusing  
Their happy lives — where freedom's pulses roam;  
Their laugh rings out — and o'er the headland sweeping  
A mildness breaks upon Macquarie's Head  
Where the huge fern robes sand stone tower is keeping  
Its sacred watch o'er charms to beauty wed —  
And now — on mountain top the Pass is ended  
And other scenes of gladness come in view  
The stretching vale toward Albion Park is blended  
With ev'ry shade of green, 'neath smiling blue —  
The waters 'neath the whisp'ring oaks are nearing  
And soon will take their part in ocean roar —  
The surges know the streamlets are appearing,  
And glad to welcome them — they line the shore  
With stately forms of spray, and billows foaming  
So that the mountain's voice may now be crowned  
With regal pomp — where high the clouded doming  
Is proudest — when on it, the storm has frowned —  
A thousand hills, and cone-shaped spurs are leaning  
'Gainst lofty bare ribbed mountain tops and range  
Dark Bong Bong looks upon the sheltered screening  
That corses yield to homes in Winter's change,  
And like a monarch, mighty in his reigning  
He holds his sceptre in the thunder cloud  
While round him Nature draws a wild disdain  
And yields him her permission to be proud.  
The meadows far, where Dapto fair is dreaming,  
Are soft enshrined with purple, misty dyes,  
Anon, through break of clouds — the sunbeams gleaming,  
Bring to her calms, the touch of golden skies.  
She rising smiles, with pleasure; and unwearied,  
Looks on her breast, and finds a garland there.  
Her pathways wend to scenes that are not dreary  
And lo! her arms caress the herds they bear.  
Thus Illawarra in her grateful changing  
Brings to the soul of man her pleasures sweet;

Seems it that glory is anew arranging  
Her comely face, where God and man may meet:  
For well has High Decree, in His Creation,  
Foreseen the bent of human minds to crave.  
For joy — known only now through inspiration,  
When scenes like this come 'tween them and the grave —  
Man turns to them — and in his clayey holding  
He drinks delight — where love is shed abroad.  
Then are the hands of beauty seen unfolding  
Her Royal gates that leads man to his God.

### The Old Fig Tree, near Hickman's Hotel

I look on thee oft — Oh! thou marvellous tree  
In thine evergreen robes on thy throne —  
So gracefully arched with thine arms o'er the free  
Who have left thee a shrine of thine own.  
When young in my years, when enamoured with light  
With the flood of the sun on my brow —  
I've sat near thy roots, overwhelmed with delight  
Of thy form, which is awing me now.

And yet! there's no change in thy high drooping head,  
In thy limbs that are bearing its height,  
No branch of thy trunk is yet numbered as dead  
Nor a bough that is marked with a blight.  
While round thee, the vines, that are close to thy base  
Where the former ones grew, and have died,  
Are climbing thy height — with their younger embrace  
For thy love, which they tenderly hide.

I stand at thy feet, while thy boughs are the fringe  
That embroider the blue and the grey,  
When Light in the West wears a deep golden tinge  
That is crowning thy age of to-day.  
That age which is lost in decay, long ago —  
Through the fading of memory here —  
That's hid in the sands of the centuries' flow  
Like an hour, that's forgot in a year.

Oh! say — hast thou aught of a treaty with Time  
To be still — on its borders of green —  
That thy younger leaves overshadow thy prime  
With the soul of a beautiful scene:  
How many have looked upon thee in their youth  
In the hour of life's charming display —  
Have lived their long lives while their moments in truth  
Were to thee — but the gleams of a day.

The dawn of their lives, breaking full on each brow —  
When they saw in thy majesty — thee.  
Thy colossal limbs, that were then, as they're now,  
The real strength of an evergreen tree.  
They're gone to their graves, but thou knowest them all  
With their aged white locks on their head,  
But their deaths to thee, only widened the pall,  
That is thine — for the face of the dead.

### The Five Island Farm.

I roam in the shades of the Five Island farm  
Through the wild tangled woods that are there —  
For gladly my heart is enticed with the charm  
That dispells ev'ry worry and care.  
The low-lying lands, where the nooks bring to sight  
A soft glimpse of the sea, in its calm —  
I fondle the more, as I leap with delight  
At the voice of the bird in its psalm.

High, stately, red gums, with the stringy bark's shades  
O'er the rich growing herbage of green —  
Are sheltering herds in their royal arcades  
In the midst of a beautiful scene.  
While the blue peeps through from the ocean in bays,  
With the ripples that dance on its face,  
Is a poet's dream in the light of his days  
That forever endears his embrace.

Mount Keira I see in the calm of her reign,  
As a guard or a natural tower,  
Not terraced for war — looking over the main,  
As a foe in its silence or power.  
But as Austral's own — in her garden divine  
In the beautiful land of her flowers —  
Where her glory dwells, and is girt by the vine  
As the queen of her groves and her bowers.

And the range that dips to the south at her side,  
With its Gabo and Kembla in sight,  
Where copses are dense, where neighbours reside,  
In the far away fairy-land height —  
Are the spells that bind ev'ry breast with a charm,  
Ev'ry heart to the glory of day —  
To the home that is on the Five Island farm —  
To the home on the banks of the bay.