THE PIANO TUNER:

A delightful article by Robert Travers in the S.M.H. magazine section of 26th June 1976 on the subject of the "Unknown Lawson" answered a number of questions that had bugged our family for a lifetime.

More than half a century ago I was in my early teens and eldest of a large family living at Albion Park on the South Coast of NSW when word flew around the district that an itinerant piano tuner was moving from home to home, plying his skill, and usually being supplied with meals and bed before moving off elsewhere next morning. He duly arrived at our place riding a single cylinder Belgian F.N. motor cycle, notable for having a shaft drive to the rear wheel instead of the belt drive usual in those days.

His black drooping moustache, haggard good looks and haunted dark eyes reminded us of someone, and had the household racking its collective brain until he announced himself as Peter, brother of the famous poet Henry Lawson.

After attending to the long overdue tuning of the family "Ronisch" he spent the evening telling us incredible stories in front of the open fire and in playing the piano in a number of intriguing ways, with probably his own composition "The Rosalind Waltz" as part of his repertoire. His charm was such that we kids implored that he be asked to stay on and make our home his headquarters for the balance of his time in the neighbourhood, and his acceptance of the offer was followed by further evenings of fun and music for about a week.

He was engaged to overhaul the pedal-operated organ in All Saints' Anglican Church, two paddocks away from our place, and during this two-day operation two of my brothers and I often looked in to marvel at the assortment of bits and pieces to which he had reduced our Sunday music maker. With everything reassembled again he gave us a session which must have inspired delusions of cathedral grandeur in the poor old instrument. He concluded with a dreamy rendition of "Moonlight and Roses" and then a spirited encore of "When the Midnight Choo-Choo leaves for Alabam.".

On his last day with us he wanted to try some perch-fishing in nearby Macquarie Rivulet, so off we went—he riding his motor bike one-handed and balancing a twenty-foot bamboo rod on his shoulder and I, barefooted, furiously pedalling a push bike behind him in the heat and dust. Our fishing in a deep pool near the foot of Macquarie Pass was of short duration, as within minutes Peter hooked a large eel and ended up with a snapped fishing rod and the line a slimy tangle. Roaring with laughter he said that as we could not land a fish we had better join them in the water. In a flash we had stripped off and skinny-dipped for awhile.

Later we watched him strap luggage and tool kit to the cycle and, with goodbyes said, our fun man and Pied Piper chuffed away never to return or to be heard of again.

Over the years we often spoke about him and reminisced about his visit but until reading the article in the "Herald" had no inkling as to his life story and personal history.

—B. E. WESTON.