

SINGABOUT

MARCH 2020

INTO THE SILENCE

Into the Silence

John Meredith

One by one they go
Through the doorway of death
And down the long corridor of fame -
Or fond memory.
The real ones. The true ones.
The ones with strength to think, to act,
To cut a track through life.
And in my time:
Jack Moses. Jim Kelly.
Mary Gilmore. Stan Wakefield.
Jack Lang. Pam & Brian.
Grace O’Clerken. Duke Tritton.
Johnnie Marshall. Les Greenleaf.
Monte Miller. Dymphna Cussack.
Mollie Collins. Walter Stone.
And all the others
Who sang a song, or shared a quiet yarn -
("Music I heard with you was more than music,
Bread I broke with you was more than bread ...")
One by one they go
Into the Silence.

Chris Woodland, in 2001, wrote of *Into the Silence*:

“Sent to me not long after Mollie Collins died in 1981, if I recall correctly. Pam & Brian refer to Pam and Brian Loughlin. Johnny (sic) Marshall and Mollie Collins were Araluen identities. Original was signed JM.”

Since John penned this piece we have lost many more to the Silence including John Dengate and John Meredith himself.

The poem *The Phantom Horseman of Cricket Ridge* on the opposite page was written in 1961 about the 1952 bushfire that had threatened the Heathcote district where John was living. Jack Barrie and Brian Loughlin (Locko) were friends and neighbours of John’s and members of both the local bush fire brigade and the *Heathcote Bushwhackers*.

More on the blog:

<https://blog.bushmusic.org.au/2020/01/poem-from-past-phantom-horse-man-of.html>



The Heathcote Bush Fire Engine parked up the top of Dillwynnia Grove. Photo: Ron Nixon

A somewhat more romantic view of silence is provided by **Mrs. E. Eddy** of Bendigo who received first prize in a Ballarat competition in 1907 with the poem on the back page.

It was published in the Bendigo Advertiser on 14 Nov 1907, p4 and in The Australasian (Melbourne) on 5 Dec 1908, p51 retrieved from Trove: <https://trove.nla.gov.au>

The Phantom Horseman of Cricket Pitch Ridge

By John Meredith

The fire burnt up near the edge of the township,
But down in the gully we held it at bay -
'If the wind gets round to the west,' said Jack Barrie
'We must warn all the folk to get out of the way!'

So on Cricket Pitch Ridge six good watchers were posted,
(The fire crept on in the gully below)
And the six men, they sat and watched and shivered
As a freezing south-easterly started to blow.

It was close on to midnight, the wind had grown colder,
When hoofbeats were heard on the chill mountain air,
And a queer ghostly voice set the echoes a-flying:
'Hollo-o-o! Hollo-o-o! Hollo-o-o! Are you there?'

'Over here!' yelled Jack Barrie; the horseman drew near
And a bundle of blankets he threw on the ground.
Then he wheeled his black mount and rode into the darkness,
Over the rocks without ever a sound.

'Who was it Jack?' asked Billy Fitzgerald.
'Don't know him,' says Barrie, 'D'you know him, Blue?'
Blue didn't know, nor did Locko, nor Loveday,
It seems he was someone that nobody knew.

But one thing we did know, his blankets were warm ones,
We wrapped them around us and watched through the night;
Then shouldered our knapsack-sprays, climbed down the gully
And battled the fire in the morning's pale light.

It was under control, just a few stumps to spray now,
The westerly wind was no more to be feared.
We left two men on duty, returned to the blankets,
But when we got back they had all disappeared!

If that horseman was real, then he carries my blessing;
I won't wish him wealth, or good fortune, or gold,
(For all my mates think he must have been ghostly)
Wherever he is, may he never go cold.

Silence

E. Eddy.

I found her on a lonely hill
Above the little town—
A presence felt and yet unseen,
With cloud-mists for her gown.
I knew her eyes beneath pent brows
Were dark with mystery;
Those wond'rous eyes, that saw the light,
First warm a tideless sea.

That saw the first day born from night,
The first bird on the wing,
The first stars light their way through space,
And dance round Saturn's ring.
That saw the tender growing things,
Pierce through the virgin sod,
When Spring came laughing green and glad,
Fresh from the hand of God.

A new world dawn'd and Silence fled,
A stricken, hunted thing,
Far from the busy haunts of men
Or their remembering.
She found a home in in spaces wide,
As limitless as sea;
The eaves and misty hinterlands
Are her own seigniory.

But in that dark and mystic hour,
Deep in the nether night,
She comes from out her hiding place
Before dawn breaks or light.
The sleeping birds they feel her near,
And lower droops each wing.
The wind is hush'd in tree tops high,
The leaves stop whispering.

White lily buds they faint and swoon,
The quiet is so deep;
The surge of forces rests awhile,
Sunk in the arms of sleep.
While Silence steals with noiseless feet
Up through the little town,
A presence felt and yet unseen,
With cloud-mists for her gown.