

How Gilbert Died

Banjo Paterson

There's never a stone at the sleeper's head,
There's never a fence beside,
And the wandering stock on the grave may tread
Unnoticed and undenied,
But the smallest child on the Watershed
Can tell you how Gilbert died.

For he rode at dusk, with his comrade Dunn
To the hut at the Stockman's Ford,
In the waning light of the sinking sun
They peered with a fierce accord.
They were outlaws both—and on each man's head
Was a thousand pounds reward.

They had taken toll of the country round,
And the troopers came behind
With a black that tracked like a human hound
In the scrub and the ranges blind:
He could run the trail where a white man's eye

No sign of a track could find.

He had hunted them out of the One Tree Hill

And over the Old Man Plain,

But they wheeled their tracks with a wild beast's skill,

And they made for the range again.

Then away to the hut where their grandsire dwelt,

They rode with a loosened rein.

And their grandsire gave them a greeting bold:

‘Come in and rest in peace,

‘No safer place does the country hold—

‘With the night pursuit must cease,

‘And we’ll drink success to the roving boys,

‘And to hell with the black police.’

But they went to death when they entered there,

In the hut at the Stockman's Ford,

For their grandsire's words were as false as fair—

They were doomed to the hangman's cord.

He had sold them both to the black police

For the sake of the big reward.

In the depth of night there are forms that glide
As stealthy as serpents creep,
And around the hut where the outlaws hide
They plant in the shadows deep,
And they wait till the first faint flush of dawn
Shall waken their prey from sleep.

But Gilbert wakes while the night is dark—
A restless sleeper, aye,
He has heard the sound of a sheep-dog's bark,
And his horse's warning neigh,
And he says to his mate, 'There are hawks abroad,
'And it's time that we went away.'

Their rifles stood at the stretcher head,
Their bridles lay to hand,
They wakened the old man out of his bed,
When they heard the sharp command:
'In the name of the Queen lay down your arms,

‘Now, Dunn and Gilbert, stand!’

Then Gilbert reached for his rifle true
That close at his hand he kept,
He pointed it straight at the voice and drew,
But never a flash outleapt,
For the water ran from the rifle breech—
It was drenched while the outlaws slept.

Then he dropped the piece with a bitter oath,
And he turned to his comrade Dunn:
‘We are sold,’ he said, ‘we are dead men both,
‘But there may be a chance for one;
‘I’ll stop and I’ll fight with the pistol here,
‘You take to your heels and run.’

So Dunn crept out on his hands and knees
In the dim, half-dawning light,
And he made his way to a patch of trees,
And vanished among the night,
And the trackers hunted his tracks all day,

But they never could trace his flight.

But Gilbert walked from the open door

In a confident style and rash;

He heard at his side the rifles roar,

And he heard the bullets crash.

But he laughed as he lifted his pistol-hand,

And he fired at the rifle flash.

Then out of the shadows the troopers aimed

At his voice and the pistol sound,

With the rifle flashes the darkness flamed,

He staggered and spun around,

And they riddled his body with rifle balls

As it lay on the blood-soaked ground.

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