Peter Clarke

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On Walden's range at early dawn
The sun shone brightly down;
It shone across the winding Page
Near Murrurundi town.

It glittered o'er the burning mount
Where murky shadows fell,
Across a path to travelers known,
To some, alas, too well.

There stands a simply block of stone
Erected as a mark
To show the spot where he fought and died,
The gallant Peter Clarke.

And if you will but listen a while,
To you I will relate
What happened there to Peter Clarke
And Jimmy Clarke, his mate.

They camped one night close by the range;
In songs the hours flew past,
And little did poor Peter think
That night would be his last.

At dawn they toiled the steep ascent,
They had scarcely reached the top
When a voice in accents stern and bold
Commanded them to stop.

"Hand up your money, watch, and chain,"
The robber sternly cried.
"Who takes my money takes my life,"
The angry Clarke replies.

Then laughed the robber loud in scorn
As he his pistol drew.
Said he, "My hand is firm and strong,
My aim is ever true.

"And he who would my word gainsay,
Though he be earl or knight,

I swear by all I sacred hold,
He'll ne'er see morning light.

"So give up your money now, my lad,
And do not idly rave;
Resist, and by the God above,
This night you'll fill the grave."

"These are but words, and idle words,"
The daring Clarke replied,
And with one rapid bound he strode
Close by the robber's side.

And now commenced the struggle
For life between them both;
One hand of Clarke's the pistol grasped
And the other grasped his throat.

Now haste you, haste you, Jimmy Clarke,
And seek for help in need.
Your comrade's welfare, nay, his life
Depends on your good speed.

But hark to that loud pistol shot
In a second rends the skies;
A human being on the sod
In his death struggle lies.

But still in his last dying gasp
Poor Peter seemed to say,
"Revenge, revenge for Peter Clarke,"
And so he passed away.

But the robber frightened by his deed
In terror now did lie;
For the hand of Clarke upon his throat
Grows tighter as he died.

And so indeed was Clarke avenged,
For God has set it so,
"Who takes a life must yield a life,"
And the murderer met his doom.

tune From John Greenway's Folkways album of Australian songs (Folkways 8718) The Australians tell me it's the same tune as "Look Out Below."

AJS
apr97

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