

Kaikoura Portrait

OLD Bill
Stood like a wall,
Straight and solid
And six feet tall.

EIGHTY summers
And more, since he
First drank swigs
Of strong sweet tea.

WITH a long white beard
And a bright blue eye,
He'd spin the yarn
Of a day gone by.

"I MIND me, girl,"
(like a tune sung)
"I mind me well
When I was young,

THEY fined us heavy
For taking then
The rabbits loosed
By gentlemen.

MY mother cried
When the flour was done
An' Dad went out
With his powder-gun.

BOATS came seldom,
An' storms were bad.
We was often hungry
When I was a lad."

SAILS sighted,
They hurried down,
Thin and wide-eyed,
Into town,



DOWN to the sea
And the shouts
and spray.
"It was heavy swags
On the homeward
way,

A BAG of sugar,
An' nails, an' tea,
An' the swamp mud reachin'
Past your knee."

OLD Bill
Had roved round
Many ranges
And much ground,

FLOOD or shine
Or drifted snow,
Crossing country
Bill would go.

"THERE wasn't
roads
An' there wasn't
tracks,
An' the fern come
over
The horses' backs,



AN' summer time
On the high rock,
They'd set us huntin'
For straggled stock.



I MIND a day—
Might be last week—
We fetched home more'n
We thought to seek,

MY mate and me
We'd climbed up high
To that there saddle
Against the sky,

AN' in a hollow
Where snow grass lay,
We come on wild dogs,
An' them at play.

A BITCH an' pups
In the noonday sun,
An' a five pound bounty
For each damn one!"

SUN and rain
And winter cold
Made no odds
When Bill grew old.

AND every fence
And every tree
Is standing up
For men to see.



WIRE and staple
And willow shoot,
What old Bill planted
Has taken root.

"PAY me money
When money comes;
I ain't much hand
At countin' sums,

BUT that there ditch
Wants draining bad,
Reckon I'd best
Be diggin', lad."

OLD Bill
'Didn't read nor write,
He had only thoughts
To think at night,

YET when my sons
Are men full grown,
I wish them like him,
Heart and bone.

THIS is the blood
That feeds the land.
Plain for all
To understand.

—Frances Blunt



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