

THE GROG-AN'-GRUMBLE STEEPLECHASE

by Henry Lawson (1867 - 1922)

'Twixt the coastline and the border lay the town of Grog-an'-Grumble
In the days before the bushman was a dull an' heartless drudge,
An' they say the local meeting was a drunken rough-and-tumble,
Which was ended pretty often by an inquest on the judge.
An' tis said the city talent very often caught a tartar
In the Grog-an'-Grumble sportsman, 'n' returned with broken heads,
For the fortune, life, and safety of the Grog-an'-Grumble starter
Mostly hung upon the finish of the local thoroughbreds.

Pat M'Durmer was the owner of a horse they called the Screamer,
Which he called "the quickest shteppey 'twixt the Darling and the sea",
And I think it's very doubtful if the stomach-troubled dreamer
Ever saw a more outrageous piece of equine scenery;
For his points were most decided, from his end to his beginning,
He had eyes of different colour, and his legs they wasn't mates.
Pat M'Durmer said he always came "widin a flip of winnin",
An' his sire had come from England, 'n' his dam was from the States.

Friends would argue with M'Durmer, and they said he was in error
To put up his horse the Screamer, for he'd lose in any case,
And they said a city racer by the name of Holy Terror
Was regarded as the winner of the coming steeplechase;
But he said he had the knowledge to come in when it was raining,
And irrelevantly mentioned that he knew the time of day,
So he rose in their opinion. It was noticed that the training
Of the Screamer was conducted in a dark, mysterious way.

Well, the day arrived in glory; 'twas a day of jubilation
With careless-hearted bushmen for a hundred miles around,
An' the rum 'n' beer 'n' whisky came in waggons from the station,
An' the Holy Terror talent were the first upon the ground.
Judge M'Ard - with whose opinion it was scarcely safe to wrestle -
Took his dangerous position on the bark-and-sapling stand:
He was what the local Stiggins used to speak of as a "wessel
Of wrath", and he'd a bludgeon that he carried in his hand.

"Off ye go!" the starter shouted, as down fell a stupid jockey -
Off they started in disorder - left the jockey where he lay -
And they fell and rolled and galloped down the crooked course and rocky,
Till the pumping of the Screamer could be heard a mile away.
But he kept his legs and galloped; he was used to rugged courses,
And he lumbered down the gully till the ridge began to quake:
And he ploughed along the siding, raising earth till other horses
An' their riders, too, were blinded by the dust-cloud in his wake.

From the ruck he'd slowly struggled - they were much surprised to find him
Close abeam of the Holy Terror as along the flat they tore -
Even higher still and denser rose the cloud of dust behind him,
While in more divided splinters flew the shattered rails before.
"Terror!" "Dead heat!" they were shouting - "Terror!" but the Screamer hung out
Nose to nose with Holy Terror as across the creek they swung,
An' M'Durmer shouted loudly, "Put yer tongue out! put yer tongue out!"
An' the Screamer put his tongue out, and he won by half-a-tongue.