A Thousand Miles Away

A History of North Queensland to 1920

G.C. Bolton
North Queensland is the most successful example in the British Commonwealth of a tropical region settled by Europeans. Here the Australian way of life has been transplanted almost intact. But one hundred years ago, when North Queensland was settled, it was taken for granted that white men could not work in the tropics. Sugar plantations were founded on imported Pacific Island labour. Meanwhile, inland North Queensland was developed by squatters and miners whose way of thinking differed widely from the planters. How could these two traditions exist together in one community? How was the prosperity of North Queensland reconciled with the White Australia policy?

In the first two generations of settlement, from 1861 to 1920, these questions were posed and answered. Professor Bolton draws on sources ranging from reports of government departments to the reminiscences of old residents to trace the social, economic, political, and human story of the early settlement of North Queensland.

Since it was first published in 1963, this account of the realities of pioneering has proved so popular that it is now in its second impression.
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A HISTORY OF NORTH QUEENSLAND TO 1920

G. C. BOLTON

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1970
TO MY WIFE CAROL
Preface

North Queensland is undoubtedly the most successful example in the British Commonwealth of settlement in the tropics by Europeans. Its 122,861 square miles lie entirely within the tropics, and over 95 per cent of its population, assessed at 267,749 by the census of 1966, are of European origin. The most nearly comparable community is Southern Rhodesia, with an area of 150,383 square miles and a European population of 175,300 at the 1956 census; but in contrast to North Queensland, these were a small minority among 2,290,000 native Africans. In Rhodesia, and in Kenya, cultivation has been assisted greatly by the labour of the natives, from whom the white minority tended to hold themselves separate. Today they face the challenge of an African nationalism which is increasingly unwilling to accept the concept of living together in a multi-racial society.

The question of coloured labour was settled differently in North Queensland, partly but not entirely from deliberate policy. Aboriginal resistance to the coming of the white man was at first often spirited, but within a few years of their arrival in 1861 the superior numbers and weapons of the invaders had reduced the natives to an insignificant remnant, committed to adapting themselves to the white man's ways. Some were eventually employed in the pastoral and agricultural industries, but it took time to accustom them to this work, and there were never enough of them. For a time the question was whether North Queensland would build its society on a basis of cheap imported labour from the Pacific Islands. The racial pattern was further complicated during the seventies by an influx of Chinese, at first seeking gold, later remaining as cultivators. These immigrants played a significant part in developing North Queensland. Beginning as temporary sojourners, they seemed at one time likely to form a permanent element in North Queensland society, and the peopling of Australia's tropics became a subject of lively controversy. But by the first years of the twentieth century, North Queensland had become federated into a Commonwealth committed to the ideas of a White Australia policy. Tropical Australia was to be
shaped by the same social influences and developed with the same ideals and purposes as the rest of the continent.

Two traditions stood in the way of permanent European settlement in North Queensland. The first was British: a conviction that few white men could endure permanent residence or continued physical exertion in the tropics. True, as early as the reign of Charles I, British emigrants to the West Indies had settled in some numbers in places such as Barbados, had cleared the forest and tilled the lands as smallholders. But within two generations economic pressures had forced them to give way to sugar plantations employing Negro slaves on a large scale. The plantation system became the model for tropical development; and the hard-drinking, under-exercised planters blamed their ailments on the evil climate and fostered the belief that manual labour in the tropics must be left to other races, better acclimatized or more expendable. Climatic prejudices of this sort were out of place in Australia, where the work of pioneering had gone unchecked by a fiercer summer heat than its settlers had known in Great Britain or Ireland. By the time North Queensland was settled, Australians were already inured to active living in a trying climate. But—and this was the second impediment to successful settlement in North Queensland—they had not yet learned to understand their environment.

The result was a prodigal waste of resources. Outside the cities the wealth of Australia derived largely from its pastoral and mining industries. One was at the mercy of the seasons, the other notoriously a gamble. In both a tendency had developed of assessing natural resources too hopefully, of taking quick profits while they lasted without conserving for the future. It was a trend that made nomadic fatalists of many outback Australians; but there were also as many who hoped, with the opening of each new district, to find a generous country where they could carve out their own holding and achieve the status of landowners. Pastoralists, miners, and farmers in turn sought in North Queensland a measure of independence that would lift them beyond the standing of mere wage-earners.

The North offered great natural assets and unexpected climatic difficulties. It was only when the newcomers had learned to adapt to their environment, to husband their land and co-operate in planning its development, that permanent white settlement in North Queensland was assured. But it was a land which, treated intelligently, offered small settlers an opportunity. Unlike so
much of the rest of Australia, North Queensland was not to remain a ‘big man’s frontier’; but parasites among its cattle, dissipation of its mineral resources, and specialization in sugar-growing among its farmers eventually limited the range of its development, so that by 1920 the economy of the area was established on the same general lines as today. From 1920 the story of North Queensland merges increasingly with that of Queensland as a whole. It is at that point, with proof of the climate’s viability for white Australians established, and the experimental stage of pioneering at an end, that the main part of this narrative concludes. It is from the society founded in North Queensland during the two generations before 1920 that the white man’s stewardship of tropical Australia can best be assessed.

North-western Queensland—the area centred on the Great Artesian Basin, with river systems draining either into the Gulf of Carpentaria or inland towards Lake Eyre—is omitted. It could not be dealt with except at the risk of adding to the length and complexity of this narrative, and has already been the subject of two good histories. Dr F. H. Bauer has recently made for C.S.I.R.O. an historical analysis of land settlement in the Gulf Country, and Geoffrey Blainey’s book, *Mines in the Spinifex*, describes the development of the Cloncurry-Mount Isa district. In this book I have chosen to cover the statistical divisions of Mackay, Townsville, Cairns and the Peninsula—the area of the North Queensland Local Government Association—as a convenient unit for study, districts linked by long-standing historical and economic ties.

G. C. B.
So, blow ye winds, hiegho!
A digging we will go,
I'll stay no more down South, my boys,
So let the music play,
In spite of what I'm told,
I'm off to search for gold,
And make a push for that new rush
A thousand miles away.

"The Old Palmer Song", derived from the Cooktown goldrush, 1873.

We will control our own affairs and not be controlled by any Government a thousand miles away, which takes little interest in our needs.

Acknowledgments

This study of North Queensland was undertaken as the result of a resolution moved by Mr George Turner* at a meeting of the North Queensland Local Government Association in 1956. The Association authorized an approach to the Australian National University, which agreed that a member of its Department of History should undertake full-time research on the history of the area. This book is the result. The judgments and opinions expressed in it are entirely those of the writer; but the publication of this book is owing to the constant co-operation of the Local Government Association with the University, and to both these bodies the writer owes a considerable debt of thanks for generous support and encouragement.

A useful body of preliminary work by local historians has led to the preservation of much interesting material. Pioneers in this field were W. J. Doherty and George Turner senior. Other early contributors to the subject included Major-General Spencer Browne, J. T. McNamee, and J. R. Chisholm. About thirty years ago Miss M. M. Bennett (author of *Christison of Lammermoor*) and Mrs Adam Black collected many reminiscences, which might otherwise have been lost, of early days in the pastoral industry. The written reminiscences of R. D. Rex and F. W. Gunning have been useful; so have the diligent researches of J. W. Collinson, the historian of Cairns, and Hugh Borland, author of newspaper articles on historical subjects totalling over one million words. Of those writing at present, Glenville Pike has been a notably active champion of past and present Northern interests. The published writings of Father Ernest Rowland on the Church of England, Dr Peter Delamothe, M.L.A. for Bowen, Mr Robert Shepherd in the *Herbert River Express*, Miss Constance Mackness and Mrs Dorothy Jones (whose history of the Cardwell shire is in many respects a model of its kind) all reach high standards of accuracy and readability. The *North Queensland Register*, *Cairns Post*, *Home Hill Observer*, and *North Australian Monthly* have done


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much to preserve items of historical interest, and to encourage old residents of the area to set down their recollections. And the formation in 1958 of an active and enterprising historical society at Cairns set an example which other centres might usefully follow. Among all these sources I have found much of interest.

It had been my intention to thank in detail the many people whose assistance, information, and hospitality were accepted during the writing of this book. Space would not permit; but it would be graceless to deny the immensity of my debts. I must endorse wholeheartedly all that has been said of the generosity and kindness of the people of North Queensland. My sincere thanks go to them; to my colleagues at the Australian National University and at Monash; to the typists and cartographers for their willing efficiency; to the Publications Section of the Australian National University, whose care and interest have groomed this manuscript far beyond the author's deserts; and to my wife, who has lived with this book all her married life, and to whom, for all she has done, I dedicate this book with gratitude.

G. C. BOLTON

Australian National University
and Monash University, 1958–63
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1 G. E. Dalrymple
By courtesy of the Mitchell Library
John Moffat
By courtesy of Mr O. H. Woodward, C.M.G.

William Hann
By courtesy of the Mitchell Library

Sir Robert Philp
By courtesy of the Oxley Library
The longest coral formation in the world is the Great Barrier Reef, one of the most remarkable features of the Australian continent. It emerges out of the Coral Sea parallel to the eastern shores of the Cape York Peninsula. Stretching southward for 900 miles, the reef gradually swings away from the Australian shore, and at its southern end, in Lat. 21° South, tails off at the Swain Reefs, 150 miles out to sea from the Queensland coast. Inside the reef the sea lanes are interspersed by a great scatter of islands, most of them mountainous outliers of the coastal ranges. Sea and islands form a scene of memorable beauty, but navigators have long known them as a source of hazard.

From over the Reef and the Coral Sea beyond, prevailing south-easterly winds bring the mainland coast an ample rainfall. The wet season extends from January to April. At this time the winds are often strong, and every few years some part of this coast suffers devastation from cyclones. Normal conditions during the wet season are cloudy, humid but not insupportable. The rest of the year, from May to December, brings little rain. The winter climate has often been praised as the finest in Australia. The average June temperature of Cairns, at the base of the Cape York Peninsula, ranges from a minimum of 63° to a maximum of 78°.

Behind the coastal strip lies a continuous line of ranges. This, the eastern scarp of the main continental plateau, gradually rises out of the sodden sandy soils of the northern Peninsula, 'so well leached by the rains that it supports today only a heath vegetation'. Further south the quality of the soil improves, especially where the range runs closely parallel to the coast, as it does between Princess Charlotte and Halifax Bays. This is an area of heavy rainfall; an annual average of eighty inches is not uncommon on this coast, and on the Tully River in 1950 over three hundred inches were recorded. Permanent rivers, the Barron, Mulgrave, Johnstone, Herbert, and their tributaries, have trenched deep gorges through the range. Along their banks as they traverse the coastal plain are patches of fertile alluvium, now extensively farmed for sugarcane. In its natural state this country and the
ranges behind were thickly covered with vegetation, which in some areas took on the character of tropical rain-forest. To the early settlers the cutting of practicable roads through this 'scrub' was a formidable problem. Several good harbours along the coast have been neglected to this day because of the difficulty of reaching the pastoral and mineral resources of their hinterland.

In contrast Cleveland Bay, south of Halifax Bay, became the site of the most important city in North Queensland (Townsville), even though its natural advantages as a port were miserably few.

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Fig. 1 North Queensland
At Cleveland Bay the coastal plain widens into a flat level terrain fringed with mangroves and occasional salt-pan. The soil is poorer, and the rainfall averages only forty to fifty inches annually; the hinterland is plains country carrying stunted and inferior timber, fair grazing but mostly hopeless for farming. But to the south-west of Cleveland Bay the Reid River breaks through the junction of the Hervey and Leichhardt Ranges, and through this gap runs the easiest line of access inland. This route was taken by the main North Queensland railway extending from Townsville through the pastoral lands of the Burdekin valley, the Charters Towers goldfield, and the ‘prairies’ of the west across the State to Mount Isa, a hundred miles from the Northern Territory border.

For 150 miles south of Cleveland Bay the coastal plain lies in a comparatively dry region. Instead of the green richness of tropical rain-forest, straggling eucalypts throw a thin shade over a land of variable soils, where most cultivation depends on conserving water. Even along the river frontages the tight clays and loams are not immediately suitable for high-return farming owing to countless years of annual flooding and annual burning. Rainfall increases only as the ranges swing close to the coast again, so that Mackay, in the valley of the Pioneer, registers an annual average of eighty inches. The best harbour on this stretch of coast is Port Denison, where the first settlers of North Queensland
founded the town of Bowen. Unfortunately Bowen has not developed as much as the less-favoured har­bours of Mackay and Townsville. This is because Port Denison is separated from the inland by the Leichhardt and Clarke Ranges to the west and south­west, and seventy miles north is the flood-plain of the Burdekin. Perhaps the greatest of North Queensland rivers, the Burdekin in flood is to this day a sizeable obstacle to travellers, and has been an interference to all traffic. * It carries down enough material to form one of the few growing Australian deltas, gradually en­croaching on Upstart Bay.

Before cutting a gorge through the Leichhardt Range and looping north to its delta, the Burdekin has run southward for over two hundred miles immediately behind the ranges and roughly parallel to the coast. Many waters feed the Burdekin. Eastward it collects tributaries from the lee side of the coast ranges; southward it receives the united systems of the Cape, Suttor and Belyando; westward it is fed from another series of low ranges running from a point north of Hughenden (on the Townsville-Mount Isa railway) to the Atherton Tableland, which lies behind the coastal scarp at the base of the Cape York Penin­sula. Until quite recent times—possibly within the last few thousand years—there was volcanic activity in this region. Its legacy survives in several forms: most spectacularly in an intricate sprawl of basalt ridges and lava walls across parts of the Burdekin valley, which provided almost impenetrable cover for the Aborigines during the first years of European settlement. In pockets of the basalt country and elsewhere the volcanic soil provides first-class pastoral grasslands. The richest tract of country, two thousand feet or more above sea level, includes the Atherton and Evelyn Tablelands. Here two fine lakes, Barrine and Eacham, have resulted from past volcanic activity; and here rich loams have nurtured a heavy growth of scrub, † soon cleared to form good dairying country. Further south the basin of the Burdekin supports a sound beef cattle industry.

West of the Tablelands and the Upper Burdekin the terrain gradually slopes away towards the depression of the Great Artesian Basin, which is partly filled by the Gulf of Carpentaria. Many rivers converge towards the Gulf. For most of the year each of them consists largely of a series of broad, shallow lagoons.

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* The construction of a high-level railway bridge in 1957 greatly improved the situation.
† 'Scrub' in North Queensland usually means rain-forest or similar timber.
along a sandy bed. Only after the rains of summer is there a continuously running stream, sometimes swollen to an abrupt brown flood broadening and eddying over the flat Gulf lowlands. Of these rivers the most notable are the Mitchell, with its tributaries the Palmer and the Lynd; the Gilbert, into which fall the Einasleigh and the Etheridge; the Norman, and the Flinders whose headwaters rise in the ranges north of Hughenden. The Mitchell and Gilbert systems are separated from the tributaries of the Upper Burdekin by rough, broken country of some mineral potential, but of no great pastoral or agricultural value. This was the first overland route taken by explorers travelling between the Burdekin and the Gulf country. Very early in the history of settlement, easier access was found farther south over the watershed of the Cape and the Flinders. This was the route followed by the Townsville railway. Hughenden, near the head of the Flinders, stands at the junction of the western lines to Mount Isa and Winton. Here the annual rainfall decreases to below twenty inches, adequate enough in most seasons, but sometimes liable to failure and drought. Homesteads and townships are spaced farther apart, and the terrain broadens into a rolling infinity of pastoral country grazing a sheep to every five acres or a bullock to every fifty. 'Out west' begins at Hughenden.

It was perhaps from the west that the first Aborigines came. From their first landfall in the north-west of Western Australia these nomads spread gradually across the continent, shaping as they went a tribal discipline which enabled them to adapt and survive in the hardest of seasons and the poorest of country. When their wanderings brought them to the more fertile lands of north-eastern Australia, it is supposed that two streams of migration formed, one heading up into the Cape York Peninsula, the other moving south into what are now New South Wales and Victoria. These events have not yet been dated with any certainty; but as stone tomahawks of Aboriginal design have been found sixteen feet deep in tin-bearing gravel on the Annan River behind Cooktown, several thousand years must have elapsed since their arrival on the eastern side of the Peninsula. Closer estimates must be guesswork, for the Aborigines left little mark on the face of the land they inhabited.

Even in the most fertile regions of assured rainfall they never became cultivators. This ignorance of agriculture has been cited as a sign of backwardness; but even in regions of comparative plenty there were no animals suitable for domestication as flocks
and herds, and no fruits or crops to make them husbandmen. Their inherited skills as hunters and gatherers enabled them to put to use a wide variety of insect and plant life. They had no other incentives towards cultivation. Clothes they had none, for their bodies were inured to extremes of climate. Even around Port Denison, where the winter nights may be nipped by a rare frost, their sole covering would be an opossum-skin cloak. Nor were they builders, but in places where the mosquitoes were bad they made sure of sleeping undisturbed by constructing a sort of platform over their night fires.

Neither unobservant nor unenterprising, the Aborigines of North Queensland developed new techniques for winning a living from the country. In the dense rain-forests they made lariats of lawyer-vine which enabled them to shin up the tall cedars in search of honey or opossums. From the crushed larvae of green ants, flavoured with a little sea-water, they manufactured a milky brew called ‘moolah’. The coastal Aborigines learned the craft of building ironbark canoes, smeared with pine-tree gum to make them watertight. They became fishers, and the ‘sand-beach men’ of the eastern Cape York Peninsula developed admirable skill as hunters of dugong. Within the Barrier Reef these maritime tribes grew to be coastal traders, and almost until the end of the nineteenth century the Lower Mossman people regularly visited the Goonganjie of Cape Grafton, sixty miles south, with whom they exchanged hardwood spears for cane baskets. These skills have almost entirely perished. How much survives of the work of Aboriginal artists in North Queensland is as yet undetermined. There have been reports of several collections of rock-drawings and cave-paintings, but these have received less attention than the art of such regions as Arnhem Land and the Kimberleys, where vestiges of the tradition still live.

The Cape York Peninsula tribes were especially notable for the rich variety of decorations on their spears and shields. These weapons were not merely for ornament; the Peninsula tribes had a well-earned reputation as fighters, developed over a long history of conflict and inter-marriage with the Torres Strait Islanders, a Papuan people ethnically quite different from the Aborigines. This uneasy contact left its impression on both peoples. There grew up among the Torres Strait Islanders the legend of Sivirri, a warrior hero from the Peninsula, ‘with a wild throat and a half wild heart . . . and all he did was mainland fashion’. The Peninsula Aborigines, for their part, showed long-standing
Papuan traces in many of their customs. Especially among the more northerly groups, many of their religious dances centred around a Papuan-type cult hero, whose influence figured in the elaborate dance patterns and ornate headdresses and masks worn by the men on these occasions. A few tribes on the Gulf of Carpentaria coast mastered the Papuan art of building wooden canoes, a skill apparently handed down among certain families of craftsmen. Unlike most Aborigines, several Peninsula groups traced kinship through the father’s line instead of the mother’s, for they were not ignorant of the link between coition and paternity, as was alleged of many Central Australians.

One other Melanesian custom, for which the North Queensland natives became notorious during the early years of white settlement, was cannibalism. The evidence on this score is conflicting. There is some indication that cannibalism was rare before the coming of the white man, who, however, was ready to credit the Aborigines with man-eating and soon found proofs which appeared to carry conviction. Especially on the Palmer and among the ranges behind Rockingham Bay the Aborigines were given a bad name for this practice. Little or no ritual significance was attached to cannibalism (as it was in many parts of the South Pacific); it was usually either an emergency measure in times of dearth, or a particularly outrageous gesture of contempt towards the victim’s friends. The disruption of Aboriginal custom after the intrusion of white settlers might well have led to an increased resort to cannibalism on both grounds.

The white men may not have been the first intruders. Possibly—although proof is lacking—the Aborigines along the Gulf of Carpentaria shore were also visited by Malays and Macassarmen looking for dugong and trepang. Anthropologists have estimated that their boats were calling at Arnhem Land, on the opposite side of the Gulf, from about the beginning of the sixteenth century. The visitors were not always over-particular in their dealings with the local tribes, and hostilities sometimes resulted. Even without this additional stimulus, the coastal Aborigines of the Cape York Peninsula had already come to nourish a distrust of all interlopers from the seas. They were not inclined to discriminate when the first Europeans sought to come ashore. Early in 1606 William Jansz of the Duyfken, in the course of an exploratory voyage for the Dutch East India Company, happened across an uncharted line of coast running southward from New Guinea. For 220 miles the Duyfken crept down this flat, mono-
tonous shore. Seeking information ‘touching the exact situation of the country and regarding the commodities obtainable and in demand there’, Jansz sent a party ashore. The Aborigines attacked and killed nine Dutchmen. This deterred Jansz from investigating further. Naming the scene of the attack Cape Keerweer (meaning ‘turn-again’), Jansz returned to his employers in Batavia, where he reported the new land ‘for the greater part uncultivated, and certain parts inhabited by savage, cruel black barbarians’.

The Dutch East India Company, however, was thorough and persistent in its quest for markets. There was no immediate sequel to Jansz’s report, as for some years the Company was busy securing itself against competition in the East Indies. But in 1623 Jan Carstensz was dispatched with two boats, the Pera and the Arnhem, to investigate the country further. Carstensz found the stretch of coast charted by the Duyfken and went ashore. His party were met by two hundred natives, who showed themselves so hostile that the Dutchmen were obliged to fire on them. One Aborigine fell mortally wounded, and the rest scattered. ‘In their wretched huts on the beach,’ wrote Carstensz, ‘we found nothing but a four-edged assegai, two or three little stones and some human bones with which they make and scrape their weapons.’

Quitting this unpromising scene, Carstensz went on to chart and name the Gulf of Carpentaria, naming the country on its western shore Arnhem Land before he returned home. His impression that the country contained little water and nothing of use to civilized man was confirmed by Abel Tasman in 1644. Prevailing winds and currents prevented any of these navigators from finding their way through Torres Strait and viewing the better country on the east side of the continent. Tasman’s voyage, indeed, rather suggested that there was no strait between New Guinea and Australia. Dutch interest languished after Tasman’s report, and later expeditions merely covered the area already known.

It was left for Captain James Cook, on his world voyage of 1768–71, to chart the eastern shores of Australia and give a more attractive description of it. The names of Georgian politicians and minor royalties mark the course threaded by the Endeavour inshore of the Barrier Reef during the winter months of 1770. Around Cape Hillsborough and Cape Conway* the mainland was ‘tolerable high and distinguished by hills and vallies which are

*Now the Cannon Vale area of Proserpine shire.
deversified with woods and lawns that look'd green and pleasant'.
In the drier area around Cape Upstart there was 'but a very barren prospect'; but appearances improved again past Cleveland Bay. Cook, however, had made no decision to go ashore until on the night of 11 June the voyage nearly came to disaster. The ship grounded on a submerged reef at high tide. Fortunately conditions were dead calm and clear with moonlight. After twenty-four anxious hours Cook was able to disengage his ship, and on 14 June beached for repairs on the mainland at the mouth of a river which he named the Endeavour.

For seven weeks while the *Endeavour* was under repair its crew camped ashore under the lee of Grassy Hill. More fortunate than the Dutch, they found the Aborigines diffident but friendly, the country well grassed and watered. Into Cook's log went observant notes on the surroundings:

> The whole country abounds with an immense number of aunt hills, some of which are 6 or 8 feet high, and more than double that in circuit. Here are but a few sorts of trees beside the gum tree, which is most numerous, and is the same as we found on the southern part of the coast, only here they do not grow near so large.

His most famous discovery in these parts was an odd, ungainly animal whose name he enquired of the natives; their reply 'Kangaroo' was almost certainly due to a misunderstanding, but it served to christen Australia's commonest marsupial and future national emblem. At length on 4 August the *Endeavour* resumed its voyage up the Cape York Peninsula and through Torres Strait. Three weeks later, after a consummate piece of seamanship, Cook established British sovereignty over eastern Australia at Possession Island, and set his course across open sea to Java and Great Britain.

His discoveries led to the settlement of New South Wales in 1788; and with the development of trade between Sydney and eastern Asia the route through the Coral Sea and Torres Strait became a fairly regular shipping lane. Following the wreck of the *Pandora* in 1791 the Strait itself was mapped efficiently two years later by Bampton and Alt. But the sea lanes inside the Barrier Reef remained hazardous, and the British Admiralty concerned itself with getting accurate charts. Matthew Flinders in 1802 and Phillip Parker King between 1818 and 1820 added considerably to knowledge of the northern coasts. By the thirties Australian interest in trade with India was quickening. Australian
horses were bred for the Indian cavalry; Australian pastoral products were exported in return for tea, rice, and cotton; and retired Anglo-Indian officers invested their savings and made their homes in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. The idea gained currency that trading posts with Asia should be opened up in northern and western Australia, and in 1838 Port Essington, a fine harbour in Arnhem Land, was garrisoned by a detachment of Royal Marines. Between 1839 and 1841 H.M.S. Beagle cruised the northern waters surveying the coast in detail. Its captain, John Lort Stokes,* had an eye to the potential of the country for investment and settlement, and he was particularly impressed with the lands watered by the Albert and Flinders Rivers at the base of the Gulf of Carpentaria. His glowing descriptions of this country concluded with an eloquent prayer ‘that ere long the now level horizon would be broken by a succession of tapering spires rising from the many christian hamlets that must ultimately stud this country’. Stokes was no expert judge of bush, and was probably viewing the country soon after a good wet season. But the name which he gave this region, 'The Plains of Promise', remained on the map to tempt speculation for over twenty years.

The search for easier trade routes to India may have been the main motive for examining northern Australia, but it was not the only one. Underlying all Australian exploration at this period was the hope of finding good pastoral country. The boom of the thirties had sent squatters grazing their flocks over a thousand miles of south-eastern Australia, expanded Sydney to a city of nearly forty thousand inhabitants, and stimulated an inflow of migrants whose coming spelt an end to convict transportation. With the removal of all but a few convicts from Moreton Bay in 1839–40 the Darling Downs were thrown open, and graziers spread northward overlanding sheep from New England and the Liverpool Plains. Even the commercial depression of 1842 failed to dim the hope of discovering a great northern river system, whose waters might support a pastoral industry and provide a highway for commerce with the Indies.

In October 1843, fresh from voting £3,500 for unemployment relief, the Legislative Council of New South Wales resolved on the motion of Charles Nicholson that

*Born 1812; rose from midshipman to commanding H.M.S. Beagle, 1825–43; on marine survey and exploratory duties in Australian waters, 1837–42; named Port Darwin, 1839; promoted admiral, 1877; died 1885.
... the establishment of an overland route between the settled parts of New South Wales and Port Essington will be attended by important additions to our geographical knowledge of the interior of Australia, and is an object the attainment of which is likely to be attended with great advantage to the commercial and other interests of the colony, by opening a direct line of communication with the islands of the Eastern Archipelago, with India, and other parts of Asia.10

Government action was urged, and interest shown by several experienced and well-known explorers, such as Sturt, Eyre, and Mitchell. Lack of funds, however, led to delay; and meanwhile it was a comparative newcomer to the country, Ludwig Leichhardt,* who took the initiative in exploring the potential of the North.

Ludwig Leichhardt’s conduct of this expedition has been called into question, and no doubt this short-sighted romantic was an odd figure to lead a party halfway across the continent, virtually adding a new province to Australia in the process. He was lucky; his party encountered a year when the rainfall was sufficient to enable them to live off the country, without once blocking their progress with floods. But it is a considerable feat to overland 1,500 miles through unexplored regions under any conditions. Leaving Jimbour station on the Darling Downs on 1 October 1844, the party shaped their course north by north-west across the Dawson and Mackenzie valleys. At times they had somewhat dry going until mid-February, when they struck the Suttor River and traced it north to its junction with a larger stream. This was the Burdekin, named for a rich young widow of Sydney, whose encouragement of Leichhardt was probably not romantic but financial. This river watered a region which Leichhardt described as ‘one of the finest we had seen. It was very open, with some plains, slightly undulating, or rising into ridges, beautifully grassed, and with sound ground.’11 The Burdekin was followed upstream to the Valley of Lagoons, ‘the most picturesque landscape we had yet met with ... all the elements of a fine pasturing country were here united.’12 It is still, after one hundred years of pastoral occupation, an uncommonly pleasant piece of country, alive with brolgas and water-fowl. Leichhardt, however, wasted no time here. It was by now May, the wet season was over, and

*Born Trebatsch, Prussia, 1813; educated Berlin University; came to Australia 1842; exploring alone in Moreton Bay district 1843; expedition to Port Essington 1844–5; unsuccessful expedition towards centre of Australia 1846–7; vanished with entire party on transcontinental expedition 1848.
Port Essington lay a long way distant. From the Valley the party struck north-west to the headwaters of the Lynd, followed this river to its junction with the Mitchell, and then took a route west paralleling the Gulf of Carpentaria. Despite privations and Aborigine attacks all but one of the party eventually won through to Port Essington in December 1845.

Leichhardt became a hero, and his success fired much enthusiasm for tropical Australia. ‘The fact is now established beyond doubt’, wrote a Sydney editor (the first of many city optimists), ‘that in point of extent, of natural fertility, and variety of resources, the Northern Territory of Australia excels all that is known of the Southern’. But for some years there was no move to settle North Queensland. More accessible pastures had been found on the Barcoo and Warrego by Sir Thomas Mitchell in 1846, and by Leichhardt himself on the earlier stages of his journey. Advocates of tropical agriculture also looked south of Capricorn. When John Dunmore Lang urged the formation of a new colony of ‘Cooksland’, to provide the future cotton supply of Great Britain, he envisaged an area between the Tropic and the Clarence River (30° South). This would have provided modern Australia with a more sensible system of state boundaries than the present arrangement; but it remained a paper scheme. The Colonial Office was moved to proclaim in January 1847 a large colony of North Australia including all the land between the sea, the Western Australian border, and 26° South; and the settlement of Gladstone, on Port Curtis, was designed as capital for the new colony. But pioneering difficulties occurred, the Colonial Office changed its mind, and the whole project was abandoned in May 1847.

The North still held interest for explorers, and in 1848 H.M.S. Rattlesnake and the barque Tam O’Shanter were commissioned to make a marine survey of the coast between the east side of the Cape York Peninsula and the Great Barrier Reef. At the same time the government gave Edmund Kennedy* charge of an expedition between Rockingham Bay (18° South) and Cape York. Kennedy had proven his qualities of leadership and perseverance on the Barcoo and Warrego, both as second-in-command to Mitchell in 1845–6, and as head of an expedition in 1847. This experience

*Born 1818; came to Australia 1839; assistant surveyor in the New South Wales Surveyor-General’s Department at Portland Bay 1840–3, Sydney 1843–5; on expeditions to Barcoo and Warrego 1845–6 and 1847–8; died on northern expedition at Escape River, Dec. 1848.
Explorers

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did not prepare him for the densely covered ranges and tangled swamp-lands awaiting him in the North. Instead of travelling light and supplementing rations by living off the country, Kennedy’s party burdened themselves from the outset with 100 sheep, and three carts each carrying 7 cwt. of provisions.

Rockingham Bay, the point of departure for the expedition, was a convenient landing place, but behind it lay the steep, jungle-clad barrier of the Seaview Range. Having landed at the end of May 1848 after an insufficient reconnaissance of the interior, Kennedy’s party consumed two valuable months—the coolest and best suited for travelling—in hacking a tedious and circuitous route to the interior. For much of this time the party were hampered by the sheep and the heavy carts, and it was not until 10 August that they were over the summit and descending into the Evelyn Tableland. For the next month the party made fair progress northward, moving in to the Peninsula by following up the Mitchell River, then striking across country and over the Palmer on 15 September.

The rest of the story is well known. During the next three months the party blundered north over difficult country, weakened by inadequate supplies, distressed by increasing heat, and uncertain everywhere of the Aborigines. Gradually equipment and animals were discarded; then on 13 November William Carron was left at the mouth of the Pascoe River in charge of eight men and the journals and botanical specimens, preserved at considerable sacrifice. Kennedy, with the faithful Jacky-Jacky and three others, attempted a dash to their rendezvous with the schooner Ariel at Cape York. Only Jacky-Jacky came through safely. Kennedy was speared on the Escape River, within sight of his goal. His three companions, left behind somewhere near Cape Grenville, vanished without trace. Of the eight men at the Pascoe River only two, starving and hard pressed by natives, lived to be rescued by the Ariel.

Kennedy’s determination had almost made good an impossible task, but little useful information resulted from his journey. It is true that much was accomplished by the Rattlesnake and the Bramble, charting the waters around the Peninsula between July 1848 and December 1849. (This was the voyage which made the name of the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, then an obscure young ship’s surgeon.) But the quest for an easy road or navigable river to the North received a setback with the abandonment of Port Essington in 1849. Trade with India and China loomed less
prominently in commercial thought after the gold discoveries of 1851. The development of North Queensland had to await the stimulus of an expanding pastoral industry, and around 1850 there was still good country to be had closer to the settled areas centred on Brisbane. Despite the alluring sound of Stokes’s Plains of Promise and Leichhardt’s Valley of Lagoons, their remoteness was at present a discouragement to most squatters.

Most, but perhaps not all. Squatters often went out in search of new country without publishing their intentions or their findings, and although no contemporary evidence seems to exist, it has been stated that two or three individuals during the fifties penetrated well into North Queensland. A firm family tradition states that in 1851 or 1852, accompanied by two young Aborigines and living off the country as he travelled, Christopher Allingham set out from Armidale in New South Wales to follow Leichhardt’s route to the Burdekin where he marked out two runs, only to find that the country was not yet available for selection. He bided his time, prospered modestly as publican and grazier on the New England goldfields, and was one of the first comers on the Burdekin as soon as opportunity offered. Another grazier, William Kilman, is reported to have travelled north in 1854 from Rockhampton, then the most recent outpost of settlement, along the coast to Cleveland Bay, later the site of Townsville. W. H. Gaden, a squatter near Gympie, claimed to have made two journeys to the Burdekin in December 1856 and September 1857, following the river to its mouth in the course of the second expedition.

 Whatever these men achieved they kept to themselves. Although Kilman and Gaden must have known that the Burdekin flowed into Upstart Bay after forming a delta, the Queensland Government remained unaware of this until 1860. One other white man had an intimate knowledge of this area, but he was in no position to share it. This was James Morrell,* last survivor of four shipwrecked sailors cast ashore at Cleveland Bay in 1846 and adopted into a tribe of friendly Aborigines. It was seventeen years before Morrell, sunburnt as black as his companions, could give himself up to a couple of astonished station hands with a cry of ‘Don’t shoot, mates, I’m a British object’.

Public attention was redirected to the North by the expedition of A. C. and F. T. Gregory. During August and September 1856,
in the closing stages of a fourteen-month journey from the Victoria River to Brisbane, their party traversed the country draining into the Gulf of Carpentaria, reached the Burdekin on 16 October, and worked back along Leichhardt's track by way of the Burdekin, Suttor, and Belyando Rivers. The Suttor-Belyando country was mainly brigalow scrub, with occasional patches of poison-bush, but the Burdekin valley impressed the Gregorys. 'The extent of country suited to squatting purposes is very considerable', wrote Augustus Gregory on 30 October, 'water forming a never-failing stream throughout the whole distance'. The Gregorys were competent surveyors with plenty of experience in searching for pastoral country in Western Australia, and they were not given to overstatement.

It was not long before pastoralists were looking to the Burdekin. Both in Victoria and New South Wales the gold-rushes had brought many who challenged the squatters' hold on the land, and reforming politicians talked of cutting up pastoral runs for selection as farms. But the northern parts of New South Wales had begun agitating for self-government as a separate colony, where pastoral interests might still hope to dominate. Even before the colony of Queensland had been authorized, a syndicate was forming at Sydney in February 1859 'to establish a thriving and industrious European and Oriental mercantile and planting community' in the empty lands of the North. The promoters planned in particular to concentrate on pastoral development, as they believed that the growing population of Sydney would provide an expanding market for beef and mutton, and that Northern properties would meet a demand for sheep stations as a safe investment. Capital was plentiful in the aftermath of the gold-rushes, and it was not long before twenty-three investors (most of them pastoralists from the Darling Downs and New England, but including several Sydney business houses) had each put up fifty pounds to equip an exploring party led by the project's keenest promoter, George Elphinstone Dalrymple.*

If anyone deserved to be called the father of North Queensland, it was Dalrymple. Tenth son of an Aberdeenshire baronet, Dalrymple had emigrated to Australia after experience in Ceylon

*Born 1826; came to Australia after military service in India; squatter in partnership with Arthur Hodgson on Darling Downs; expeditions to North Queensland 1859, 1860 and 1864; commissioner for Crown Lands, Kennedy district 1861-3; M.L.A. Kennedy 1865-7; colonial secretary July–Aug. 1866; assistant goldfields commissioner, Gilberton 1871-3; led expedition along north-east coast 1873; police magistrate, Somerset 1874-5; died 22 Jan. 1876.
as a coffee-planter, and had spent a year or two as a Darling Downs grazier. To a Lowlander’s fertility in schemes and commercial projects he joined a Gaelic chieftain’s dash and gallantry which gained him many friends and followers. Besides two Aborigines, his exploring party consisted of five other men, most of whom were to figure prominently in the later development of North Queensland. Two were fairly recent immigrants, with a few years’ pastoral experience behind them: Ernest Henry,* an adventurous young Englishman fresh from the Crimean War, and Philip Sellheim,† a well-born German who, despite a stammer and a somewhat quaintly formal manner of expressing himself, fitted so well into outback life that his adaptability and sound common sense later made him one of the best and most respected wardens on the Queensland goldfields. The others were Henry Stone,‡ a surveyor whose job it was ‘to lay off in not less than eight blocks of five miles square each for every subscriber, the best of the land,’ Richard Houghton,§ and a man named Hood. In mid-August 1859 the full party left Princhester, the outermost station to the north, well equipped with stores and pack-horses, and fortified by the hopes of the *Sydney Morning Herald* that their findings would be ‘so satisfactory as to stimulate a speedy migration northward’.

Others were already making their plans. In the third week of July Christopher and John Allingham had left Armidale with 1,500 sheep, and headed north. Some of their Armidale neighbours were shortly to finance an expedition in the same direction under the leadership of a young Scot, John Mackay.** In Sydney

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*Born 1837; came to Australia 1857; stocked Baroondah 1860 and Mount McConnel 1861; explored and took up country around Hughenden 1863; sold all his properties by 1865; discovered Cloncurry copper lode 1867 and Mount Oxide 1882; developed Duchess mine 1897; died 1919.

†Born in Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany 1833; studied merino breeding in Silesia; emigrated to Queensland 1855, and managed Banana station, Lower Dawson, for four years; owned Strathmore station 1861–6; managed Valley of Lagoons 1866–70; goldfields warden on Palmer 1874–80, Charters Towers 1880–8, Gympie 1888–92; under-secretary of mines 1892–9; died 1899.

‡Born 1835; educated King’s College, Sherborne; arrived Australia 1851; worked on pastoral properties, South Australia and Tasmania; after Dalrymple’s expeditions became manager of Vale of Herbert 1864–70 and Valley of Lagoons 1870–82; part-owner Wairuna station 1879–82; settled in Herbert River district and was 17 years on Hinchinbrook divisional board (7 years chairman); went to Evelyn Tableland 1904; died 1919.

§ Later employed by James Cassady, one of the first squatters in the Kennedy district, Houghton gave his name to a river south of Townsville.

**Born at Inverness, Scotland 1839; went to sea, settled in Australia 1855, at Rocky River goldfield until 1859; explorer and pastoralist North Queensland 1860–2;
Horse harnessed to pull a car
up a steep pinch on Mount Molloy Road

By courtesy of Mrs M. Allan
William Lockhart Morton put out a circular inviting twenty businessmen to invest in an expedition to chart the Burdekin from its mouth to its junction with the Cape River. It was intended by taking the seaward approach to avoid the country plotted by Dalrymple. Also, added Morton, ‘I may mention that the Honourable the Colonial Secretary has promised to see that compensation be awarded for the discovery of a good port and harbour’.

Morton apparently got no further with his plans for an expedition, but his talk about a reward (never confirmed by the discreet Colonial Secretary) produced unexpected results.

Captain Henry Daniel Sinclair, owner of the nine-ton ketch Santa Barbara, determined to find a harbour and claim the reward. On 1 September 1859, with two partners James Gordon and Benjamin Poole, and a seaman William Thomas, Sinclair slipped out of Rockhampton and cruised north to Upstart Bay. On the return journey they anchored on 16 October in a previously undiscovered harbour, screened by islands and scenically fine enough to evoke comparisons with the Bay of Naples. Having named their find Port Denison, in honour of the Governor of New South Wales, Sinclair’s party hastened south to claim a reward which, unhappily, never materialized.

When news of Sinclair’s discovery reached Sydney the separation of Queensland from New South Wales was imminent. Immediately the New South Wales Government proclaimed two new pastoral districts open for settlement, Mitchell and Kennedy. This was on 18 November, only three weeks before it was due to relinquish control of these lands. The Mitchell country took in the upper Barcoo, for which Port Denison was a possible outlet. The Kennedy district ran from Cape Palmerston to Halifax Bay, and extended inland to include the Burdekin watershed. Tenders for runs would be accepted in January 1860 and allocated in February. As soon as the first Queensland cabinet took office, it countermanded this proclamation. It was their belief that action had been hurried on by the Sydney authorities to give an advantage to the sponsors of Dalrymple’s expedition, ‘and’, wrote the minister in charge of the Lands Department,

... as most of these parties look on the expedition as a mere matter of speculation and have no intention, as far as I understand, of stocking commanded ships in South Seas trade 1863–82; harbour master at Cooktown 1883 and Brisbane 1892; chairman of Queensland Marine Board from 1902 until his death in 1914.
the country themselves, I do not think their claims are entitled to much consideration from this Government.21

Accordingly on 23 December Governor Bowen deferred tenders until August 1860; and all concerned settled down to await Dalrymple's return.

Dalrymple reached civilization in April 1860 with glowing reports of land 'undoubtedly capable of becoming one of the finest and largest pastoral and agricultural regions of Australia'.22 His optimism was boundless and persuasive. Inland there were very strong indications of gold, and, as well, the rich, low country along the coast would be 'especially suitable for cotton, sugar, tobacco, etc.'; although hostile natives prevented his party from tracing the Burdekin to its mouth, he believed there would be 'great capabilities for a seaport' somewhere in Upstart Bay. Despite this good news the Sydney investors behind Dalrymple must have lost interest, as hardly any of them attempted to take up the land marked out for them, when it was eventually open for selection. But Governor Bowen and the new Premier of Queensland, Robert Herbert, were now inclined to take a more favourable view of Dalrymple, especially when his report was confirmed by the expedition of John Mackay from Armidale.

Leaving Rockhampton on 16 March 1860, Mackay's party of six had followed the Bowen River to its junction with the Burdekin. Finding that Dalrymple had beaten them there, they struck back south-east towards the coast and had the fortune to discover more good pastoral country in the valley of the Mackay (later renamed the Pioneer).

This encouraged the Government of Queensland to authorize an official investigation of the coast, and in August 1860 Lieutenant J. W. Smith was sent north on the *Spitfire* with Dalrymple and Henry Stone to examine the harbours beyond Rockhampton and to locate the Burdekin mouth. This outlet Dalrymple had expected to find in Cleveland Bay; but he was disappointed. The Burdekin emptied into Upstart Bay, its mouth forming a delta useless for navigation. Port Denison, however, was all that Sinclair's party had claimed for it, and it was here that the government decided to found a township, to be named Bowen in honour of the Governor. Dalrymple was appointed commissioner for Crown Lands in the Kennedy district, with authority to receive applications for pastoral runs at any time from 1 January 1861. The *Santa Barbara* party were also looked
after. Captain Sinclair became harbour master, James Gordon collector of customs, and W. H. Thomas clerk in the Lands Office. None of them had much benefit from these rewards. Thomas was drowned during the floods of 1864. Captain Sinclair grew disgruntled with the place, took to drink, and was dismissed. For the next forty years first he, and then Gordon, vainly petitioned the Queensland Government for a more substantial acknowledgement of their services to the community.*

The Queensland legislature’s good opinion of the North was, however, apparent in their steps to prevent speculators and absentees from taking over newly-opened pastoral country. The Land Act of 1860 provided that fourteen-year leases would be granted only to those run-holders who stocked their country within a year of taking out a grazing licence. No provision was made, however, against ‘map graziers’, who selected country by guesswork and secured an option on it by paying the licence fee before inspecting the country personally. ‘Map graziers’ tended to take up land where the explorers had indicated permanent watercourses and good pastures, which they might examine at leisure, keeping the best for themselves and locking out the less speculative or less wealthy individual who was prepared to go and view the country before applying for a grazing licence.

Because of this state of affairs a somewhat indiscriminate rush for pastoral runs in the Kennedy district seemed likely. In New South Wales and Victoria conflicts between established squatters and land reformers gave little encouragement to young men of modest means hoping to build up stations of their own, and their demand for new pastoral country stimulated the lively spread of settlement in Queensland. As early as December 1860 Governor Bowen was moved to observe

something almost sublime in the steady, silent flow of pastoral occupation over north-eastern Australia. It resembles the rise of the tide or some other operation of nature, rather than a work of man. Although it is difficult to ascertain exactly what progress may have been made at the end of each week and month, still, at the close of every year, we find that the margin of Christianity and civilisation has been pushed forward by some 200 miles.23

*Sinclair (1818–68) was drowned in Cleveland Bay and is buried in Townsville Cemetery. Gordon (1822–1904) became a public official and grazier at Cluden, a few miles south of Townsville. Poole returned to England soon after the voyage of discovery.
It was certain that this tide could not long be held back from the good grazing lands reported by Leichhardt, the Gregorys and Dalrymple.

Between daybreak and breakfast-time on New Year’s morning, 1861, the first North Queensland squatters took possession of their runs. The story goes that Dalrymple foresaw a rush for the new country, and took characteristic action. Mixing conviviality and canniness, he invited Ernest Henry, Philip Sellheim and one or two other friends to a Hogmanay supper party, at the end of which his guests marked out for themselves their chosen blocks of country. The first run selected was Philip Sellheim’s Strathmore; next Ernest Henry took up Mount McConnell. This forethought was justified. Other investors were in fact early on the scene, and by 9 a.m. claims had been staked to an area totalling 1,046 square miles. During the next few weeks more licences were taken out, and by the time Dalrymple left Rockhampton on 25 February to blaze an overland route to Port Denison, he was accompanied by more than a dozen prospective squatters.

There was still something of a convivial air of holiday about the party as it rode north, impetuously swimming rivers in high flood, and pausing only to mark out runs in a country which looked its freshest in the aftermath of the wet season. A balladist was on hand (he was almost certainly Philip Somer, later a member of Cunningham’s exploratory party) to compose a jingle to the tune of ‘Bonnie Dundee’:

The northernmost part of bonnie Queensland,
Is held in possession by stout heart and hand;
’Twas settled by us, who came out here—and then
We were known in the world, as the Kennedy men.

Through swamps, and through scrub, over ranges and sand,
Dalrymple—he led us, and here made a stand;
Said he, ‘This will do—for a city, I ken—
So three cheers for the Queen and the Kennedy men.’

Chorus: Then we’ll up with our voices, and cry out with glee,
We are the lords of the bush, we are happy and free—
In future may poets with pride use their pen,
On all that is done by the Kennedy men.

On 11 April they reached their destination to find two vessels at anchor in the bay. Captain Sinclair and his family had arrived
by the *Santa Barbara* on 19 March, to be joined ten days later by the schooner *Jeannie Dove*, with a party of settlers including women and children. Hostile Aborigines had deterred them from coming ashore, and they had camped on Stone Island, where they would have gone short of provisions but for the resourcefulness of Captain Sinclair and his men in netting fish. Dalrymple’s party at once sent the Aborigines packing, and on the next day the *Jeannie Dove* settlers came ashore in time for the proclamation of the township of Bowen. The Aborigines’ instinct was sound; Bowen was to become the base for the pastoral conquest of North Queensland.

Dalrymple’s approach to the problems of pioneering may have been over-confident, but it was shared by his companions, even although little was known of the effect of tropical conditions on man or beast. Some would-be experts had predicted ‘that it would be impossible to colonise tropical regions with the Anglo-Saxon race’\(^{26}\) or to grow wool of satisfactory quality in a hot climate. (When somebody tried to convince the explorer Landsborough of this, he replied: ‘Sir, you are theorizing. Does not wool grow on negroes in the Tropics?’) Such pessimists had little influence, for North Queensland’s future did not depend solely on its graziers. Shortly after the first settlement in 1861 Sir Charles Nicholson visited North Queensland, whose exploration he had urged in the New South Wales legislature eighteen years previously. He forecast that, although the pastoral industry would provide employment inland for Europeans, the coastal area would become a field for tropical agriculture, worked by Asiatic labour.

This seemed a shrewd prophecy. On the same April day that Dalrymple proclaimed the townsite of Bowen, halfway across the world the first guns of the American Civil War were firing on Fort Sumter. Four years of blockade and warfare were to maim the cotton states of America, and send the price of their staple product soaring from 10 cents a pound in 1860 to 52.8 cents in 1863. For want of American cotton, the mill hands of Lancashire would be idle and destitute, and Great Britain’s sudden demand would create opportunities for Australian planters. The world sugar market, too, was improving for the first time since the abolition of slavery in 1833. And since Sydney and Melbourne had suddenly become big cities, there were obvious markets for tea, coffee, tobacco and other common goods which now had to be imported. All this spelt prosperity for the coastal lands of
North Queensland, if only an adequate labour force could be secured. It was taken for granted the world over that tropical agriculture was not fit work for white men, and Nicholson's suggestion of importing Asiatic coolie labour had already been tried and found successful in British Guiana, Mauritius, and Natal. On the coast there would be a plantation economy depending on coloured labour; and inland a community of the type familiar in Australia, perhaps of miners seeking the gold predicted by Dalrymple, certainly of small graziers and pastoral workers hoping to make themselves independent and prosperous on the 'better country further out'.

It remained a question whether northern Queensland could support within its bounds two economies and two ways of life so different in every respect from each other and from the ancient pattern of the nomadic Aborigines.


7Ibid., p. 42.

8James Cook, Journals... (ed. J. Beaglehole), Cambridge, 1955, I, p. 368.


10Sydney Morning Herald, 4 Oct. 1843.


12Ibid., p. 212.

13Sydney Morning Herald, 1 Jan. 1847.

14The names (if any) given by Kennedy to his discoveries are not known. The Herbert was not named until 1864, the Palmer until 1872, and the Evelyn Tableland until about 1878.

15For a discussion of these stories see the author's article, 'The Exploration of North Queensland: Some Problems' in J.R.A.H.S. XLVI, vi, p. 352.

16A. C. and F. T. Gregory, Journals of Australian Expeditions, Brisbane, 1884, p. 188.

19 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 July 1859.
20 Ibid., 28 July 1859 and 24 Nov. 1859 for an account of Sinclair’s voyage.
24 J. T. S. Bird, Early History of Rockhampton, Brisbane, 1904, pp. 395-6. I owe this reference to Dr P. R. Delamothe. The register of leases for the Kennedy district in the Lands and Surveys Office, Brisbane, gives times for these applications which confirm that Dalrymple’s friends were up very early on New Year’s morning.
25 From Queenslanders’ New Colonial Camp Fire Song Book, Sydney, 1865. I find it interesting that this song was published about the same time that Dalrymple was standing for parliament.
Overlanders, 1861-70

Most of the pioneer pastoralists of North Queensland were young men for whom the opening of the Kennedy district provided their best, perhaps their only opportunity of 'farming sheep and cattle stations themselves, or, after discovering a favourite locality, of selling the position and knowledge of it to some wealthy squatter or moneyed Sydney firm'. Immigrants with a few years' colonial experience, younger sons of squatting families with inadequate opportunities at home in Victoria or New South Wales, even in a few cases artisans or tradesmen with savings accumulated during the gold-rush boom of the fifties, all saw in the new country the hope of independence and prosperity. The township of Bowen had scarcely been laid out before small parties of intending squatters were riding out north and west in search of good country. One by one they returned to the modest tent that was Dalrymple's first lands office, there to mark out the runs of their choice or to report disappointment.

First to return was James Cassady,* a young Ulsterman sent north from an overcrowded holding in the Burnett district to take up land for his father and brothers. Another party was led by John Melton Black,† arriving on his ketch the Bonaparte a few days after the foundation of Bowen, from Melbourne, where he had recently made money from a theatre and hotel. Black had no pastoral experience whatever, but he had plenty of ambitious ideas for developing the North and the capacity to interest competent and influential men in his schemes. For the moment, he confined himself to 'map grazing' areas totalling over a thousand square miles, and then stocking the choicest sections.

A longer journey was accomplished by four young men who

*James Cassady was born at Port Glenone, co. Antrim, Ireland in 1837; arrived in Australia with his parents 1848; came to North Queensland 1861; took up a station in the Gulf country 1864; moved to Herbert River 1872; cattle and horse breeding until his death in 1902.
†Born in 1830 at Edinburgh, Black emigrated to Victoria in 1853; made money in the carrying business; built the Hotel and Theatre Royal, Melbourne; in North Queensland 1861-7; first mayor of Townsville 1866-7; returned to London, became head of Bell Punch and Printing Company; died 1919.
had overlanded from Rockhampton with Dalrymple: Edward Cunningham, William Stenhouse, Michael Miles and Philip Somer,* who joined forces at Bowen with Christopher Allingham and his servant Jimmy, a highly intelligent Aborigine. They began by striking across country to the blocks some of them had marked out on the Cape and Broughton Rivers. Only Somer was entirely satisfied with his choice, so the expedition moved on northward, traversing a wide circuit around the basalt regions of the upper Burdekin, and marking out as they went pastoral runs for which they drew lots at the close of their journey. Cunningham took up Burdekin Downs, Allingham took up Hillgrove, and Miles, Fanning Downs. On 29 June the party returned to civilization:

The good people of Port Denison were very much surprized and amused when they beheld the weather-beaten and sun-burned travellers... Some were altogether divested of their nether garments, having either had them completely worn out or torn to atoms when cutting their way through dense and almost impenetrable brigalow scrubs, whilst others were esconced in skins made or rather tied together out of the skins of kangaroos, wallabies or warrigals.²

By this time all the Burdekin frontage country had been taken up and only a few third-rate pockets along the coastal plains remained unoccupied. Several parties abandoned their North Queensland search in disappointment, and others were looking further afield. During 1861 J. G. Macdonald† explored north-west towards the Gulf as far as the spot where two years later he

*Edward Cunningham was born 1834, the son of a Murrumbidgee grazier; with his brothers owned Burdekin Downs station 1861-73, and was later partner with the Sydney firm of Gilchrist & Watt in Woodhouse. Married a daughter of Joseph Hann (q.v.); died 1898.

William Stenhouse, a Victorian, was a pastoralist on the Clarke River 1862-73; went to the Palmer and Hodgkinson goldfields, managing the Homeward Bound mine, Thornborough; later a mine manager at Herberton.

Michael Miles, born in England 1829, came to Australia 1855; drover and station manager Victoria and Riverina 1855-60; came to Bowen 1861; owned Fanning Downs 1861-3 and Eridge (Star River) 1863-6; managed Barcaldine Downs 1866-9; bought share in Natal Downs and Pegurrima 1869-74; formed Mount Elsie, Cape River 1874; died 1921.

Philip Somer was obliged to dispose of his North Queensland property in 1866, and was gold-mining in 1870.

†John Graham Macdonald (1834-1918), a grazier near Geelong (Vic.) 1855-9; explored headwaters of Belyando 1860; led North Queensland expeditions for pastoral country 1861 and 1864; founded Inkerman, Carpentaria Downs and other stations (later owned by Towns & Co., for whom he managed until 1869); parliamentary candidate for Kennedy 1867; gold commissioner Gilberton 1872, Charters Towers 1872-3; police magistrate, Springsure 1874; Bowen 1885; Townsville 1888; Warwick 1899; South Brisbane 1904; retired 1905.
founded Carpentaria Downs station. Between September and November a South Australian party organized by Daniel Cudmore* followed the western tributaries of the Burdekin and marked out runs along their courses. Early the next year Joseph and William Hann† were out in the same direction, followed by several other hopeful parties.

Competition for pastoral runs was keen and often unscrupulous. Some squatters tried to secure a run by camping with stock on a newly-selected piece of land, with or without the owner’s permission, and then claiming prior occupancy. Others involved themselves in lawsuits, especially when the owner of a block had been lax about paying his rent or properly defining his boundaries. In this way J. M. Black ejected Michael Miles from the Fanning station; he at once applied for another block on the Star River, to be named Perjury Plains. From this period of landtaking come half-a-dozen stories of two squatters simultaneously happening on a piece of country, taking to their horses, and riding furiously to Bowen to establish a prior claim to the land; of the younger Daniel Cudmore, who twice ran such a race and was each time unlucky; of Joseph Hann and the Allinghams meeting on the road to Bowen at the flooded Burdekin, camping together amicably for two days, seeing each other safely across the river, and then pressing forward with undiminished rivalry; of Henry Stone riding by night to overtake his too confident rival as he slept camped on the very outskirts of Bowen. And in the centre of affairs, having secured his own title to the fertile Valley of Lagoons, Dalrymple was happily busy proffering advice and encouragement to all comers, or trotting around in the district’s first American buggy surveying the progress of his domain.³

Settlement spread rapidly. In September 1861 Exmoor, seventy miles south-west of Bowen, had been the outermost station; by April 1862 the Cunninghams and the Allinghams had taken the

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*Born Ireland 1811; arrived South Australia 1837, and set up brewery at Adelaide; owned four stations in South Australia; in Queensland 1861–9; returned to South Australia; died 1891. His eldest son, Daniel Cudmore (d. 1913) managed his Queensland properties, including lands taken up on the Herbert River 1869.

†Joseph Hann, a Wiltshire farmer, settled at Westernport (Vic.) 1851; took up Bluff Downs, Maryvale and Lolworth 1862–3; drowned in the Burdekin 1864. His eldest son, William (1837–89) sold Bluff Downs 1870, and retained Maryvale; explored Cape York Peninsula 1872, discovering the Palmer River. Another son, Frank (1845–1921) owned Lolworth 1865–72; was partner in Lawn Hill (Burke district) 1875–94; pilot to transcontinental railway survey 1882; went to Western Australia, and after exploring in the Kimberleys 1896–7, took up properties in the Murchison district.
first mobs of sheep across the upper Burdekin; by 1863 settlement stretched almost to the limits of the Kennedy district. The westward movement was stimulated by the reports of search parties looking for trace of Burke and Wills, who had perished in June 1861 returning from the tidal waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Landsborough, McKinlay, and Walker each brought back very favourable reports of the pastures of north-west Queensland, where Stokes had named his Plains of Promise twenty years before. McKinlay and Walker returned to civilization by way of Bowen, where they found a receptive hearing. Before the end of 1863 Ernest Henry, Roger Sheaffe and J. M. Delvin were all looking for good country beyond the Burdekin watershed, Delvin blazing a trail from the Cape River to the Flinders which became one of the main stock routes westward. In response to this activity, the government threw open the new pastoral districts of Burke and Cook on 1 January 1864. By the end of April seven runs had been taken up on the Etheridge and Einasleigh (then believed to be Leichhardt's Lynd), and others were forming on the Flinders. A foray by J. G. Macdonald to the Plains of Promise in October 1864 touched off a rush for the Gulf country. Most of these runs were taken up by squatters already operating in the Kennedy district, and were partly stocked from there. Few questioned the wisdom of such rapid expansion, as it was confidently believed that a brisk demand from Melbourne and Sydney would keep up boom prices for pastoral properties.

Only to the northward was there no expansion. The difficulty of the country and the ferocity of the Peninsula Aborigines had already been experienced by Kennedy. They were confirmed by two young men, Frank and Alec Jardine,* who in the wet season of 1864–5 overlanded cattle from Carpentaria Downs to the newly-formed settlement of Somerset on the tip of Cape York Peninsula. It was a magnificent feat of bushmanship, but one which no one ventured to imitate. Somerset, founded in hopes of becoming the 'Singapore of Australia', soon languished for want of a hinterland, and was eventually superseded by Thursday Island, a better centre for the Torres Strait pearling fleet. Along

*Sons of John Jardine, police magistrate at Rockhampton (appointed as first magistrate and Government Resident, Somerset, 1863–5); Francis Lascelles (Frank) Jardine (1841–1919) remained all his life at Somerset, in the pastoral and pearling industries; several times acting Government Resident; Alexander (Alec) Jardine (1843–1920) entered the Queensland Civil Service as roads engineer 1865; held several offices before his promotion as Chief Engineer, Harbours and Rivers 1890.
with these developments, the Jardine enterprise became a northward-looking establishment, cut off by the Peninsula wilderness from any part in the main current of North Queensland development.

Elsewhere in North Queensland all roads led to Bowen. Although itinerant hawkers were travelling to the Flinders as early as 1865, the mainstay of the outback stations were the bullock teams which toiled out of Bowen two or three times a year, over barely-formed tracks, poorly grassed in spring and often impassably bogged in summer. Such roads led south to Rockhampton, south-west (with freight at £18 a ton) to Bowen Downs and Mount Cornish in the Barcoo country, and north-west as far as the new runs on the Etheridge. Thriving on this trade, Bowen increased its population from an estimated 120 in May 1862 to 1,192 in October 1865—the maximum for nearly half a century. For the first two or three years of its life Bowen had been a canvas town, dependent for its water supplies on native wells and the Don River, four miles away. After the heavy wet season of 1863–4 more substantial buildings appeared, the better houses weatherboard with shingled roofs, others of slab or corrugated iron. Halfway through 1864 government contractors were at work on a permanent jetty for the port, and the town boasted not merely a mayor and aldermen, but its own newspaper, the *Port Denison Times*, which for over forty years was to be enlivened by the old-fashioned but robust editorial style of its owner, F. W. Rayner.

In other respects, too, Bowen soon lost its outback manners. In 1862 the explorer McKinlay, returning from his search for Burke and Wills, had been entertained at a leading hotel ‘with lots of speeches, songs, etc.’ until four o’clock in the morning by thirty squatters who ‘looked quite fierce with their long knives stuck in their belts, and revolvers at their sides’. At Bowen and Mackay it was customary to end the night’s entertainment with a ‘bottle chorus’—the singing of a sailors’ shanty ‘accompanied by each man drawing an empty bottle down the side of a weather-board house in imitation of hauling in ropes’. ‘Shenandoah’ was regarded as particularly suitable for the small hours. But by the end of 1864 the up-country stockmen were preferring to celebrate their Christmas spree at the bush shanties, because Bowen had already become too law-abiding.

More sober critics complained that, for most of the outback stations, Bowen was on the wrong side of the Burdekin flood-
plain. During the exceptionally heavy wet season of 1864 these stations were isolated almost constantly from Christmas to Easter. In the previous year some Bowen merchants had established a trading depot at the police camp on the upper Burdekin, thus forming the village of Dalrymple, but it was well into April before the first teams could arrive with fresh supplies after a journey over roads which even so hardy a traveller as William Hann described as 'frightful'. Nevertheless, for two or three years Bowen had no rival. Its nearest neighbour, Mackay,* founded in October 1862 one hundred miles to the south, was a dilapidated and unenterprising little township. 'Law and justice are much needed here,' wrote one visitor in 1864, ‘... brute force, savage debauchery and disgusting language make one emphatically doubt whether he resided in a British colony.'7 Morals apart, its future seemed limited by a bar across the river mouth.

Better omens attended the founding of a port at Rockingham Bay, some three hundred miles north of Bowen. The more northerly squatters seeking an outlet closer than Port Denison had a sympathizer in the Premier of Queensland, Robert Herbert, himself a shareholder with Dalrymple in the Valley of Lagoons station. A marine survey party had praised Rockingham Bay in 1862, and in the following year Dalrymple with another partner, Arthur Scott,† had tried unsuccessfully to cut a track there from the Valley of Lagoons. With official blessing, Dalrymple and Scott next made an attempt from the seaward side. On leaving Bowen aboard the schooner Policeman on 12 January 1864, they were accompanied by the foundation party of a new township, consisting of a surveyor, a police officer with three native troopers, James Morrell as Aboriginal interpreter, Philip Sellheim, and several tradesmen including the inevitable publican.

Early in February Dalrymple set out from the new settlement to blaze a trail over the range behind Rockingham Bay. It was a tough undertaking at midsummer in one of the wettest seasons on record, but Dalrymple was more fortunate than Kennedy.

*In 1862 the Mackay River was re-named the Pioneer. To perpetuate the discoverer’s name, the new township on its banks was called Mackay.
†Arthur Scott (1833–95) was educated at Eton and Oxford; Fellow of All Souls 1858; in Australia 1863–4; refused nomination as M.L.C. 1864; after return to England succeeded father as owner Rotherfield Park, Hants., 1873; married Mary, sister of the 3rd Duke of Wellington, 1875; county alderman and deputy lieutenant, Hants.; died 1895. His brother Walter (1835–90), after a term as secretary to the Governor of Mauritius, was managing partner, Valley of Lagoons 1864–90.
By a steep but trafficable route his party reached the Valley of Lagoons and returned with cattle on 24 April. The new port was named Cardwell, after the Secretary of State for Colonies, and Dalrymple’s prophetic eye saw ‘churches, public buildings, streets, warehouses, &c. spread far along the gleaming shore and back to the base of the mountains, and the taper spires of a merchant fleet give life to the now lonely waters of the harbour’. It all sounded like Stokes with his Plains of Promise, and the gap between dream and reality was almost as great. Undoubtedly the port was sheltered and the scenery remarkable—Governor Bowen, a ready hand with a classical allusion, was reminded of Thermopylae— but Dalrymple’s optimism and leadership were not enough to make Cardwell progress. The road inland was difficult for all but the most experienced teamsters, and the port never amounted to much.

The successful rival that dimmed the prospects of both Cardwell and Bowen was financed by a Sydney trader, Captain Robert Towns. Towns at seventy was a godly old man with an intriguing past in the Levant and Pacific trades, which had left him with an imperious temper and a bold vision for commercial speculations. One of the promoters of Dalrymple’s 1859 expedition, Towns had since confined his North Queensland interests to the bêche-de-mer fisheries of the Coral Sea. His sole pastoral stake in the district was Strathalbyn station, owned by two men who owed their financial backing to him. But at the beginning of 1864 Towns decided to take over from the Oriental Bank mortgages totalling £25,000 on two of North Queensland’s most extensive pastoralists, J. G. Macdonald (who with the politician John Robertson owned Carpentaria Downs, Inkerman, and some smaller runs) and J. M. Black, each of whom remained as manager and junior partner on his former properties.

In March Black travelled down to Sydney and talked the old capitalist into authorizing the construction of a boiling-down works where cattlemen could find a quick market. There are many colourful yarns explaining why these works were not built at Bowen. One story has it that the inhabitants feared the stench. Another states that Black lost his temper when a lawsuit went against him, and, with fist clenched to Heaven, swore: ‘The day

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*Born 1791 or 1794; in Levant trade 1813; trading between England and Australia 1827–42; settled at Sydney and married a sister of W. C. Wentworth 1842; prominent in re-organization of Bank of New South Wales 1851; nom. M.L.C. (N.S.W.) 1856–61 and 1863–73; extensive Pacific trading interests; died 1873.
will come when I shall make Bowen tremble!' But W. J. Doherty simply says: 'The road to Bowen . . . was very long and troublesome. Besides, Black was a man who wanted his own way and found very little deference from the early residents of Bowen'.

His first plan was to settle at the mouth of the Burdekin, but the embryo port of Wickham was washed into the sea by the 1864 floods, and its subsequent use as a landing-place was obviously a makeshift. In April 1864 Andrew Ball and Mark Watt Reid, two of Black's employees, set out with two Aborigines from Woodstock station to examine the country around Cleveland Bay, a harbour praised by Dalrymple and believed to receive a wide river from Mount Elliott. The river—named the Ross after another of Black's station managers—turned out to be a tidal creek with a deceptively full appearance at flood-tide; but despite surrounding mangrove swamps the site was a suitable landing-place, and what was more, easily accessible to the inland.

Here, Black decided, was the spot for a city, and Towns consented, though grumbling not a little at the expense. Hopeful of securing some form of government compensation, such as a free land grant, Black at first tried to keep his activities secret. This proved impossible, and by June 1865 when the Amherst arrived with the boiling-down plant, the community already had 'over three times the population of Rockingham Bay'. Gazetted in July as a port of entry named Townsville, the new settlement was a constant source of misgivings to its godfather, who fussed ineffectually about every aspect of 'this crotchet of township building'—particularly the expense, which by November came to over £10,000. Black meanwhile threw all his energies into promoting Townsville: 'he was surveyor, builder, storekeeper, shipping agent, stockman, newspaper editor . . . and first mayor'.

By the end of the year William Hann, Daniel Cudmore, and other established Burdekin pastoralists were shipping their wool through Cleveland Bay in preference to Bowen. But as late as 1868, although Townsville had taken most of the trade and inhabitants from Cardwell, it was still only one-third the size of Bowen.

Black was not the only person to show a buoyant optimism in the future of North Queensland land values. Although the upset price of town lots was £20 an acre, the first sale of Cardwell land in March 1865 saw eighty-one lots taken at an average of almost £40; the first Townsville sale realized £4,139 for sixty-nine allotments; and Governor Bowen was delighted at news of a
later Cardwell auction where Brisbane and Sydney speculators pushed the average price for sixty-three lots to £600 per acre. Nor were the richer pastoralists free from a rage to speculate. Towns acquired run after run in the belief that a continuing demand for North Queensland stations would force up values until he could re-sell at a substantial profit.

A more original venture was attempted by Arthur and Walter Scott, who held a controlling interest in the Valley of Lagoons station after Dalrymple had dropped out and become first member of parliament for the Kennedy district in 1865. Sons of a rich Hampshire squire, the Scotts spared no expense in stocking their property, which in 1867 carried thirty thousand sheep and three thousand cattle. To maintain a steady inflow of capital, Arthur Scott developed a scheme of bringing out aristocratic young newchums from England, each with a minimum of £2,000 in capital, part of which was to be invested in the purchase of Valley of Lagoons sheep. During three years while the newcomers’ sheep multiplied, they were to gain pastoral experience as jackaroos in the Valley, maintaining themselves on the interest of their unexpended capital, and making over to the Scott brothers one-third of the value of all wool and lamb sales on their flock. At the end of their time they would be provided with an outlying block of Valley of Lagoons country on which to set up independently as sheep station owners. It was an ingenious scheme, apparently Arthur Scott’s own, and it attracted scions of the Percy and Bathurst families, among others; but none of these jackaroos finished their time or claimed their runs. Too often they were wastrels sent out by their parents to the colonies as a last resort, and the one or two who were neither drunkards nor hopeless incompetents soon tired of taking orders and threw up their jobs. Within a few years the Valley of Lagoons was indistinguishable from neighbouring properties, except that heavy expenditure had improved the quality of its stock beyond the ordinary.

No other pastoral enterprise reached the scale of the Valley of Lagoons or Towns’s empire. The typical North Queensland pioneer was a young owner-manager. Sometimes, like E.S. Antill of Jarvisfield, or Daniel Cudmore, he came of an established squatting family to whom he owed his backing. Others depended on a sleeping partner in Sydney or Melbourne, or on the confidence of one of the banks or old-established merchant houses dealing in pastoral business. The Allinghams of Hillgrove, for
instance, were carried throughout the sixties by an advance of about £1,800 from Thomas Mort and partners. More detailed accounts exist for the Hann family, pioneers and managing partners of Maryvale and Bluff Downs. Needing to supplement their capital after selling out their former properties at Westernport in Victoria, they admitted to partnership two Melbourne lawyers and the geologist, Richard Daintree;* the latter paid £2,000 for a one-seventh share in the stations. Outlay on stock included the purchase of 1,800 mixed cattle at 39s. a head on the Darling Downs in 1862; 7,000 sheep from an unsuccessful squatter near Bowen in September 1863, and 3,700 ewes from the Darling Downs in February 1864. By April 1866 William Hann found it necessary to borrow £3,000 from a finance company, who took a lien for that amount on future wool sales, with security assessed on 15,451 sheep and 1,500 cattle. Another thousand cattle were already under mortgage. This level of indebtedness was apparently not unusual. Credit was easy in the early sixties, and many who settled in North Queensland put all they had into their stations, hopeful that a continuing land boom and the rapid development of markets would reward their choice of hardship and isolation. Some spent a minimum on improvements, hoping to leave as soon as the expected inrush of buyers sent up station prices; but others had more permanent intentions, and prepared to share the vicissitudes of pioneering with their wives and young families.

Women like Mrs. Anning at Reedy Springs, or Mrs Atkinson and Mrs. Firth at Mount Surprise overlanded with their husbands many hundreds of miles in the drays containing their worldly possessions, eventually to arrive on an undeveloped run, remote from neighbours, and almost beyond access of the nearest town. It is true that station homesteads were, by the bush standards of those times, usually adequate. The five-roomed homestead at Exmoor, ‘a long, low building, built of dark colored slabs of wood with a veranda in front and the doors and window opening into it’, was a good but not exceptional family dwelling. Even further out, the thatched homestead at Maryvale or the log huts at Reedy Springs provided a decent amount of family comfort. But on many stations the few amenities which could be spared

*Born 1832; educated at Cambridge; came to Victoria 1852, practised as a geologist; in North Queensland 1863-70; government geologist for Northern Queensland 1868-70; agent-general for Queensland 1871-6; C.M.G. 1875; took first prizes for photography in Paris, Vienna and Philadelphia exhibitions; died 1878.
for the women did little to compensate for the anxieties and discomforts of a trying climate, a monotonous and unbalanced diet, the constant fear of an Aboriginal attack during the absence of their men. Moreover, women and men alike were gripped by long bouts of fever. The depressing effect on morale shows plainly in a letter by Mrs James of Nulla Nulla:

My own health seems completely broken, and it is with the utmost difficulty some days that I am able to wash and dress the two babies. Every day I have this weary fever . . . even my poor little one is not spared. Quinidine, Opium, Laudanum and Turpentine, and Brandy are almost in daily request from one and another. The men on the place are no better than we are, and the strangers who call are as bad, no matter which way they come from. . . The deaths have not been so many as one would imagine where so much sickness existed, but it seems to utterly prostrate every faculty of mind and body. . . When James or Fred goes out, although they go apparently quite well, I expect to see them return unable to hold up their heads. It is a miserable way to live, neither dead or alive.15

Nor was this an isolated case. The diaries of William Hann are often marked by a single entry, ‘Fever’, or ‘Fever and ague’. But deaths from fever seem to have been less common inland than on the wet coastal lands.

Of course it was not all like this. The letters of Rachel Henning,16 for instance, provide a delightful picture of a spirited Englishwoman growing to respect, enjoy and become part of the pastoral community of North Queensland, without in any way losing her good humour or sense of the proper behaviour for gentlefolk. But unlike the Hennings, too many families found that the privations of outback squatting brought no hope of reward: ‘if we were progressing any, there would be some feeling of satisfaction’, went on Adelaide James in the letter quoted above, ‘but to know one is going backward all the time, is very discouraging to say the least’. During the latter part of 1865 pioneering optimism gave way to a widespread disillusion about the Northern sheep industry. ‘This business don’t pay me at all’, wrote Richard Daintree tersely from Maryvale;17 and his verdict was echoed on all sides, from Ernest Henry’s run at Mount McConnell to the Valley of Lagoons, where an annual deficit of over £3,000 was blamed on the wages and other expenses of sheep-raising. Expansion ceased completely. In the six years after January 1866 no new pastoral leases were taken up in the Kennedy district.
There can be no simple explanation for this seepage of confidence from the North Queensland pastoral industry. Stock numbers, indeed, were still increasing consistently. Sheep rose from 61,800 at the end of 1861 to a maximum of 483,575 in 1868. Over the same period cattle increased from 17,200 to 122,936. But quality did not improve apace with quantity, and marketing difficulties, pasture problems and human error shared the responsibility. There had been unforeseen drawbacks to that wise provision of the 1860 Land Act obliging runs to be stocked within twelve months of occupation. Because North Queensland was far from city markets, many squatters had concentrated on growing wool, which could be transported more easily than beef. Breeding stock from established sheep stations in southern Queensland had been in keen demand, especially when in 1863 the import of sheep from elsewhere in Australia was banned for quarantine reasons. ‘Against their own deliberate judgment’ Northern squatters were obliged to buy inferior animals culled from southern flocks, sometimes at very high prices; Robert Gray of Hughenden records paying a guinea a head for 1,800 breeders. From these beginnings, squatters who had mostly gained their pastoral experience in southern Australia faced the problem of breeding up sound flocks in the climate and pastures of the tropics. Following southern custom, most pastoralists put their rams among the ewes in the hot summer months, with lambing between July and October. This practice almost certainly reduced ram fertility by 25 or 30 per cent; it also involved a risk of lamb losses in the poorest months of the year, from September to Christmas. In other years a late cold spell with rain might take graziers by surprise in the Burdekin uplands; in this way the Valley of Lagoons lost 1,100 ewes in lamb one October. As early as 1864 Edward Cunningham, after a lambing of only 5 per cent, began to change over to cattle on Burdekin Downs. Better results were secured further west. On the Clarke River, W. P. Stenhouse was the first to schedule lambing for March, considering that even if a few lambs succumbed to the wet season, and even though the rams and ewes would not be in top condition at mating time, the certainty of ample feed and milk supplies for the lambs would compensate enough. Among stations following his example, the Lynd had a 93 per cent lambing in 1867; but good results were also reported in that year on the Flinders, where no particular season was observed, and on one or two stations which kept to the old routine.
Over-grazing was sometimes the clue to poor lambing figures. On several properties, especially those with a spring lambing, the dry months between August and December became an anxious round of shifting stock among dwindling pastures, and in poor seasons such as 1866 a number of managers had to knock the lambs on the head as fast as they came, in order to save the ewes. Even comparatively experienced graziers were sometimes tempted by the heavy growth of summer grasses into overstocking, and not all graziers were experienced. An anonymous station hand on the Burdekin wrote in 1865 that, while seasoned squatters were maintaining themselves successfully, a number were in trouble who were "nothing formerly but cab-drivers and horse-jockeys". Often, however, labour problems aggravated matters. Shepherds demanded high wages—30s. weekly and rations, compared with the £1 paid at that time in most parts of southern Queensland and New South Wales. But shepherding was the only means of flock control. Shifting sheep with hurdles was found tedious and unsatisfactory, and fencing into paddocks was virtually unknown. In most parts of Australia it was a recent innovation, and in North Queensland during the sixties fences are known to have been erected only on Woodstock and Maryvale stations, and there only to enclose very small paddocks.

Where shepherding was the custom, one man tended between five and eight hundred sheep, but on some Northern properties a man was expected to look after two thousand. Few would go shepherding if anything else was offering, and the majority were either newchums or else "men of a misanthropic turn of mind", sometimes well-educated and travelled, for whom liquor alone made the solitude and climate supportable. The situation was not helped by employers such as Captain Towns, who viewed North Queensland as a place where ne'er-do-wells might be given a last chance to redeem themselves. Good labour was particularly hard to come by during the shearing season between August and November. Now and again the local newspapers carried advertisements from squatters offering a reward to any constable lodging in one of Her Majesty's gaols some labourer or station hand absconding from service. During 1864 and 1865, however, the arrival of several hundred migrants from Great Britain and Germany eased the position in the Bowen district. Shepherds' wages fell to £1 weekly, and in August 1865 the Bowen squatters successfully combined to cut shearsers' wages from between 4s. 9d. and 5s. 3d. a score to 4s. But for much of
the time the labour shortage was colony-wide, and outback districts such as the North were the last to fill their needs.

By 1865 some sheep stations were starting to consider changing to cattle, which required less labour and smaller running costs. As Walter Scott put it to his partners on the Valley of Lagoons: 'Cattle are certain ruin, but sheep are a little quicker.' Although wool exports continued to increase until 1868, when 1,325 bales weighing 625,563 pounds were shipped through Bowen, makeshift baling, washing and shipping methods gave North Queensland fleeces a rather poor name in some quarters, and freight costs ate into the profits. Until 1866, however, there was no market for cattle. Nothing came of a scheme of Herbert's to develop a trade between Cardwell and Melbourne, nor of a trial shipment of 75 cattle and 300 sheep consigned from Bowen to Java in July 1866. Better returns seemed likely when in April 1866 the Townsville boiling-down works came into operation, and the first cattle treated (a mob of 500 from Dotswood station) realized 46s. a head. Altogether 1,950 cattle were treated at the works during 1866, averaging 230 lb. of tallow per beast; one lot of Woodstock cattle averaged 385 lb., which Towns thought an Australian record. As there were 73,295 cattle in the Kennedy district in 1866, this represented a 2½ per cent turnoff. Considering the difficulties of mustering and droving under pioneer conditions, this was none too discouraging a start. Tallow prices fell, however, and next season's killing was much smaller.

Marketing and pasture problems may have dispelled the squatters' optimism, but the most wearing strain on morale came from the hostility of the Aborigines. Any account of this hostility must of necessity be one-sided, as little information has survived about the nature of the Aborigines before the inflow of squatting. Even their numbers cannot be guessed; the first estimate was not taken until 1897, by which date there was not a tribe worth counting south of Cardwell. Leichhardt thought them comparatively few in number, and Christopher Allingham found them peaceable. Dalrymple, whose natives were often a little more than life-size, described the coastal Aborigines as 'large, muscular men, with bullet-shaped heads and a ferocious, cunning, and repulsive cast of features', and most settlers came expecting trouble.

They soon had it. Resentful of trespass on their lands, the Aborigines within two or three years were spearing stock and stockmen, until shepherds refused to work in danger areas where
basalt ridges or rugged hill country gave the natives cover. It was with grim surprise that the *Tort Denison Times* in 1865 recorded a week gone by without report of a white man speared. Robert Gray estimated that between 10 and 15 per cent of the white men in outback North Queensland were killed by Aborigines during the sixties. Accustomed from previous Queensland experience to such hostilities, the squatters and the native police took ample retribution. The manager of Reedy Lake station spoke for many in asserting that 'life was never safe, and the only wise thing to do on seeing a black was to shoot and shoot straight, otherwise he would certainly spear you'.26 (North Queenslanders at this period usually spoke of the 'blacks'. ‘Natives’ was a term reserved for Australian-born whites.)

Even within a few miles of Townsville and Bowen, this guerrilla warfare lasted throughout the sixties. The conflict between naked spearsmen and police rifles was not entirely one-sided. The Aborigines showed uncanny skill at dodging punitive action, while leaving a sorry trail of slaughtered sheep and maimed cattle: ‘if the owners do not get protection’, exploded the manager of a station not twenty-five miles from Townsville, ‘they will have to take the law into their own hands and exterminate every Black within the limits of their run, or abandon the country’.27 Angered and baffled by the Aboriginal psychology, many settlers were tempted to take the shortest method with them. But others, especially those with wives and young children, found the constant vigilance and struggle too demanding. Several stations were abandoned, and other owners sought the first opportunity of selling out.

Some of the original settlers decided to cut their losses while there was still some demand for North Queensland stations. One or two, like E. S. Antill of Jarvisfield, sold to a neighbour who had over-stocked and desperately needed extra grazing to see his sheep through the dry season. Others were fortunate enough to find a city buyer. As late as April 1866 Michael Miles sold his Star River cattle run for £3 a head, and Reedy Lake, ‘virtually void of improvements’,28 carrying 6,000 old ewes and 160 cattle, went for £4,000. But several stations were advertised in the Brisbane papers for months without a taker, and by June there was such a glut on the market that North Queensland properties could not be sold ‘on any terms’.29 Within a month the collapse of a London bank underwriting the colony’s all too lavish borrowing had plunged all Queensland into a grave commercial
depression. Their credit already over-extended, the Northern squatters were among the first to feel the pinch.

Already some of the original pioneers, among them Ernest Henry and Phillip Sellheim, had been obliged either to sell out at a heavy loss, or simply walk off a station which was no longer theirs. Those who remained explored every possible means of cutting down costs. Petition after dispirited petition went down to the Parliament at Brisbane, setting forth the hardships of pastoral life in the tropics, and urging a reduction in leasehold rents. Not even the suggestion that such relief would attract capital for fencing and other necessary improvements had any effect on the government, which was itself painfully hard up.

One source of expense was the cost of labour. Sheep-raising required a numerous labour force (the Valley of Lagoons, even after a period of retrenchment, employed thirty); but cheap coloured labour had been resorted to by the pastoral industry elsewhere in Australia during hard times, and the idea of North Queensland as a white man's tropics was not yet dominant. In September 1866 a number of Bowen squatters formed an Eastern Labour Association to import Chinese from Java. Indentured for four years, these immigrants would have cost £8 in fares, as well as annual wages on a scale between £10 and £25 assessed on length of service. The scheme came to nothing, but an alternative soon presented itself.

Since 1863 cotton and sugar planters around Brisbane had been employing natives introduced from the New Hebrides. A few of them had been brought up to Townsville and proved very serviceable for heavy labour. Although life in the South Seas in no way equipped them for pastoral work, the Islanders impressed the needy squatters as likely shepherds, and when in May 1867 the owners of Strathmore station signed on ten of them as station hands, their example was widely followed. Of 407 New Hebrideans employed north of Mackay in March 1868, 237 were pastoral workers. But they were less experienced than white shepherds, and no better able to cope with hostile Aborigines.30

Such expedients did little to save the pastoralists from the depression which, after lifting slightly in 1867, closed in with added severity during the next three years. A run of poor wool prices led to the abandonment of sheep stations in all the newly developed areas of Queensland, and in the Burdekin Valley there were local reasons to speed this tendency. Dingoes were a
problem, and so was footrot, but worst of all was the spread of spear-grass. Working through the thickest fleeces, it cruelly worried the condition off their flocks, and seemed every year to dominate increasingly over more nutritious grasses. Unless all other feed was eaten out, cattle and horses tended to avoid spear-grass, with its low protein content in winter and spring; and on a number of stations over-grazing, probably combined with the practice of burning off pastures to encourage young growth, favoured the spread of the hardy spear-grass.31

Sheep properties became unsaleable along the Burdekin. Around 1868 the owners of Allandale station could not find a taker for thirteen thousand sheep at sixpence a head, with the run thrown in free. Young Nathan, the owner's son, trying to win the interest of the publican at the Burdekin crossing, the only man in the district with ready money, invited him to a nip of rum. 'As soon as he learnt that the charge for two drinks was two shillings, he pushed back his hat on his head, and exclaimed, "My God, four bloody sheep!"'32 Several squatters sent their flocks to the boiling-down works at Townsville and Mackay to fetch whatever their tallow would bring. In 1869 about one-sixth of the district's flocks, 76,313 sheep, were treated in this way, but both plants closed in 1870, possibly because of cyclone damage. Other graziers drove their sheep many hundreds of miles overland, in hope of better prices at the southern saleyards. This movement began in 1869–70 when Captain Towns, having accumulated deficits of more than £175,000 on his Northern interests, quarrelled sulphurously with his managing partners, and determined to withdraw his flocks to the proven sheeplands of Central Queensland. His Gulf properties were abandoned, his Burdekin stations went over to cattle. Others sought further for a market. William Hann, for instance, was on the road fourteen months, and travelled 2,000 miles before finding in Victoria a buyer for his 19,000 sheep. Sheep numbers in North Queensland fell rapidly from 483,575 in 1868 to 63,344 in 1871, and since that time this part of Australia has never been a significant wool producer.

Despite these reverses, many North Queenslanders were unwilling to quit. Many were the hardships they underwent, the economies they enforced, even the subterfuges they practised to keep a remnant of their property. They took on carting, butchering, any kind of work that would keep them solvent; some, such as the Allinghams and the Hanns, found it necessary
Overlanders, 1861–70

...to sell or give up much of their land, and to husband their resources on a small remainder of good country. It was at this period that members of the Anning family were living exclusively on home-grown meat, milk, pumpkins, sweet potatoes and corn:

Some of the corn they ground and used for coffee. They had wild honey from the bush for sugar, but, alas, no salt, and it was far more craved for than flour, tea or other store rations.33

Old man Firth, the tough little Yorkshireman who founded Mount Surprise, more than once accompanied the bullock-dray taking his wool-clip to Townsville, walking the 200 miles barefoot because, with wool prices at 6d. a pound, there had been no money to spare from the previous clip to stock up on boots. Those who managed to dispose of their sheep at least made a saving in labour costs by discharging their shepherds. Even the Pacific Islanders were dispensed with, so that by 1871 there were only thirty-seven left in the pastoral districts of North Queensland.

If, after all these economies, foreclosure was inevitable, it was at least possible to save a few breeders from the débâcle, and begin again elsewhere. So it was that Alexander McDonald of Eton Vale, hearing that the Bowen bank manager was on his way to repossess the property, shifted the best of his herd to unoccupied land some miles away, where his daughter tailed the cattle while her father satisfied the bank manager with a plausible yarn of blacks and bad seasons. The cattle thus saved became the nucleus of a new station when times improved. Some who had been obliged, by financial pressures or Aboriginal hostility, to withdraw from inland properties tried to establish themselves on small coastal grazing runs. From 1868 three or four graziers of this kind selected blocks in the Herbert River valley, seventy miles north of Townsville. Others settled near Bowen, and were dismayed to find Aboriginal raids still happening within fifteen miles of the port. By 1870 a picture of disappointment and retreat was apparent. Of seventy stations taken up in the district between 1861 and 1866, nine were abandoned and thirty-nine had passed out of the hands of the original owners.34 Few of the rest had prospered, and the failure of sheep, and unsatisfactory markets for cattle, gave no promise of an early improvement.

And so the sixties, which began with high hopes as Dalrymple and his companions rode north to mark out their properties, ended with the North Queensland pastoral industry dependent
on a few dozen struggling resident owners. The grandiose schemes of such large-scale investors as Robert Towns and Arthur Scott had proved unworkable. They had not sufficiently considered the hardships and uncertainties which might be undergone in this northern environment; which might dishearten any pastoral worker except an owner-manager who had staked everything in his venture, and could not afford to get out. North Queensland was not to be a 'big man's frontier'. But it is doubtful whether the small cattlemen, however resourceful and determined, could have kept going but for the timely discovery of several well-distributed goldfields. During the seventies the pastoral industry was to take a secondary and dependent role, as gold-mining came to dominate the inland North. Meanwhile, as Sir Charles Nicholson had foretold, the coastal valleys were becoming the scene of thriving sugar plantations worked by coloured labour. It was not, as the pioneers had thought, the pastoral industry alone which was to dominate the economic future of North Queensland. Instead, the interaction of these three industries on each other would determine the pattern of its development.

3Rachel Henning, who met him in July 1863, thought him 'pleasant and gentlemanly'. (David Adams (ed.), *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, Sydney, 1954, p. 59). However, he was hot-tempered at times, and risked gaol for abusing John Jardine, the Rockhampton police magistrate, in an affair over a lady's good name. See his biography by Jean Farnford, *Frontiersman*, Melbourne, 1968.
6W. Hann, *Journal*, March 1864 (Maryvale MSS.).
7*Weekly Herald*, 12 March 1864; *Port Denison Times*, 29 July 1865; Ling Roth, op. cit., pp. 56-9.
8Dalrymple to Bowen, 1 Aug. 1864; *J.R.G.S.*, XXXV, p. 199.
9Bowen to Cardwell, 18 Nov. 1865: in S. Lane-Poole, op. cit., I., p. 232.
11Black to Towns, 11 July 1865 (Black MSS.).
14David Adams, op. cit., p. 48.
15Mrs Adelaide James to her sister, 7 May 1865 (Goodwin MSS.).
Richard Daintree to William Hann, 26 Nov. 1865 (Maryvale MSS.).


Weekly Herald, 25 Feb. 1865; a similar opinion was expressed by Edward Cunningham, ibid., 10 Dec. 1864.

David Adams, op. cit., p. 50.

Arthur Scott to Walter Scott, 21 March 1866 (Scott MSS.).

Port Denison Times, 14 and 28 July 1866.


Dalrymple to Bowen, 1 Aug. 1864, J.R.G.S. XXXV, p. 199.


Port Denison Times, 31 Aug. 1867 and 5 Dec. 1868.

W. R. O. Hill, op. cit., p. 32; Daintree to Hann, 11 April 1866 (Maryvale MSS.); Port Denison Times, 2 June 1866.

Towns to Black, 20 June 1866 (Towns MSS.).

V. & P. 1868–9, p. 549: ‘Report from the Immigration Agent on the Working of the Polynesian Act, 1868’. Port Denison Times, 3 April 1869, reports the arrival at Bowen of 103 Islanders, of whom 41 were already allocated to nearby sheep stations.


In the North Kennedy and Cook districts in the three years 1868–70 pastoral leases totalling 4,836 square miles were abandoned. V. & P. 1871, 1st session, p. 549, ‘Pastoral Country Abandoned in Unsettled Districts’.
Prospectors, 1865-80

During the first few years of settlement, the men of North Queensland had given little thought to the discovery of gold, even although California in 1849 and Victoria and New South Wales since 1851 had shown that no more forceful boost could be given to a pioneering community. Dalrymple, it is true, with little to guide him but his own optimism, had seen good promise of gold on his 1859 expedition. Probably he traversed country (such as the future Ravenswood field) which was later found rewarding. But—except in one area as yet unexplored—no part of North Queensland was very rich in alluvial gold, the simplest to identify and work, the mainstay of the early rushes in 1851. Moreover, during the pastoral boom the squatters were entirely preoccupied with sheep and cattle, and the area was too far from the established goldfields of the south to attract even the most speculative of prospectors. It was only in September 1865 that the inhabitants of Townsville, eager to promote their infant settlement beyond the rival ports of Bowen and Cardwell, offered a reward of £1,000 to the finder of payable gold within their hinterland.

Results soon followed. Two months later a station overseer named Gibson reported gold on Michael Miles’s Star River station about fifty miles due west of Townsville. In January 1866 a public meeting at the port voted him £500 reward, and a small rush set in. During February and March the diggings attracted several parties from Bowen and even further afield, especially when news circulated of a second find on the Fanning River. But rumour had exaggerated, possibly through the inspiration of Townsville land-jobbers. There was no gold on the Fanning, and not enough on the Star to compensate for the hardships of an unusually dry season. By May not more than a dozen men were left on the Star: ‘there is not water enough for drinking purposes. At all the neighbouring stations the disappointed diggers may be seen loafing about, sitting for hours on the rail speculating what to do next.’ Two or three parties prospected further west, and for several months managed to
scratch a living on the headwaters of the Clarke River. But the majority presumably found station jobs, or drifted south. Bowen, as ever not to be outdone by Townsville, had its own little rush in January 1867, when W. D. Bauerle reported gold at Mount Wyatt. About seventy men tried their luck there, some not unsuccessfully, but the Aborigines in this area were so hostile that by March the field was virtually abandoned.

This somewhat futile chasing after every rumour of gold was common in the Australia of the sixties, but in North Queensland it marked a growing feeling that some such gift of Providence was needed to set the district on its feet after the slump in the pastoral industry. Until 1867 the search for mineral wealth in the North was almost completely inexpert, and results disappointing. The man who introduced a more systematic approach was Richard Daintree, hopeful that his experience with the Victorian Geological Survey would bring him and his partner, William Hann, the good fortunes so gloomily absent from their pastoral venture. Operating from Maryvale station, he scoured the country north and west, photographing the rock formations with a finished technique remarkable for his time and circumstances. Daintree and Hann’s first mining speculation was an open-cut copper mine on what was then thought to be Leichhardt’s Lynd River, but was later found to be a different water-course and named the Einasleigh. Several tons of ore were excavated in 1866 and carted in bullock teams to Townsville, but despite good returns costly freight made the mine unpayable. In 1867 the partners ceased work, and the mine entrance was sealed, to remain unopened for more than thirty years.

Daintree’s travels had also given him a promising view of the upper reaches of the Cape River. Acting on his advice a party of six prospectors* located payable gold which was announced to the world in July 1867. This time a full-scale rush set in, many diggers overlanding from Bowen or from the Peak Downs field in Central Queensland. There were 250 men on the Cape in August, 600 in October. This influx was checked for some months by such a scarcity of water that bullock drivers were able to charge 25s. for carting a dray-load of washdirt to a running creek. The breaking of the wet season brought new finds, including a 78-ounce nugget, which confirmed the reputation of the field. Although overshadowed by a rush at Gympie, little more than

*David Jones, Robert Robertson, Thomas Ellen, James Hewson, James Stonor and Charles Chappell.
a hundred miles from Brisbane, the Cape diggings had by the beginning of 1868 established themselves as the harbinger of better times for North Queensland.

As soon as the field looked permanent, the government appointed a commissioner with eight police to administer it. William Skelton Ewbank Melbourne Charters* was six feet four inches tall and weighed eighteen stone. His name and physique were the most impressive things about him. As a routine administrator he was efficient enough, and even for a while popular; but he was slow, very pompous, and inclined to dodge his responsibilities in moments of crisis. Law and order certainly had few enthusiasts. We may if we wish discount the lurid picture of the Cape given by Charters's clerk, W. R. O. Hill: "a decidedly rough locality, there being full 2,500 men representing many nationalities, and among them the scum of all the Southern gold fields . . . brutal fights were a daily occurrence. I have seen a man kicked to death in the open daylight, the police and everybody else being powerless to interfere." But it was doubtless a community with little respect for officialdom. The day Charters arrived an enterprising thief made off with his horse. Although 1,588 diggers consented to take out miners' rights during 1868, these were sometimes paid for by a small nugget flipped at the head of the commissioner's clerk; and they refused to give returns of their gold, whether because of inadequate police protection, or to evade paying gold duty, Charters was uncertain.

Whatever their merits as citizens, the Cape diggers were on the whole very welcome to nearby pastoralists, since they at least provided a market for their beef. Other struggling squatters in North Queensland began to hope for a local goldrush. Nobody was as fortunate as the Curr brothers of Merri Merriwah, seventy miles south-west of Townsville. Diggers passing to and from the Cape had their attention drawn by Marmaduke Curr to the promising appearance of the small creeks on the eastern side of the Burdekin. Thomas Aitken, a stockman on the next station, Ravenswood, was the first to find gold. Several prospecting parties followed, working claims near Merri Merriwah, although the field continued to be known as the Ravenswood. By April 1869, 140 men were making a living from it.4

*Charters had been inspector in charge of Maranoa district police between 1861 and 1866. He was warden at Cape River 1867–71 and 1872–4, Ravenswood for a few months in 1872, Charters Towers 1872 and 1874–80, and after his retirement bought Bletchingdon Park station, Cape River, 1881.
Prospectors, 1865–80

For a while Ravenswood was overshadowed. In April 1869 great excitement was created by news of another find by Richard Daintree. Following a hunch formed during his Einasleigh venture of 1866–7, Daintree paid a visit to the headwaters of the Gilbert River. A month’s exploring based on Oak Park station produced satisfying traces both of alluvial gold and quartz reefs. Coming just when the easiest alluvial patches on the Cape were running out, this news was irresistible. ‘A small stampede’ to the Gilbert swelled to a major rush after reports of diggers making up to £20 a week, and not even hostile Aborigines and limited water supplies could stop it. T. R. Hackett, arriving on the field as warden in July, estimated the population at 3,000. Most men were making from £2 to £4 weekly, but with freight at £40 a ton from the Cape and £75 from Townsville, necessities were dear. Liquor was abundant, but flour scarce; and a pair of Blucher boots were sold for an ounce of gold. The less fortunate diggers grumbled that Daintree had overrated his find, although in fact he had consistently said that the alluvial deposits were limited —by August they were nearly exhausted—and that the Gilbert’s future lay in quartz reefing. By October fever was rife and all mining suspended for want of water. Only about one hundred and fifty men stayed, and the coastal ports began to fill up with idle and disgruntled Gilbert diggers.

The Cape was also on the wane. Several rich quartz reefs had been opened up, but they did not persist in depth. Exploration and development were discouraged by the unreliability of primitive pumping and crushing facilities. The alluvial, too, was cutting out; a newspaper correspondent wrote in November 1869 that ‘the most notable features of Cape River society are patience, patchwork, rags, resignation, Chinamen and fleas’. Only one other discovery had stirred activity during the year, in June, when a find by Thomas Woodhouse sparked off a second rush to Mount Wyatt. The 300 miners who flocked to this field were soon disappointed, and there was some talk—but only talk—of whipping and hanging Woodhouse. By the end of the year this field was deserted.

The decline of these other fields stimulated prospecting at Ravenswood, whose solid merits soon became apparent with the discovery of the Perseverance, General Grant, Donnybrook and other reefs. Easy access to the coast advanced Ravenswood beyond previous Northern goldfields by reducing the cost of necessities and facilitating the early introduction of crushing
machinery. In April 1870 W. O. Hodgkinson,* a young journalist noted for his grandiloquent language, had deserted the Press to set up a ten-head battery on the field. Within twelve months the Ravenswood mines were feeding quartz into five well-equipped crushing mills, and the canvas village of Top Camp was fast giving way to Ravenswood town, iron-roofed, weatherboard, with banks, churches, and a court-house giving its 2,000 inhabitants a satisfying impression of permanency.

Ravenswood's success stimulated widespread prospecting. North of the Gilbert itinerant optimists explored the dusty gullies of the Western Creek area, until the discovery of the Overland Telegraph reef in November 1870 drew another rush, and founded the Etheridge goldfield. The experience of Ravenswood ensured that no time was lost in bringing crushing machinery to this field, and in 1871 seven mills were at work on gold from the widely-flung claims centred on the township of Georgetown. Although the Etheridge never rivalled the spectacular performances of other northern fields, its yields were consistent, and it was to support several hundred miners as long as gold lasted in North Queensland. The Etheridge field did something to awaken Cardwell, which for several years became the terminus of the gold escort, and from January 1872 of a telegraph line designed to connect the rest of Queensland with the Gulf of Carpentaria, and thence overseas. But the port most benefited by the mining boom was Townsville. Despite a poor, muddy apology for a harbour, Townsville seized the Cape and Ravenswood trade while the better port of Bowen languished, because of the barrier of the Burdekin crossing and squabbles among its leading businessmen. Between 1868 and 1871 Bowen lost one-third of its population; after 1870 Townsville handled a greater volume of shipping; and although between 1871 and 1873 the Bowen hinterland saw minor gold rushes at Marengo, the Normanby, and Happy Valley on the Proserpine River, all were short-lived because of rapidly diminishing returns and isolation from the main centres of mining.\(^9\)

Inland from Townsville richer discoveries lay waiting. One

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*Born 1838; civil servant Victoria 1853–4 and U.K. 1854–9; with early stages of Burke and Wills expedition 1860; founded Mackay Mercury 1866; on Ravenswood and Etheridge goldfields 1870–4; M.L.A. for Burke 1874–6; resigned to conduct expedition in south-western Queensland; goldfields warden on Etheridge 1878–81 and Palmer 1881–3; commissioner to investigate sites for central sugar mills 1886; again M.L.A. for Burke 1887–93; Minister for Mines 1890–3; first editor of Queensland Government Mining Journal 1899; died 1900.
Fig. 3  North Queensland, showing principal goldfields
alluvial rush west of Ravenswood sent 600 men fossicking along
the sandy bed of the Broughton River; others brought to life
the fields known as the Seventy Mile and the Rochford, all in
the one year 1871. Experienced miners and venturesome new-
comers came hurrying up from the South to the scene of these
finds. Late in 1871 Hugh Mosman, George Clarke, and James
Fraser joined forces to seek gold north of the Seventy Mile
among a cluster of small peaks, which they named Charters Tors
in honour of the mining warden. As they prospected around
the base of the largest hill, Mosman’s eleven-year-old Aboriginal
boy Jupiter spied quartz outcrops thickly marked out with fine
gold. At the end of January 1872 the party registered their claims
at Ravenswood. The rush which at once followed was without
precedent anywhere in Australia for a field almost entirely lacking
deposits of alluvial gold.

The new find—Charters Towers as it was popularly miscalled
—lay in the middle of a large, almost treeless, undulating flat
extending from the Broughton to the Burdekin, and broken up
by innumerable ‘blows’ of quartz, in and around which lay a great
deal of rich surface stone requiring neither skill nor expense to
work. At Ravenswood the returns of many mines had been
diminishing as they sank into a layer of mundic stone, in which
gold was difficult to extract because it was conglomerated with
deposits of copper and zinc. From these problems many Ravens-
wood men thankfully turned to the easier pickings of Charters
Towers, especially as crushing machinery was introduced to
that field more rapidly than on any other Queensland goldfield.
By August five mills provided a nucleus for Millchester, which
for two or three years seemed more likely to become the centre of
settlement than the original ‘Upper Camp’ three miles east at
Charters Towers. At the end of 1872 three thousand miners were
on the field, and the 91,265 ounces of gold sent by escort from
Charters Towers and Ravenswood in that year accounted for
more than half the total output of Queensland.

However, neither Charters Towers nor any other northern
goldfield was yet assured of the permanency that had come to such
places as Ballarat and Bendigo. Stability of this kind came only
with the development of deep reefing, a business involving
capital, machinery, and—what was too often lacking—a working
knowledge of geology. Most North Queensland miners were
content to take quick profits from alluvial or surface reefs without
re-investing in exploration for deeper deposits. Perhaps this was
natural at a time when exploration was opening up new fields almost every year, but shrewd observers such as Philip Sellheim shook their heads over the lack of system and element of gamble in this sort of mining:

If the Northern miner has one besetting sin ... and it certainly proves the existence of, at any rate, a remnant of energy that even the severity of a Northern climate has not been able to deprive him of—it is his readiness at a moment's notice to sacrifice his all, if required, to enable him to hurry off to the scene of some new discovery—good or bad, authenticated or not. He most probably leaves a claim that means good wages, if nothing better, and tramps, suffering all kinds of danger and hardships, on his way to some locality where, on calm reflection, his own common sense and long experience would have told him that payable gold at the best could be but a very remote contingency; but his remembrance of having once missed a rush where his mate made a rise is too powerful an argument for him. . .

This desire for change, which Sellheim thought understandable in men leading 'the most monotonous life on the globe', caused prospecting to continue ceaselessly even while the Charters Towers and Etheridge rushes were at their height. During 1871 one or two parties had gone even beyond Ezra Firth's station, Mount Surprise, a northern outpost where strangers had been rarely seen from one year's end to another. The little-known country to northward was now ready for systematic exploration, and when, early in 1872, the squatter William Hann was entrusted by the Queensland Government with the conduct of an expedition into the Cape York Peninsula, the mineral potential of this area interested him as much as the pastoral. Between June and November 1872, although several of his party lacked the experience or temperament for bush life—as the terse comments in his journal bear witness—Hann successfully traversed and mapped a wide area of the southern Peninsula, retracing his steps only when baffled by the rough tangle of ranges north of the Endeavour River. Except as a journey of discovery Hann was not inclined to make much of his expedition. He had found some fair second-class pastoral country; but although his offer of half a pound of tobacco to any member of the party finding gold had been claimed by the surveyor, Frederick Warner, while camped on a large tributary of the Mitchell which they named the Palmer, Hann was not convinced that Warner's Gully would be profitable working.
However, such a hint was enough for the prospectors. Believing that ‘where there’s a little gold, there may be more’, James Venture Mulligan,* a courageous little Irishman who had carried his swag to half-a-dozen rushes, led a party from Georgetown on the Etheridge to look more carefully at the Palmer deposits. It was soon plain that Hann and Warner had underestimated their find. All along the upper Palmer Mulligan’s party sifted the richest alluvial to come to light in North Queensland. Hardly had they returned to Georgetown on 4 September than the news was all over the colony. Too old a hand to welcome an indiscriminate rush, Mulligan at first played down his find. ‘It is a poor place,’ he wrote, ‘and if you are doing any good . . . for God’s sake do not attempt to come, as people caught out in that direction without rations must perish.’

Nobody heeded him. Veteran diggers, gullible newcomers everywhere forgot caution, preparing for what promised to be the biggest Australian gold-rush in twenty years. Townsville was almost deserted, the Gilbert was abandoned to the blacks, the Etheridge people paid £56 a ton to freight their belongings to the Palmer. After many disappointments here at last was rich alluvial in North Queensland, a seeming climax to the mounting interest aroused by previous discoveries. Around the camp-fires of Gulgong, last of the New South Wales rushes, along the streets of Bendigo, among the declining Thames and Westland fields of New Zealand, news of the Palmer became irresistible through vivid exaggeration. ‘The Old Palmer Song’ caught the atmosphere:

I hear the blacks are troublesome,
And spear both horse and man,
The rivers are all wide and deep,
No bridges them do span,
No bridges them do span, my boys,
And so you’ll have to swim,
But never fear the yarns you hear
And gold you’re sure to win.

*Born co. Down, Ireland, 1837; emigrated to Australia 1859; was on New England, Gympie, Krombit, Gilbert, Etheridge and Charters Towers fields before his Palmer find 1873; led five more prospecting expeditions 1874–6, discovering the Hodgkinson 1876; storekeeper at Thornborough; discovered Silver Valley 1880; numerous other prospecting journeys; died 1907. His reminiscences appeared weekly in the *Queenslander*, 3 Sept. to 8 Oct. 1904.
Prospectors, 1865–80

Chorus: So, blow ye winds, heigho!
A digging we will go,
I'll stay no more down South, my boys,
So let the music play,
In spite of what I’m told,
I’m off to search for gold,
And make a push for that new rush
A thousand miles away.\(^{13}\)

On the beach where a century previously Cook had repaired the *Endeavour*, innumerable tents and the lively bustle of hundreds of prospectors brought to life the port of Cooktown in October 1873. The surveyor, A. C. Macmillan, lost no time in blazing a trail to the Palmer, and the onset of a heavy wet season in January 1874 caught probably a thousand men at the diggings, several hundred more marooned at various points along the road, and as many as five thousand impatiently waiting at the port for the swollen rivers to subside. Those at the Palmer were acutely short of provisions. The few carriers and packers who had got through before the worst of the season charged heavily and did well. One packer could afford to pay for a horseshoe nail with its weight in gold, and made up double his outlay in a day’s business. It is certain that flour sold at a minimum of 2s. a pound, and the price is alleged to have gone as high as 3s. 6d. for a full pannikin. But this, and the stories of men boiling their boots for a meal, may be merely some of the fine crop of camp-fire yarns that started on the Palmer.\(^{14}\)

Certainly when the wet season lifted in April, the Palmer track was a scene of chaos remarkable even in a gold-rush. It was not merely that fevers, dysentery and typhoid were severe. The Aborigines, untamed by earlier contact with pastoralists or white men of any sort, were unusually belligerent. The first clash was provoked late in 1873, when a group of trigger-happy miners on the road to the Palmer enlivened a dull evening by shooting up a native camp. It was a costly night’s entertainment. Nobody has ever estimated how many travellers were speared, stripped of their clothes and possessions, and in some cases cut up for their kidney-fat; nor how many Aborigines fell in unequal combat with the Sniders and revolvers of a ‘punitive expedition’.

Those braving these risks were buoyed up by news that several parties already on the Palmer had panned over one hundred ounces of gold in a week. But during April confidence suddenly
melted. Diggers leaving the field reported dwindling returns, growing hardships, and the necessities of life still at famine prices. This dashed the enthusiasm of many. There were riotous scenes on the Cooktown waterfront as those unable or unwilling to pay the fare clamoured to force their way on to steamers returning south. Cooktown had attracted a considerable number of card-sharpers, pickpockets and other petty criminals, as well as over-hopeful newchums who found the going too hard on the Palmer, and all these elements wanted nothing more than a quick return home. Eventually the government subsidized the shipping company for a number of free passages.

Early in May 1874, while reports about the field’s future were still confused, William Hann, droving fat cattle to Edwardstown* on the Palmer, met a Chinaman who told him that his countrymen were coming in mobs of a hundred or more from all parts of Queensland to the new find. It had always been their custom to move into fields deserted by the white men, who tended to overlook many small particles of gold from which patient and systematic Chinese fossickers could make a fair living. Advised of their coming, Howard St. George, the warden of the Palmer field, told two delegates from the European diggers that, at their request, he would turn away the Chinese; but once they were admitted to the field, he would be obliged to protect them. New alluvial deposits, very easy to work, had just been discovered at Sandy Creek, and the miners willingly discarded the old ground, saying, ‘Let the chows have it. It’s only fit for Chinamen anyhow . . .’

It was a decision which made for a good deal of racial tension over the ensuing years.

Chinese prospectors had been present on the North Queensland goldfields ever since news of the Cape River find had brought a thousand of them overlanding from the south during the wet season of 1867-8. In Victoria and New South Wales they had been the butt of European antagonism on the diggings, where they were accused of sharp practices, the fouling of water supplies, unnatural vice, and an annoying ability to find gold on claims abandoned by white miners. North Queensland reactions were varied. At Ravenswood their hospitality to all comers was noted, and the local editor could write quite tolerantly: ‘... there are

*Named after its leading butcher, a man who made money even faster than his thirst could spend it, Edwardstown was soon superseded as the Palmer centre by Maytown, three-quarters of a mile away.
worse colonists than John—he never lowers wages, and he is a kind-hearted fellow if one is hard up for a feed. But ill feeling developed on the Gilbert in November 1871 when armed Chinese resisted an attempt by Europeans to evict them from the Six Mile Diggings. A few weeks later a miner called Knox was killed in a public-house brawl between Europeans and Chinese on the Cape. A roll-up of diggers in reprisal burnt down the publican’s shanty and all the Chinese humpies. But the next two or three years were apparently without incident. The six or seven thousand Europeans mining in North Queensland were too occupied with following and developing new finds to clash with the two thousand Chinese. The Chinese were not interested in Charters Towers, where there was no scope for fossicking among alluvial claims; and their numbers were not increasing during these years.

By the end of 1874, however, all but five hundred of these North Queensland Chinese had moved up into the Palmer, where only two thousand Europeans remained. The rest had been driven away when a few weeks of famine, during which flour, sugar, potatoes and salt all cost between 3s. and 4s. a pound, followed the working out of the easiest Sandy Creek gold in mid-September. But the field was still rewarding enough for the Chinese. Where a white man needed to find gold worth £3 10s. or £4 to ‘make tucker’—an ounce a week to meet his average expenses—Warden W. O. Hodgkinson estimated that a Chinaman could live comfortably on 13s. or 14s. and put away any surplus as profit. In 1874 the first shipments of Queensland gold (3,586 ounces worth £12,959, apparently all from the Palmer) reached Canton and Hong Kong. This stirred the interest of those Chinese merchants who organized overseas migration for their poorer countrymen. From the beginning of 1875 immigrants from South China, owing their fares and the maintenance of their families to Cantonese financiers, and bearing an obligation to remit a large percentage of their earnings to their backers, began to arrive at Cooktown in ever-increasing numbers.

Queensland politicians were to declare that these newcomers were the dregs of Chinese society, repulsive in habits and appearance, and fit for any villainy. This description was based on ignorance. In fact the majority came from four small districts in the Kwang-tung province, whose men had for many years gone out in similar circumstances to mine, at first for Malayan

*I.e. John Chinaman.
tin and gold, later in Indonesia, North America, Peru, and the southern colonies of Australia. A minority came from Amoy; there was no reason to suppose their background was in any way more sinister. But no Chinese had been sent to Australia in recent years, and the arrival of the 800 first-comers stirred immediate reactions among miners already feeling crowded by Chinese competition.

A meeting of 250 men at a Cooktown hotel urged an immediate ban on Chinese immigration, on the grounds that the Chinese were threatening to disturb the peace and would not ultimately settle down to improve the land. Neither statement was well founded, but there was good reason to expect further Chinese encroachments on the diminishing alluvial grounds. Already a tree on Sandy Creek bore the notice: 'Any Chinaman found higher up this creek will be instantly seized and hanged until he is dead.' But by September the aliens were established there and at Oakey Creek. Already pressed into service as freight carriers, with their burdens suspended in baskets from a long pole balanced across their shoulders, the blue-clad figures became a familiar sight as they trudged in long files from the port to the diggings. Some fell to the Aborigines, some from heat exhaustion, but most won through to flock like birds along some stretch of the river where, rocking and dollying the sands through their rough wooden cradles, they worked long hours for the leavings of the white prospectors.

As ship after ship put into Cooktown, each with its load of seven or eight hundred Chinese, the Queensland Government took action. In 1876 an Act was passed imposing a head tax of £10 on each Chinese immigrant, with heavier fees for miners' rights and shopkeepers' licences on those already in the colony. Uneasy about the diplomatic repercussions on their Far Eastern interests, the British Government at first refused assent to the measure, and it was not until 20 August 1877 that the £10 poll-tax secured Crown approval. By this time the number of Chinese on the Palmer had risen in April 1877 to a maximum of 17,000, almost without exception adult males. Excluding Chinese and Pacific Islanders, the entire population of North Queensland at the 1876 census was 17,042 and this total included nearly all the women and children in the area.

The disquiet of the white community was not surprising. Indeed, the remarkable feature about the Chinese question in those years is that very little serious racial trouble occurred, even
Prospectors, 1865–80

on the goldfields. Anti-Chinese Leagues urging more stringent restrictions on the interlopers were formed at Cooktown, Charters Towers, and Ravenswood, but none of them lasted long. There was some petty persecution by larrikins—it appealed to a certain sense of humour to slice the pigtail off a Chinese head—but no organized scenes of riot or violence comparable with those at Lambing Flat and Buckland River. Talk, rather than action; a grudging tolerance in practice, rather than the stern measures urged by public-house orators.

Most disputes between white men and Chinese arose when a European, having left his claim for a while to follow a rush, returned to his old ground and sought to eject Chinese who had meanwhile taken possession—as in law they might. In one such case a Chinaman resisting expulsion was shot dead by an English miner acting, a Cooktown jury found, clearly in self-defence against assault by the Chinaman’s shovel. But such incidents were apparently uncommon. The Chinese on the whole were unaggressive, except sometimes towards other Chinese, and had a great capacity for minding their own business. They were found to provide the community with services which had been lacking or inadequate, some as market gardeners, others as cooks, a few even as doctors or herbalists. For the Europeans, who had not been long enough on the Palmer to put down roots, new mineral fields were constantly opening during the seventies. Moving from rush to rush, each time hopeful of striking it rich, they were less likely to come into conflict with the Chinese, especially after regulations of 1878 forbade the latter to enter a new field until three years after its proclamation.

Control of the Chinese situation was in part due to the very competent administration of such goldfields wardens as Philip Sellheim, Howard St. George and W. R. O. Hill. Vigilant in patrolling for the many Chinese who attempted to evade paying for a miner’s right, the wardens and police were equally active in protecting them against the Aborigines. (Many old-timers assert that the especial hostility of the Palmer natives towards them was due to a belief, quietly encouraged by some Europeans, that the vegetarian Chinese made better eating than white men. The very few accounts of Palmer cannibalism which sound in any way authentic certainly suggest a preference for Chinese; but there is not much good evidence to go on, and as many Chinamen travelled unarmed, they were in any case easier victims to hostile spearsmen.)
A Thousand Miles Away

In other respects, even in the matter of opium smoking, the authorities interfered very little with the Chinese. The Chinese managed their own affairs through a number of 'tribes' or societies, among whom the goldfield was divided into strictly recognized working areas. Their interests were not political. At Cooktown some of them had the right to sit on juries and exercise a vote at the municipal elections, but they made no attempt to form a pressure-group, although European candidates sometimes used them to secure a majority. Their custom was sought by the local banks; the Maytown branch of the Queensland National even accepted a consignment of opium as security for one merchant, but found that as a rule the Chinese preferred to use their own banking arrangements. These were operated through some of the more prosperous storekeepers, who may also have been immigration agents. Most Chinese preferred to keep their gold, or to sell to one of their own buyers, who sometimes attracted even European diggers by offering a little more than the standard price of £3 17s. an ounce fixed by gentlemen’s agreement between the Banks of Australasia, New South Wales, and the Queensland National.

It is impossible to assess the amount of gold won by the Chinese. In each of the years 1876 and 1877 over 50,000 ounces of gold valued at £200,000 were exported to China through official channels, and as late as 1881, when Palmer alluvial was giving very meagre returns, over 10 per cent of Queensland’s exports of gold went to China. Over and above this a certain quantity—estimates vary with the imagination of the story-teller—was smuggled back to China without payment of customs duties. It was apparently particularly common to secrete gold-dust among the remains of dead Chinese shipped home for burial among their ancestors, in the hope that pious or squeamish officials would refrain from investigating.

It is at least certain that in the six years between 1873 and 1879 the Palmer produced over one million ounces (28 tons) of gold, or slightly more than the entire production of the rest of North Queensland to the end of that period. But after 1875 the majority of white diggers were not prepared to compete with the well-organized and patient Chinese, and the number working on alluvial dropped during 1876 from 1,500 to 300. By that year, however, 600 Europeans had gone in for reefing, for, although transport costs and living expenses made it unprofitable to exploit any deposits yielding less than 1½ ounces to the ton, many Palmer
reefs gave better returns, and the champagne celebrations which traditionally marked a good crushing were satisfyingly frequent.

Many preferred to pin their hopes on new discoveries, and among the prospectors ranging out in all directions from the Palmer none was more indefatigable than J. V. Mulligan. Between 1874 and 1876 he led five prospecting trips west and south of Maytown, on the last of which his party reported gold on the Hodgkinson, a higher tributary of the Mitchell, named for his friend the journalist who may have ghosted some of his articles. ‘The field will be one of the largest reefing districts in the colonies,’ Mulligan forecast, ‘but regarding the alluvial there is not a field on which I believe there will be more disappointments.’

Inevitably he was disregarded; inevitably there was a rush of optimists gambling on an alluvial strike; inevitably there were hardships, and Mulligan’s honesty was reviled; but 900 miners were working quartz claims on the Hodgkinson by the end of 1876. In 1877 the number grew to 1,400, and their early success tended to overshadow reefing on the Palmer.

The isolation of the Hodgkinson and the high freights charged by the ‘carrier princes of the North’ soon showed up the need for a port somewhere between Cardwell and Cooktown. During 1876 several parties set out to chart a track between the Hodgkinson townships, Thornborough and Kingsborough, across razor-back ranges covered with tropical rain-forest to Trinity Bay, the most likely anchorage on that stretch of coast. ‘Old Bill’ Smith, a popular publican, was the first to succeed in September 1876, thanks largely to the guidance of the prospector, John Doyle.* Two days later a second route was reported by a police officer, Alexander Douglas. A crowd of loafers and speculators at once rushed to Trinity Bay to mark out among its mangrove swamps blocks of land, on which they confidently hoped to make huge profits when a flourishing port was developed. Except for patronizing the canvas grog-shanties, these individuals did nothing to develop the townsite—that was the government’s responsibility—but they were prominent in hustling the Cooktown magistrate and police officers into the sea when they attempted to come ashore with a few Chinese servants and gardeners. The arrival of seventeen police soon brought order to the new settlement, which was named Cairns after the Governor of Queensland; and although a few nights later a few shots were fired at

*Doyle, whose role was revealed by Hugh Borland in From Wilderness to Wealth, died in Mareeba at an advanced age in 1933.
a party of Chinese fishermen, it was not long before the first settlers of this nationality were going about their business unmolested.

The more rowdy element tended to frequent the rival township of Smithfield, founded by ‘Old Bill’ on the flood-plain of the Barron River, about eight miles from Cairns. As the first stopping-place for travellers from the Hodgkinson, Smithfield won some little notoriety as a hard-drinking, free-spending community, until its existence was quenched by Smith’s death in a shooting affray at Christmas 1877, a destructive cyclone two months later, and heavy floods in 1879 and 1881. A more serious threat to Cairns appeared towards the end of 1877, when Christy Palmerston,* a solitary adventurer whose dealings with the Aborigines had made him a first-class bushman, cut a trail from the Hodgkinson to Island Point, forty miles north of Cairns. Although longer than the Cairns route, Palmerston’s trail was easier, and could be negotiated by carriers with teams whereas the older road was fit only for pack-horses. Soon Cairns was overshadowed by a port at Island Point, at first known as Salisbury, but later re-named Port Douglas.

The rush to the Hodgkinson spelt the end of the Palmer’s heyday. After 1876 many perfectly sound reefing claims were abandoned by men who preferred speculative prospecting. A very dry season in 1877 gave access to a few alluvial deposits previously submerged in creek-beds, but also caused great hardship to many of the Chinese. This resulted in an epidemic of theft and an upsurge of anti-Chinese feeling, as well as several cases of murder or robbery with violence among the Chinese themselves. The discovery of alluvial gold at Lukinville on the Lower Palmer in July 1878 provoked quarrels over ground between rival societies of Chinese, during which four were shot dead. Next year there was further bloodshed among the Chinese when market gardeners attempted to drive off encroaching prospectors. Even for the Chinese the Palmer was becoming overcrowded, and between 1877 and 1880 their numbers fell from 17,000 to 3,000. Some returned to China, but many trekked to another field. In 1877, 400 Chinese, mainly gardeners and tradesmen,

*Born about 1850, the son of the opera-singer Madame Caradini; said to have been an illegitimate son of Lord Palmerston, who was ten thousand miles away at the appropriate time; on Palmer, Hodgkinson and Herberton fields; pioneered track to Port Douglas 1877 and Mourilyan Harbour 1884; died in Malaya 1897. Owing to the air of mystery he cultivated, there are few trustworthy accounts of his life. See p. 94.
gained access to the Hodgkinson, and were reinforced during the next year by 1,500 miners. Others appeared on the deserted Gilbert field, but the revival of the nearby Etheridge in 1878 was more particularly due to the re-opening and systematic working of abandoned reefs by Europeans returning to that field.

Meanwhile the remotest corners of North Queensland were combed in the vain quest for another Palmer. For two seasons Robert Sefton and his party had been working a modest claim on the headwaters of the Coen, in the far north. In January 1878 the *Cooktown Herald* told the world that Sefton was on payable gold, and a rush followed. 'The result was, as it could not well be otherwise, universal disappointment coupled with loss of time and money; very few men outstayed a couple of weeks and before the lapse of five months the field was to all intents and purposes deserted . . .' It was not until 1880 that the Chinese went there in any number, but even they soon abandoned the field; a Maytown merchant who had equipped a large party of his compatriots with one hundred cattle and several wagon loads of goods estimated his loss on the Coen at £1,200.

Beyond the Cape York Peninsula and the narrow channel of Torres Strait lay the no-man's-land of New Guinea. Even the name, wrote one journalist, had in it the ring of gold, and its unknown mineral resources had tempted speculation at least since 1872. Early in 1878 a missionary named Goldie found alluvial some forty miles inland from Port Moresby. Two parties of prospectors set out by schooner from North Queensland, the *Colonist* from Cooktown with an orderly complement of Palmer veterans, and the *Emma* from Cairns with a mixed crew who solaced the rigours of pioneering with liquor and women. Neither group prospered, and many of the survivors returned to Queensland later in the year with nothing to show for their hardships but malaria and dysentery.

During the next two years the record of disappointments continued. The Mulgrave goldfield, deep in the rain-forests behind Cairns, attracted during 1879 and 1880 a few bold spirits, who, for the sake of gold worth £1 a day, could tolerate conditions in which, while one man was digging, his mate would have to stand over him with a loaded revolver to prevent the natives from stealing their tools. Something more like the old rushes of a few years previously started in January 1880, with the report of gold on the Woolgar, south-west of the Etheridge, but here
too the alluvial deposits were short-lived, and few comers stayed more than a month or two. The signs were becoming increasingly clear that the nomadic age of large-scale rushes was drawing to a close in eastern Australia. Already in Victoria, and now in Queensland the individual prospector was being supplanted by the deep-reefing company employing wage labour.

The development of reefing during the seventies had varied considerably from field to field. On the Palmer and the Etheridge high transport costs made only the richest claims payable, so that holdings were often abandoned after the easiest gold had been worked. From 1878 the Hodgkinson went into a decline when many of its reefs were found to cut out not far from the surface. At Ravenswood the extraction of pure gold from the refractory mundic stone was a long-standing problem. Even the matchless reefs of Charters Towers were abandoned unless the crushings of ore were constantly rewarding. No attempt was made to test below the water level, and six years after the opening of the field the deepest shaft was no more than 240 feet below the surface. But along the four main lines of reef many claim-owners were prospering, and the liveliness of Charters Towers was a model to be envied by less thriving communities, such as Georgetown and Maytown, where grass grew in the streets.

Even on Charters Towers, and more especially on the Palmer and the Hodgkinson, the development and exploration of quartz reefs had been fairly primitive, as might be expected on a 'small man's field'. Many excavations were mere shafts in the ground. The hoisting equipment was seldom advanced enough to use steam-power. Often it consisted of nothing but a windlass with a greenhide bucket, operated by two miners; sometimes the motive power was provided by an old horse at the end of a 'whip' or a 'whim'—a whip being a simple pulley arrangement, while a whim worked on the capstan principle. In such mines the timbering was often improvised and rickety, with ladders contrived of saplings nailed together. Labour problems, too, hampered the development of reefing on all fields. Miners were notoriously reluctant to take pay; even today one will meet old prospectors whose proudest boast is 'I was never a wages man'. Often mine employees would down tools and quit at the first rumour of a rush. Inexperienced bosses suffered other inconveniences; W. R. O. Hill relates that wages men working on a claim, of which he was part-owner, artistically faked the prospects of the mine until the owners abandoned the ground in disgust. Their
employees then formed a co-operative and worked the abandoned claim for gold worth several hundred pounds.

Such incidents may not have been typical, but during the seventies when every new rush offered a miner the chance of his own little El Dorado, wages men could afford an independent outlook. It was this prospect of being one's own master which attracted many to the North Queensland fields. While some Northern miners came from among the station hands out of a job after the pastoral slump of 1866–9, or the immigrants who throughout this period were arriving at Townsville and Bowen, the majority were old hands from other colonies. A representative sample were the eighteen miners examined in North Queensland by the Royal Commission of 1871; only two had no mining experience outside the colony, and eleven had been between ten and twenty years on the goldfields of California and southern Australia. New chums appeared in conspicuous numbers only at the Palmer rush, and many of these did not last long. By then North Queensland mining had become well imbued with those traditions of mateship, co-operative individualism, and belief in the equality of all white men which Russel Ward has called 'the Australian legend'.

Despite an irreverent attitude towards authority, the diggers were not given to lawlessness. In places where the Queen's writ ran ineffectually, they were prompt in administering their own justice. One of the first procedures of the North Queenslanders who went to New Guinea by the Colonist was to draw up a legal code and appoint a committee to enforce it. By a procedure long established in California and south-eastern Australia, crime and dishonesty were dealt with by a roll-up of all hands. Punishments were seldom excessive, and lynching was unknown, although as we have seen there was some talk of hanging Thomas Woodhouse when his find at Mount Wyatt turned out a duffer, and threats of a similar nature were levelled at Mulligan by disappointed alluvial hunters on the Hodgkinson in 1876. One rather sensational story got around in July 1869, describing the lynching of a German publican named Klatte 'for selling poisonous grog' to the miners at the Gilbert rush. Considering the sour mood created on the Gilbert by patchy gold, dear food, and poor water, there was some likelihood in the story, especially for such a heinous offence. But it was all lies, and in September the Port Denison Times reported Klatte alive and sufficiently thriving to pay £200 for a share in a good reefing claim.
Usually retribution was taken out of a culprit’s hide. Thus on Granite Creek in the Peninsula an impromptu trial in February 1881 convicted two men of the theft of a sluicebox and shovel. Physical punishment was inflicted by fists, sticks, bamboo, and even shovels, and justice was satisfied.32 Horse thieves were a persistent nuisance, and when caught could expect the treatment meted out to one offender on the Hodgkinson—six lashes, confiscation of rations, and orders to leave the district within twenty-four hours. Such rough justice had its precedents on the North Queensland cattle stations. Biddulph Henning authorized one of his station hands to punish a thief with twenty-four lashes, rather than waste time and energy preferring a charge seventy miles away at Bowen. As a rule, incidents of this sort took place only when no police were available.

If only because of the Aborigines, most mining camps welcomed police protection, and were quick to complain if the force seemed inadequate. But a successful policeman soon learned to recognize the limit to which his authority was welcome. There is a revealing passage in the memoirs of the Ravenswood auctioneer, William Ackers:

We had some famous pugilists such as Bill Blakey, Tipperary Jim, Sailor Bill, etc., who used to do their differences at the rear of Dermott Henry’s hotel under the supervision of Inspectors Clohesy and Collopy, who, having no lock-up accommodation in those days, were wise enough to see fair play sitting on the top rail of the fence.33

At Byerstown, on the Palmer, in 1876 Warden Coward fulminated against his four police for making no attempt to put down grog-selling, even when liquor was dispensed from a cart in the main street. But it was the warden whom the local inhabitants made the subject of one complaint after another, until the Queensland Government willingly accepted his resignation.34 Coward was not the only warden to meet popular defiance. In December 1871 about five hundred miners turned out to watch John Murtagh Macrossan,* organizer of the Ravenswood Miners’ Association, thrash an unpopular warden whose removal they had requested.35

On the other hand, a firm and fair official could command difficult situations with considerable popular respect. An example

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*Macrossan emerged from obscurity through this episode, becoming M.L.A. for Kennedy 1874–8 and Townsville 1879–91; Minister for Works and Mines 1879–83 and 1888–90, and Colonial Secretary 1888–90; parliamentary leader of the Northern separation movement from 1886 until his death, aged about 58, in 1891.
Cape River Township, 1867

Irvinebank dam during flood, 1906

From the Daintree Collection

By courtesy of the Royal Queensland Historical Society
Scenes from Charters Towers in 1874. The assayer in the picture below was later Sir Thomas Buckland

By courtesy of Mr R. Hurle
occurred in the Charters Towers beef riots of November 1872, which began when a Friday night crowd took ropes and pulled down the shop of a butcher named Trevethan who had refused to lower his prices. On his way to the ensuing court case, Trevethan was heckled by a crowd of roughs, and with unnecessary bravado drew his revolver on them. Warden Charters, pleading illness, had left town at the outset of trouble, and the situation might have got out of hand but for the presence of Superintendent Commissioner Jardine and Dr Quinn, the Catholic Bishop of Brisbane, who happened to be visiting the field and managed to quiet the crowd. In reporting this affray Jardine made a point of paying tribute to ‘the love of order amongst the majority of the population’ and laid the trouble at the door of ‘a few factious individuals’.

Liquor was the main cause of disorder in these early mining camps. Men coming in from a monotonous stint of dry work in a dry climate were often ready for the more riotous forms of relaxation, and there were numerous pretexts for a celebration. ‘He is reckoned a mean man on the Broughton who don’t liquor up all hands when he crushes’, wrote a Charters Towers editor in 1880 of a custom which had already been lavishly honoured on the Palmer and Hodgkinson—and was still in evidence during the wolfram boom at Mount Carbine as recently as 1953.

At Thornborough in 1876 ‘Old Bill’ Smith’s discovery of a track to Trinity Bay was copiously toasted in Hennessy’s brandy for several days. During the first New Year’s Eve on the Charters Towers field ‘there were some hundreds of men in Millchester more or less intoxicated, they having been round the town and had collected over fifty bottles of brandy.’ Observers differed in their reactions to these goings-on. One visitor to Millchester saw only that ‘The state of social morality appears to be very low indeed, which is sufficiently accounted for by the fact of publicans’ licenses being granted to women of the lowest character—of whom there always seemed to be a few arriving on a field not far behind the more legitimate gold-diggers. For others, however, the ideal mining town was one with ‘dancing saloons, skittle alleys, pretty coaxing barmaids, champagne flying not in single bottles but ordered by the dozen (turn about) and the usual wind-up consisting of free fights . . .’. It all depended on the point of view.

There were plenty of opportunities for these alcoholic marathons. At various times during the seventies there were
92 licensed publicans in Charters Towers, 79 on the Palmer, a like number on the Hodgkinson, and 62 at Cooktown; in 1876 these four centres accounted for 207 of the 1,000 licensed premises in the whole colony of Queensland, boasting one public house to every thirty-six inhabitants, women and children included. In addition, unlicensed grog-shops peddled the sort of rum that was reinforced with laudanum, water, and cheap plug tobacco. Such places bred crimes of violence; when a Hodgkinson storekeeper murdered his packer, the Townsville Herald remarked: ‘This is the third murder recorded due to drink during the last four months’, and as late as 1887 a Ravenswood murderer’s dying confession blamed his downfall on the ‘adulteration of liquor in the up-country places’. Perversely miners continued to patronize the sly-grog sellers, nor were they edified by the occasional stories of unfortunates—one formerly a prosperous storekeeper, another ‘at one time considered the smartest literary man in the North of Queensland’—committed to an asylum as of unsound mind through drink. ‘We had many cases of insanity from Cooktown’, testified the magistrate who had charge of the Townsville reception house, ‘hardly any cases at all except cases of excessive drinking; occasionally we have had a man in suffering from delirium tremens . . . for perhaps a week for medical treatment and so forth. That is now almost the only phase of mania that comes before us’. And many cases of ‘sunstroke’ or ‘apoplexy’ could be laid to the effects of too much liquor in tropical conditions.

Hard living and careless spending went with the early stages of a mining town’s existence, when gold came readily but with no assurance of permanence, when officials, tradesmen and prospectors dwelt without distinction of rank in a haphazard scatter of tents which might be shifted overnight. Those settlements which lasted more than a year or two soon graduated to the next phase. First the publicans and storekeepers, then the officials and better-off miners, finally even the Chinese tradesmen put up more pretentious structures in weatherboard, zinc or corrugated iron, and the township took shape along a main street which almost never contrived to run perfectly straight. (I am told the same thing may be observed in California mining towns.) Construction of this kind came when miners had sufficient faith in their prospects to bring their women and children to the field, and schools and churches began to appear.

To inform and edify, newspaper editors came bringing with
them their simple presses that could be taken down and packed
to another field if their first choice slumped. Vigorous writers,
most of them in their time had encountered irate citizens with
horse-whips, but survived to become landmarks in their com-

munities: J. R. Boyett, who was his own printer, advertising
manager, and defending counsel in libel cases;* Smith Reid, who
later became a founding father of Broken Hill; or, most famous
of all, Thadeus O'Kane† of the Charters Towers Northern Miner,

an elderly Irishman with ferocious gifts of invective. One speci-

men, directed at a pastoralist alleged (without the least proof)
to have murdered some Aborigines:

... any jury looking at this man if he were placed in the dock,
his low and brute-like forehead, his receding and conical head, his
close-set hyena eyes, and savage hatchet face, would say at once
"Hang him away at once, try him after." He glories in the murders of
the blacks, he boasts of them in language to make devils shudder...45

and so on for about twenty-five lines. More typically, the outback
editors developed a blend of straight-talking journalism, seasoned
with Americanisms and waggish Biblical allusions, that was to
have a considerable effect on the Sydney Bulletin and the literature
of the nineties.

After the editors, occasional entertainers came venturing up
from the cities. A pioneering Signor Vertelli, bamboozling an
uncritical house of Cooktown miners with his feats as conjuror
and ventriloquist, was shortly followed by Cooper and Bailey's
circus with Nubian lions and Madame d'Atallie, a 'French female
Samson in feats of strength and dexterity, concluding with the
firing of a 500 lb. cannon while borne on her shoulders.'46 Later
came the theatre, varying the farcical humours of 'The Bashful
Lover' with the ever-welcome Irish plays of Dion Boucicault,
'Arrah-na-pogue' or 'The Wicklow Wedding', from which the
audiences came away whistling 'The Wearing of the Green' into
the background of countless bush songs. And increasingly miners
were to be found spending their evenings decently with the Good

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*J. R. Boyett (1838–1904) edited the Golden Age, Edwardstown, 1876; the Hodgkinson
Miner, Thornborough, 1877–9; and the Wild River Times, Herberton, from 1881
until his death.
†Born co. Kerry, Ireland 1820; spent four years as journalist in London 1846–50;
then founder-editor of Kerry Star; emigrated to Queensland 1862; editor Australian
(a Catholic journal); sub-editor Rockhampton Morning Bulletin 1865–72; founder and
from 1873 sole owner Northern Miner; alderman Charters Towers 1880–3 and
1884–7; unsuccessful parliamentary candidate Bowen 1880, Charters Towers 1883
and 1888; retired 1889; died 1890.
Templars or the Oddfellows, the Hibernians or the Orange Lodge.47

As elsewhere in Australia, the nomadic age of prospecting in North Queensland came to be invested with a golden nostalgia. Fifty years later William Ackers lamented the Ravenswood of his young days:

Everyone was happy, gold and money plentiful, there was 700 men upon the field, all upon gold. No wages men. Every building in the main street was either a public house and dance house or public house and store combined, and gaiety was the order of the night.48

No doubt the reality was a good deal less idyllic. Brawls and hangovers, heat and flies, typhoid and dysentery were just as characteristic of these early mining camps. Many prospectors, however, thought mainly of striking that rich patch where there would be gold for all and 'no wages men', and were slow to recognize that by 1880 the nomadic age of large-scale rushes was drawing to a close. Some, like Mulligan, went on fossicking around the lesser-known backblocks until after the turn of the century, always hopeful of striking another bonanza. But the scene for new discoveries was shifting further away, to the Northern Territory, to the deserts of Western Australia, eventually to New Guinea. Had the development of North Queensland depended entirely on the prospectors, working out alluvial deposits and the shallow outcrops of reef gold, even the richest of its mining towns would soon have faded into insignificance, leaving merely the record of a little timely boost to the ports and the pastoral industry, and a host of colourful legends that grew in the telling. It remained for the North Queensland mining industry to survive and grow by finding the skill, capital, and changed way of life required for the exploration and development of the deep reefs. As already in Victoria, mining would become another business in which men worked for wages, and the independent prospector was left more and more as a picturesque anachronism.

1Weekly Herald, 5 May 1866.
2Some fine examples of his work are owned by the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, Brisbane. Others are still held at Maryvale by Mr Edgar Clarke, grandson of William Hann.
Prospectors, 1865–80

7 Port Denison Times, 7 Sept. 1867: V. & P. 1869, II, pp. 163 et seq.
8 Queensland, 17, 24, and 31 July, 11 and 18 Sept. 1869.
9 Ibid., 6 Nov. 1869.
10 Port Denison Times, 13 Nov. 1869, for the earliest mention of prospecting in this area; see also North Queensland Register, 16 March 1914, for an account of its early history; also H. A. Borland in Cairns Post, 18 Jan. 1939.
13 William Hann, ‘Report . . . and Copy and Diary of the Northern Expedition’, V. & P. 1873, pp. 1031–70. The original journals are at Maryvale station. The journal of another member of the party, Thomas Tate, is in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.
14 Ravenswood Miner, 27 Sept. 1873.
15 Anon.] The Native Companion Songster, Brisbane, 1889.
18 Ravenswood Miner, 21 Oct. 1871: but compare the reports in the same newspaper, 2 and 30 Dec. 1871.
20 The correspondence of the Queensland National Bank branches at Maytown and Cooktown give some insight into the organization of the Chinese community, esp. Branch Manager, Maytown, to General Manager, 1 June 1876; Branch Manager, Cooktown, to General Manager, 11 July 1877; General Manager to Branch Manager, Maytown, 3 Dec. 1880. See also C. P. FitzGerald, ‘Overseas Chinese in South East Asia’, Australian Journal of Politics and History, VIII, i, May 1962, p. 66.
22 Cooktown Courier, 22 May, 15 Sept. 1875.
23 Spencer Browne, A Journalist’s Memories, Brisbane, 1927, p. 33.
25 From the first discovery of gold in 1865 to the end of 1879 North Queensland (exclusive of the Palmer) produced an estimated 1,014,315 ounces. The Palmer produced 1,023,855 ounces, four-fifths of it between October 1873 and December 1877. This is probably an underestimate.
26 Cooktown Herald, 18 March 1876.
29 As late as 1883 the Inspector of Mines for the Northern district noted many examples of such conditions: V. & P. 1884, III, pp. 234–9.
30 Ex-miners testifying before a royal commission in 1911 spoke strongly in this vein: ‘I never worked for wages in any capacity in my life’, said James McLeod, aged 82; ‘I was a wages man sometimes, but when I saw a show, I went on my own hook and worked it’, said John Sands, aged 63: Q.P.P. 1911–12, III, p. 469 (Royal Commission appointed to enquire into certain matters relating to the mining industry: Qs. 253 and 471).
31 V. & P. 1871, 1st session, p. 569.
32 Russell Ward, The Australian Legend, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 1–2 and 183: ‘Queensland was the most “Australian” and the most nationalistic of all the colonies’.
33 Port Denison Times, 10 and 17 July, 18 Sept. 1869.
35 North Queensland Register, c. 1920 (no date: cutting in possession of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, Newstead House, Brisbane).
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V. & P. 1873, pp. 1071-82; Ravenswood Miner, 9 Nov. 1872.


V. & P. 1874, I, p. 655.

Ibid., p. 697.

Cooktown Courier, 10 Oct. 1877.

Quoted Cooktown Herald, 26 Sept. 1876.

Northern Miner, 31 May 1887.


V. & P. 1877, I, pp. 1202-3.

Northern Miner, 8 June 1880.

Cooktown Courier, 7 July 1877.

Cf. the editorial remarks of the Northern Miner, 9 June 1877.

North Queensland Register, c. 1920 (n.d.).
Planters, 1865-78

The economy and way of life established by the pastoral workers and miners of inland North Queensland were in many ways typical of Australian pioneering communities, and showed little sign of modifying under the influence of a tropical environment. Occasionally—not often, as North Queenslanders were seldom given to self-examination—a commentator would ponder this achievement. 'Will this district be ultimately abandoned by its white inhabitants?' wrote a Cooktown editor in 1876, 'or will our Europeans be able to accomplish the hitherto impossible feat of settling a white race within 15° of the equator?' And he glanced at the dispiriting examples of the West Indies and South America: 'a parti-coloured mongrel race fills the land, sluggish, vicious and ignorant.' However, his conclusions were optimistic. 'Doggedly braving the heat, we carry on our own business, we eat, drink and live as if in New Zealand.'

'As if in New Zealand' was a revealing phrase. It could be contended that the settlers made too little effort to adapt to the needs of the tropics. Bred to a temperate climate, they wore the same Crimean shirts, moleskin trousers and flannel underwear as their brothers on the windswept Riverina or the Ballarat diggings. Too often their diet lacked balance or variety, with insufficient fruit or green vegetables, too much starch and protein, and in many cases too much hard liquor. It was not entirely surprising that some observers thought only the constant excitement of the search for gold could sustain the white man in North Queensland. Deprived of this stimulus, he could live for long periods in the tropics only by avoiding hard physical labour and taking frequent recuperative trips to the cool South. To men of this way of thinking, North Queensland could be permanently developed only through a system of agriculture, dependent—as tropical plantations the world over were dependent—on a plentiful supply of cheap non-European labour.

These ideas could not square with the views of most Australians, in the vigorous and often radical democracy of the sixties. Except for goldfield clashes over the Chinese, alien labour
had rarely been a serious issue in Australia. In the early years of settlement it had soon become evident that the Aborigines, even when subdued, could seldom be made to work the regular hours required by European employers. Convict transportation had answered the need for cheap labour in the developmental years of New South Wales, and the gold-rush boom silenced the hankerings of those squatters who wanted to solve their later difficulties by indenturing docile aliens. But in 1860 Queensland, unlike the rest of Australia, was still entirely dependent on one export product—wool—and so less able to take a moral line about introducing coloured labour to develop its resources. There had been a little spark of feeling over the employment of Chinese near Brisbane in the late fifties, but in the face of a colony-wide labour shortage, the Queensland Parliament raised little controversy in passing a Coolie Act in 1862, providing conditions under which Asiatics could be indentured to work in the colony. Under-developed frontier colonies, lacking either a convict past when manpower was cheap or a goldrush prosperity when capital was plentiful, had to make good their labour shortages if they were to progress; Western Australia had tried a renewal of convict transportation, only to be regarded with ill-concealed contempt by the rest of the continent. For Queensland the only alternatives before the discovery of gold seemed to be alien labour or stagnation. This applied especially to the North, one of the few important areas in Australia never worked by convict labour.

But the North was not particularly quick in grasping the opportunities of coloured labour. Captain Robert Towns, the first to take advantage of the 1862 Act, proposed to employ Indians growing cotton on the Logan River, south of Brisbane and not far from the New South Wales border. Indians proving unavailable, and Chinese too unpopular for Australian conditions, Towns sent his schooner, the Don Juan, under the command of a tough beachcomber named Ross Lewin, to recruit labour in the New Hebrides. As the innovator of the traffic in Pacific Islanders, Towns need not be condemned too harshly. He seems genuinely to have persuaded himself that the influence of Christian civilization and useful pursuits would benefit the Islanders, and he had at least the intention (although Ross Lewin ignored it) of allowing his recruits to bring their wives with them—a privilege few planters seem even to have considered. When the Don Juan tied up in the Brisbane River in August 1863, there was considerable curiosity about its cargo of 'Polynesians', as they were
usually miscalled. These tractable, hard-working Islanders soon proved their worth, and before long plantations manned by their labour appeared in the neighbourhood of Brisbane: cotton on the Logan and the Darling Downs, sugar at Cleveland, Caboolture, and 150 miles north at Maryborough.

Newcomers, and not local enterprise, took the initiative in North Queensland. In 1864 Bowen was visited by experts from Mauritius, where malaria was crippling the sugar industry. Surprisingly, they concluded that the Bowen district, with its forty-inch rainfall, was not too dry for successful cane-growing. One can only surmise that they were misled by first viewing Bowen after an exceptionally wet season; or perhaps they were over-eager to take advantage of the growing demand from the Melbourne, Sydney and British markets, on which sugar prices were reviving for the first time in thirty years. Early in 1865 J. F. Kelsey floated the Bowen Sugar Company. Although in 1868 thirty tons of sugar and 3,729 gallons of rum were produced in Bowen, planting ceased that year because of disappointing results, and Kelsey returned to Mauritius with a reputation for incompetence.* Cotton farmers at Bowen did better for a while. In February 1869 Gideon Pott and Donald Bell sold 6½ tons of New Orleans type for 10½d. lb. average on the Brisbane market, and 1,100 lb. of Sea Island fetched 1s. 6d. Captain Towns's estates at Cleveland Bay, after an unsuccessful start with sugar, also concentrated on cotton. The crop reached its peak in North Queensland in 1870 when 163 acres at Bowen and 190 at Townsville were planted. But such progress was puny compared with the 14,000-acre industry on the Darling Downs. A fall in world prices in 1870 was enough to end cultivation in North Queensland. Within four years there was not an acre under cotton in the area.

The main centre of sugar-growing shifted to Mackay. On 1 June 1865 John Spiller planted a small plot of canes brought from a Javanese plantation where he had learnt sugar growing and manufacture. On this, the Pioneer plantation, Spiller and a partner put up a wooden horse-driven mill—mostly a home-made contraption—with which, at the end of June 1867, they crushed some cane and reduced the juice in an ordinary boiler, thus producing the first sugar in North Queensland. But this extremely

*But he made his name by winning a bet that he would ride one hundred miles between sunrise and sunset; he circled the Bowen race-track 107 times. In later life he returned to Bowen.
primitive mill kept breaking down, and produced only a few pounds. Meanwhile, of four other plantations founded in 1866, only the Alexandra had survived two seasons; and here it was that the owner, T. H. Fitzgerald*—a man of some engineering experience—in partnership with J. Ewen Davidson† erected an iron mill which proved the commercial possibilities of Mackay-grown sugar. Over a seven-week crushing season ending on 18 November 1868, 110 tons of sugar were milled. The next year Spiller’s Pioneer mill was improved and went into continuous production. Now Mackay went ahead consistently. A thousand acres were brought under cane during 1869 and 1870; during each of the four succeeding years a thousand more were planted. By 1874 Mackay, with sixteen mills in operation and 4,927 acres cultivated, grew over one-third of Queensland’s sugar-cane.

Elsewhere in North Queensland the industry was much smaller. One or two Bowen farmers planted on a modest scale, but gave up for want of crushing facilities. Townsville had abandoned all attempt at sugar-growing. Farther north a small but thriving industry had come into being. As early as 1866 Ewen Davidson, after exploring the Lower Herbert, settled north of Cardwell on Bellenden Plains, but neither he nor two successive owners of the estate managed to complete a mill, and by 1873 the plantation was abandoned because of repeated floods. 4 However, between 1869 and 1872 the rich chocolate loams of the Lower Herbert became the basis of a firmly established industry. A minor rush for freehold land was followed by the erection of mills on three estates—Farleigh, Macknade, and Bemerside—and by 1874 the canefields of the Lower Herbert spread over 500 acres. During 1872 and 1873 experimental plantings of cotton and tobacco were less successful in this district. The climate was too moist for cotton fibre, whereas tobacco grew well, “but the manufactured article did not suit the taste of the people.” 5

The coastal lands beyond Cardwell were investigated early in 1872, almost by accident. A party of hare-brained adventurers

*Born Carrickmacross, co. Monaghan, Ireland, 1824; qualified civil engineer; came to New Zealand 1842; Wellington Provincial Council 1856–8; provincial superintendent 1859–61; M.H.R. Hawke’s Bay, May–Nov. 1860; arrived Australia 1862; surveyed Mackay 1864–5; M.L.A. Kennedy 1867–9; Colonial Treasurer Nov. 1868–Jan. 1869; M.L.A. Bowen 1873–5; formed sugar plantations at Mackay 1866–76, and Johnstone River 1880–8; died 1888.

†Of Tulloch Castle, Ross, Scotland; born about 1840; an Oxford graduate, went to West Indies and Demerara for sugar experience before settling in Queensland. Sugar growing at Cardwell 1866–8 and Mackay 1868–99. Died in Britain about 1924.
after gold had chartered the unseaworthy brig *Maria* to take them from Sydney to New Guinea. Wrecked north of Cardwell, they lost several of their number to the Aborigines. During the ensuing punitive expedition Mourilyan Harbour and the Gladys River (later found to be identical with the Johnstone) were discovered by Captain John Moresby of the *Basilisk*. His report, followed by Hann's description of the Peninsula in 1872, prompted a government-sponsored expedition to assess the resources of the north-east coast. Leadership was entrusted to G. E. Dalrymple, who had fallen upon hard times after a short, spectacular political career, and had been glad enough to bury himself in a subordinate post on the dwindling Gilbert goldfield. Most willingly Dalrymple answered the call. Leaving Gilberton to be abandoned to the blacks, he rode down the old track from the Valley of Lagoons to Cardwell, to begin on 9 September 1873 the most successful expedition of his career. Middle age and the heavy fevers which would shortly end his life could not quench his enterprise and optimism, and he found in the country between Cardwell and the Endeavour River several fertile valleys which in his view could not be bettered for tropical cultivation. Carrying out his investigations more scientifically than before, he brought back to Brisbane specimens of minerals, plants, timber, and soil. Although his assessment of 300,000 acres fit for sugar may have been an over-estimate, his optimism was justified by the discovery of the Johnstone, Mulgrave, and Mossman Rivers, now among Queensland's leading sugar districts.6

Dalrymple's expedition came at an opportune time. For the first time Queensland was growing enough sugar for her own needs; 230 tons of refined and 3,400 tons of raw sugar were exported in 1874 to other Australian colonies. Moreover, for the first time the northern ports were connected with Brisbane and the outside world by a reliable shipping service. During the sixties private trading schooners and the Australian Steam Navigation Company had provided a very indifferent service. Cardwell had once been left so long unvisited that the town ran out of all rations except bread, and had to send a small boat to Townsville for provisions. Even the A.S.N. Company had the habit of forgetting to call at scheduled ports—Bowen was particularly sensitive about such neglect—and it was perhaps the threat of Northern merchants to patronize a competitor that forced the company into signing the contract of March 1870; stipulating a regular service for all ports to Cardwell during the
next five years. Further improvement was made after November 1873, when, following the Palmer rush and the opening of Cooktown, a new service was initiated linking the coastal line to an overseas run via Torres Strait to Singapore and London. Much of the increased traffic which justified this expansion was due to the gold discoveries in the interior, but the sugar industry also stood to benefit by improved communications. Yet for several years no attempt was made to follow up Dalrymple’s discoveries by bringing the lands north of the Herbert under cane.

The pioneers of this stretch of coast were to be the cedar-cutters, and before them the bêche-de-mer fishers, a rough, uncommunicative group whose rumoured (but unconfirmed) discoveries included Spanish wrecks and relics of Cook’s landing. Since the early years of settlement in Australia, fishers had intermittently cruised northern waters for trepang, as that sausage-shaped sea-slug was regarded as a delicacy by the Chinese, and formed a major item of the limited Australian trade with the Far East. The preparation and treatment of bêche-de-mer was a noisome business, but since it could be practised at fishing camps on an otherwise deserted coast, there were always seafaring men willing to enter this profitable pursuit. During the sixties Captain Towns had developed a modest trade from the Great Barrier Reef to meet the wants of the Chinese community in New South Wales. After languishing almost entirely around 1870, fishing revived with a rise in prices, and a trial shipment in 1874 led to a flourishing export trade with Hong Kong and China. By the end of the decade bêche-de-mer worth over £13,000 was shipped each year to this market. A fleet of over forty boats, representing a total capital of £11,700 invested almost entirely by ships’ masters and sharemen, operated from all the ports north of Townsville. Cooktown, where thirteen boats were estimated to employ 450 men (mainly non-European), was the headquarters of the industry. The fishing vessels ranged along the Barrier Reef and beyond to the Louisiades and other off-shore islands of New Guinea. Daring sailors, their masters had often a fund of information about the landing-places and native tribes of the Cape York Peninsula and the Coral Sea.7

Cedar-cutters had appeared on the scene after Dalrymple reported prolific stands of timber along much of the coast between Cardwell and Cooktown. From 1874 the Freshney brothers and other Cardwell timber-getters were working the
area between the Johnstone and the Tully. Activity chiefly centred, however, on the Mossman and Daintree Rivers, where a party led by one O'Grady felled 700,000 feet of timber between July and September 1874. Their success attracted other parties who laboured for several years, undeterred by marauding Aborigines, and apparently unaware that many experts had conclusively proved that it was physically impossible for white men to undertake continuous hard manual labour in the humid tropics. The local knowledge gathered by such men would guide the pioneer sugar-planters in their selection of lands. Indeed, their work in clearing the richest stands of cedar was an effective guide and rough preparation for what would become some of the best sugar-growing country. But for some years the sugar-planters were in no position to take advantage of the pioneering work of the timbermen.

During the wet seasons of 1874 and 1875 the sugar industry struck trouble. An outbreak of rust appeared in the cane crops, attacking in particular the easy-growing Bourbon variety that was the mainstay of many plantations. It was most severely felt in the area around Brisbane, where antiquated machinery, occasional frosts, reliance on coarse grade sugars, and competition from other crops were already discouraging the industry. Further north its effects were mitigated by the discovery that some varieties of cane, such as the Cherrabun and Rose Bamboo grown at Macknade on the Herbert River, were rust-resistant. The northern planters were quick to learn the lesson. At Mackay enterprising managers like McCready of Te Kowai estate had their Pacific Islanders scouring the stricken fields of Bourbon for stands of any other variety of cane which might have been accidentally introduced. The hasty switch to new cane varieties meant that eventually the North would become a museum of almost every variety of cane disease known to science, but for the present its ability to adapt enabled the district to weather the crisis.

Some few planters had to go out of business, mainly because the banks, hitherto almost too willing to pump capital into the sugar industry, had been thrown into a more stringent mood by the outbreak of rust. Depression seems to have been least marked at Mackay, where the number of mills in operation remained at sixteen, and only T. H. Fitzgerald among the prominent settlers had to submit to foreclosure. But on the Herbert two mills, Gairloch and Bemerside, had to close in 1876, and a third, erected
at an alleged cost of £60,000 by a young Englishman, W. B. Ingham,* was shut down for want of credit without having crushed at all. Even at the end of the decade the Herbert had not recovered its 1874 status of having 500 acres under cane. In contrast Mackay advanced steadily, and by 1879 accounted for 7,440 acres, rather more than two-fifths of Queensland’s sugar-growing area.

Mackay’s advance to pre-eminence as the ‘Sugaropolis’† of Queensland had one deeply significant consequence: it identified the district’s prosperity, as never before, with the maintenance of South Sea Island labour. Previously, when the centre of sugar-growing had been in southern Queensland, the North had not been the main coloured labour region in Australia. Only 502 of the colony’s 1,539 Pacific Islanders were recorded in North Queensland at the 1868 census, and of these less than half were in the sugar or cotton industries. Most of the rest were taking part in the short-lived experiment to use them as pastoral workers.8 During the next five years (1869–1873) the pattern was the same. North Queensland accounted for 702 of the Islanders brought to the colony, but over three thousand were landed elsewhere. Brisbane and Maryborough in southern Queensland were the main ports of entry. The situation changed when the Mackay canefields continued to extend while the rest of the industry was coping with the rust problem. By 1877 Mackay had become the destination for more Pacific Islanders than any other port, and retained this dubious distinction for all but one of the next seven years.

Right from the beginning the traffic in Islanders had its critics. Robert Herbert privately and others more openly described it as ‘kidnapping’,9 a word suggesting the use of fraud or force in recruiting. Often objections were on economic rather than humane grounds. The working men of Brisbane feared that these immigrants would undercut them in the labour market, and never grew to like them even though the development of the sugar industry created many new jobs. But those defending the system included so liberal-minded a man as Charles Lilley,‡ who believed

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*William Bairstow Ingham, born about 1850 of a landed family in Lincolnshire; came to Australia after graduating at Cambridge; sugar-planter on the Herbert 1874–6; exploring Trinity Bay 1876; ran local shipping service, Cairns-Smithfield 1876–7; then Government Agent in New Guinea until his death, Dec. 1878. (See p. 141)
†A term much favoured by contemporary journalists.
‡Born 1830; Premier 1868–70; Chief Justice 1872–93; died 1897.
that the civilized surroundings of Queensland were beneficial to the Kanaka labourers, and through them to the inhabitants of the South Pacific in general. Perhaps this was arguable after the 1868 Act had ensured some few of the benefits of civilization for such workers, by providing a minimum scale of wages and rations, and repatriation after serving three years.

Among the most persistent critics of the trade were the clergy, especially the nonconformist missionaries. Their views, indeed, were somewhat discredited after one or two of the more vocal had been caught exaggerating about conditions in Queensland; but they received weighty support from officers of the Royal Navy. Patrolling the Western Pacific, H.M.S. *Rosario* brought to light damning evidence about recruiting methods. ‘Blackbirders’, as those engaged in the labour trade were called, lied to the natives without conscience. Few carried interpreters (and so many different languages were spoken in the Western Pacific that one interpreter would have been of limited use); but on the strength of a little pantomime and pidgin English, blackbirders were prepared to aver that the Islanders understood fully their obligation to work on the canefields for three years. The pantomime had often been farcical: ‘a favourite device was to hold up two or three fingers and to imitate the cutting of cane and grass or the digging of yams. One gentleman with a sense of humour took a yam and bit it three times.’ Left with the impression that they were simply being invited on a short cruising holiday, to see the wonders of the white man’s island, the natives were often astonished on their arrival, and were found to require ‘breaking in’. Other blackbirders got recruits by impersonating missionaries and promising the gifts which these clergy usually brought. In reprisal, several genuine missionaries were murdered by natives, among them the Anglican Bishop of Melanesia.

Sometimes force and bloodshed were used to shanghai natives aboard. The worst cases seem to have involved ships recruiting for Fiji, Samoa, or other places where no government exercised effective control. A notorious affair concerned a Melbourne vessel, the *Carl*, with seventy natives for the Fiji plantations. After the Islanders had raised their voices in protest at being penned in the hold, Doctor Murray, the owner, lustily singing ‘Marching through Georgia’, led the crew in shooting down almost all the recruits and throwing the bodies overboard. The subsequent trial (at which Murray got off by turning Queen’s evidence) cast a good deal of odium on the employment of
Pacific Islanders in Queensland. However, the Australian labour trade fostered no such flagrant abuses—possibly because, as Ross Lewin argued from a long experience of blackbirding, it was not in their own interests to antagonize through sharp practices and violence the people of the islands where they hoped to recruit regularly. Under pressure from the British Government, Queensland in 1871 appointed government agents to sail with each recruiting ship and supervise the conditions of enlistment. This suited the planters, as it was now less likely that the traffic would be brought to an end because of abuses.

Before long the Islanders of the southern New Hebrides—Tanna, Eromango, Sandwich—had grown accustomed to the visits of blackbirding ships. Guns and ammunition were the benefits of civilization which compensated a tribe for the loss of its finest young men and—since the gunpowder was often of poor quality and soon exhausted—secured a welcome for those time-expired labourers who returned home with fresh supplies. Those New Hebrideans were among the best workers who could have been found anywhere in the Pacific Islands. The men of Tanna especially were of fine physique, capable of sustained manual labour, experienced clearers and gardeners, and much sought after. Because the older men who controlled kinship customs tended to monopolize the eligible women, the young bachelors of Tanna had fewer ties to keep them from travelling, and were already accustomed to the sort of communal barracks life to be found on many Queensland plantations. A number adjusted themselves so well to plantation life that they could not adapt to their old ways on returning home, and found it preferable to sign on for another three years, or even to remain permanently in Queensland. Ross Lewin had been right. Once the traffic had established itself, it was not, after all, in the least necessary to resort to violent methods of recruiting.

The journey across the Pacific, beating windward to Queensland over rough seas in a crowded and stuffy hold, was seldom pleasant for the Islanders, and in an average year eight or ten died in transit. But according to the Registrar-General for Queensland in 1880, the mortality rate on 'Polynesian' ships was not much more than half that on British migrant vessels, and only one-seventh the death rate on ships from Germany.* Once arrived in Queensland, the Islanders were seldom actively ill-treated.

*This may not be a particularly meaningful comparison, as the Pacific Islanders were almost all adult males, and the British and German migrants included many young
An entrance to the first mine in Charters Towers, the North Australian Mine

Mills's United Mine, Charters Towers

Both by courtesy of Mr R. Hurle
Kanakas at work and play, Goondi 1891
Inclined though the planters were to dismiss most criticism of the labour system as ill-informed sentimentalism, they did not condone the use of fraud and brutality by blackbirders; and when they took pains to convince inquirers that the Islanders were kindly treated, there was no need to convict them all of insincerity. The private letters of Captain Towns, for instance, show an unexpected concern for ‘the darkies’, even although it took the form of giving them mid-Victorian European clothes and a solid but monotonous diet of maize. There was, however, a tendency to assume that the wants of a simple Islander were few, and to provide accordingly.

Housing varied considerably. Of the more enlightened Mackay sugar-growers, Hewitt of Pleystowe housed his 135 employees in seven clean and well-constructed huts, and Hume Black of The Cedars, whose fifty-six workers all lived under one roof, had provided a central fireplace for warmth and heating. But other planters housed their Islanders in rough huts with thatched roofs and walls of slab or even bagging, and on several estates they were left to build themselves grass humpies, usually shared by several men from the same island. Inflammable, badly ventilated, seldom high enough to admit a man standing up, these humpies were generally condemned by inspectors in favour of substantial wooden communal barracks, preferably with a hospital and dispensary attached. But as late as 1880 only six of Mackay’s sixteen biggest plantations had reached this standard.

Minimum rations were defined by government regulation. Each Pacific Islander was to have daily one pound of beef or mutton (or two of fish), one pound of bread or flour, five ounces of sugar or molasses, and either two pounds of vegetables, eight ounces of maize meal, or four ounces of rice. On some plantations sweet potatoes were used a good deal, but otherwise their food was not very similar to the pork, yams and breadfruit to which they had been accustomed in the New Hebrides. Fish, another familiar food, the Mackay workers never had unless they caught it themselves (nor, for that matter, did their employers, as there was no professional fishing fleet along the North coast). Rice was unpopular and molasses more so, although the latter was often served to the Islanders, as a by-product for which the sugar mills could find no other use. Maize was a far commoner alternative than fresh vegetables. Most plantations found it a short-
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sighted policy to stint the labourers of food, and Pacific Islanders whose employers adhered to the government dietary scale would seldom have gone hungry, and their calorie intake would have been sufficient for their work. But except where fresh vegetables were regularly provided—which almost never happened—this diet would have been low in vitamins A and C and somewhat deficient in calcium. Since the meat provided plenty of protein, fat and iron, the Pacific Islanders were hardly worse off than the average Australian working man at this time in North Queensland.

The regulations also provided them each week with 1½ ounces of tobacco, two of salt, and four of soap, and once a year with two shirts, two pairs of trousers, a hat, and a pair of blankets. Some contended that these clothes gave insufficient protection against a climate ranging from quite chilly mornings to a humid midday heat in which all but a loincloth might be discarded. As W. O. Hodgkinson commented a few years later:

... the kanaka, removed from the equable temperature of his native isle, and subject to the violent alternations of Australia, fed on a strange diet, copious though it be, clothed, and changing from the close atmosphere of a grass hut to the chill morning dews of plantation field work, debarred from all but the most depraved sexual association, falls an easy victim to pulmonary and venereal disease, however anxious his employer may be to promote his physical welfare.

Even at this time it was noted that the death rate among Pacific Islanders was consistently higher than the Queensland average. A dysentery outbreak on the Herbert in 1871, and a fairly widespread epidemic of measles in 1875 were responsible for a number of deaths; and there are several allusions to new arrivals falling victim to chest and lung complaints. About venereal disease there is less evidence. In the New Hebrides—according to one reputable anthropologist—the natives were largely immunized by their habit of drinking kava, but of course they discontinued this in Queensland. As women formed less than four per cent of immigrants from the Pacific Islands during the seventies, the plantation workers may have formed undesirable associations, but there are very few references to this problem or to alcoholism until the eighties.

Despite everything, few observers suggested that the life of a plantation labourer was one of unrelieved misery. H. T. Easterby, the historian of the sugar industry, commented a little complacently:
The kanaka days, however, were not without their humorous side. The boys would have feasts and sham fights, showing great proficiency in throwing grass spears. If they were late in turning out in the mornings they would often get a kick from an irate boss or overseer, but they mostly bore it smilingly.18

All good fun, indeed. Sunday was by custom a holiday, when groups of Islanders visited town to gaze at the merchandise of the Mackay storekeepers, or took their guns and dogs to hunt in the bush; Ling Roth blamed the disappearance of Mackay’s fauna and bird life on the indiscriminate slaughter on these Sunday jaunts.19 Other ‘boys’ spent their Sabbath at the more seemly pastime of learning to read the Bible. A time of festivities for all was Christmas, which usually followed the end of the crushing season. A Herbert River report of 1878 describes a Christmas picnic given for Pacific Islanders on Macknade and Bemerside plantations, with races, athletics, chasing a greased pig, climbing the greasy pole, and other amusements culminating in an evening of fireworks.20

But the gala occasion was pay-day, when time-expired ‘boys’ received the accumulated earnings of three years at ten shillings a month. A Mackay paper of 1869 drew an approving picture:

A large variety of things—clothing, tools, tobacco, axes, tomahawks, etc. were displayed before their delighted faces, and they were informed by one of their late masters, Mr. J. E. Davidson, that they could purchase out of the wages due to them, £18 per man, whatever they required to take to their island homes, or get pay in current coin. Almost every laborer bought what seemed suitable, and none seemed to care about taking the whole of their wages in money. They received a very liberal treatment for all goods were sold to them at cost price, and several (those who had shown themselves the best workers) were allowed to increase their stock of articles to £2 and £3 over their pay.21

Cost price, it will be noted; the Mackay planters did not approve of those up-country squatters who were alleged to sell red coats and swords to their Pacific Islanders at 100 per cent profit. And by withholding their employees’ pay until their time was served, many planters saved them from the temptation of wasting their money on muskets and powder, like the shepherds who were paid once a month.22 Instead they were sent home to their native islands with a fine collection of possessions, which might attract others to accept a stint on the cane-fields.
By now it was an article of faith with the sugar-growers that Pacific Islanders were essential labour. So many aspects of plantation routine required hard manual toil. The preparation of ground for cultivation in some areas involved the clearing of a thick growth of tropical scrub; although along the Pioneer and the Herbert the main task seems to have been the firing of the dense native grasses, higher than a tall man, which lined the alluvial lands near the rivers, and testified the fitness of the area for sugar-cane. In either case, clearing was a job for the Pacific Islanders, as was the hoeing of the ground to receive the first cane sets. These operations took place in the cool months following the rainy season, between April and July. Twelve months later, when the cane had ‘arrowed’ in feathery heads, it was time for trashing and cutting. In those days cane was not burnt before harvesting, and trashing by hand was necessary to clear the cane of its lower leaves and extraneous weeds. This was counted among the hardest work, and was usually entrusted only to old hands among the Islanders, who had been given time to toughen up and acquire what one planter rather quaintly called ‘more the appearance of the sturdy Britisher.’

New arrivals were as a rule put to fairly light work, hoeing, weeding between the young plants, catching cane grubs, and making themselves useful around the crushing mill. Europeans were employed as engineers and skilled workers on the mills, and as overseers in the field.

It was in the interests of the planters to rebut allegations that a plantation economy closed the district to settlement by other white men, and they went to some pains to demonstrate the opportunities in the sugar industry for European employment. A return prepared by Hume Black,* when M.L.A. for Mackay, showed that in 1880 the sixteen working estates in Mackay paid £36,057 in wages to 428 Europeans, as well as employing 1,594 Pacific Islanders for £9,654. Between 1876 and 1881 the European population of the district increased from 2,479 to 3,700, the Pacific Islanders only from 1,334 to 2,081.24 And apart from direct employees the sugar mills were the mainstay of a number of storekeepers and tradesmen. Selectors, too, attempted the growing of maize to feed the plantations. But almost without exception

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*Born Edinburgh in 1835, a member of the publishing family, Maurice Hume Black emigrated to the gold-rush in Victoria 1852; on the land in South Australia, Riverina and Queensland; invented a steam-driven sheep-washing machine 1864; sugar-growing at Mackay from 1871; M.L.A. for Mackay 1880–93; Minister for Agriculture 1888–90; went to Western Australia and died there 1899.
the white inhabitants of Mackay and the Herbert would have agreed that Pacific Island labour was indispensable.

Proof of this assertion had apparently been furnished in the early seventies, at the time of the Carl affair and other scandals, when some planters anticipated a shortage of labour from the New Hebrides and sought to tap other sources. One planter in 1872 signed on a dozen immigrants, newly-arrived from Denmark and Germany, for labour in the canefields. Even the most willing of them soon proved unequal to the hard drudgery of the plantations, and sixteen years afterwards their example was still cited to show that white men could not do the work of Pacific Islanders.25 In 1874 northern members of parliament, led by T. H. Fitzgerald, attempted to invoke the Coolie Act of 1862 for the import of indentured Indians, but the move was blocked in the Legislative Assembly.26 At Mackay in the same year one man, G. F. Bridgman, sought to solve the labour problem by forming an Association for the Employment and Protection of Aborigines. The Mackay Aborigines by this time had been gathered into superintended camps. They were 'said to understand both the terms and period of an agreement, and faithfully to adhere to it, working diligently and giving their employees little trouble'.27 An inspecting committee of planters agreed that these Aborigines could work usefully during the crushing season, but added that only Bridgman's influence made them reliable; and most authorities agreed with Ewen Davidson that neither their physique nor their traditional way of life fitted them for anything except occasional light work, such as weeding.

Another possibility was exploded a year later in November 1875, when John Spiller, confronted with a labour shortage at harvesting time, brought forty Chinese from Cooktown to work on his Pioneer plantation at Mackay. In two months he had discharged them all as 'lazy and dishonest, trying every possible means to evade their work'.28 The Pacific Islands remained the one reliable source of labour. Busily the swift, graceful recruiting ships—the Lyttona, the Lady Darling, the Borough Belle and the rest of them—plied between Mackay and the New Hebrides, ceasing only for the summer monsoons. During 1874 and 1875 they extended their activities to the Solomons. Three hundred 'boys' were taken from this source, chiefly from Malaita and Guadalcanal, but the majority still came from the southern New Hebrides.

It was not for long that this traffic could remain outside the
realm of politics. A bubble of controversy was blown up in 1876 after a government official alleged ill-treatment of islanders on plantations at Maryborough, in southern Queensland. It was undeniable that the death rate of 'Polynesians' between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five in that district was over five times the Queensland average, but this was attributed to the cool winters there. A somewhat partial select committee in 1876 found little evidence of cruelty. But Maryborough was close enough to Brisbane to influence popular ideas about conditions on the plantations; and whether or not these particular allegations were false, the Pacific Islanders at Maryborough were not always well provided for, especially on some absentee-owned estates.

Moreover, many time-expired 'boys' were staying on around Maryborough and drifting into other trades, much to the indignation of over five hundred local working men, who in 1876 petitioned Parliament to '... relieve European labourers from the unjust competition in nearly every department of industry of natives of barbarous countries, who can never become permanent settlers or useful citizens of the colony'.

A Liberal administration under John Douglas* was moved to enforce stricter conditions of employment. Apart from the appointment of Inspectors of Polynesians, whose duty it was to inquire into and report on plantation conditions, little resulted. A proposal to restrict the employment of Pacific Islanders to tropical and semi-tropical cultivation within thirty miles of the coast was not carried until 1880, after the government had fallen. A regulation banning the sale of firearms to Islanders returning home was withdrawn in 1878 after protests from the planters about this 'interference'. From such interventions northern interests were delivered by the elections of 1878, which swept the Liberals from office and brought to power Thomas McIlwraith,† an empire-builder with a robust conscience. His personal interests included questionable speculations in Northern gold-mines, part-ownership of Dotswood, Woodstock, and

*Nephew of the fifth marquess of Queensberry; born 1828; educated Harrow and Durham University; arrived N.S.W. 1851; M.L.A. (N.S.W.) 1859–61 and (Qld.) 1863–9 and 1875–9; Postmaster-General 1866 and 1868–9; Colonial Treasurer 1866; Minister for Public Works 1867; Minister for Lands 1876–7; Premier 1877–9; Government Resident, Thursday Island 1885–1904; died 1904.

†Born Ayr, Scotland 1835; civil engineer; emigrated to Victoria 1854; came to Queensland 1862; M.L.A. 1868–86 and 1888–93; Minister for Works 1874; Premier 1879–83, 1888 and 1893; Minister without portfolio 1888–9; Treasurer 1890–3; Chief Secretary 1893–5; died 1900.
Inkerman stations, and deep involvement with the Queensland National Bank, the mainstay for so many mining companies and sugar plantations in North Queensland; and his ambitious public works programme and tolerance of coloured labour gained him the support of nearly all the Northern politicians. Under McIlwraith's genial régime, which coincided with a temporary rise in prices, the sugar industry looked a safe investment. The banks lifted the credit restrictions imposed during the outbreak of rust. The way was open for an unhampered traffic in Pacific Islanders, to develop and cultivate the virgin lands described by Dalrymple, and bring sugar planters to a peak of prosperity.

The plantation worked by coloured labour was now confirmed as the basis of the sugar industry, and at Mackay and on the Herbert a way of life was developing which has been compared to the southern states of America before the Civil War, and was at any rate unlike the social pattern elsewhere in Australia. Few of the men who owned or managed plantations in North Queensland were Australians by birth, and some had little personal knowledge of any other part of the continent. Often the planters were younger sons of good British families, accustomed to habits of command, who saw nothing inappropriate in bringing to Queensland the sort of indentured labour which had sustained the sugar industries of the West Indies, Mauritius, and Natal.

A little selfconsciously many of them tried to keep up a way of life that was 'gentlemanly'. Not that it was over-formal. An old inhabitant thus described the clothes they wore at race meetings:

I can't describe the ladies' dresses, but the men's were: Bosses, moleskin trousers and a blue Oxford shirt; working men wore moles and a crimson shirt. The only gentlemen with coats and hard-hitters were the card-sharpers who came from the south by the dozen.

But even these conventions gave scope to a dandy like Julius Tottenham,* whose well-trained Aboriginal valet turned him out a dashing figure, with a patch over one eye, spotless white moleskin trousers, shirt of specially selected white wool fitted with more than the usual number of pockets, and a wide-brimmed panama hat, but no coat; Tottenham's foible was to refuse wearing

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*Great-nephew of the second Marquess of Ely, and grandson of a bishop, Tottenham was born 1839; emigrated to Australia c. 1864 as jackaroo on Valley of Lagoons; sugar-planting at Cardwell with J. E. Davidson from 1865; later grazing cattle on the Herbert; died 1891.
a coat even for the Governor's visit to the Lower Herbert.35*

Plantation homesteads bespoke the gentlemanly ideal. Not for them the modern cane farmers' careful husbandry of every square yard, with tall green cane surrounding their modest bungalows to the very edge of the front lawn. The planters planned more spaciously, as may still be seen at surviving homesteads such as the one built for the Neames at Macknade, now the residence of the manager for Colonial Sugar. Such houses were approached by a drive, often through a tropical garden, Islander-tended, where butcher-birds, mynahs and small bright rosellas darted among the jacarandas. Dismounting from his horse, the visitor would be received on a cool, wide verandah, whose elevation caught every breath of passing air. Here he was made welcome to take his ease, to talk politics with his host over excellent rum, while, deftly inconspicuous in the background, the soft-footed New Hebridean house staff tidied about, prepared the serving of a meal, or—in those few estates where the manager was a married man—attended the children as nursemaids, to leave the hostess leisure for her guests.

Yet theirs was not an idle life, nor did the tropical environment sink them into apathy and inertia. Rather it seemed that a restless energy possessed many of the planters, an energy dissipated neither by the work of supervising a plantation, nor by a certain amount of hard drinking. They had to keep themselves constantly occupied, and their recreations were by no means uncultivated. They ranged the countryside, studying and classifying its botany and fauna; they climbed mountains, not as explorers, but simply (it would seem) for the exercise and the achievement. They encouraged the formation of reading rooms and debating societies, and were the most combative of politicians. The varied interests of a man like J. Ewen Davidson made him the discoverer of a comet and a new variety of plum tree. A pianist of some talent, he played accompaniments for pretty young women who sang, among them Mrs Charles Armstrong, who was married to the younger son of an Irish baronet, the engineer at Marian mill. It was Davidson who is said to have played Tosti's Good-bye for her, the evening that she left Mackay on the first step to becoming Madame Melba.36 Her boredom with Mackay at that time is understandable. Women were rather in the background in that

*The story goes on that Lord Normanby (the Governor) greeted Tottenham as an old school friend, but as Tottenham was twenty years younger this sounds improbable.
plantation society, with its energetic, boisterous masculine pastimes.

Self-confident, hospitable, careless of outside criticisms, and 'incredulous of Government promises', the North Queensland planters may have looked to superficial observers like incipient Southern gentlemen of the American type. In fact, they stood largely in the tradition of planter paternalism which appeared in many other parts of the British colonies. It was a tradition which took for granted the right of white men to exploit the cheap labour of more backward races, but laid on the employer the obligation of allowing his labourers some of the benefits of what was then sincerely believed to be a superior civilization. This tradition is perishing in our own day, and was even then felt to be unsuitable for Australia. But if the planters of Mackay and the Herbert failed to appreciate liberal and working-class feelings about coloured labour, on the whole they also avoided the ugly contempt for non-white races, which around that time marked parts of Australia, and not least inland North Queensland.

1Cooktown Courier, 11 Nov. 1876.
2Hume Black, M.L.A. for Mackay, was still arguing in this way in 1885: V. & P. 1885, II, p. 1001.
3Port Denison Times, 6 Aug. 1864, 11 June 1866, 9 June 1883.
4D. Jones, Cardwell Shire Story, Brisbane, 1961, pp. 110-12, 120-7; Cooktown Herald, 20 March 1874.
6V. & P. 1874, II, p. 655.
7Cooktown Herald, 2 Feb. 1881.
8See p. 39, supra.
9Robert Herbert to Walter Scott, 3 Oct. 1865 (Scott MSS.).
10See evidence proffered at the ‘Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the circumstances under which labourers have been introduced into Queensland from New Guinea and other islands’, V. & P. 1884, II, p. 797.
13Towns to Black, 2 June 1866 (Towns MSS.).
14V. & P. 1880, II, pp. 421 et seq.
15For the analysis of the nutritive value of the regulation diet for Pacific Islanders, I am indebted to Miss N. E. Kirk of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, Canberra.
17Tom Harrison, op. cit., pp. 279-80.
19H. Ling Roth, Port Mackay, Halifax, 1908, p. 81.
20Queenslander, 10 Jan. 1879.
21Quoted without reference in B. H. Molesworth, op. cit., p. 34.
22Queenslander, 22 July 1871.
Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the condition of the sugar industry in Queensland and to report upon the causes which have led to the present languishing condition of the industry throughout the colony, the best means to be adopted for reviving and maintaining its prosperity, and generally upon the production of tropical agriculture in Queensland (hereafter referred to as R.C. 1889), Qn. 3001: V. & P. 1889, IV, p. 37.

24 V. & P. 1881, I, p. 1121.

25 R.C. 1889, Qn. 5634.


27 V. & P. 1874, II, p. 697.

28 Port Denison Times, 19 Feb. 1876.

29 Select Committee on the General Question of South Sea Labour, V. & P. 1876, III, p. 51.


31 V. & P. 1876, III, p. 151.


33 Ling Roth (op. cit.) is full of examples. F. T. Amhurst, member for Mackay, was a brother of Lord Amherst of Hackney; Harold Finch-Hatton later became Earl of Winchilsea and Nottingham; others appearing in Burke’s Peerage or Burke’s Landed Gentry included Armstrong, Davidson, Macartney and Rawson at Mackay, and the Haig brothers, the Neame brothers, Ingham, and Tottenham on the Herbert River.

34 A. McClanachan in The Jubilee of Mackay, Mackay, 1912.

35 J. Alm in Herbert River Express, 18 Oct. 1932.

36 This story is common around Mackay, but it has been demolished by John Hetherington, Melba, Melbourne, 1966.

37 Courier (Brisbane), 22 Oct. 1881.
Squatters and Aborigines, 1870-90

Compared with the miners and the sugar growers, the pastoralists came to prosperity slowly and unspectacularly. Yet there could be no doubt that after 1870 they had turned a corner; not for a generation would prospects of ruin confront them. During the seventies, indeed, their main markets depended somewhat precariously on the permanence of the goldfields. But the mining camps and townships were so thriving and so widely distributed through North Queensland that until the end of the decade no station lacked ready access to a profitable market. As early as 1872 buyers from Ravenswood and Charters Towers were reported to be overwhelming the Lower Burdekin stations with demands for cattle, and those squatters who still retained a few thousand sheep found themselves making unexpected returns from the sale of mutton. The Palmer rush sent cattle prices to an average of £10 a head, and, almost before the wet season of 1874 was over, mobs of cattle from the more northerly properties were pioneering the stock routes to raw new mining camps, where butchers outtrivalled even the publicans in quick profits. The opening of the Hodgkinson, the revival of the Etheridge, the growth of the sugar industry and ports all created new demands.

The spread of squatting in North Queensland, checked since the 1866 slump, began anew. One or two stations, such as Bluff Downs and Nulla Nulla, changed hands in 1870, but it was a year or two later before demand was so strong as to force newcomers into unoccupied country. From 1872 a number of new cattle stations were formed west and south of Charters Towers, mostly by small resident owners such as Michael Miles and Alexander McDonald making a new start after losing out in the depression. A number of stations in these districts were investments by mining men seeking to diversify their interests—or perhaps there was a feeling that, in contrast to the fluctuations of the mining game, station-owning was a symbol that a man had arrived, and now enjoyed the status and stability of a stake in the country.
But the main trend of pastoral expansion was northward. Between 1873 and 1877 Greenvale, Cashmere and Gunnawarra stations were carved from outlying blocks of the Valley of Lagoons, and Kangaroo Hills and Christmas Creek were formed on its borders. Meanwhile Hann’s discoveries and the Palmer rush were attracting squatters to the country beyond. On the western side of the Peninsula the formation of Wrotham Park in 1873 was followed by the occupation of much of the Lower Mitchell, in several instances by pastoralists from the Bowen district. The Palmer rush attracted from 1874 several graziers hopeful of supplying the Maytown and Cooktown markets. Prospecting journeys by James Venture Mulligan in 1874 and 1875 drew attention to the lands on the Upper Mitchell, which were first occupied by James Fraser in 1876. The next year saw John Atherton* overlanding with his family to take up Emerald End, near the present town of Mareeba. His run included a tableland, then almost impenetrably scrub-covered, to which his name was given. Close on his heels came George Clarke, one of the discoverers of Charters Towers, to claim for Frank Stubley,† one of the new magnates of that golden city, much of what has since been known as the Evelyn Tableland. During the next three years there was a minor rush for country north and south of the Atherton Tableland.

By 1880 many stations in the longer-settled portions of North Queensland were becoming stocked to the limit of their capacity.¹ A number of runs between the Hodgkinson and the Mitchell were taken up by pastoralists looking for a second property on which to breed store cattle. Sometimes they overrated the value of this land of heavy summer rainfall and rapid run-off. The lush pastures of early April could become yellow and valueless by the following spring, and rain, when it did come, suddenly flooded the river frontages, carrying off some cattle and bogging others. Much of the country bordering the Tablelands was rough, with deep ravines and gorges, where only the most experienced stockmen could keep track of their herds. Poison-plant added to the troubles

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*Born Lancashire, England 1837; arrived Sydney with parents 1844; grazier Rockhampton district 1857, Mackay district 1863; took up Cashmere station 1875; Emerald End 1877; died 1913. Among his sons were William Atherton (1865–1949), founder of Chillagoe station 1887; and Ernest ("Paddy") Atherton (1879–1955), M.L.A. for Chillagoe and Minister for Mines 1929–32.

†A blacksmith; one of the original shareholders in the St Patrick, the first of the great Charters Towers mines; M.L.A. for Kennedy 1878–83; lost his money in unwise investments and died on the road to the Croydon rush early in 1887.
of some stations. Judith Wright’s moving account of her grandfather exemplifies the plight of several of those graziers who, after a few years of such conditions, had to muster the remnants of their herds and abandon their holdings.

For latecomers after land there remained beyond the Palmer and the Mitchell only the Cape York Peninsula. Patchy in quality, inadequately explored, far away from good markets, the Peninsula was inhabited by the tribes whose spearmen had hounded Kennedy, harassed the Jardines, and wounded, during the expedition of 1879, the geologist Logan Jack, a man noted for his kindly treatment of Aborigines. Right at the outset of the Palmer rush, early comers had noted...

... serious drawbacks arising from the presence of a copper-coloured race of natives who are fierce and warlike, very treacherous, and have no more fear of a bullet than a spear. They will show fight in the face of odds and seem to be perfectly indifferent to the chances of being shot.

Bad treatment had confirmed the Peninsula tribes in their hostility by the time the pastoralists arrived, and the conquest of the area was full of difficulties.

The squatters were men of great hardiness but little capital, like Pat Fox, who said his homestead consisted of whatever his packhorse could carry. They complied with the stocking regulations by droving the same mob of cattle to two or three different blocks of country, an old dodge that had been practised on the Burdekin twenty years before. On sparsely stocked and unimproved country these nomadic battlers held the land by a tenure scarcely more secure than that of the Aborigines themselves. Especially during dry seasons conflict was frequent, and cattle and horses were killed in some numbers. Two squatters in the Coen district were fatally speared, and as late as 1888 Watson of Merluna met his death during an attack on a neighbouring station. There were counter-measures of course, but the Aborigines were still unsubdued in some corners of the Peninsula at the turn of the century.

*Robert Logan Jack (1845–1921), a graduate of Edinburgh University, was assistant geologist, Scottish geological survey 1866; government geologist, Queensland 1877; two expeditions in Cape York Peninsula 1879–80; reported on many mining fields and promoted development of artesian boring; resigned 1899; expedition Korea and China 1900; returned to Australia 1904; frequently consulted by Western Australian government; published Northernmost Australia, a history of exploration.
In other districts, too, encroachment on Aboriginal hunting grounds led to the old cycle of misunderstanding, hostility, and reprisal. The dense forests between the Atherton Tableland and the coast hid the comings and goings of cattle-killers only too well. John Atherton estimated his average loss as a bullock a day for five years, and once or twice a spear was aimed at him. Several times the killing of a lone prospector was reported from the Mulgrave and Russell rivers. The one white man who seemed at home in that gloomy tangle of scrub was the solitary pathfinder, Christy Palmerston. He would slouch off into the rainforest in search of gold for months at a time, living unmolested with the Aborigines and sharing the same food. To other white men he was a mystery:

Some assert his mastery of the aboriginal language enabled him to scent out danger, and if a plot were hatching against him he could be relied upon to disperse the plotters. The most accepted theory, however, was that his reputation as an unfailling revolver shot, and his strict non-interference in the conjugal happiness of his dusky companions for the time being, were his greatest security. ... Though unquestionably a courageous and resolute man, Palmerston loved theatrical effect, and he was never happier than when, an arduous trip completed, he rode into Herberton all battered and torn, bootless with toes in stirrup, and followed by a ragged, half-naked troop of myalls, whose rolling eye-balls expressed the greatest mistrust of the civilisation to which their master was introducing them.

Few people found the Aborigines as amenable as Palmerston. Greatest notoriety of all attached to the inhabitants of the coastal scrub between the Tully and the Herbert. Their attacks on white settlers became so frequent that by 1872 the Resident Magistrate of Cardwell thought an attack on the port itself not unlikely. After the wreck of the Maria in that year, a punitive expedition with assistance from H.M.S. Basilisk did something to satisfy the settlers; but for several years afterwards the natives were scarcely less bold in raiding sugar plantations, maize farms, and homesteads. On one occasion they over-ran a becalmed bêche-de-mer ship, stripping the deck of everything movable while the crew sheltered below, with all hatches battened.

Greatly daring, the Reverend Edward Fuller attempted in 1874 to start a mission on Hinchinbrook Island. Contrary to expectations, he was not molested. His mission failed instead because the Aborigines refused to come near him. Settlers who tried
kindness were often less lucky. Several who tried to win over the Aborigines with gifts of cloth or tobacco suffered greatly from thefts. A few miles south of Cardwell, William Conn and his wife disregarded cynical friends, and encouraged the local tribe with frequent gifts. Nobody was surprised when in April 1875 a police party found the stripped and battered bodies of the Conns, killed while resisting a thieving party. The troopers pursued the natives, but, it was alleged, exacted vengeance mainly on the women and children, only two men of the tribe being shot.

Many white men were less patient. Carl Lumholtz,* a Norwegian anthropologist who spent ten months on the Herbert River in 1882-3, met one farmer who boasted that he cremated all the blacks whom he shot, in order to destroy evidence of his activities. This may merely have been a yarn to impress the foreigner, but on at least one occasion on the Tully River a considerable number of unaggressive natives were killed by a festive party of horsemen. On their side the natives were by no means cowed into a respect of white men, and most of the locals felt that Lumholtz was taking his life into his hands by living among them for several months. By the eighties killings had become less frequent, as efficient policing deterred both settler and native from racial warfare, but thefts continued to be a source of grievance for many years. The need for co-existence with the white men changed the character of the range tribes but slowly, and until 1914 some of the Aborigines between the Herbert and the Atherton Tableland maintained their traditional way of life in a form at least comparable with their ancestors'.

Change came most drastically for the Aborigines who found themselves close to the centres of white settlement. On the goldfields in particular, they often suffered considerable distress for want of their traditional sources of food. Deprived of their natural game and customary waterholes, the Hodgkinson Aborigines suffered from famine in the dry years from 1877 to 1879. So, too, on the Etheridge the drought of 1888–9 left the natives ‘very emaciated and in many instances starving’. If reduced to begging and stealing, the Aborigines soon excited the facile indignation of local editors:

*Born Norway 1851; anthropologist with the University of Christiana, by whom he was sent to Australia 1880–4; in Rockhampton, Mackay, and Lower Herbert districts; re-discovered tree kangaroo (Dendrolagus lumholtzii) first noted by Hann; in U.S.A. in later life; died 1922.
The ‘poor blacks’ have been amusing themselves in this town lately by indulging in nocturnal strolls and helping themselves to the goods of their white brethren. These objectionable niggers should be hunted out of the precincts of the town at sundown every evening, and if caught inside after dark they should be punished in a manner that would impress them...10

Probably the only municipality to impose a formal curfew on Aborigines was Cooktown, where in February 1885 they were banned from the town after dark. Here there were strong feelings against the natives, aroused partly by continued raids on the properties of neighbouring selectors, and tribal fights in the streets of the town itself. Strong emotions had also been stirred by the tragedy of Mary Watson. The young wife of a bêche-de-mer fisher, she had been alone with her infant son and two Chinese servants at their fishing station on Lizard Island when natives attacked and killed one servant. Mrs Watson, her baby, and Ah Sam managed to escape in an iron boiling-down tank to No. 5 Island of the Howick group, only to perish for want of water. Her remains, with a pathetic diary, were found in January 1882, and a monument was erected to her in the main street of Cooktown. Meanwhile an enthusiastic punitive expedition had dealt with a group who were almost certainly the wrong Aborigines. Cooktown in consequence took a jaundiced view of the natives; but their lot was scarcely happier even in a comparatively tolerant town such as Bowen. There the Bumburra soon got into the way of hanging around the streets begging for clothes, food, and liquor, until after repeated accusations of stealing they were shifted to a camp on the outskirts of town among the mosquitoes and sandflies. By 1900 only 200 could be found in the entire surrounding neighbourhood to take part in the last recorded corroboree.11 For the most part in North Queensland towns Aborigines received little attention from the white community, except the charity of an occasional parson and the official issue of government blankets every year for the Queen’s birthday. Small comforts for ‘a dying race’.

Matters went differently for the Aborigines among the pastoral properties west of the coastal range. After ten years of settlement the Burdekin squatters had an effective mastery of the local tribes. It was less easy for Aborigines to attack a cattleman’s homestead than a shepherd’s hut, and after 1870 very few, if any, white men lost their lives, although stock-killing and thefts continued for some years to be a problem in newly-settled areas. Tribes recon-
Squatters and Aborigines, 1870–90

ciled to the presence of the white men were by degrees permitted to visit station homesteads, at first always in the presence of the owner or manager. Mutual trust was slow to develop as the standards required of the natives were not high:

To know that they will be killed if they murder a white man, to be fond of wearing the garments and ornaments of white people, and to smoke tobacco, is all that is required in order to be styled ‘civilised’ among the Australian blacks, though sometimes they do learn a little more than that.12

Few were as systematic in winning the confidence of natives as Robert Christison of Lammermoor. Having captured one young man from the local tribe, Christison detained him at his homestead until each could understand the other’s language, after which the Aborigine became an emissary to his people, explaining that portion of the run would be open to them as hunting-grounds so long as they speared no sheep or horses. A policy combining kindness and firmness apparently worked. Christison was not troubled by native depredations, and the Aborigines were protected from indiscriminate attack by white men.13

On many properties assimilation took some time. In 1872 Walter Scott of Valley of Lagoons was distastefully observing the habits of his station natives; they were, he thought, subhuman, with less capacity for feeling pain and pleasure than other races. As example he cited their lack of concern when a four-year-old child chopped off his younger brother’s head with the family hatchet. ‘My word’, was the father’s comment, ‘Sharp boy that; make boodgerry* policeman by and by.’14 The sterner punishment of flogging was reserved for the young miscreant who ate Scott’s pet possum. Two years later Scott wrote that none of the neighbouring stations would allow natives near their homesteads, because cattle were so often disturbed and chased. His experience seems to have been unlucky. Maryvale station had earlier been the scene of many raids from the basalt country, but by this time William Hann and his wife were on good enough terms with the Aborigines to be invited to a corroboree staged by three hundred:

They had a great night and the next day Mr. Hann killed an old bullock for them. They took it to their camp, threw huge junks on the fire, and as soon as it was partly cooked and cool enough to handle,

*Good.
tore it to pieces with their teeth and gorged themselves till they could
only lie on the ground and groan, and rub portions of their body with
fat... That was about the last occasion when a very large mob of blacks
came to the station at one time, and gradually they became less and
less until at last only a few old ones ever came in.¹⁵

Soon they made themselves useful. From the outset of settle-
ment several squatters had relied a good deal on the bush lore
and faithful service of civilized Aborigines from Southern
Queensland and New South Wales, and after a while these were
reinforced by recruits from pacified tribes in the neighbourhood
of their stations. The men often took keenly to stockmen’s work
because they enjoyed riding, and the women proved useful as
unskilled domestic help, and as solace for bachelor station hands.
Between 1871 and 1874 Chatfield of Natal Downs, one of the last
stations to graze sheep, employed Aborigines for sheep washing,
shepherding and lambing, and reported them ‘quite equal to
white men’.¹⁶ The Palmer rush of 1873–4, while it created a
good market for the squatters, also left them with an acute
labour shortage as station hands deserted for the goldfields.
Then it was that a man such as Fulford of Lyndhurst, who had
taken the trouble to get on good terms with the Aborigines,
was able to find labour for mustering and drafting at a time
when his neighbours’ cattle were running wild for want of
stockmen. Other pastoralists turned to Aboriginal labour, a
tendency accelerated after 1880, when the Queensland Govern-
ment forbade the employment of Pacific Islanders on properties
more than thirty miles from the coast. Not many stations had
used Islanders in any number, but several Burdekin squatters
employed a few for gardening or other useful tasks around the
homestead and stables. Although only eleven remained in the
Kennedy district at the census of 1881, these hard-working
Islanders were still to be found on one or two properties until
well within the memory of men not yet old. Content with a
hut, an Aboriginal wife and a small regular wage, such Islanders
shared with their employers a mutual respect, and even affection,
joined with an unquestioning acceptance of the difference in the
lot to which each had been called.

The taming of the Aborigines did not end the squatters’
problems. As the tribes dwindled, their hiding-places among the
basalt ridges became the resort of marauders of a different kind.
Cattle-duffing had gone on almost as long as there had been cattle
stations in Queensland, and many had come to regard it as a
trifling offence. In 1871 a sympathetic jury empanelled at Roma, in the face of clear evidence, had acquitted the bold rider who smuggled a mob of Mount Cornish cattle across some of Australia's harshest desert to market at Adelaide. As a result of this case Roma was struck off the assize circuit, and a Brands Act was passed introducing an improved system of registering stock. This did not answer immediately, and during the seventies cattle-duffing spread to the Burdekin, encouraged by the appearance of numerous mining camps where stock could be quickly disposed of. In 1876, partly as a result of happenings on the Burdekin, the Chief Inspector of Stock was lamenting as 'a most demoralising tendency on many young men reared in the bush', that 'in more than one district, men of known doubtful reputation are, in several instances, employed to muster unbranded stock and remunerated at a rate per head on all unbranded calves run into the yards'.

By 1879 squatters around Charters Towers were stirred into independent action. Twenty-seven stations combined to offer a reward of £200, later increased to £300, for the capture and conviction of cattle thieves. The next year a recently bankrupt squatter and a butcher were convicted of trafficking in stolen stock, and duffing fell off. By January 1882 the _Towers Herald_ could assert that the district was 'freer from the crime of cattle-stealing than any other in the colony'. Despite this optimism, in 1883 a judge found it necessary to sentence a Charters Towers horse-thief to ten years' gaol, as a deterrent to others; and travellers on Robert Christison's property were greeted by a notice reading: 'Anyone found fooling about Lammermoor station disturbing cattle or horses without permission, look out for trouble'. For many years cattle thieves continued to be a sporadic nuisance to some pastoralists.

For many stations the difficult years were now over. During the seventies a run of fair seasons had enabled cattlemen to build up their herds, until by 1880 North Queensland cattle numbers were estimated at 450,009—almost three times the 1874 figure. The next four years were seasons of rapid increase, especially in the Etheridge and Charters Towers districts. In 1884 North Queensland pastured 740,953. Dry years in 1884–5 and 1888–9 slowed the rate of growth, but in the five years after 1889 numbers bred up quickly. The established cattle districts continued to expand, and the sparsely stocked pastures of the Hodgkinson and the Mitchell filled up rapidly with the passing of the
Aborigine problem. In 1894 numbers reached 1,390,899, a peak which has never been exceeded; nor has the region bettered its record of pasturing in that year, 19.8 per cent of all Queensland cattle, or nearly one in five. (In 1875 the proportion had been little more than one in nine.)

On many stations an increase in quality followed growth in quantity. After the profitable seasons of the late seventies pastoralists had the opportunity to start sub-dividing their holdings into paddocks and go into systematic herd improvement. Most North Queensland cattle runs had been stocked originally with Shorthorns, but in many areas experience suggested that this was not the most suitable breed. On the Clarke River and other western tributaries of the Burdekin, several graziers, among whom White of Bluff Downs was prominent, chose to develop a cross-bred herd, reinforcing the good beef qualities of the Shorthorn with the greater hardiness and activity of the Devon. On the good grasses of the basalt country the Devon-Shorthorn cross thrived well, but some pastoralists contended that they were less suited to the more rugged country west and south.

From 1871 Fulford of Lyndhurst became well known as a successful Hereford breeder, and from this herd other stations such as Lammermoor, Oak Park, and Wando Vale purchased the stud stock which founded some of North Queensland's most consistent herds of beef cattle. The Hereford owners claimed that their beasts would travel further from watering points in search of feed, and build up condition more rapidly than other breeds. Between these men and the Devon-Shorthorn fanciers a keen rivalry existed, although on balance the Hereford owners seem to have taken more prizes at local shows. Most squatters found it preferable to improve the quality of their herds by systematic culling, rather than by the introduction of blood stock from the United Kingdom, or the southern colonies of Australia, which was often risky because stud animals were slow to adapt to tropical conditions. This threw considerable responsibility on the knowledge and care of station managers, as unculled herds without new blood were apt to deteriorate through inbreeding. By 1890 herd quality varied a good deal among North Queensland stations, according to the continuity and efficiency of management.

Successful improvement policies depended on stable marketing conditions. During the seventies the squatters were well placed. As well as in the mining towns, they had at least as early as 1872
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an outlet with the sugar plantations of the Herbert and Mackay. As cattle numbers grew, however, prices receded from the £7–£10 level of 1872 and 1873. By the end of the decade some goldfields markets were glutted with beef. A squatter like Anning of Reedy Springs could travel five months about the Palmer, nearly meeting his death of fever, before he could dispose of a mob at £3 a head. This recession may only have been local and temporary. Store cattle for stocking the new country beyond the Palmer fetched between £2 10s. and £3, and in hard years fat cattle prices were sometimes at £5 or more. Even at this price, in the dry year 1884 a Charters Towers butcher found only two stations within two hundred miles able to supply 300 head of fat cattle—by which he meant cattle averaging seven hundred-weight. In good seasons, however, despite an expanding population the local demand could not absorb all the stock available. Several squatters established themselves in this competitive market by setting up their own butcheries. Others took a financial interest in a local tradesman, who would feel obliged to give their stock priority; sometimes the process was reversed, and a prosperous butcher or storekeeper would turn grazier; but there was not room for everyone. Increasingly it became apparent that new markets must be sought outside North Queensland.

In 1880 a Townsville company, including several local graziers among its shareholders, opened a boiling-down works for the disposal of surplus stock. Like Captain Towns’s venture before it, this concern lasted five seasons, treating some twenty thousand cattle from a radius of 500 miles.21 It closed after the 1884 drought. Meanwhile a more original approach to the marketing problem was shown by Robert Christison of Lammermoor. Impressed during a visit to England by the success of an Australian firm in exporting a cargo of mutton by the new freezing process, Christison interested a group of British capitalists in floating a company to establish freezing works in North Queensland. A site was selected at Poole Island, off Bowen, and by dint of Scottish perseverance Christison persuaded local pastoralists to take 15,000 shares in the company, and to enter into contracts for providing 6,000 cattle annually for five years. By October 1883 the works were ready. During the first three months of operations 3,250 cattle were purchased for freezing at between £4 and £6 a head. Bowen was an unlucky place, however. In January 1884 the works were ruined by the most destructive cyclone for many years. Although plans for reconstruction were
under consideration for several years, no capital could be found for the ill-starred venture; and once more Bowen languished.

None of the Northern ports had facilities for shipping livestock. Cardwell had a long enough jetty, completed in 1876; but the track over the Seaview Range was too difficult to be used as a stock route by any but the most skilled drovers. When a cyclone destroyed part of the jetty it was not considered worth while to re-build it. Townsville and Bowen were both too shallow. Sea-going ships were obliged to anchor a mile off-shore, and goods and passengers were freighted to and from the port in lighters. When the tide was out at Townsville, the jetty was separated from anchored shipping by a waste of ooze, in which cattle would have been bogged at once. Port Molle, south of Bowen, was an undeveloped harbour with a good deepwater anchorage. It had been overlooked in the past, as the landward approaches were thought too steep for a good road. Convinced otherwise, local squatters invited the Chief Inspector of Stock for Queensland to inspect Port Molle in 1883. He was sufficiently interested to recommend a survey, but no action followed. Lacking facilities to ship cattle to southern markets, North Queensland pastoralists then fell back on overlanding.

During the early eighties many cattle properties in the south of Queensland and New South Wales were changing over to sheep, and this gave North Queensland cattlemen a chance to enter southern markets. Between 1885 and 1895 it became not uncommon for a mob of cattle, great, heavy beasts five, six or seven years old bearing the brand of some distant property on the Burdekin or the Etheridge, to arrive, after six or seven months on the road, at the railhead marketing centres of New South Wales and Victoria, a thousand miles or more south. The stations north from the Upper Burdekin were winning a reputation as breeding country that has lasted to this day, and has dominated the character of North Queensland cattle-raising; the coastal country, which might have made the best fattening area, was in many places taken over by the sugar industry.

Soon the traffic in store cattle became sizeable. Valley of Lagoons, a station with between twelve and thirteen thousand head of cattle, sent south a draft of about one thousand stores each year between 1887 and 1892. The returns were low. In successive years the Muswellbrook prices for such a mob were 24s. 6d. and 22s. 6d. a head, and since the Valley had already tried the markets at Bourke and Wodonga, it must be presumed
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that these were the best returns offering. But many squatters entered this trade, and by 1890 mobs of between two and three thousand at a time were being walked from the Upper Burdekin to Wodonga for the Melbourne market. In that year A. J. Cotton, an enterprising young drover, took five contracts simultaneously to deliver a total of 7,600 cattle from North Queensland to Brisbane and New South Wales.22

The droving of these large mobs seven or eight miles a day without undue loss of condition called for considerable skill and patience: how to control the spread of a grazing mob, how to check them while approaching water, how to prevent the restiveness of one beast from upsetting the others, and many other pieces of outback lore could only be learnt thoroughly from following the cattle through the long, slow, dusty stages of the southward stock routes. The Queensland overlanders found their way into the literature of the time, personifying as they did a tradition which had departed from much of New South Wales and Victoria. Several of Banjo Paterson's best-known characters—Saltbush Bill, Clancy, the 'swarthy Queensland drovers who reckoned all land by miles'23—got their experience in cattle 'up North'. More practically, the North Queenslanders regarded a year or two overlanding as a useful qualification in the education of a station manager.

The cattle stations had by now fallen into a cycle of routine that changed little from year to year. At the easing of the rains in April the stockmen saddled up to muster bullocks for the road south, while their condition was still topped up by summer fodder, and while there was still feed to be had along the stock routes. Then came the branding of the new season's calves, an operation which often went on late into the year, as long as feed and water lasted. In very bad years, when the young cattle were weak and dying, there could be little branding; but such years were infrequent. By the end of June, when light ground frosts sometimes formed on the tablelands, and a bitter little wind from inland took the edge off the constant sunshine, the hardest mustering might be over. Then it was that all hands took a week off for the picnic race meetings, sometimes going as far as Charters Towers or Townsville, but more often favouring one of the well-known station racecourses, Oak Park or Wyandotte, where the local squattting family kept apparently inexhaustible open house. For many miles around visitors came, sleeping in their swags or under canvas in the short intervals that could be spared from talking
horses, talking stock, talking seasons, arguing, drinking, dancing to fiddle and concertina, and making holiday in a full-blooded manner which has left its mark on modern traditions.

By the eighties Charters Towers and Townsville each put on a pastoral and agricultural show at this time of the year, at which the exhibition riding and cattle judging provoked keen rivalry. In Charters Towers the body responsible for these shows was known as the 'Mining, Pastoral and Agricultural Association', for in North Queensland there was at this time very little rivalry between miners and squatters. The lengthy speeches with which the annual show banquet concluded are full of references to the good relations between the two industries; nor was this simply the rosy vision of after-dinner speakers. Even Macrossan in his most outspoken days as a demagogue differentiated between the hard-working resident pastoralists of the North and the land hungry 'cormorants' of the Darling Downs. In fact, so many miners and mine-owners turned grazier, and so many pastoralists dabbled in mining investments that it was impossible to separate the two interests. The miners had no urge to turn agriculturalist, and there was no lack of second-class grazing country for the hardy and enterprising, so that controversies over land did not arise to sour relations between miners and pastoralists.

After the excitements of their week in town or at the races, the station people returned to their constant round of tasks. By August the pastures would have lost much of their nutriment, and a time followed of shifting stock between the remaining feed and water, or, if the season was favourable, of drafting a second mob for the boiling-down works or the local market. Towards the end of the year the bullock teams from Townsville or Bowen laboured up to the homesteads with six months' provisions for the summer. There was often a formidable accumulation. A list surviving from the Valley of Lagoons includes 2½ tons of flour, one ton of salt, one and a quarter of sugar, four boxes of candles and one of Pears soap, three half-chests of Ceylon tea, six mats of rice, eight caddies of Derby tobacco, ten pounds each of currants and raisins, besides tools and saddlery requirements. Once the first storms of the new year heralded the approach of the wet season, men travelled as little as possible, for flooded creeks and rivers were always a hazard, and the blacksoil plains in some areas were extremely unpleasant going. Summer was the time for repairs and jobs around the homestead, or for the richer squatters to go south with their families.
Gradually between 1870 and 1890 most of the Northern graziers achieved, if not prosperity, a modest standard of comfort. One or two of the old bark huts survived on bachelor properties, but the usual type of homestead was represented by Gunnawarra, 'a comfortable house with slab walls and floors and a very large stone and antbed fireplace'. On many stations the initiative for improving and civilizing living standards came with the squatter’s wife. Mrs John Fulford, who came in March 1871 to join her husband, manager for H. F. Smith at Lyndhurst station, found much to do:

The station building was a four-roomed house, built of slabs of long timber and the roof covered with bark. It had a ground floor and a verandah in front, which was used by the menfolk to keep their riding saddles under, a large wooden peg was driven into the wall for each saddle and a rail for the pack saddles. The windows were just rough wooden shutters and the doors rough slabs with no locks. The bed in my room was made of saplings, and resembled nothing so much as a gridiron, but it had one redeeming feature, a hair mattress. My bedroom was next to the store room and all through the night there was a constant procession of sugar ants across it. The crowning glory of the room was a porcelain jug and basin which Mr. Smith had brought from Craigie. It sat in state on a box which was my home-made washstand, but alas, its splendour was short-lived. A fractious horse with evil intentions kicked a slab out of the wall, as the timber was very much white-ant eaten and smashed my precious jug and basin to fragments. When I was settled I set to work to make the house more comfortable. I lined the walls with calico tents that were not good enough for camping out and papered it with pictures out of the "Illustrated London News", a stack of which Mr Smith had left there. I then made furniture out of packing cases and upholstered some seats and even made cots for the children afterwards out of large cases.

Here the Fulfords lived for ten years, rearing six children; then times were easy enough to allow the construction of a new homestead of timber sawn on the property. Eventually John Fulford was able to buy a station of his own, and founded a respected North Queensland family.

This story of steady achievement could be paralleled on many properties. William Hann of Maryvale, hard-pressed financially during the sixties, could afford by the eighties to dabble in mining investment, hold a sleeping partnership in a substantial Townsville hotel, give £1,000 to the building of an Anglican cathedral,
and introduce from Ceylon in 1886 the axis deer that still run in the neighbourhood of Maryvale station.27 William Aplin,* a Townsville merchant turned squatter, made his homestead at Southwick a centre of hospitality, with a piano for music and dancing, an ant-bed tennis court, and two or three rowing boats on the station lagoon. Christison of Lammermoor was one of several pastoralists who by the eighties were at last able to re-visit the British Isles which they left over a quarter of a century before.

Nor was this prosperity confined to old established pioneers. In 1884 Henry Hurle, an English gold-miner, married and tired of rambling, invested a small legacy in forming a cattle property at Mount Windsor, west of Charters Towers. It was a small venture: seven hundred cattle in 1885, and not quite one thousand by 1890. Between 1887 and 1890 his average income was £637, his normal annual expenditure £555, a profit representing less than half the usual wages for a working miner at Charters Towers. His money was made by selling a few cattle to local butchers —except in the drought year 1888, when he was obliged to sell one-third of his herd at the best price available, in order to conserve feed for the rest—but he supplemented his income by the manufacture and sale of butter. By 1890 he felt sufficiently well established to spend £468 on fencing, and from then on, despite droughts and other setbacks, his run prospered until, grown old, he and his wife could afford a trip to England, where he was encouraged to tell intending migrants of his achievement:

Our herd of over fifteen hundred cattle, besides horses and pigs that we count by the hundred, have a run wide enough to satisfy all their needs, and we have sunk wells deep and numerous that will prevent our being in the same disastrous plight again, come what droughts and famine there may.28

Such were the pastoralists' rewards; but their hardships were many. Although the ‘fever and ague’, which assailed many pioneer families during the first decade of settlement, in time diminished, other ailments—scurvy and ‘Belyando rot’—were prevalent because of an unbalanced diet lacking fruit and green vegetables. After the Palmer gold-rush many stations secured a Chinese cook and vegetable gardener, and ate better in con-

*Born Somerset, England 1840; emigrated to Brisbane 1862; with W. V. Brown founded store and agency business, Townsville 1865; retired 1880 after purchasing Southwick station; first chairman Thuringowa divisional board, also on Dalrymple board; M.L.C. from Oct. 1880 until his death in Feb. 1901.
sequence. Ill-health and injury were always calamitous. If well enough to travel, a patient faced a slow journey by buggy, with night camping, until the nearest town was reached; if not, everything depended on the nursing and remedies that could be provided on the spot. These were not always adequate for men hurt in a fall from a horse, for women in childbirth, for small children with 'sunstroke', 'convulsions' and the other ill-defined complaints of the young.

There were also psychological hardships. The more remote areas, with the constant pressure of loneliness, monotony, and hard climatic conditions, could drive men to alcohol and occasionally to suicide. Most station people were well aware of the danger of 'letting themselves go'. This need to remain masters of their environment underlay both their capacity for noisy and violent enjoyment when they had time to relax, and their surprising formality on other occasions. A squatter was expected to be approachable and hospitable to all comers, and usually was glad to be so; but a traveller's reception depended on first impressions. A Brisbane journalist touring the Burdekin stations in the early nineties observed:

As a man is generally judged by appearances, an owner knows at a glance whether you are an 'inside' or a 'kitchen' visitor... Always, although you are away from civilisation and may not for hours see a human being, dress as cleanly and decently as possible. A horseman well dressed, with good horses and decent equipment, will generally impress the station people well, and be asked to take a seat at the dinner table.29

This distinction arose not so much from snobbery, as from a desire to see each guest in the surroundings where he would be most comfortable. There are still North Queensland stations where this advice holds good. A station where people neglected to dress neatly at dinner-time—and it is the boss and his wife who must set the pattern—would probably be slovenly in other respects. Not a few pastoralists also made a point of keeping up their reading when time permitted. When the Curr family shifted from the Ravenswood area to Abingdon, on the edge of the Gulf country, they took with them a library of 500 books, including Southey's Life of Nelson, Cook's Voyages, and many accounts of exploration in Africa. Robert Christison's taste, formed in a Scottish manse, inclined him to the Bible, Shakespeare, and Goulburn's Personal Religion, with Pickwick Papers, Macaulay's
Essays and diaries of Australian explorers for secular relief. Others were content to leave culture to their wives and daughters, but few would have maintained that books and music were out of place in a station homestead.

So by 1890 the Australian pastoral tradition was firmly established in the Queensland tropics, virtually unaltered by distance or climate. Once the unsuitability of the area for sheep had been recognized, it had not been necessary to resort to coloured labour for the Northern pastoral industry. The hazards of pioneering, although considerable, were no harsher than they had been in other parts of inland Australia. The man who attempted to understand his environment and persevered in his endeavour could hope to build up a successful property, especially in the fair economic conditions prevailing in Australia during the seventies and eighties. Even the growth of trade unionism and the threat of disturbances in the wool industry gave the cattlemen of North Queensland little cause for uneasiness as yet.

It must have seemed in 1890 that North Queensland had gone a considerable way to fulfilling the hopes of its pastoral pioneers, in becoming the support of a flourishing community of resident owners. Though the wealth and population of North Queensland were chiefly derived from the mining and sugar industries, the pastoralists could claim to have made productive a wide region which would otherwise have remained a mere hunting ground for Aborigines. Some there were who regretted that the white man's penetration of the country had caused such hostility and wrought such destruction among the natives. Most authorities agreed, however, that the Aborigines were a dying race. They were to be clothed and fed, and might make themselves useful around the stations to the best of their ability—so limited in most respects, so remarkable when their powers of observation or memory were called into play. Their children and the station children might join in each other's games whole-heartedly, until they reached the age of selfconsciousness. But as the world evolved, an 'inferior' race had to give way to those who were better able to develop the land and its resources; such was the thought of the times, and in truth the Aborigines who lived under the paternalism of a North Queensland cattle station were not, in 1890, the least fortunate of their race.

See V. & P. 1879, 2nd session, II, p. 999: 'Stock Depastured on Runs in Settled Districts'. From this it appears that such established stations in the Bowen district as Salisbury Plains, Inkerman and Woodhouse pastured an average of 7,300
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cattle in 1875 and 9,200 in 1879, around which figure numbers were tending to level out.

2Judith Wright, *The Generations of Men*, Melbourne, 1959, esp. Ch. 9. Albert Wright’s diaries between 1878 and 1883 are at the University of New England Library, Armidale, N.S.W.

3Queenslander, 29 Nov. 1873.


5Interview in *Walsh and Tinaroo Miner*, 24 Dec. 1907. (Copy in possession of Mrs A. E. V. Trappes-Lomax, Edmonton, Qld.)

6Northern Miner, 16 Feb. 1897.

7Dorothy Jones, *The History of Cardwell Shire*, Brisbane, 1961, Ch. xx.


9V. & P. 1889, III, p. 481.

10Towers Herald, 1 March 1882.

11P. R. Delamothe, *Bowen’s First Hundred Years*, Bowen, 1959, ch. I.

12Carl Lumholtz, op. cit., p. 76.


14Walter Scott to his mother, 29 May 1872; and Walter Scott to Arthur Scott, 22 May 1874 (Scott MSS.).


16Queenslander, 27 June 1874: M. M. Bennett, op. cit., p. 95.

17V. & P. 1877, II, p. 1013.

18Towers Herald, 18 Jan. 1882.

19Ibid., 2 May and 15 Sept. 1883.

20On 31 March 1958 there were 1,027,680 cattle in North Queensland (including 74,021 dairy cattle) as against 7,187,195 in the whole State (including 1,269,969 dairy cattle); a proportion of about one in seven, or one in six counting beef cattle only.

21In 1880, 2,431; 1881, 5,573; 1882, 1,838; 1883, 5,327; 1884, 4,993: total, 20,162.


24Manager, Valley of Lagoons, to Burns, Philp & Co., Townsville, 15 Oct. 1902 (Valley of Lagoons MSS.).

25Mrs E. Harte (nee Atherton) to Mrs A. E. V. Trappes-Lomax, 28 March 1958 (Atherton MSS.).

26Quoted in J. Black, op. cit., p. 45.

27Maryvale MSS.

28J. Black, op. cit., pp. 53-4. Mr Hurle’s diaries, 1885–90, are held by his son, Mr R. E. Hurle, Charters Towers.

29Queenslander, 23 Nov. 1895.
While the pastoralists consolidated their modest prosperity, the mining men continued to look for richer prizes and new opportunities. By the close of the seventies the major alluvial deposits had been thoroughly worked over, and only the patient Chinese fossickers looked for reward in the threadbare gullies. There were few fresh discoveries during the eighties. Two or three pockets of alluvial were found on headwaters of the Russell and the Johnstone, among the tangled rain-forest between the Atherton Tableland and the coast, but none of these finds was important. North Queensland mining was to proceed along two fresh lines of development. Gold would be sought by deep-reefing, at first tentatively and slowly, later with the mounting excitement of a speculative boom. The prospectors would diversify their interests by turning to tin, silver, lead, copper, and any other base metals which offered the independent operator of small means a chance to make his pile.

Overshadowing all other North Queensland mining centres, Charters Towers went from strength to strength during the eighties. Easy access to Townsville saved the Towers from many of the problems of high costs and dear freights which retarded the Palmer and the Etheridge. Though its yields surpassed the Palmer only in 1880, and still stood second to Bendigo among Australian goldfields, production was hearteningly consistent; between 1878 and 1883 it never varied by more than 10 per cent from an annual average of 62,500 ounces. Despite these advantages, mining methods were scarcely more advanced at Charters Towers in 1880 than anywhere else in North Queensland. Reefing was usually financed by small co-operative groups of working miners or local businessmen. The same system had been developed to grubstake prospecting expeditions or to finance reefing propositions on newly discovered fields where the lines of ore were not yet properly explored; thus many of the early claims on the Hodgkinson had been backed by parties of Charters Towers miners.
As a means of developing permanent reefing claims its limitations were obvious. Mine-owners were tempted to spend as little as possible on working and development, and to gouge out the richest patches of ore without regard for future exploitation. Few could afford their own crushing machinery, and most were dependent on a small group of mill-owners who gave priority for treatment to claims in which they themselves held an interest. These mill-owners looked after themselves well. They laid claim to the pickings of gold dust left over in stamper boxes and their machinery. When the pyrites method of extraction was introduced to Charters Towers in 1878, enabling the recovery of part of the gold remaining in the heaps of ‘tailings’ after the gold-bearing quartz had been crushed, mill-owners for a while refused to treat any but their own tailings. Enriched by these practices, mill-owners were able to invest in the development of reefing more heavily than working miners, and the few companies floated in Charters Towers, Ravenswood, and Maytown during the seventies had nearly all been backed by the proprietors of crushing plants. But company mining was the exception rather than the rule, and although goldfields wardens and editors called for outside capital to open up deep reefing, the investors of Melbourne and Ballarat were not tempted as yet.

It was hardly to be expected that city capitalists would provide funds to mechanize North Queensland gold-mines when so little was done with local capital. Frank Stubley, who struck it rich with the St Patrick, re-invested much of his money on the Charters Towers field; but what was left from treating his friends and standing for parliament went in exploring new mines rather than improving the efficiency of those already producing. Several Charters Towers notables put their money into investments right outside the industry. Stubley was among the first to form cattle stations in the neighbourhood of the Atherton Tableland. Squatting also attracted the leading mill-owners, dapper E. H. T. Plant,* and Falstaffian John Deane;† so did the temptation to speculate in sugar lands during the boom of the early eighties.

*Edward Hood Thornburgh Plant erected crushing mills at Ravenswood, 1870, and Charters Towers 1872; several times chairman Dalrymple divisional board; member Charters Towers waterworks board from 1888; mine-owner; M.L.C. 1905–22; died 1926.

†John Deane (1842–1913) owned crushing mills at Ravenswood and Charters Towers; established foundry business, Charters Towers 1875; part-owner The Bluff station; partner in Burdekin meatworks, Sellheim, from 1895; M.L.A. for Townsville 1878–9; M.L.C. 1896–1913; member Townsville Harbour Board 1899–1913.
Thomas Buckland,* a hard-working tight-fisted young man who was for some years the only accredited assayer on the field, also found time to run a butchering business, buy into cattle stations, and serve as mayor of Charters Towers. Wily enough to liquidate his extensive mining interests while the Towers was still booming, he finished as chairman of the Bank of New South Wales, was knighted, and lived to be ninety-eight. With such diverse interests, it is perhaps not surprising that few of the early magnates of Charters Towers had capital to spare for deep reefing. Many old-timers believed, in any case, that in ironstone country the gold would pinch out at deeper levels, so that exploration at depth would be money wasted.

At length Charters Towers stopped waiting passively for the coming of the outside capitalist, and took the initiative with developmental work. The owners of the Day Dawn, a mine which in 1878 had unexpectedly come to the fore as the richest producer on the field, three years later floated a company with a capital of £24,000 for the systematic exploration of deeper levels. By 1882 they had reached 520 feet, and convinced even the most sceptical that values did not deteriorate, but in fact improved with depth. Meanwhile, the Queensland Government introduced a diamond drill to prospect deep levels in untested portions of the field, and their findings confirmed the Day Dawn's experience. From that year a number of companies were floated to take in hand claims abandoned at fairly shallow levels. By 1886 thirty-three shafts had been sunk below the 500-feet level, one going as deep as 1,400 feet, and the gold returns of Charters Towers had doubled from 55,264 ounces in 1883 to 112,166 in 1886. Continued good results from the Day Dawn and Queen lines of reef were at last beginning to exert an appeal on outside speculators. It looked as if Charters Towers was assured of a stable future.

Elsewhere the record was less heartening. Ravenswood, which had been in the doldrums since the Charters Towers and Palmer rushes, staged something of a recovery during 1878 and 1879, but few claimholders were winning returns greater than an average miner's weekly wage. Despite improved methods of...

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*Thomas Buckland (1848–1947) emigrated from England to Sydney, 1863, in office of uncle, a merchant; mining at Gympie 1867; assayer with Bank of New South Wales; resigned 1872 and set up independently at Charters Towers; mine manager and butcher; mayor 1880; unsuccessful candidate for parliament 1883; lived in Sydney after 1892; director Pitt, Son and Badgery from 1900, and chairman from 1906; chairman United Insurance Co. from 1904; director Permanent Trustee Co. of N.S.W. from 1920; president Bank of N.S.W. 1922–37; Kt. 1935; died 1947.
reducing stone, the problem remained of extracting gold from the conglomerated ore in the mundic found below the surface workings. By 1882 nearly all the surface stone was exhausted, and several mines were shipping mundic to England or Germany for treatment. Since it was obviously more rewarding to refine on the spot, a local smelting company was formed in 1884 with the object of separating the gold, zinc and copper in the mundic. Its furnaces closed in August 1886, a failure through high fuel costs, over-reliance on hand labour, and difficulties in removing elements of silica from the ore. Another company, which tried chlorination, failed even more miserably in the same year. Over one hundred men were thrown out of employment when these companies stopped work, and only the development of new mines along the John Bull line of reef kept gold-mining alive in the district.

For some years the mainstay of Ravenswood was silver-lead mining. Opened in 1880, these mines produced galena worth £200,000 during their first eight years of operation. The chief producer was King’s Freehold, employing one hundred men and machinery worth £15,000 at Totley, one mile from Ravenswood. But the returns were not unrewarding for small operators; in 1884 a prospector named Markham, working alone, raised twenty-six tons worth £702 from a five-acre claim. Next to Totley, the most promising silver-lead deposits in the Ravenswood mining district were at Argentine, on the old Star River goldfield. From 1881 this was the scene of a hectic rush, which ended suddenly early in 1883, after the failure of a locally capitalized smelting works caused many disgruntled claim holders to quit. (The failure was largely their own fault. Investigating the field a little later, the geologist Logan Jack was mildly astonished at the careless way in which many consignments of ore had been sent to the smelter mixed with masses of ironstone and other rubbish.)

South of Ravenswood several other deposits were too remote to attract systematic working, although by the end of the eighties a small settlement had formed at Ukalunda on the Sellheim River, from which silver-lead and bismuth were sent away through Bowen and Ravenswood.

The Charters Towers-Ravenswood group seemed the most durable of North Queensland goldfields; next, surprisingly, came the Etheridge. Although reduced at the beginning of 1878 to a few claims around Georgetown and Charleston, the Etheridge already bore the reputation of a reliable standby when
more spectacular goldfields proved a disappointment. During that year miners returning from the Palmer and Hodgkinson tested this field extensively, opening several new reefs as well as many claims abandoned since 1873. This expansion found the field seriously under-equipped in mining machinery. 'Work is done in the same primitive style as in 1851' wrote Warden Hodgkinson in 1879; there were no boring or drilling appliances on the field, and insufficient crushing machinery. With freights at between £22 and £35 a ton from Townsville, battery owners who set up operations on the Etheridge felt justified in levying up to 30s. a ton for their services, even though these charges were almost twice as costly as the more effective Charters Towers machines. Since the Etheridge consisted of many fairly small and widely distributed claims, the expense of carting and crushing killed the prospects of any mine unable to keep a battery fully employed. Only the richer deposits could be exploited, by such cumbersome and laborious methods that many miners were ready to abandon a claim at the first sign of diminishing returns. A low rate of profit gave them no encouragement to develop the lower-grade seams, to spend time in systematic exploration, or to install modern machinery.

The few who persevered often did well. O'Brien, Steele, and Hunt, who set up their own ten-head battery, with a dam for sluicing, at the Cumberland mine achieved such consistent results that many other claims were taken, and a small township grew up in the neighbourhood. Georgetown, twenty miles east of the Cumberland, remained the chief centre of the Etheridge, as although deplorably backward in mechanization its mines were productive and plentiful, and it had the best water supply in the district. Charleston, thirty miles south, was less flourishing; the local ore was too intractable for the available crushing machines. One hundred miles further south, the original camp of Gilberton was dominated by Chinese fossickers and tradesmen, with a few Europeans trying to develop reefing claims. Results were generally disappointing, so that by 1887 Gilberton was once more a ghost town. 'There are at present only two residents', wrote Warden Samwell, 'and both are deaf and dumb men'.

Despite problems of transport and management the Etheridge survived and—although its yield of 19,854 ounces lagged a long way behind the golden splendours of Charters Towers—became by 1885 the second richest field in North Queensland. With a more promising start, and no greater natural difficulties
than the Etheridge, the Palmer in the same period had become a model of the ways in which a goldfield could be plundered and mismanaged into virtual extinction. By 1883, when Warden Hodgkinson removed there from the Etheridge, it had become an inbred, stagnant little community. The more enterprising miners had nearly all left the district, and many who remained were too interested in liquor to make good workmen; their thirst maintained one licensed public house to every fourteen European males, without counting the sly-grog sellers. Nor were the mineowners a stabilizing influence. Financed by a peculiarly gullible branch of the Queensland National Bank, operating on inadequate or badly sited machinery, and manned by speculators who exploited only the richest stone and made no provision for working the rest, the leading reefing companies around Maytown were a discouraging collection, incapable of showing a profit on gold yielding up to four ounces to the ton. 'Cliquism is rampant,' wrote Warden Hodgkinson, 'and the outside investor is regarded as a providential zoophyte, to be squeezed as much as possible.' He should have known. Before long he was removed from office, pending an inquiry into an official report he had written boosting a mine in which his temporary Minister, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, was deeply interested. By 1884 the Queensland National Bank found itself the sole prop of a number of semi-derelict mines, many of which required constant pumping to keep them from becoming water-logged. The sole hope for the district lay in the possibility of a railway from Cooktown, which by eliminating the heavy costs of freight might make the Palmer a more attractive proposition for genuine investors.

On the Hodgkinson a similar record unfolded itself. Here the natural prospects were less favourable than on the Palmer. The gold lay in narrow vertical veins which tended to cut out around the 200-foot level or earlier, and such exploration as took place, while it probed only to a maximum depth of 430 feet, failed to reveal any indication of improved values lower down. Nearly all authorities agreed, however, that better use could have been made of the known resources. Capital for developmental work was never forthcoming from the Hodgkinson miners. Little good was done either by 'the unthrifty in squandering large sums of money easily obtained from the upper workings [or] the thrifty in sticking to their money thus easily made, seldom speculating in other mines, and ultimately clearing out with their savings either for home or the southern colonies, and in
sorrie instances the neighbouring districts’. The consequence was that the mines were primitively equipped—Inspector Shakespeare in 1883 found ladders consisting of saplings and clothes line—and no money was spent on the exploratory work, which was so necessary among the small-veined reefs of the Hodgkinson. By 1886 the only mines working on this field were some antimony deposits opened five years earlier by S. J. Denny and a few shafts operated by working miners who could afford only to scratch a little ore from reefs already known to be payable. As on the Palmer, because of the absence of pumping machinery, water gradually made head in many of the abandoned workings, so adding to the expenses confronting any investor who might venture into this field.

Prospectors were no longer tempted by such forlorn hopes. The age of gold was giving way to the age of lead, tin, and copper. During the seventies, when gold was paramount, few had been interested in baser metals, especially in country whose remoteness from a port spelt heavy freight costs. Of the many prospectors who had ranged North Queensland, some at least must have noted—and dismissed—the promise of mineral wealth in the tangle of gullies and ranges west and south of the Hodgkinson. It seems fairly certain that the ubiquitous James Venture Mulligan was the first to report finding tin. This was in 1875, on one of the headwaters of the Herbert. Mulligan, impressed at the end of the wet season by its turbulent spate through a rugged scenery, called it the Wild River. But it was over 150 miles distant from the nearest settlement on the Palmer, too far to stimulate a rush. Even more remote was another find made three years later on the Tate, a tributary of the Lynd River, by John Hogsfleisch, a pioneer mailman, and two companions. Meanwhile, the first commercial tin workings in North Queensland had been developed by the Chinese—some of whom may possibly have been acquainted with tin-mining in Malaya. Probably as early as the wet season of 1876-7, and certainly by 1878, declining gold yields had caused the Chinese to test the tin deposits on Granite Creek and Cannibal Creek, south-east of Maytown. In 1880 five hundred of them were employed at Granite Creek, and 760 tons valued at £38,000 were exported in that year from Cooktown by Chinese entrepreneurs and Europeans employing Chinese gang-labour.

The real impetus to tin prospecting in North Queensland was given by John Atherton, one of the cattlemen who had pushed up north at the heels of the Hodgkinson and Palmer gold rushes.
to exploit the new markets and have first choice of the good country. In 1878 Atherton and two companions went prospecting, and made a find on what they humorously named Tinaroo Creek.* A small rush followed, especially after a little gold had been found in the same area. Atherton, however, found mining more unprofitable and less to his liking than cattle-raising, and let his ground to a party of Chinese from the Hodgkinson. When in 1879 he made another find near Mulligan’s camping-place on the Wild River, he was content to pilot a party of Tinaroo miners to the spot, without prospecting himself. These men—William Jack,† John Newell, Thomas Brandon and John Brown—were not very impressed at first, and did not stay long. When, in April 1880, a rumour began to spread of a big discovery by Chinese, they began to have second thoughts, and lost no time in returning to the Wild. To their relief, the scene was completely deserted. Smelting ore in a hollow stump, with an old felt hat for draught, they soon came to realize that a valuable lode lay in the Wild valley, and Newell was sent riding post-haste to Thornborough to lay their claims with the warden of the Hodgkinson field. Even this news failed to shift John Atherton. ‘No,’ he told the prospectors, when offered a share in their Great Northern mine, ‘you stick to your tin, and I’ll stick to my bullocks, something I know something about’.7 But news of the Great Northern discovery at once drew prospectors from many fields, including the Hodgkinson, which from that time never recovered its early glory.

The first rush for claims around the Great Northern brought to life the town of Herberton along the banks of the Wild. From this centre groups of fossickers fanned out west and south, as successive reports of fresh discoveries re-kindled an enthusiasm for prospecting which had been flagging since the run of disappointments over alluvial gold. Throughout the eighties no year went by without report of an important find. It was probably in 1880 that J. V. Mulligan, W. P. Stenhouse, and James Newell, while camped on the Dry River—another head-

*There is an old yarn that, on making his discovery, Atherton exclaimed, ‘Tin! Huroo!’, hence the name. This is about as unreliable as most stories explaining the names of country districts. The Atherton family believe the name to be a humorous formation on the lines of ‘kangaroo’, ‘jackaroo’, etc.
†William Jack (1834–1910) emigrated from Scotland to Queensland 1858; was on Stanthorpe, Palmer and Hodgkinson fields before coming to Herberton 1880; prospecting in Celebes and Timor 1884–92; founder-partner in Jack and Newell, storekeepers, with his son-in-law John Newell (1855–1932), M.L.A. for Woothakata 1896–1902; first mayor of Herberton.
water of the Herbert—gave themselves some pistol practice firing at a nearby bluff, and exposed the lode that gave its name to Silver Valley. In February 1881 R. H. Watson opened up the North Australian lode and founded Watsonville, seven miles west of Herberton. Early in 1882 another party found ore at Coolgarra, while in March of that year Gibbs, Thompson and McDonald located a number of claims which formed the nucleus of Irvinebank. Next year the copper of Mount Garnet and the alluvial tin of the Tate were worked for the first time. In May 1883 J. McDonald found the ‘Herberton deep lead’, an ancient river bed parallel to the Wild, which later became the district’s chief source of alluvial tin, although it was some years before payable deposits were worked in quantities rich enough to challenge the Tate’s performance.

Early in 1885 falling returns at Silver Valley were offset by the discovery of very rich galena at Montalbion, from which nearly eleven tons of silver were extracted in three years. Similarly new finds of tin at Glen Linedale and Stannary Hills in 1886 offset the cessation of work at Watsonville and California Creek. Between Montalbion and Port Douglas Pat Molloy, a carrier searching for lost bullocks, found the outcrop of copper later known as Mount Molloy. Further north, behind Cooktown, more tin-bearing deposits were developed between 1885 and 1887. By the latter year prospectors were gully-raking and sluicing along the Annan and Bloomfield rivers, and in September the first claim was registered at Mount Spurgeon, named by the prospector O’Shannassy after his dog. This tally of discoveries was appropriately rounded off in 1887 by a son of the pioneer of Tinaroo. William Atherton had left the family homestead to establish, on the rough country 100 miles west of Thornborough, a property named, in the whimsical Atherton manner, Chillagoe.* Late that year there camped on his run two mining men, Anthony Linedale and S. J. Delaney, searching on behalf of John Moffat for some copper which Delaney had noted on a prospecting trip about four years earlier. Copper there was in plenty all over Atherton’s property, and by the time Linedale and Delaney returned to Herberton, he had shown them several promising spots to peg—claims which would grow into the mining camps of Zillmanton, Calcifer and Mungana, and provide a useful market for Atherton beef.

*From a sea-shanty, of which the refrain was: ‘Ikey, pikey, psyche, crikey, chillagoe walabadorie’. I have been unable to trace it.
As the earliest deposits were exhausted, the production of tin ore on the Herberton field fell rapidly. From a record figure of 105,537 tons in 1881 it slumped to 14,467 in 1884, going on to decline much more slowly during the following three years. The small shows along the Herberton deep lead and the Tate River still enabled individual fossickers to scratch a living, but the bulk of production was soon centred at Herberton and Irvinebank. The Great Northern at Herberton owed its pre-eminence largely to the canny management of its principal owner, John Newell. In a large number of mines near Herberton surface tin had appeared to die out at shallow depths; and, as a later mines warden noted ruefully: 'A large amount of reckless work was done in the early days of the Herberton tin mines, in many cases approaching vandalism. All the upper ground had been rooted out quite regardless of future operations. . .'9

For want of capital or initiative very few mine owners probed the deeper levels. Newell was almost alone in realizing that, because of the peculiar occurrence of the local tinstone in bunches, veins and pockets, constant exploratory work was necessary to keep the mine going. Instead of merely working established deposits to exhaustion, Newell was content with the smaller dividends that came from employing less than half his men raising ore, with the rest sinking prospecting shafts in search of deeper lines of ore. Success rewarded this careful approach; and the Great Northern's performance at depth encouraged others to go back to abandoned holdings and work them more systematically. Meanwhile, Newell's father-in-law, William Jack, was investing his share of the profits in establishing throughout the tin-mining centres a chain of stores. Starting with a Herberton bark hut sixteen feet by twelve in size, Jack had a monthly turnover of £3,000 within his first year of business despite his refusal—unheard of until then among bush storekeepers—to stock hard liquor in any form. Newell came into partnership in 1882, and by the end of the decade the firm was the largest merchant house north of Townsville.

Before the end of 1880 another shareholder was admitted to the Great Northern, who was to dominate the base metal industry of North Queensland for a generation. This was John Moffat,* a

*Born Scotland 1841; emigrated to Brisbane 1862; storekeeper on Stanthorpe tin-mining field 1869–80; at Irvinebank 1884–1912, with extensive mining interests throughout North Queensland; inventor and patentee Moffat-Virtue shearing machine; died 1918.
storekeeper on the Stanthorpe field for whom both Jack and Newell had worked as departmental managers. A lean, gently-spoken Scot, who described himself as a ‘dreamy, inconclusive and procrastinating character’, Moffat was very unlike the conventional idea of a mining tycoon. With him exploration and development became an intellectual passion in itself, and profits mattered less than the pleasure of seeing a mine opened, and settlement flourish where only a wilderness existed before. Rarest of all virtues among mining promoters, he was unshakably honest. Not even his keenest rivals would question the integrity of a man who, when one of his speculations turned out unprofitably, refunded the purchase price to the London company who had bought it from him on the grounds that they should not lose through his error of judgment. A time would come when experts would find his mining methods ‘mediaeval in their simplicity’, and sophisticated union bosses would chafe against his patriarchal régime. But his failure to mechanize arose mainly from reluctance to deprive any man of his job, for his benevolence as an employer was famous. Many testified to his generosity with down-and-outs, and his willingness to grubstake the most battered old tin-scratcher, no matter how forlorn his hopes. It was easy to believe the story that Irvinebank children concluded their nightly prayers with ‘God bless John Moffat’.

But as yet the legend was still in the making. After an overseas trip to study mining and smelting methods, Moffat returned late in 1883 to centre his activities on Irvinebank. A well-chosen headquarters in the heart of the mining field, Irvinebank in the eighties was a mere clearing in a bush valley, with a store, a small hotel, a few tents and houses, and the crash of falling timber and whine of a circular saw, as preparations went forward for the smelting works. It was—like Herberton—remarkably orderly as mining communities went. ‘We have a very decent crowd of men here,’ wrote Moffat, ‘of all nationalities and varied peculiarities’. There was certainly some drunkenness at Christmas and St Patrick’s Day, but less than the ordinary amount. For the most part the men of Irvinebank and Herberton took their

*However, since writing the above, I have seen the autobiography of Mr O. H. Woodward, C.M.G., in which he quotes the opinion of H. Herman, president of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy: ‘Mr Moffat has experimented and scrapped until he has arrived quite independently at a system in general accord with the practice in Tasmania and Cornwall, and so far as the writer can judge he has probably been ahead of practice in these places’. This judgment—endorsed by Mr Woodward—must carry weight.
amusements improvising sports carnivals; or taking the few ladies for a New Year's picnic, with a gorgeous Highlander to provide the only available music with his bag-pipes; or on winter nights amusing themselves with a planchette belonging to a little Glasgow man who claimed some skill with spirit-writing and table-rapping.

A go-ahead spirit of self-help marked Herberton and Irvinebank. The solid and creditable shops and hotels in the main streets may have owed something of their appearance to the quantities of fine cedar available in the 'Atherton scrub'; but it was entirely due to the citizens' initiative that a School of Arts, with a well-stocked library, appeared at both centres within a year or two of their foundation. (In most North Queensland towns such cultural amenities were provided only five to ten years after their establishment; except for Mackay, the sugar centres were particularly slow in this respect). Many of the older mining centres, however, took some time to provide the decent amenities which encouraged permanent settlement and construction.

Civic pride did not flourish in an industry as transient and uncertain as gold-mining. Maytown and Charters Towers each boasted over a thousand citizens in 1875; who could tell which would be a deserted village after ten years, and which a boom town? Thornborough, chief centre on the Hodgkinson, had in 1878 a thriving little state school, staffed by a married couple instructing forty or fifty youngsters in the three Rs. It displeased the school inspector on his visits that no attempt was made to erect a fence around the schoolground, or to break the unrelieved monotony of the surroundings by cultivating a garden. By 1882 his complaints ceased. Many miners had left Thornborough for richer fields, their families went with them, and for lack of children the school was closing down without having wasted anyone's time and labour on short-lived improvements. Nor had it concerned anyone to equip Thornborough with an adequate water supply. In dry seasons such as 1878 the schoolchildren and their mothers had to push and jostle with the Chinese gardeners to draw water from the few permanent wells, and on several occasions all the crushing machines in the district had to close down for want of water, and it was impossible for any miner to find pasture for his horse. Rather than overcome these inconveniences, many left, and their departure made it even less worth while to spend money on improvements.
Even at Charters Towers a municipal council of mining investors was reluctant to rate the gold-mines, and contented itself with collecting much of its revenue from hansom-cab and dog licences. The civic fathers showed little interest in improving or beautifying their surroundings. Street lighting did not exist until 1890, and by day the town offered little to please the eye. The horse-drawn drays carting ore to the mills stirred a constant dust on the unsealed roads, yet Thadeus O'Kane was a lone voice when he called for the planning of wide, tree-lined streets, or suggested the use of local limestone for building, as a variant from the eternal wood and iron. The countryside around Charters Towers became a barren waste, as every tree of any size was cut down to provide firewood, charcoal, or props for pit-shafts. What greenery remained was eaten bare by the roving herds of cattle and goats belonging to those miners who supplemented their earnings by owning a small grazing block—unfenced, of course. Prodded by complaints from miners who could not find a vestige of feed for their horses, the municipal authorities at last set up a pound, into which during February 1880 they elaborately rounded up every accessible stray goat. One dark night, however, some unidentified desperado burnt down the pound, leaving the goats free to scatter for miles. The baffled Council never repeated the experiment, and to this day the goats are a feature of Charters Towers and other North Queensland mining towns. The cattle continued to breed up and compete hungrily for feed—the Towers had never been thought good grazing—with droughts as the only check on their numbers.

But the most scandalous feature of local government in Charters Towers was the neglect of sanitation and water supply. Although the crushing mills depended on water, no Northern mining town enjoyed a reliable supply, so that the dry months at the end of each year almost always spelt unemployment. Charters Towers made no attempt to tap the nearby Burdekin until the severe drought of 1888-9, even although the sole supply of drinking water during dry months consisted of a number of wells, into which the overflow from cesspits was allowed to seep continuously. Warden Sellheim was hardly exaggerating when he described this water supply as 'diluted poison', for after any long spell without sufficient flooding to cleanse the wells, typhoid and enteric fever were common, and in some years such as 1878 and 1881 the death rate in Charters Towers was almost double that of Queensland as a whole. Nor were children pro-
tected; at least one school in the town area of Charters Towers had no lavatory at all. But the casual mining communities were remarkably tolerant of nuisances.

And yet, despite its imperfections, Charters Towers was a vigorous self-confident community, a model for lesser centres. Throughout the week the steady pound of the crushing machines on Towers Hill and Sadd’s Ridge never faltered: as sustaining and as little thought of as the beating of a pulse. With several schools instructing about 2,500 children, eight churches, three newspapers, two iron foundries, a hospital, fire brigade, jockey club and gasworks, it was a thriving city, never more lively than on Saturday evenings. Then Gill and Mosman Streets were crammed with so many people that the roads were closed to wheeled traffic. Miners in bell-bottomed trousers, tight at the knee and baggy at the ankle; mothers trailing excited children who would not miss this one late night of the week; patient, ingratiating Chinese pedlars; eager shopkeepers, crying their wares whenever trade slackened; noisy, gregarious public bars; two brass bands in rivalry at opposite ends of the shopping centre—this is the memorable crowd which old inhabitants contrast with the present quiet.

It was a prosperous community, with no man on less than £3 a week, and almost every miner owning his own house—usually a four-square wooden building on stilts, with an iron hip roof and the amount of verandah space varying with the economic status of the owner. No unemployment, for it was still something of a favour to take service as a ‘wages man’, and if jobs were short, one could always try for a little alluvial on the old Cape or Ravenswood diggings. No concern for the future, with the miners almost to a man enthusiastic sportsmen and gamblers. A few, and Thadeus O’Kane among them, grumbled at this tendency. When several hundred pounds changed hands on a Saturday afternoon foot-race between two runners O’Kane complained (perhaps he had backed the wrong man):

The ‘new rich’ here, many of them dazzled by the possession of a little money beyond their wildest dreams and, destitute of all education or culture, rush wildly for excitement into gambling and betting, no matter on what...

Athletics and boxing matches were always a draw. So, too, was cock-fighting, technically an illegal sport, but one which drew a crowd of drifters behind Towers Hill most Sunday mornings.
without any interference from a discreet officialdom. Probably the most widespread and popular of all games was two-up. Poor indeed was the mining camp where a few willing hands could not be found to make up a ring, and seldom—we are told—was anyone rash enough to attempt cheating. Such are the nostalgic memories of men and honesty in this heyday of North Queensland.

For the North Queensland mining community, with this confirmed tradition of gambling, and its long experience of the hazards and uncertainties of the search for gold, the boom in deep-reefing offered rich prizes to the enterprising or the unscrupulous. The Day Dawn’s pioneering success had changed attitudes to deep reefing on Charters Towers, where by 1885 ‘the probability of having to sink a thousand feet is now taken into account with the same nonchalance as to risk as a hundred feet was taken five years ago’.\(^\text{17}\) The confidence generated by continued successes at depth, fanned by news of that rival development near Rockhampton, ‘the golden hill, Mount Morgan’, was beginning to propel North Queensland mining interests into a speculative boom.

Several lines of reef a few miles outside Charters Towers, abandoned during the seventies after the first surface deposits were exploited, were now re-opened for development at depth. James Leyshon, a local businessman, formed a syndicate in 1884 to develop ‘Cornish Jim’s claim’, miles south of Charters Towers. Boosted as a ‘second Mount Morgan’, the new development created a rush for claims, which brought Logan Jack hurrying up from Townsville to assess the geology of Mount Leyshon, as it became known.\(^\text{18}\) While its development hung fire, awaiting finance from a Brisbane syndicate, Leyshon formed a local company to re-open another mine nearer Charters Towers, the Black Jack. Rich gold, assaying between three and four ounces to the ton, was found, and within two years the mine was to yield 16,000 ounces of gold and £20,650 in dividends. The rush for claims exceeded even Mount Leyshon. ‘A remarkably buoyant feeling animates mining circles here;’ wrote a Towers newspaperman late in 1884, ‘never in the history of this field was the feeling so pronounced as at the present.’\(^\text{19}\)

At last it was becoming recognized that the old system of co-operative partnerships simply was not adequate to capitalize the machinery required for deep reefing. For the first time mining shares cut up into scrip commanded a market value. Even
prudent Philip Sellheim, viewing the course of progress from his warden’s office, could not help sharing in the optimism, although he considered working methods still much in need of improvement. Fifty-eight of the 160 mines were still without steam-winding equipment, rockdrills were not generally in use, and preparations were not going forward for the day when the capitalist would have to take his dividends from low-grade ores. ‘Much money,’ he observed, ‘is also wasted often by directors and consulting engineers, who reside at a distance, who by intermeddling in matters that they cannot possibly be judges of, jeopardise the success of ventures.’

Little they cared. The deeper the reefs—the miners believed—the richer became the gold. Along the Day Dawn line the mines were being gutted of their richest pockets for spectacular returns. In 1886 the Day Dawn Block and Wyndham produced 13 per cent of Queensland’s gold, 37,950 ounces; the next year output rose to 39,192 ounces, with another 25,000 from the neighbouring Day Dawn Proprietary Company. News of this kind at last enticed British investors into unfastening their purse-strings for North Queensland propositions. At a time when the British money market, in its search for new outlets, was turning towards mining, Queensland was one of the very few areas in the world where gold production was on the increase. Local interests soon woke up to the lucrative possibilities of forming mining companies for sale to British investors. The number of companies on Charters Towers went from 41 to 123 between 1884 and 1886. Nominal capital rose from £942,700 to £2,383,500, but paid-up funds only from £489,170 to £817,683. Moreover—ominously—insufficient use was made of the Queensland law of 1875–86 permitting the formation of mining companies on a ‘no liability’ basis. Instead, many optimistic shareholders pledged themselves to pay future calls on shares for which they might only have contributed 1s. in the £.

This zeal for company formation was encouraged by the absurd willingness of British buyers to pay fantastic prices for anything bearing a Queensland name. At first, they at least bought proven producers for their money; but even so, £401,600 in cash and £56,400 in shares was a high price for the Day Dawn Block and Wyndham, purchased from Thomas Mills’ syndicate in August 1886, especially as the British buyers had reserved only £40,400 for working expenses. Since there were very few mines as rich as the Day Dawn group, it was not long before shadier
propositions were being hawked successfully. The simple-hearted mining men who owned the Bonnie Dundee, after grubbing gold worth £7,200 from it in three years following September 1883, were able to sell it to a British syndicate for £70,000 cash and £30,000 in shares. The price included a fifteen-head stamping mill at the foot of Mosman Street, but as Thadeus O’Kane wrote at the time ‘unless the Bonnie shapes better then it has done for the past few years, the English purchasers may wait for a long time before they get their money back’.21

As the boom developed in 1886, the working miners involved themselves ever more deeply in the speculation. Underground men had often the first information of promising developments, and this made them keen investors. (Self-interest, it was noted, made for better work. In these boom years there was a sharp falling-off in absenteeism and week-end drunkenness, as miners saved their money for sharebuying.) The prevailing wages of £3–£4 weekly left most men a surplus for investment, which in past years had gone to backing prospecting ventures or small co-operative ventures. Suddenly aware of the profits to be made from floating companies for the overseas buyers, the miners overcame their early dislike of dealing in scrip, and plunged heavily. They had the usual luck of small investors on a bull market. Most of the old-established mines along the central lines of reef were already under negotiation for sale, with share prices correspondingly high. Discouraged from these investments, working miners tended to buy into the cheaper propositions on the outskirts of the field—the Mount Leyshon, Black Jack and Stockholm districts which had only recently come into prominence. On these lines of reef, for which few reliable estimates of extent or permanence were available, mining secretaries cheerfully drew claims on the map and floated companies with the flimsiest of prospects. Considerable new ground was taken up, of which Sellheim observed: ‘the promoters could not have expected to strike a reef if they penetrated the earth to its centre’.22 Since these claims were designed only for sale to overseas interests, many small investors around Charters Towers were willing to take a gamble and buy into these ventures. Two stock exchanges came into being on Mosman Street, and throughout the August and September of 1886 trading was at fever point. Smartly dressed kerbside brokers bustled about hoarsely vending Alabamas, Alexandras, Band of Hope . . . Merrie Monarch, Old Identity, Papuan Queen . . . Stockholm Extended, Victory and
Worcester, Victoria . . . Some of these outside reefs were ‘done to shreds’ muttered old O’Kane in mid-September, but few heeded him.23

The first check came in October. Coldly observant from his premier’s office in Brisbane, Samuel Griffith saw Queensland’s credit on the London money market endangered by this epidemic of spurious company-promoting. On 19 October he sent the Agent-General in London a cable for publication, warning investors against shady propositions from the North Queensland goldfields.24 Some of Griffith’s opponents accused him of scaring capital away by this action, but the recession which followed at the end of 1886 was a natural enough reaction to over-speculation, and took some time to assume serious proportions. In many respects Charters Towers seemed in good heart during 1887. In March, when the government threw open its public reserves for mining, the Day Dawn Freehold Company was prepared to pay a royalty of £5,400 for rights to the one-acre block around the boys’ school. During the year the value of machinery on the field increased from £112,180 to £150,892, and the number of miners under employment from 1,652 to 1,950.

But one by one the weaker companies were folding up. The Disraeli at Rishton proved a duffer. The Merrie Monarch, sold in London for £75,000 in January, was liquidated by the end of August, and its local secretary had left Charters Towers for an obscure destination in Melbourne, taking with him the company’s books—and presumably those of the thirteen other companies for which he had acted. Money was becoming tighter in London. British investors had risen nobly to the bait, providing a total of £4,900,000 capital for twenty-seven Queensland gold-mines, of which £4,100,000 had been spent on cash payments to the vendors. Even to such wonderful gullibility, however, there was a limit. Alternative fields were opening up in the United States and the Transvaal, and the London buyer was growing cautious about Queensland propositions. Instead of buying out a local company, British interests were coming gradually to adopt a policy of waiting until a Charters Towers mine proved itself, and then judiciously purchasing shares on the open market.25 This policy, and tighter supervision of company formation by the Queensland authorities, put a finish to the wild-cats. The only remaining hope of the small investors, who had staked their earnings on the Black Jack and Stockholm lines, was the chance that their holdings might, after all, be gold-bearing.
Confidence still held at the end of 1887. When the Brisbane syndicate backing Mount Leyshon ran out of funds, a London company was floated, and shares placed in Charters Towers and Townsville without difficulty. Warden Haldane could summarize the year’s development with a ringing peroration which mirrored the prevailing optimism perfectly:

To the small capitalist who is not afraid of manual labour, to the miner, to the labourer, and especially to the dwellers in the crowded cities of the old land, a country like this presents attractions that few others can offer. Here poverty—excepting in cases of the sickness or death of the bread-winner—is almost unknown. Here, too, the working man soon becomes his own landlord, and his board is daily spread with articles that in the old home he would have deemed luxuries. . . . Some here who were working men a few years ago are now drawing incomes of over £20,000 a year from the gold-mines; others are receiving smaller amounts; and a large number have at least made what in the old land would be considered competencies. There can be little doubt that much gold still lies unfound, hidden in the depths of the earth, until those that are fated to be the discoverers, with the brain to guide and the hand to labour, appear on the scene. The land is wide, and for many long years hence there will be room enough for all who care to come.26

The land was not wide enough. The blow fell when the Black Jack reef suddenly petered out early in 1888. The company went into liquidation, dragging with it many of the surrounding claims. These were for the most part forlorn hopes whose shareholders, mainly working miners and small shopkeepers, had held on since the 1886 depression, paying call after call on their investment in the hope that exploration would reveal a paying line of reef. Few of these companies had been promoted on the ‘no liability’ system, and these shareholders not only bore the loss of their original outlay, but also found themselves liable for the company’s debts. In 1888 £76,817 was paid out by Charters Towers companies, as against £144,160 called up; and many of the dividends went to London interests owning the rich central mines. For them, indeed, it was not a bad year. The Day Dawn freehold was drawing from its thousand-feet level the ‘richest specimens ever seen here, being literally rotten with gold’.27 And in the same year Richard Craven, a blustering Cornishman who had been the butt of sceptics for many months, was able to boast the discovery of the Brilliant line of reef, a sure dividend-producer for twenty years. But many storekeepers and small investors were
Early-style house, Hambledon, near Cairns

By courtesy of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company

C.S.R.'s raw sugar mill at Goondi, about 1888
in desperate straits. ‘There is now a very large number of them in the hands of either the new or the old banks, or else of the large merchants,’ wrote an editor in 1889, pleading for leniency.28

All the luck turned against them. 1888 and 1889 were both years of poor rainfall, so that many mills suspended crushing at Charters Towers, where a dilatory municipality was only now bestirring itself to put up a waterworks supplied from the Burdekin. No crushing meant no dividends. Many mines used the drought as an excuse to secure an exemption from working their claims for several months, and discharged their employees. Some of the richer companies turned their attention to ‘dead’ work, sinking shafts through barren ground to calculated depths where it was hoped to intercept a reef. This marked an advance from the old unsystematic practices, but it made for lower dividends. Confidence shrank. For the first time there were more ‘wages men’ available than the mines required. Unemployment had caught up with the independent miners of the North Queensland frontier.

The reefing boom affected other North Queensland mining centres unevenly. It scarcely touched Ravenswood or the Hodgkinson, where the problems of mining at depth were still unresolved. The Palmer flickered to life momentarily, as although its old mineshafts were waterlogged and unworkable, a new line of reef, the Anglo-Saxon on Limestone Creek, was discovered in 1886. Three hundred men were attracted to the ephemeral township of Quartzborough, and speculation revived among the Cooktown merchants, but the London share market felt no impact from this activity. The Etheridge, on the other hand, became within a short time a museum of the various ways in which a London mining company could lose money. Several British companies imported at great expense crushing mills which were erected on sites where gold was in short supply, or left idle because the owners had no capital left to develop their reefs. The company who bought out the Cumberland for £180,000 spent the rest of their capital on expensive machinery, made no provision for exploring further lines of reef, and were totally unprepared when the gold cut out in September 1889. Two years of despondent search failed to pick up a further line of reef. Eventually their plant was dismantled and sold for scrap iron.

Extravagant management was common; a visiting mine manager from Herberton noted disapprovingly that the Etheridge Reef Quartz Company had a legal manager at £800 a year and at least three mining managers at £600. The Durham, purchased for
£100,000, was notoriously mismanaged by executives whose love for magnificent entertainment strained even the resources of a mine yielding three ounces of gold to the ton. By September 1889 the mine was on an overdraft of over £20,000, and although the company could still find capital for a dam which overcame the annual problem of drought, its days as an effective dividend-producer were finished. These mines at least were proven performers; but little can excuse the gullibility of the investors who subscribed £70,000 into the Elektron Mount, which began operations by purchasing five acres of virgin ground for £50,000. Successive disappointments of this kind frightened off the British investor by 1888, and left the Etheridge almost as under-developed as before the boom. Even the lavish introduction of crushing machinery had not helped the many small parties of working miners, as facilities were still distributed very unevenly throughout the district, and most of the large companies with batteries refused to treat stone for others. Here, as at Charters Towers, the long-awaited introduction of outside capital had brought no benefits for the working miner, but only difficulties and disillusionment.

North-west of the Etheridge on the last outlying spurs of hill country before the featureless alluvial Gulf plains, the reefing boom had brought to life an entirely new field—Croydon. Discovered in November 1885 by two brothers named Aldridge while sinking post-holes on a cattle station, this field was slow to develop during the next year. Its gold was worked mainly by inexperienced station hands backed by local syndicates of tradesmen, none of whom had much notion of systematic mining. It was not until December 1886 that there were facilities for crushing the stone locally instead of sending it many costly miles to the Etheridge batteries. Aroused by some valuable ore specimens milled at the Cumberland, and swelled by some hundreds of Queensland miners returning unsuccessful from the Kimberley field in Western Australia, a rush set in at the beginning of 1887. By the end of that year 3,500 men were on the field, and Croydon, with its satellites Table-Top and Golden Gate, sprawled in thriving corrugated-iron splendour among the stunted tea-trees. Its yields were second only to Charters Towers, and there were not wanting optimists to boast: 'Within five years Croydon is going to lick the Towers at the same age.'

But in mining more than most other speculations, allowance must be made for human frailty. With the experienced miners
from the Towers and the Etheridge came the boosters, the promoters, and the shady little men whose dealings on the share-markets had weakened the earlier boom. Thirty-one companies were floated at Croydon in 1887, some well-founded or at least well-intentioned, but some formed with no other object than fleecing the outside investor. This was, to say the least, premature. The direction and extent of the Croydon reefs were still under exploration, and most of the profitable mining took place on small claims worked by a few men. Tempted by wages of £4 a week for miners and £1 a day for skilled artisans, the unemployed—usually the newchums and the poor workers who were the first to be laid off on older fields—flocked in considerable numbers to Croydon. But the deep mines that would employ wage labour in quantity existed only in the imaginations of company promoters. Although production was on the increase, the yield of gold did not rise in ratio to the number of newcomers. The collapse of several rash speculations early in 1888 plunged Croydon into the depression which was now becoming general throughout Queensland. Privations and drought drove many away. By 1890, of the forty-nine mining companies formed at Croydon, twenty-four were in liquidation, fourteen idle, and only one of those still working was a dividend-payer. Pitted like a rabbit-warren, the Croydon field presented an unattractive look to possible investors.

Though at first the base metal miners of the Walsh and Tinaroo field, centred on Herberton, were better off, they too felt the pinch before long. At Irvinebank, the Vulcan, greatest of all North Queensland tin mines, was coming to the fore a year or two after its discovery by a party of Italian charcoal-burners in 1888. Around Chillagoe and Koorboora the Moffat interests spent £20,000 between 1888 and 1890 preparing to develop the widespread deposits of silver and copper. But after 1890 world base metal prices dropped steadily. Black tin fell from over £80 to under £40 a ton, as over-supply followed new developments in Malaya and South America. The failure of a French syndicate’s attempt to corner copper, the defeat of the silver lobby at Washington, contributed to the slump in metal prices. North Queensland operators, so distant from world markets, could not foresee these fluctuations. They tended to blame their difficulties on the slowness of the Queensland Government in providing a railway to the coast.

In fact, competition between the rival ports of Cairns and
Port Douglas kept freights to a minimum. Packers who charged £30 a ton freight for provisions on the upward journey would convey tin from Herberton to Cairns for no more than £4. Other authorities considered the depression in gold-mining responsible for checking the flow of local investment into tin and copper and producing a constant supply of travellers looking for work at the Great Northern or one of John Moffat’s places. One thing was plain to all: depression had come through the workings of unforeseen and remote economic causes to the newest and most distant mineral fields.

For a quarter of a century men had sought mineral wealth among Queensland’s northern outposts, keeping alive the sense of independence and the optimism that had suffused all eastern Australia during the great gold-rush of the fifties. While New South Wales and Victoria had become dominated by urban growth, while squatter and selector alike found themselves tied to city financial interests, the North Queensland miner thought of himself in the manner portrayed by Warden Haldane: a man capable of prospering by his own efforts at least to the status of an independent home-owner (indelible Australian aspiration!), and perhaps... why not... to ‘incomes of over £20,000 a year’. It was this hope of the lucky strike, the gamble that paid off, which was for many the fundamental attraction of the Northern mining fields. It was—they would have admitted—an aspiration unlikely of fulfilment. But it was natural enough that so many of them were dissatisfied with small profits, with the systematic working of a modest claim, with prudent plans of long-range development. On most of the Northern fields the gold, dispersed among the quartz reefs in shallow shoots, was soon exhausted. Profits were seldom rich enough to sustain an uncertain period of exploratory work, especially where new shafts had to be sunk in hope of picking up the line of reef at a lower level. In the absence of any incentive to remain, the working miner usually preferred to abandon his claim and look for another.

For the capitalist who followed him on the scene, exploratory work was equally a gamble. Except for returns of crushings, no records of the development of individual mines were kept at the wardens’ offices before 1886. All the past experiences of the pioneer miner were forgotten, and the new owners had to base their plans for exploration on hope and intuition. Wise in the pitfalls of North Queensland mining, Logan Jack urged the need of government intervention. He suggested that miners on payable
claims should have the opportunity of lodging a percentage of
their winnings into a government fund. Later, if the gold cut out
and it was necessary to form a company for exploration, the
working miner should be enabled to draw a loan from this fund,
so as to take a fair share in the company together with the outside
capitalists. In this way city investors would have the security of
drawing on the original prospectors' experience, whilst the
working miner would not be left out of the benefits of systematic
development and deep reefing.  

Logan Jack's views seem to have been ignored entirely; but
his was the only attempt to grapple with the problems of the
transition from prospecting by individuals to mining by
companies, and at a time when the government was prepared to
help the small sugar-grower, it was not unreasonable to voice a
plea for the working miner. But the mining industry was left to
the anarchy of the gamblers' ring, where the rewards went so
often to the broker and the promoter who knew the ways of the
stock exchange, and so seldom to the working miner. Fortune
rarely favoured the deserving; 'you had to speculate to
accumulate'; and it was hardly surprising that many miners took
the view that small pickings were to be shared with one's mates,
gambled, drunk, or spent quickly in any other way. Such a
philosophy was not calculated to develop North Queensland's
mineral resources in the most efficient or far-sighted manner,
though it had its influence on strengthening certain traits of the
Australian character already flourishing in the hard, tricky
environment of the inland tropics.

In the years of anti-climax after the boom of 1886 the dream of
independence was broken for the men of the Northern frontier.
A few years before the rest of Australia, they learned that the
resources of the earth were not unlimited, that a progress based
on overseas capital could not be counted on to leave them forever
independent, and that they too could be caught by the necessity
of taking wages in regular employment. Their optimism gone
sour, North Queenslanders now found themselves under the
restraint of problems which in the past they had largely escaped.
They began to look for their remedy in politics.

Mines, Kennedy District.'
4V. & P. 1884, III, p. 187. 'Zoophyte' is typical Hodgkinson English for 'sponge'.
There is some controversy about the size of this party. *Walsh and Tinaroo Miner*, 24 Dec. 1907 gives the names of James Gibbs, Andy Thompson and James McDonald, joined later by William Eales, Finlay McLean, and Jack and Jim Pollard, and later still by Harry Way and James Green. *N.Q.R.* 21 April 1913 omits Jack Pollard. *C.C.M.* July 1934, p. 25, describes the party as Gibbs, Eales, Way, Thompson and one J. Donoghue, otherwise unknown to early writers. G. Pike, *In the Path of the Pioneers*, p. 3, notes Gibbs, Eales, Pollard, Green and Thompson. F. Jones, ‘Irvinebank’, *Cairns Historical Society Bulletin* No. 10, Aug. 1959, gives the credit to Gibbs, Eales, McDonald and Thompson. The two main creeks at Irvinebank are named after Gibbs and McDonald. I follow the account in the *Walsh and Tinaroo Miner*, as being the oldest and published while many of the discoverers of Irvinebank were still alive.

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*V. & P.* 1889, 2nd session, III, p. 391.

10 John Moffat to George ______, 31 May 1884. (Letter in possession of Mrs A. Templeton, Mareeba.)


12 John Moffat to George ______, 31 May 1884.


14 *V. & P.* 1886, III, p. 21.

15 *V. & P.* 1882, II, p. 754; *Australasian Medical Gazette*, IX, p. 319 (Sept. 1890).

16 *Northern Miner*, 21 Nov. 1877.

17 *V. & P.* 1886, III, p. 17.


20 *V. & P.* 1886, III, p. 20.

21 *Northern Miner*, 17 Sept. 1886.

22 *V. & P.* 1888, III, p. 382.

23 *Northern Miner*, 24 Sept. 1886.

24 *V. & P.* 1886, II, p. 935.


26 *V. & P.* 1888, III, p. 393.

27 *Northern Miner*, 5 Sept. 1888.


30 *Northern Miner*, 24 Feb. 1887.

Mining was not the only lure, nor the first, to charm outside investors into losing their money in North Queensland. Of all the features of the North Queensland boom that coincided with Sir Thomas McIlwraith's first premiership, the most spectacular in public eyes was the leap forward taken by the sugar industry. The bare statistics of growth were impressive. In 1878 the North had produced less than half Queensland's sugar; by 1885 it grew two-thirds. In 1878 there were 4,630 acres under cane at Mackay, 339 on the Herbert, and none elsewhere. During the next seven years the scrub went down and cane was planted along the entire northern coast to Cooktown and beyond. By 1885 Mackay's sugar acreage had trebled to 14,604, and 9,871 acres were planted in the rest of North Queensland. Mackay alone grew more sugar than all the cane-growing districts of southern Queensland taken together. Further north the timbermen had done their work in clearing the heaviest scrub and marking the areas where the quick re-birth of secondary growth gave the best promise of good farming. By the eighties, with much of the best cedar on the Johnstone and the Daintree cut out, they were turning their attention to the tablelands behind Cairns, where the four Mazlin brothers pioneered the 'Atherton scrub' in 1881. Tempted by a rise in sugar prices, investors were now ready to follow them into the coastal valleys and found plantations.

By 1883 a survey of the Queensland coast north from Mackay would have revealed the boom at its height. At Mackay itself the number of mills had increased within the previous four years from sixteen to twenty-five. Seventy miles north in the Proserpine valley, the Crystal Brook Sugar Company planned by December 1883 to set up a mill where previously there had been no settlement beyond the isolated out-station of a cattle run. Further up, at Bowen, the Hildebrandt brothers, patient German settlers, ran the district's first successful crushing in September 1883. Beyond Bowen lay the Burdekin delta. Because of light rainfall, its rich loams had been passed over for sugar and left for cattle-grazing. While some claimed that 'underground moisture' would
supplement the rainfall, this was guesswork. No attempt had been made to probe the sub-artesian supplies of the delta, those extensive ‘drifts’ of water-bearing gravel, laid down many centuries ago by the meanderings of the Burdekin across the coastal plain. But A. C. Macmillan,* a road engineer turned cattleman, saw the possibility of irrigating canefields by pumping water from the lagoons of the delta. In 1879 he floated a sugar planting company in which British shareholders invested £200,000. This capitalization was not excessive. Apart from irrigation, the normal costs of founding a mill were now rising with the introduction of technological improvements. The old, crude methods of the sixties were losing favour, especially after 1871, when it became possible to obtain sugar machinery locally from a Maryborough foundry. On the Burdekin delta growers faced the additional expense of breaking up the virgin loams for planting. Macmillan solved this problem by becoming the first Queensland planter to introduce steam-ploughs—another expense which made the lower Burdekin a promising field only for the large-scale capitalist.

Investors were undeterred. Estates were founded and mills erected by James Mackenzie at Seaforth in 1880; by Colin Munro at Drynie in 1881; the Young brothers at Kalamia in 1882; and later in the same year John Spiller, the first of the Mackay planters, with Henry Brandon at Pioneer. Besides these five mills (representing capital totalling over £500,000) other selectors took up land on what had previously been part of Inkerman station. After purchasing that property from the estate of Captain Towns, its original owner, Sir Thomas McIwraith, and his partners had converted much of their land on the Burdekin frontage into freehold a few years previously. This was either good luck or shrewd judgement of no mean order, for they were able to sell at a time when sugar lands commanded between £3 and £5 an acre. Appropriately, the township for the area, surveyed in 1882, was named Ayr for McIwraith’s birthplace.

Between the Burdekin and the Herbert was an area too dry for even the most sanguine investor to contemplate sugar-growing. On the Lower Herbert, however, unprecedented prosperity had brought to life the townships of Ingham and Halifax. ‘Money was literally shovelled into the district;’ reminisced Shewcroft, the twenty-two stone publican of Ingham, ‘I don’t complain, I received a fair share of it’.1 Victorian capital re-opened Gairloch.

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*Engineer of northern roads 1873–7; surveyed Palmer track; took up land in Burdekin Delta 1878; died 1905.
mill and plantation in 1880; two years later Gairloch absorbed Bemerside, which had been for some time in the hands of the Queensland National Bank. Another Victorian syndicate took up Hamleigh on Trebonne Creek in 1881. In the next year Ripple Creek was founded by Wood brothers and Boyd of Newcastle (New South Wales). The Neame brothers of Macknade, the only mill and plantation to survive the rust outbreak, had built up the best of reputations as employers and efficient sugar-growers. 'Macknade was the pinnacle which other Valley producers tried unsuccessfully to emulate.' In 1878 sugar from that estate carried off a first prize at the Paris Exhibition. Four years later the Neames took advantage of the keen demand for plantations, and sold out for £90,000 to a Melbourne company closely allied to the Gairloch interests.

But a greater leviathan still was on the scene. The Victoria Sugar Company, a Melbourne associate of Colonial Sugar, had hitherto concentrated its investments in Fiji. In 1880 the company formed the view that Fiji offered insufficient scope for growth, and turned its attention to North Queensland. Colonial Sugar had already decided on the development of a medium-sized mill at Homebush, near Mackay. Of the more northerly districts, the Herbert Valley had most to offer. Its capacity for sugar-growing was proven; only the rust, and the locking up of some of the best lands by speculators, had kept the district back. Between 1881 and 1883 the company set up Victoria, greatest of all Queensland sugar mills. The scale of their £200,000 investment, their use of innovations such as steam-ploughs and electric light, their advanced machinery, designed to crush 60,000 tons of cane in four months, and incorporating weighbridges, automatic feeding, and conveyance by endless belt—all provided an impressive model for others to admire and copy.

None of the newly developed districts north of the Herbert could report such prodigious investment, but all showed the results of optimistic planning. Beyond Cardwell, on the Tully, the somewhat unlikely figure of Tyson, the cattle magnate, came to light as the pioneer planter. A visit to the scene of the old Bellenden Plains plantation late in 1880 convinced him that there would never be a labour shortage in the area because of the numerous Aborigines. During the next three years he and his nephew, Isaac Henry, bought up land and prepared a mill-site. A few selectors followed them, but more were attracted to the Johnstone River, still further north. Opened by cedar-cutters,
this district had been settled by two selectors, Heinrich Scheu and Leopold Stamp. Local tradition says that Scheu claimed a reward for cutting the first track suitable for drays between the Tully and the Johnstone, but the road was so bad that he could substantiate his claim only by taking his dray to pieces and re-assembling it after arrival on the Johnstone. Coming by the easier seaward approach, the old Mackay planter, T. H. Fitzgerald, thought this lush region of heavy rainfall the most hopeful of the new coastal lands on which to seek recovery of his fortunes. In 1879 he founded Innisfail plantation in partnership with eight sisters of the Brisbane Convent of Mercy. A year later Colonial Sugar looked at the Johnstone during their search for a mill-site, but their agent was dubious:

The soil is exceedingly rich, and will grow cane very rankly for the first few years—the rainfall is very great, so far as is known considerably over 100" and well spread throughout the year. The prime objection to the district is that it is all scrub, and consequently slow to get under cultivation, expensive to cultivate for the first few years, and likely to be exceedingly unhealthy and consequently expensive to open up.4

Unhealthy the district certainly was; the first government party to visit Fitzgerald’s plantation found him delirious with fever, and the Johnstone had an unenviable record for disease during the first few years of settlement.5 But by 1882 two more large companies, the Mourilyan and the Queensland, had taken up tracts of country there. Two years later C.S.R. also ventured into the district, founding a mill and plantation at Goondi. Although the smallest of these properties, Fitzgerald’s holding became the centre for settlement, and on the opposite side of the Johnstone the small town of Geraldton was named in compliment to him.*

North again, the Cairns area saw the erection of three mills. The first of these was started by a rather unorthodox syndicate. The Hop Wah company consisted entirely of Chinese who had made money on the Palmer goldfield. It said something for the standing of the Chinese in the community at that time that, although they could offer £25,000 as security, the Bank of New South Wales was prepared to advance the Hop Wah syndicate credit without any security at all, while other banks were on the alert to capture their account. Organized by Andrew Lee On, a naturalized Chinese with West Indian experience, the Hop Wah

*Changed to Innisfail in 1909.
grew 200 acres of cotton in 1880. When this crop failed, they got advice from Hawaiian Chinese about sugar cultivation, and in the next season put 160 acres under cane, crushing their first sugar in 1882. Next in the Cairns area were Thomas Swallow and F. T. Derham. Heads of a large Melbourne firm of biscuit manufacturers, they hoped to find a use for molasses—regarded by most planters as a waste by-product—as well as setting a high standard of sugar production. Late in 1881 they took up an estate of 6,000 acres at Hambledon, six miles from Cairns. A capital investment eventually totalling £180,000 gave them a large and powerful crushing-plant, a four-mile tramway connecting their mill to a wharf on Trinity Inlet, and a homestead whose outlay on fine horses and splendid hospitality survives in Cairns legend to the present day. A third mill was completed in 1884 on the Mulgrave at the Pyramid plantation, some fifteen miles south of Cairns. The owners, J. B. Loridan and Company, were also Melbourne-financed.

This sugar boom saved Cairns from extinction. As late as October 1881 the last of its banks had contemplated transferring to the rival township of Port Douglas, which was twice as populous (510 inhabitants to 278 at Cairns) and enjoyed far more of the inland trade. But although during 1881 and 1882 there was a rush for land around Port Douglas, hardly any sugar cultivation followed. Much of the most accessible country along the river frontages was taken up by speculators, who conformed with the minimum requirements of the Land Act by bailifling their properties and did no more while they waited for values to rise. The Brie Brie plantation, financed like so many others with Victorian capital, was the only one to erect a mill. This was not completed until 1884, and suffered from a constantly changing management. Not merely was Port Douglas left behind by Cairns, but two Victorian companies passed it over in favour of areas further north. The Knockroe mill, which had its first crushing in 1882, was set up on the Bloomfield and in the next year Bauer’s Weary Bay mill began operations north of Cooktown. Both localities were inaccessible except by small boats, and neither concern flourished. Their sole advantage was the availability of cheap land. Since the eighties neither district has ever been used for sugar-growing.

The effects of this bold expansion did not stop short here. During the eighties North Queensland interests in the Pacific were stimulated by trade, by widening activity among the
bèche-de-mer fleet, and most notably by the pressing demand for more recruits to labour in the cane-fields. The simultaneous opening of so many plantations and new sugar districts in North Queensland sent the blackbirding schooners busily searching the tropic seas for new islands that might be denuded of their manpower. The limit had been reached in the southern New Hebrides, where even the most complaisant of villages had no men left to spare. There remained the Solomons to exploit more systematically, and from 1880 the recruiters also followed the bèche-de-mer fishers to the off-shore islands of New Guinea—New Britain, the Woodlarks and the Louisiades. It mattered little that many of the people of these islands were not so well fitted as the tough New Hebrideans, either by customs or physique, for sustained plantation work. All the old subterfuges and enticements, all the old readiness to use force were employed once more, encouraged by the competitive demand in Queensland and the slackness of government agents.

McIlwraith’s government was slow to move in this matter until late in 1882, when the young man who was later to become famous as ‘Chinese’ Morrison took ship with a blackbirder, and wrote for the Melbourne press a damning account of what he saw. The resultant controversy needles the government into ordering an inquiry by two officials at Mackay; and these two gentlemen reported that Morrison was merely a scamp of dubious character creating a fuss where a perfectly satisfactory state of affairs existed. And so during the years 1881 to 1883, when the recruiting of Pacific Islanders was at its height, abuses flourished unchecked. At the same time the traffic was identified more closely than ever before with North Queensland. Of 11,059 Islanders brought to Queensland in those three years, Mackay absorbed 4,426 and the other Northern ports 2,200 more. It was in those years that the belief crystallized in a North Queensland whose future prosperity was bound up with the maintenance of indentured coloured labour. From this belief sprang support for two political movements: for McIlwraith’s imperialism, which urged the annexation of New Guinea and the islands beyond, and—although this movement tended to lie dormant while a sympathetic régime prevailed at Brisbane—for a separate self-governing colony of North Queensland, run by people who ‘understood’ the requirements of the tropics.

North Queensland interest in New Guinea had been stimulated by the bèche-de-mer fisheries. In 1878 W. B. Ingham, an unsuc-
cessful Herbert River planter turned beachcomber, had been appointed Queensland Government Agent at Port Moresby with a rather vague commission to gather information about the state of New Guinea during his cruises around the islands. He did not last long. In December 1878, off the Louisiades, a group of his native 'boys' threw him overboard. Roaring with laughter at their high spirits, Ingham swam back to the boat; as he made to climb aboard, the natives cut off his hands and killed him. Ingham was very popular in North Queensland (his name was given to the main township on the Herbert River), and his fate gave the New Guinea natives a bad reputation, confirmed a year or two later by the murders of several parties of Chinese and Europeans engaged in bêche-de-mer fishing. In November 1880 several victims of these attacks were brought to Cooktown for Christian burial. So great was local indignation that the authorities had difficulty in preventing fifty or sixty men from forming a 'punitive expedition', and the *Cooktown Herald* editorially demanded the annexation of New Guinea by Great Britain—remarking that if Britain refused, some people would prefer to see France take control rather than abide the present state of danger to peaceful fishermen.7

The *Cooktown Herald* failed to point out that the bêche-de-mer fishers were not all model visitors. As a senior police official commented some years later, 'The bêche-de-mer business is a dirty one but profitable, and seems to possess attractions for the lowest class of whites and Manilla men, who have no scruples whatever in dealing with their black employees.'8 Even granting that the Cooktown men had given no cause for trouble, the New Guinea natives could hardly be expected to distinguish them from the blackbirding ships plying their coast in the years from 1880. Indeed, one reason for Great Britain's long reluctance to annex New Guinea was a suspicion that Queensland wanted a safe preserve for blackbirding. When in March 1883 McIlwraith sought to force the Home Government's hand by declaring British sovereignty, the man sent to hoist the Union Jack at Port Moresby was a North Queensland magistrate with no small experience of the backwaters of Empire.* Northern interests

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*Henry Majoribanks Chester (1832–1914) served with the navy of the East India Company 1849–60, suppressing piracy in the Persian Gulf and acting as political agent at the courts of Muscat and Oman; entered Queensland government service 1866; resident magistrate Somerset 1869–70 and 1875–7; transferred Thursday Island 1877, Cairns 1885, Croydon 1887, Cooktown 1891, Clermont 1898, and Gladstone 1902; retired 1903.
watched impatiently the ensuing diplomatic manoeuvres, which in November 1884 left the eastern half of New Guinea partitioned between a tardy Britain and an opportunistic Germany. One Cooktown editor had already urged that Britain should take over the whole island, purchasing the western half from the Dutch for 'a few thousand guildern'; another wrote, just after the final annexation:

There has been quite a flutter of excitement in town over the annexation of Papua, and there are many projected departures for the new lands of promise, while hopes are rife about increased trade to Cooktown. There can be no doubt about the benefits which should accrue to Cooktown if the grand island is opened for settlement, because it is the nearest and most convenient port on the mainland, from whence all necessary supplies can be drawn both for the commercial and naval marine, and the settlers when they go there, which will not be long as it would be preposterous to attempt holding it for Missionaries and their converts... If Britain refuses to do that because of a secret understanding with Germany, let Commodore Erskine haul down the Union Jack, and Victoria, with the help of South Australia and Queensland, will replace it with the banner of the Southern Cross.9

Strong words, these. But they justly reflected the aggressive self-confidence, the willingness to break with older and more cautious authorities, which at that time characterized many North Queenslanders.

These qualities were to appear most forcibly in the Separation movement, which aimed at freeing North Queensland from control by a Brisbane administration felt to lack understanding or sympathy for Northern problems. Almost from the first settlement of North Queensland, the idea had been played with. In 1861 Sir Roderick Murchison, president of the Royal Geographical Society, had pronounced the area 'much too distant from Queensland or South Australia to be governed with effect from either Brisbane or Adelaide',10 and during the pastoral boom of 1864–6 Bowen had dreamed of becoming capital of a new colony; Dalrymple was thought of as a likely premier.11 The next few years of depression quietened but did not stifle the movement. In 1869 the Kennedy constituency elected the British statesman John Bright as its member in what Shann calls 'a conventional gesture of despair'; in fact Bright's election was got up by the people of Mackay in protest because none of the other parliamentary candidates visited them, and had little to do with
northern grievances as such. But the idea of Separation never wholly died at Mackay, and at Bowen a petition of 1870 carried a large number of signatures.\textsuperscript{12}

The \textit{Port Denison Times}, eager for Bowen's advancement, preached Separation in season and out of it, and by 1876 counted among its supporters the \textit{Cleveland Bay Express} at Townsville, the \textit{Ravenswood Times} and the \textit{Cooktown Courier}; but the \textit{Mackay Mercury} was at that time lukewarm, and the widely-read Charters Towers \textit{Northern Miner} hostile.\textsuperscript{13}

It was often alleged that Brisbane governments gave the South more than its fair share of public works, so that Northern revenue was not applied to Northern roads and bridges, but filched by the greedy politicians of Brisbane and the Darling Downs, whose numbers dominated both houses of Parliament. Successive premiers pondered the remedy of 'financial separation', the keeping of different accounts for North Queensland.\textsuperscript{14} Broached in 1872, 1875, and 1877, the subject never seemed urgent enough to call for an immediate decision. Meanwhile the development of the telegraph system during the early seventies had done much to break down isolation and speed the processes of administration; and McIlwraith's appointment of John Murtagh Macrossan as his Minister for Works and Railways turned the flow of public expenditure generously into Northern channels between 1879 and 1882.

The motives which inspired some citizens of Townsville in February 1882 to form a Separation League, pledged to seek complete territorial independence for North Queensland, are not clear. With 27,549 inhabitants at the census of 1881, and thriving mining and sugar industries supplementing its original pastoral basis, North Queensland certainly looked a safer proposition as a self-governing colony than Western Australia, which at the same time was beginning a successful campaign to free itself of control by Downing Street; safer, too, than Queensland itself had been when it separated from New South Wales in 1859. But except for the ambitions of small towns that hoped to grow into capital cities, and small town orators who hoped to become politicians and cabinet ministers, no section of North Queensland in 1882 had any compelling motive to throw off the Brisbane yoke. For its first year or two, the Separation League remained unimportant, while Brisbane was controlled by the McIlwraith-Macrossan régime, with its free-spending public works policy, its tolerance of coloured labour, and the grandiose
attraction of a transcontinental railway, to be built across North-Western Queensland on the land-grant principle which had been the basis of the Canadian Pacific. But in the latter half of 1883 the cause of Separation was stimulated by two rude shocks. World sugar prices began to fall under the pressure of competition from Germany, where beet sugar production was encouraged by government subsidy. And in the elections of September 1883 McIlwraith was soundly beaten, and the Liberals under Griffith came to power on a policy of restricting coloured labour.

Griffith could not have taken office at a worse time for the planters. Not only were they confronted with the decline in sugar prices, whose effects they hardly as yet appreciated; but by 1883 the immense strides taken by the industry had created a dearth of coloured labour. So many acres of dense tropical scrub had to be cleared, so many stands of cane planted by hand, so many mature canefields to be trashed clean and cut down by men stooping under a strong sun to wield their machetes, so many mills to be staffed, that even the most diligent efforts of the blackbirders could not cajole or coerce sufficient Pacific Islanders to Australia. Even in 1883, a record year when 5,276 Islanders made the journey to Queensland, the Cairns Post was reviewing the situation gloomily:

South Sea Islanders in consequence of the large drain are becoming daily scarcer; they are harder to obtain and therefore more costly than hitherto; hence also a lower class as regards physique is being introduced and the cost is thereby again increased.15

Of other forms of what they termed 'low-class' labour, Maltese had been found too costly; Indians were unobtainable; four hundred Tamil coolies from Ceylon had proved unfit for the work. A few Javanese were available—one sugar company on the Johnstone indentured 170 of them in 1885—but the Dutch authorities were unfriendly, and made it clear that if there was any tendency towards large-scale recruiting for Queensland, they would ban the traffic altogether. This dismayed the sugar-growers for, although inlanders accustomed to rice culture, the Javanese adapted well to cane-growing on the damp Johnstone lowlands. With cleaner habits and sounder notions of hygiene than the Pacific Islanders, they stood up better to the climate, and this compensated for their slighter physique.16

At Mackay over three hundred Chinese from the Palmer were employed for 9s. a week and their board. Others were working

11 Banana Lighter, Tully River
By courtesy of the Oxley Library
at Ayr and Cairns, perhaps more content to toil in the canefields than they had been in the seventies, when alluvial gold had still been plentiful. The Mackay Planters’ Association was inspired to send a representative to Hong Kong to negotiate for a regular supply of Chinese labour. Coolies would not come as cheaply as Pacific Islanders on their £6 a year; but the industry could not afford white labour, and in any case: ‘Surely if a white man can find no better work than tending sugar-cane he is no gain to Queensland or any other country’.17 Three millions of capital had been attracted to sugar-growing in North Queensland on the basis of inexpensive coloured labour. And now here was the clever city lawyer, Samuel Griffith, claiming a mandate from southerners to curb or put an end to the traffic, and with it the exhilarating boom that had brought such expansion to the North within the last four years. It was rumoured—Griffith himself believed it18—that the Mackay planters had taken to prefacing their nobblers of rum with the toast ‘D.S.G.’—‘Damn Sam Griffith’.

To many planters Griffith seemed to be either an opportunist agitating the working-class vote or an impractical idealist. But, however lacking in personal experience of sugar-growing, of agriculture, or of manual labour of any sort, Griffith was no political innocent. His notions of working the industry without coloured labour were calculated to appeal to one section at least of the North Queensland community. Since the Land Act of 1876 came into force, a number of small farmers had taken up home­steads in the sugar districts. Often former employees of the plantations, these selectors concentrated at first on growing maize for the Pacific Islanders. Their activities fitted in with the plantation economy, and the cane-growers did nothing to dis­courage them. But maize was found to give unsatisfactory results, both at Mackay and the Herbert. After 1878 production fell off as, encouraged by the boom in sugar, the selectors turned their holdings into canefields.

The odds seemed against them. To have their sugar milled, they depended on the goodwill of the bigger planters, many of whom refused to enter into definite contracts for crushing, and would fit in the small men’s cane only at short notice, after their own had been given priority. This uncertainty about his market left the selector helpless, as the cane-cutters and teamsters required to get his harvest to the mill were usually provided by the mill­owners. Even if the selector had the resources to find his own

12 ‘The Old Bark Hut’, Cape River gold diggings, about 1868

By courtesy of the Oxley Library
labour, he could not tell at what part of the busiest season of the year extra hands would be required. In years of glut his crop might be left standing. One or two millers—Long of Habana at Mackay, and the Neames on the Herbert—were more cooperative, but they were exceptions. Most planters quite naturally placed their own convenience before that of a class of men who seemed likely to disprove many of the comfortable assumptions on which the plantation system had been based.

Scratching a living from other produce, the smallholders maintained themselves by doing in person many of the tasks which, on the plantation canefields, had been relegated to Pacific Islanders as too strenuous for white men. By 1882 six smallholders on the Herbert felt sufficiently well established to brave early ridicule and form the Herbert River Farmers’ Association. In this district there were fewer large estates to overshadow them than at Mackay; and Frank Neame of Macknade, most respected and successful of local planters, gave them his backing by accepting the presidency of the Association and donating five guineas to their funds. Forthright views were expressed on behalf of the Association:

We small settlers can explode the belief that the district only can be developed by gangs of black labour with a few white bosses. We are six who have been in the district continuously for upward of ten years. We have done hard work from fencing to scrub clearing and in spite of having no trips to the South we can physically measure ourselves with those fortunate ones who have had the advantage of recuperative trips.¹⁹

These words did not convince all who heard them. In the same year (1882) the Government Land Agent on the Herbert wrote: ‘I anticipate that the greater proportion of the present homesteads will, on becoming freehold, be sold to and become absorbed into the neighbouring larger estates’.²⁰ But along the frontages of the Tully, the Johnstone, and the Daintree a brisk demand for homesteads was becoming apparent. In each of these districts between fifteen and twenty selectors took up land, and nearly all were self-made men of little capital: miners, packers, timber-cutters, occasionally a speculative bank clerk or government official.

Opposition to coloured labour was meanwhile growing among the working men of North Queensland, who found time-expired Pacific Islanders tending to take jobs where they competed with
European labour. Towards the end of 1882 anti-coolie demon­
strations were held at Mackay, Charters Towers, and Townsville,
during the last of which an orderly torchlight procession of
working men proclaimed their support for Griffith. During the
next year 733 residents of Mackay petitioned the government to
impose penalties on the engagement of Pacific Islanders outside
tropical agriculture. Before the elections of 1883 Griffith
made three tours of the North within eighteen months, and it
must have been borne in upon him that his best hopes of breaking
McIlwraith’s grip on the northern constituencies lay in this
quarter. Even if—as in fact happened—he failed to take any
Northern seats outside the mining centres in 1883, the settlement
of a Liberal yeomanry among the sugar districts could do his
party no harm on future occasions.

Any scheme to encourage smallholding in the sugar districts
was confronted with the problem of milling. The crude methods
of the sixties, when almost every planter had been his own miller,
were now hardly feasible. Technological advances had made the
erection of a mill a matter for large-scale capital. In Mauritius
and the French West Indies this situation had been met by the
emergence of a central mill system. Planters confined themselves
to sugar-growing, sending their cane to a milling firm which dealt
exclusively in crushing and refining. During the seventies
Colonial Sugar had pioneered this system in northern New South
Wales, where it worked satisfactorily with the farmers of the
Clarence and Richmond Rivers. In North Queensland, however,
although the firm had the avowed intention of purchasing cane
from small farmers, it felt that the plantation system offered the
best hopes of assuring a regular supply of cane. There were
hardly any smallholders near its mill at Goondi, on the Johnstone.
On the Herbert, the company had declined to accept isolated
proposals from selectors, although it was willing to enter con­
tracts if, by acting collectively, the farmers could guarantee a fair
tonnage. When, however, the Farmers’ Association was formed,
the local manager of C.S.R.—a coloured labour stalwart—proved
hostile to the scheme, and advised his head office to follow the
accepted tradition of plantation development with indentured
coloured labour. But the times were against him. As this kind
of labour became increasingly difficult to obtain, planters
throughout Queensland began to show interest in the central
mill system, especially after a Sydney engineer named Angus
Mackay had reported to the Queensland Government in 1883
on the working of central mills overseas. But for the present they were prepared to go no further than agreeing that such a scheme might prove useful at some time in the distant future.23

Griffith could not accept such a gradual approach to the problems of the sugar industry. Soon after he took office, a series of scandals came to light about the conduct of blackbirders off the eastern part of New Guinea. One recruiting ship, the Forest King, was seized by a Royal Navy patrol on the grounds that its cargo of Islanders had not been properly informed of the purpose for which they were required. Charges were preferred against the master and the recruiting agent, who were acquitted by a Brisbane jury. Later in 1884 the captain and boatswain of the Hopeful were brought to trial for illicit recruiting and murder. It was alleged that the boatswain had pursued an escapee and cut his throat; also that a boy, too young for plantation work, had been thrown overboard without proper means of getting ashore, so that he drowned. This time the Crown secured a conviction, and the accused were sentenced to death. Numerous petitions sought mercy for them, and the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, the first two years to be spent in chains. This severe example may have served as a deterrent. The number of Pacific Islanders brought to Queensland fell off during 1884 and 1885.

The planters took the view that they could not be held responsible for the treatment of the Islanders before reaching Queensland. Their concern lay with the welfare of those employed on their plantations; and who could point to any abuses there? Already, however, the appearance of harmony had been upset. At a Boxing Day race meeting near Mackay, in 1883, a time-expired Islander demanded liquor from a white man in charge of a refreshment booth—who, it was believed, had secretly supplied Islanders with alcohol at more convenient times. Irritated by a refusal, the New Hebridean with some of his companions began throwing bottles at the storekeeper and other white men. "The riot would have been stopped quickly," said a newspaper report of the incident, "had it not been that a large number of excited white men interfered."24 Some on horseback, and all armed with sticks and palings, they charged the Islanders, whom they outnumbered, and pursued them through a fence, beating them brutally. This went on for half an hour. Throughout the evening wounded Islanders were brought into town. Of these, five were seriously injured, and one died.
While this incident was seized on by opponents of coloured labour as the sort of undesirable scene that might be expected in a racially mixed society, few sympathized with the Pacific Islanders. The comment of a Charters Towers editor was all too typical: ‘Kanakas, like other dark races, cannot understand too much kindness and will be much more obedient if inspired by a sense of fear than if they are pampered’. Twenty years later the Mackay riot—exaggerated into a lurid battle, with white men defending their wives for hours against a howling Kanaka mob—was still being cited by radical journals urging the abolition of Pacific Island employment. It cannot be said that the planters were much worse than their critics.

On one point A. R. Macdonald, the Immigration Inspector at Mackay and a man of considerable experience, was emphatic:

So far as I am aware there has not been in my experience a case at all proved in which a Kanaka had been flogged on the plantations. Of course I have known of men—Kanakas who have received a thrashing from a white man in a quarrel between them. Except in the case of the Christmas races last year, I know of no instance of anything like cruel treatment of the labour boys.

Passing over the thought that Macdonald nowhere mentioned any quarrel where a white man received a thrashing from an Islander, this can be accepted as a fair report from an impartial observer; North Queensland bred no Simon Legrees. But the cold statistics of the Registrar-General showed that the death rate among Pacific Islanders was disturbingly high, and since 1879 had been steadily on the increase. Even in that year, at 55-78 per thousand it was three times the death rate of Queensland as a whole, and in 1883 one Islander died in every twelve. During the summer of 1883-4 an epidemic of dystentery and scurvy swept the plantations, appearing with especial severity among the natives of New Ireland, who seemed unable to cope with the change from their normal diet of fish and coconuts. In 1884 the ‘Polynesian’ death rate was 147-74 per thousand, one man in every seven.

At Mackay the epidemic became a matter for politics. It happened that a government hospital for the reception of Pacific Islanders was nearing completion. For its upkeep a capitation fee of ten shillings a head was to be levied annually on all employers of Pacific Islanders. True to the traditions of govern-
ment building in Australia, the hospital was not ready on 1 January 1884, when the new system came into force, but meanwhile the planters were confronted with the widespread outbreak of dysentery. ‘Immediately on the capitation fees being demanded,’ reported A. R. Macdonald, ‘every sick islander in the district seems to have been rushed into the hospital’; 28 within a few weeks 187 were accommodated in a building intended for about one-third that number. The hospital, although clean and well run, was inadequately furnished and ventilated, and had to be fenced to prevent many of the patients from escaping—as, unless extremely ill, they often refused to stay in these unfamiliar surroundings for treatment. In March a Brisbane paper printed an anonymous letter alleging neglect and incompetence. Its more extreme charges were soon refuted; but a government doctor sent up to manage the hospital resigned after eleven days of struggling against difficulties, and eventually the hospital had to be closed for some months. The Mackay planters demanded the formation of a hospital management committee on which they should be represented. The episode tended to confirm their scepticism about government intervention in matters affecting the welfare of the Islanders.

With so many sick and dying among them, and with replacement increasingly difficult, the Pacific Islanders were no longer regarded as the most efficient of labour forces. Under McLlwraith negotiations had begun with the Government of India for the import of indentured labour. In Fiji Indians were being used in some numbers on the sugar estates, in place of the blackbirders’ recruits from the Solomons and New Hebrides. Such planters as J. Ewen Davidson argued that if Indians were introduced to Queensland solely for tropical agriculture, the European working man would not be affected. In 1884 Davidson visited London to win Colonial Office support for his scheme. But Whitehall would not move without assurances that the Queensland Government, and not any private individual, would accept the responsibility for recruiting, reception and welfare of Indians, and that meant shifting Griffith. 29 One of his first actions on taking power had been the introduction of a bill repealing the 1862 Act facilitating the indenture of coloured labour into Queensland. The bill may have been for show rather than effect, but the Legislative Council took no chances, and by throwing it out confirmed Griffith’s reputation as an opponent of Indian and other forms of coloured migration.
The planters fought back. Their methods were none too scrupulous. Playing on the anti-Chinese sentiments of many North Queenslanders, they secured 1,574 signatures to a petition requesting indentured Indian labour as the safeguard against Chinese economic aggression. ‘This step they consider the only one that can save the sugar industry to the white inhabitants and prevent it falling into the hands of the Chinese, who have already established one factory and are settling extensively on the lands.’

(Such considerations did not hinder the planters from employing Chinese extensively where they could. ‘On the Johnstone River,’ wrote a commentator in 1884, ‘John Chinaman is already cock of the walk, nearly the whole of the field work—even to the cutting of the cane and loading the trucks—being done by contract’.)

Not content with traducing the blameless Hop Wah syndicate, planters’ spokesmen also poured scorn on the class of European migrants who might be attracted to the canefields. The few dozen Maltese to arrive at Townsville became in Macrossan’s imagination the forerunners of hundreds, politically dominated by their priests and economically undercutting the Australian worker. ‘This is where the real danger to the country lies, not from the coolies.’

Perhaps the claims of Griffith’s opponents that they upheld the white workers’ standard of living could have been taken seriously, if the Mackay Planters’ Association had not found it desirable, in August 1884, to reduce the wages of all white employees by 10 per cent.

By now the North Queensland planters were in the grip of economic pressures on which no government of those times, however sympathetic, could have had much influence. The bounty-fed sugar-beet industry of Germany and France had made such inroads into the British market that world prices had tumbled sharply. Queensland exported about 60 per cent of her sugar production to the southern colonies of Australia, on whose markets it had to compete with the cheaply-produced output of Java and China. But many planters, feeling pressure from their banks, could see only that Griffith’s policies had led to a threatened shortage of cheap, reliable labour. It was alleged that a £50,000 mill for the Johnstone River, and another costing £80,000 for Cairns, had been countermanded when Griffith took office. Certain it was that Tyson closed down his Tully River operations abruptly, and the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Company, in which Davidson was managing partner, shut three of their five mills by the end of the 1884 season. Gone was the air of
bustle and expansion from the sugar towns. A journalist's pen-picture of Mackay was dispiriting:

The sun glared on a multitude of galvanised iron roofs, and the dust blew up the street and then round about and down again and then across and dodged at the corners. A few people, all wearing billycock hats with puggaries of different degrees of whiteness helped by the contrast of their presence to make the street appear utterly desolate.34

Some planters were predicting the extinction of the industry within a few years.

But Griffith was not yet done. In January 1885 a three-man Royal Commission arrived in North Queensland to investigate every aspect of the traffic in Pacific Islanders, especially recruits from New Guinea.35 Perhaps the Commissioners were inclined to an abolitionist bias, but they took their evidence with every appearance of care, interviewing no less than 500 Islanders. On the plantations they found little about which to complain. At the Mourilyan plantation the manager successfully cleared himself of allegations of ill-treatment. An odd incident at Ingham aroused some controversy. The manager of Hamleigh plantation, A. S. Cowley,* was a man whose plantation experience in South Africa and sharp intellect had brought him to the fore as an able partisan of the sugar-planters. He was respected rather than popular, partly because in an easygoing community he set a strict example as teetotaller and Anglican churchman, but mainly because of a clever man's irascibility or impatience with any form of what he considered slowness or muddleheadedness. With the Commission he was none too accommodating. He informed them that, in his view, it would be sufficient for them to interview two or three English-speaking representatives among the Islanders. When they decided to take a larger sample, he protested that his arrangements would not permit the Islanders awaiting examination to be kept separate from those already questioned; but the Commission formed the impression that witnesses were intimidated by the presence of the overseer, and after some obvious signalling between bystanders and one of the Islanders under question, they over-ruled Cowley's objections and saw each witness separately. The resulting information helped the Commission to draw up a

*Born 1848; sugar-growing in South Africa; on Herbert River from 1877 as manager of sugar plantations and owner of small cattle run; M.L.A. for Herbert 1888–1907; Minister for Lands 1890–3; Speaker 1893–9 and 1903–6; unsuccessful Senate candidate 1901; Knight 1904; died 1926.
damning report, in which they stated that at least six vessels recruiting from the New Guinea islands had taken no trouble to make sure that the natives understood how long they would be away, or for what purpose they would be employed. Fortified by this report, Griffith proceeded to his next move. In August 1885 he brought down legislation providing that no licences to recruit Pacific Islanders would be issued after the end of 1890. Five years' grace would be allowed for the sugar industry to make other arrangements; then the planters must fare as best they could without Pacific Island labour.

Somewhat surprisingly, the measure had an easy passage through Parliament. McIlwraith's Opposition were seldom unwilling to put up a fight against Griffith's policies, but on this occasion they contented themselves with prophesying ruin to the sugar industry, and did not even press the matter to a division.36 Instead, they held their fire until November, 1885, when Griffith brought forward his own proposal for keeping the sugar industry alive. He requested a vote of £50,000 to finance the construction of central sugar mills on the co-operative principle. Any group of selectors prepared to mortgage their holdings to the government, and to forgo the use of coloured labour, would receive a pound-for-pound subsidy towards building a mill. Once completed, mills set up under this scheme would be run by the government until their operations had paid capital expenses; then they would be handed over to the cane-farmers for maintenance as a co-operative. In this way Griffith hoped to foster an independent yeomanry in the Northern sugar areas. The scheme was fiercely assailed by McIlwraith and Macrossan, who contended that the government had no right to use public money to supply capital for carrying on a private industry. Such dependence on the state would demoralize the small farmers, they predicted; and they fought a long delaying action as the vote went through the Legislative Assembly.37 To the Opposition's disappointment, however, the Mackay planter, Hume Black, supported the measure, saying that any experiment designed for the benefit of the sugar industry deserved a fair trial.

In this, Hume Black showed no inconsistency, despite his previous fight for the retention of coloured labour. More than a year earlier, he had predicted that the plantation system would eventually give way to a central mill economy, although most Mackay planters would have agreed with him in placing this change a long way into the future. In fact, even before the
Griffith administration brought down the central mill proposals of November 1885, private enterprise in North Queensland was moving in this direction. Early in 1884 Colonial Sugar had overruled its local manager and offered the small growers of the Lower Herbert seven-year agreements, under which the company paid 10s. a ton for cane and stood the cost of harvesting. The company would advance £3 an acre on trashed cane six months old, and another £3 at nine months after a second trashing, or £2 a ton on ratoon cane. These terms were similar to those offered in northern New South Wales, and the selectors lost no time in accepting. The growers undertook to cut their own cane on the co-operative system, moving from farm to farm at the Colonial Sugar cane inspector’s direction, and delivering a minimum of sixty tons daily.

Given this security, the smallholders could afford to employ a few labourers. At first they could not obtain Pacific Islanders, and engaged ‘slow but trustworthy’ Chinese at 16s. a week and keep. Later (from 1886) a more sympathetic mill manager enabled them to employ Islanders, who were cheaper. By the end of 1884 it was becoming widely accepted on the Herbert that cane-farming and sugar manufacture would soon be two separate and distinct occupations.38 The notion was slower in spreading to Mackay, where the selectors, although numerous, formed a less influential element in the community, but by 1885 it was noted that the millers were showing themselves more anxious to conciliate the smallholders and secure their business than at any time previously. But this seemed to be something of a deathbed repentance, and a number of Mackay selectors preferred to ask for a government central mill.

The encouragement of smallholders by developing the central mill system has often been regarded as Griffith’s answer to the coloured labour question, and Griffith himself probably regarded the central mills as in some way compensating for the withdrawal of the Pacific Islanders. It was his view that a farmer working for himself would be capable of that sustained hard labour, of which white men in the tropics had been regarded as incapable. This was the case argued by the selectors on the Herbert, and the planters could not easily refute it, since the only white men previously employed on the canefields had been wage-earners, with little incentive to exert themselves. But although the farmers were prepared to tackle jobs usually left on the plantations to Pacific Islanders, and although they looked for support
in establishing themselves from the Liberals—whose Land Acts of 1876 and 1884 did much to assist the small agriculturalist—it did not follow that they also favoured the prohibition of coloured labour. That side of Griffith's policy was supported in North Queensland only by workingmen exasperated by the threat of competition from time-expired plantation hands in the sugar towns—and perhaps by a very few people who regarded the matter as a moral issue.

The farmers were not, on the whole, averse to coloured labour. Of 176 northern sugar-growers employing Pacific Islanders between 1886 and 1888, 132—three-quarters—were selectors employing a dozen or less—usually only two or three. If the wealthy planters could not find enough white labour, at a time when the attractions of the goldfields and the demand for railway labourers absorbed newcomers as fast as the immigrant ships could bring them, how could a struggling farmer expect to provide more alluring wages and conditions? When W. O. Hodgkinson was sent north in 1886 to advise the government on the most likely sites for government-subsidized central mills, he found almost all the smallholders—even on the Daintree and the Mossman, where there were no crushing facilities—firm in their refusal to attempt sugar-growing without the use of coloured labour. The sole exception was at Mackay, where Hodgkinson duly recommended the establishment of two central mills, one at Racecourse and one at North Eton. At each of these centres a group of farmers agreed to mortgage their lands to the government for an advance of between £20,000 and £21,000.40

Both concerns soon ran into difficulties. Their shareholders were unable to keep the mills fully supplied with cane, and the directors found it necessary to purchase extra, at higher prices, from growers outside the scheme using coloured labour. Moreover, one or two of the larger shareholders in the North Eton double-crossed the government by raising money on their lands through a private bank, instead of fulfilling their promise to mortgage with the government when their selections became freehold. The mill was mismanaged in other ways, and had to be subsidized with another £5,000 of public money. Although these circumstances were peculiar to the North Eton, they furnished the coloured-labour party with a stick to beat Griffith's policy. Natural setbacks also threw the growers into a stronger reliance on cheap coloured labour. A plague of locusts on the Herbert in 1884 was followed by a general outbreak of cane-grub between
1886 and 1888, and drought in 1888–9. Everywhere in North Queensland except on the Johnstone the acreage under cane dwindled between 1885 and 1889, and all sugar-growing interests blamed the government.

Here was Griffith's problem. His policies had checked the growth of a plantation economy, and had encouraged a tendency—already developing within the industry—towards the separation of milling and farming operations. This tendency had been encouraged by the increasing costs of equipping an efficient, modern mill, which made for specialization of interest, and prepared the way for the replacement of plantations by farms. The next step would be the subdivision of large estates, provision of roads and transport facilities, and the growth of a community of farmers. But none of these developments was inconsistent with the retention of coloured labour, and in an era of falling prices, farmers combined with planters to assert that it would be impossible to carry on the industry profitably, let alone stimulate its growth, without cheap, reliable labour. Griffith's idealism foundered on economics. His modest subsidies of central mills could not offset the profound influence on the world sugar market of the government-aided beet industries of Germany, Austria, and France. North Queenslanders, who tended to look no further than Brisbane for the source of their troubles, saw only that the depression had coincided with Griffith's term of office. Within months some of the very selectors who had been appealing to Griffith for central mills were turning to support the Separation movement.

Few doubted that the spread of the Separation cause had been accelerated by Griffith's coloured labour policy. Ewen Davidson, after the failure of his London mission to secure Indian coolies, had gone on to urge the grant of self-government to North Queensland, admitting—all too candidly for the liking of some of his colleagues back in North Queensland—that a divergence of views on the coloured labour question was one influence making for a clash between Brisbane and the North. The Mackay planters were hot for Separation. But the cause needed a wider appeal. Simply as a means of securing cheap labour for sugar-growers, it could not be justified. The Kanaka traffic had not even the sanction of long-established tradition. Outside Mackay, the sense of dependence on it had developed only since the boom of 1880. If, however, support for Separation could be proven to rest on a wider basis, with inland mining and pastoral interests reinforcing
the aspiration of the coastal areas, the movement for a new colony would indeed be powerful. It all hinged on whether the sugar growers could find common ground with the miners and pastoralists, whose origins, traditions and interests linked them more closely with the rest of the Australian community.

It would not be easy. The miners had shown little interest in agriculture of any sort, and forcibly objected to coolie labour. Those who had left the goldmines had become town labourers, suspicious of alien competition; only a small minority could have had the slightest interest in the fortunes of the cane-farming selectors. The only way in which miners and sugar-growers could be drawn together would be through a common reaction against Brisbane, and in the early eighties the miners were too prosperous to feel strongly about such matters. But when coastal North Queenslanders voiced a robust nationalism over the New Guinea issue, or wished to be free of the restraints imposed on their activities by the British Government, the inland newspapers found space to print their views, and nobody arose to defend Britain's caution. If North Queensland, Australia's northern outpost, was not the birth-place of Australian nationalism, it was at any rate a healthy climate for its spread.

2Ibid., 24 Jan. 1957.
3D. Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Ch. XXII. According to Mr Frederic Stewart, Tolga, Fitzgerald had originally intended settling on the Daintree, but was shown the Johnstone by Sub-Inspector Robert Johnstone and his father, John Stewart, a cedar-cutter.
5*Towrns Herald*, 25 April 1883.
6*V. & P. 1884, II*, p. 1435: 'Charges by George Ernest Morrison in Connection with the Polynesian Vessel, "Larne"'.
7*Cooktown Herald*, 8 Dec. 1880.
10Towns to Black, 15 Aug. 1866. (Towns MSS.).
12Port Denison Times, 1 and 22 Jan., 1 Apr., 13 May, 8 July 1876.
14Cairns Post, 17 May 1883.
15R. C. 1889, qns 2771, 2794-2801, 2834-5 (evidence of R. R. Smellie, manager Mourilyan Sugar Co.).
19 Quoted by R. Shepherd in Herbert River Express, 31 Jan. 1957.
21 V. & P. 1883-4, p. 1455.
22 According to J. Alm in Herbert River Express, 24, 31 Jan., 7 Feb. 1933.
23 See, for instance, Hume Black’s remarks in Q.P.D. XLI, p. 71.
24 Towers Herald, 29 Dec. 1883.
25 Ibid., 5 Jan. 1884.
26 New Eagle, 30 Sept. 1905.
27 Sydney Mail, 30 August 1884.
28 V. & P. 1884, II, p. 697.
29 Ibid., p. 927, et seq.
30 Ibid., p. 941.
31 Queenslander, 27 Oct. 1884.
32 Q.P.D. XLI, p. 58.
33 Sydney Mail, 16 Aug. 1884: ‘This will no doubt stiffen the backs of the anti-planter party’.
34 Ibid.
35 V. & P. 1885, II, p. 797.
37 Q.P.D. XLVII, pp. 1442-77: see also comments of Brisbane Courier.
39 R. C. 1889, appendices, 7, 12, 14 and 19.
41 V. & P. 1885, I, p. 377.
During the eighties most North Queenslanders felt a growing sense of community, fed from many sources. Partly it arose from the plain fact that there were now many who had lived there fifteen or twenty years, including a generation of young people who had known no other home. (In 1891 23.7 per cent of North Queenslanders were under 21 years of age.) North Queensland had ceased to be the outpost of northern settlement in Australia. The pioneers were now droving their cattle across the Northern Territory to the Kimberleys, or hunting for gold in the North-West and New Guinea. In North Queensland the nomadic days were over for the gold-miners; the squatters were building and improving on land they hoped to leave to their sons; the coastal lowlands were dotted with the holdings of those who chose the settled routine of planter and farmer. Gradually they were brought together by improved communications, common business interests, and in consequence mutual social and political problems.

Settlement and consolidation left their mark on the census-taker's tallies. Between 1876 and 1891 the North was the fastest-growing part of Queensland. Its population increased by over 150 per cent from 27,489 to 69,651; or, excluding non-Europeans, from 15,988 to 57,247. (The total Queensland increase over the same period was 173,283 to 393,718, or 127 per cent.) Hardly more than one-third of the white inhabitants in 1876 were Australian-born, and over one-half were British. The Irish were a somewhat stronger group than they were in Queensland or Australia as a whole, and showed up especially on the mining fields, among the nomadic element who shifted easily from rush to rush. Their traces remained in the naming of such mines as the Tyrconnell and the Home Rule at Thornborough, the Dan O'Connell, St Patrick and Wild Irishman at Herberton and Watsonville, the Harp of Erin at Croydon. For many years the North Queensland mining community could be counted on to pass resolutions in favour of Home Rule, or to send round the hat for generous contributions to the Irish poor. Among migrants
of European origin, Germans were most numerous, with Danes and Swedes next. They included several who had jumped ship to try their luck in a new land, and others who left home because of military conscription. These groups contributed several selecting families to the coastal farming areas, particularly around Bowen and Proserpine. The Italians, so conspicuous an element in later years, were not yet present in any numbers. But as early as 1869 the first reef at Ravenswood was discovered by Louis Borghero, founder of a numerous clan; while one or two families, such as the Regazzolis on the Herbert River, were already in the sugar districts in the eighties. By 1890 the Italians were beginning to supersede the Chinese as charcoal-burners and timber-cutters on the mining fields.\(^1\)

A cohesive white Australian community was coming into being. In 1876 only one Northerner in six was Queensland-born; by 1891 the proportion was one in three, many of them locally-reared children. Native Australians almost equalled immigrants in number by 1891, and the proportion of foreign-born had fallen from one-seventh to one-eighth. North Queensland was no longer a new frontier to be conquered, but for many a familiar home.

Physical barriers were diminishing. Since the early seventies every settlement of any size had telegraph. Roads were defined, and teamsters with bullock drays pulling out from Townsville or Bowen served the inland from the Etheridge in the north to Bowen Downs and Aramac far down in Central Queensland. By 1880 the first coaching services linked established mining towns. It was possible to leave Townsville at 9 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, arriving next day by 1 p.m. at Ravenswood, or by 3 p.m. at Charters Towers, a distance of 82 miles. The more northerly mining fields, the Palmer, Hodgkinson, and Herberton, were less easily served. Teamsters found the steep ridges of the coast ranges hard going, and these conditions brought forward the packers, a group of men who made faster time by transporting goods on donkeys or horseback. Late in the eighties mules came into favour with both packers and teamsters. More sure-footed than horses or bullocks, they showed a hardy resistance to disease, and were capable of carrying loads as heavy as ten or eleven hundredweight each.\(^2\)

Through the scrub-covered ranges down from the Tablelands to the coast, this traffic was served by several routes, whose merits were argued with anxious rivalry by the inhabitants of the newly-
Growth of a Community, 1880–90

opened ports. Cairns was almost extinguished by Christy Palmerston’s trail from the Hodgkinson to Port Douglas, and when, late in 1880, James Robson blazed a direct trail from Herberton to the coast, the inhabitants of Cairns were glad to pay the expenses of clearing the road for use by packers.³ Even then Cobb’s coaches, introduced in 1882 to serve Herberton and Georgetown, preferred the Port Douglas route. The local authorities of Geraldton, on the Johnstone River, also hankered for a share of the trade, and at their request Palmerston marked a trail from Herberton to Mourilyan Harbour in December 1884. The trade was well worth contending for; on one day in May 1883 there were estimated to be five hundred pack-horses plying between the coast and Herberton.

Where such rivalries existed, it was the coming of a railway that clinched the advancement of one port over its competitors, especially as Queensland’s geography made for a decentralized railway system, with lines penetrating the interior from a number of points along the coast. Editors and deputations from Mackay to Cooktown raised their voices in demands for what nobody could keep from calling ‘the iron horse’. Long and tedious were the intrigues and quarrels over routes. Townsville and Bowen each had hopes of becoming the gateway to Charters Towers and the pastoral west. Bowen had the better harbour, Townsville had the better politicians, and was on the right side of the Burdekin. In 1877 a Liberal government decided to start the inland railway from Townsville. (It was possibly relevant that a leading Liberal, Griffith, invested substantially in Townsville real estate.)⁴ Five years later the line was open to Charters Towers, and in 1884 a southern branch filched the Ravenswood trade from Bowen; by 1887 the rails stretched west from Charters Towers to Hughenden. Mackay was the next port to get a railway, a short twenty-two miles to Mirani in 1885. In the same year a line was begun from Cooktown to the Palmer goldfield. Its precise destination was for some years in dispute between two or three of the decayed mining towns, of which Maytown had the best case. As it happened the line only got as far as Laura, sixty-seven miles of flat, third-rate country from Cooktown. There a substantial bridge was built over the Laura River, and a single locomotive was run across and back as a test. And nothing else ever crossed the Laura, for the line got no further.

Bitter political fighting was provoked over the starting point for
the line to the Atherton Tableland and Herberton. Port Douglas, Cairns, and Mourilyan Harbour all had their champions. Cairns was chosen, in reality on sound engineering grounds; but Sir Samuel Griffith, who turned the first sod for the line on 10 May 1886, was widely believed to be influenced either by election considerations (his party won Cairns by a twelve-vote majority after an unruly contest in 1888) or by cabinet colleagues with property in the town. It was anyway a great day for Cairns. A bullock was roasted in the main street, and the 300 navvies employed on construction were feasted with four hogsheads of beer and a quantity of bread. So many were arrested for drunkenness that the lock-up was filled, and about twenty were confined on an old punt in mid-harbour. But before long criticism was levelled at John Robb, contractor for the railway. The survey and construction of a line through dense rain-forest and over steep grades took more time and much more money than had at first been estimated. Heavy rainfall created landslides and impeded working conditions; meanwhile Robb's contract became the subject of long and costly legal proceedings. It was seven years before the line was clear of the range and complete even as far as the coaching station of Granite Creek (now Mareeba), by which time the 1893 depression had stopped all future plans. But the line which now passes Barron Falls, with its fifteen tunnels and many zigzag bends, is creditable both to its engineers and to the Italian and Irish labourers who worked for Robb.

Bowen too, unlucky as ever, was also hit by the depression. In 1890 a line northward had at last been begun. Work ceased in October 1891, 37 miles of indifferent country away at Wanganatta, and the line was for long locally known as 'two sticks of rust leading to a gum-tree'. Another line built at the time began from Normanton, on the Gulf of Carpentaria. It had originally been intended for Cloncurry; but political pressure changed its direction completely, and in 1891 the line finished up at Croydon. Railway construction in North Queensland as a whole had been too much a matter of piecemeal expediencies, too little planned with an eye to future pastoral, agricultural, or industrial development. Lines such as the Cooktown and Bowen railways, built to satisfy a political clamour and left half-finished in the bush, were born deficit producers. Nor were there many years of profit to be had from the services to Croydon and Ravenswood, where traffic depended almost entirely on the fluctuating fortunes of a single group of mines. But the 546 miles of line built by 1893
at least reduced the isolation of many inland communities and facilitated the commerce of the ports.

A fundamental motive behind government spending was the need to populate and develop the North. North Queensland's growing insistence on this aim was but part of a world-wide trend towards colonizing and rendering productive the under-developed frontiers of empire;* and the rapidly growing Australian nationalism of the eighties saw an empty North as a temptation to foreign invaders. But much of the government money spent in North Queensland was allotted not along any orderly scheme of priorities—the machinery of government was not then adapted to planning on this scale—but simply to satisfy, as far as possible, the competing claims of rival districts and rival business groups. Fierce local loyalties exerted their pressures through Northern members of parliament in Brisbane. As a leading merchant of Cairns expressed it:

... politicians were merely the instruments through which measures were carried into law; the real political force lay at their back in the communities that originated measures and fought them through ...5

Among those who originated measures for the development of their own districts, the merchants and businessmen of the ports were the most energetic boosters. There were importers and exporters of every item in North Queensland’s trade, agents for insurance, shipping, and investment companies, firms that provisioned the squatters, backed the teamsters and packers, and stood behind the goldfields storekeepers when they sank their capital in prospecting ventures and recouped it in grog-selling. The earliest Bowen firms, Ellis Read and Company, and Seaward, Marsh and Gegne, were soon overshadowed by Townsville rivals such as Samuel Allen and Clifton, Aplin (later Aplin, Brown and Co.), and in the far north Callaghan Walsh of Cooktown was pre-eminent during the seventies. By 1880 one firm—Burns, Philp and Company—had won paramountcy in North Queensland by developing wider and more varied interests. It is particularly unfortunate that, almost alone of all the great

*It is illustrative of the financial links between the frontier outposts of the British Empire that in 1897, when a temporary depression was held to make investments in North Queensland unattractive, the North Queensland Loan and Investment Company decided to look for opportunities in the newly found Yukon goldfield of Canada.
business houses of Australia, this company possesses no records of historical interest.*

Founded in 1875 when James Burns made Robert Philp† partner in his two-year-old firm at Townsville, this combination of an Edinburgh and a Glasgow man proved irresistible. Carefully calculating the risks, they entered fields previously neglected by their competitors. Theirs was the first business to go systematically after trade with the sheep-runs of Western Queensland. A Burns, Philp store was at the nucleus of the western townships of Hughenden and Winton, founded in the late seventies. From 1878 the company worked up a business as woolbuyers from the distant stations of the Diamantina. The first consignment of wool, twenty-three bales from Oondooroo station, was four months on the road by bullock-team, labouring through the onset of a wet season, but arrived in such good condition that many others followed, especially after the completion of the Charters Towers railway in 1882.6

Next 'B.P.' turned to the Gulf and Etheridge trade, where the older Townsville company of Clifton, Aplin had enjoyed a monopoly ever since Captain Towns had cut his losses. Eighteen months of keen competition ended with Burns, Philp buying out their rivals in 1880. In those remote parts coin was used only for government transactions, and where previously a sovereign had sold for thirty shillings or more of the 'paper' that normally passed as currency (anything 'from a cheque . . . or a printed form to a scrap torn from the margin of a newspaper'), orders on Burns, Philp were soon recognized as equal in value to legal tender. Already, too, the firm was casting a canny eye at the potential of New Guinea, waiting only for McIlwraith's annexation before going in to secure an early hold on the island's trade. Almost their only unprofitable speculation occurred around this time—probably in 1883—when Philp decided to enter the timber

*Secretary, Burns, Philp & Co., Sydney, to author, 19 Nov. 1958. During 1961, however, some papers of Sir Robert Philp were lodged at the Oxley Library, Brisbane, and I am grateful to Mrs Neil Thornton for cataloguing and summarizing their contents. See my article, 'The rise of Burns, Philp' in A. Birch and D. S. Macmillan, Wealth and Progress, Sydney, 1967.

†Born Glasgow 1851; emigrated to Australia with his parents 1852; worked for stores at Brisbane from 1865; with Burns at Townsville 1873; partner 1875; M.L.A. Musgrave 1886–8, Townsville 1888–1915; Minister for Mines 1893–9; Treasurer 1898–9, Premier and Treasurer 1899–1903 and 1907–8; K.C.M.G. 1915; leader of delegation to London to ensure appointment of a British-born State Governor and for business purposes 1920; died 1922. Burns (1846–1923) left Townsville after 1875 to devote his energies to the Sydney end of the firm's business.
industry by contracting for the purchase of fifteen million feet of Atherton Tableland cedar. Because of poor roads over the steep ranges behind Cairns, his agents decided to try the Canadian method of logging the cedar down the Barron River in full flood. They failed. Swept over the Barron Falls, the cedar was smashed and scattered, and only about one million feet were ever recovered.8

This setback might have ruined a smaller operator, but it left Burns, Philp undaunted. The sugar boom provided fresh opportunities. They ran a small fleet of lighters at Townsville to land heavy machinery for the crushing mills of the Herbert and Lower Burdekin, and sent ocean-going schooners to the Pacific Islands to recruit plantation labour. Soon their interests in the Western Pacific extended to copra, béche-de-mer and other tropical produce, and required a fleet of steamships. The Cooktown firms that might have rivalled them in New Guinea—John Clunn and Sons, or Power, Thomas and Madden—went too deeply into mining speculation and leant too heavily on that insecure prop, the Queensland National Bank. Power, Thomas and Madden, for instance, chased one rainbow's end on the Palmer after another until their final bankruptcy after a fire in 1889 found them owing over £30,000.9 With their diversified interests, Burns, Philp were not so dependent on bank finance (they were ‘independent of outside capital’ by 1882,10) and better able to hazard mining speculation. They seem to have begun mainly through loans to storekeepers who took the risk of grub-staking prospectors and small reefing parties. If they inherited a mine from a debtor their practice was to let it ‘on tribute’ to a party of working miners, who paid them a fixed percentage of their winnings. By 1886 they were involved in floating such valuable North Queensland mines as the Cumberland on the London market, and Philp’s repute in mining matters had become so great that when he entered Cabinet in 1893 it was as Minister for Mines. (His under-secretary, appointed the previous year, was old Philip Sellheim, now grown somewhat long-winded and sporting an immense pair of white mustachios, but still immensely sound and sagacious. Together they put through Queensland’s great Mining Act of 1898, consolidating and modernizing a mass of previous legislation.)

By now the firm was moving out of North Queensland into deeper waters, although in 1888 Philp was an automatic choice for the board of directors when a group of confident businessmen
founded the Bank of North Queensland. But Burns, Philp’s overseas trading interests became increasingly centred on their Sydney office. The company was prepared to share the North Queensland importing and agency firm with other firms, such as Samuel Allen and Aplin, Brown; content, too, to relinquish some of its Townsville retail interests to suitable buyers, such as the drapery business of Hollis Hopkins. Burns, Philp were after bigger things. In November 1886 their capital founded the North Queensland Insurance Company. Originally a marine insurance company formed mainly to cover their own shipping, the North Queensland soon absorbed its only local rival, the North Australian Lloyds, and had gone into fire insurance by 1891. With the takeover in 1896 of the Sydney Lloyds Underwriters’ Association this company’s interests shifted out of the purely local sphere, a change signified in 1907 by altering its name to the Queensland. Still predominantly a Burns, Philp holding, it is now the largest Australian-owned insurance firm. (Interestingly enough, New Zealand firms were probably their main competitors in North Queensland; one can only guess that they followed the miners at the time of the Palmer rush.)

In the shipping business also Burns, Philp used their favourite technique of building up keen competition against an older-established rival, and then joining forces with it. Burns, Philp combined in 1886 with the British India line, Gilchrist, Watt and Company (partners in North Queensland cattle properties) and McIlwraith, McEachern to organize the Queensland Steamship Company as competitors against the old Australian Steam Navigation line, who had previously the monopoly of the North Queensland coastal traffic. Within a year the Queensland bought out its rival for £200,000, and operated a monopoly coastal service under the name of the Australian United Steam Navigation Company. Townsville had indeed spawned a commercial leviathan, and its electors, shrewd men with a happy knack of choosing influential members of parliament, were not unmindful of their debt to the firm. While its supremacy as business centre of North Queensland depended greatly on its railway, the port owed much to its role as headquarters of Burns, Philp. Not surprisingly, Robert Philp—a prudent, decent man, who despite his wealth made few personal enemies*—had no difficulty in

*In 1899 when he and A. S. Cowley went to Charters Towers electioneering, the miners of that Labor stronghold heckled Cowley incessantly, but heard Philp ‘with patience and courtesy’ (Eagle, 5 Aug. 1899). Note, however, the case of William
leaving commerce for politics. First returned as member for Musgrave* in 1886, two years later he became Macrossan's colleague for Townsville and fostered the town carefully during his twenty-seven years as member.

To many Townsville's progress seemed undeserved. Its harbour facilities were poor. Even at the end of the eighties cargo had still to be transported by lighter from its wharves to the anchorage for ocean-going ships. The soil and climate of the district had not tempted even the most venturesome investors to try to grow sugar there. But the town spread fast. Every year saw brick superseding wood in the construction of new government offices and business premises, though it was not until 1889 that a rich mining man, John Deane, built the first private house of brick. Already, however, such visitors as the Canadian journalist, Gilbert Parker, † were impressed by the good sense of Townsville builders in setting houses high on piles, and surrounding them with fine, wide verandahs:

It would please some architects one knows to see the banks and public buildings of Townsville built in refreshing white, with colonnades and arcades, and looking like places for human beings in a hot climate, and not like gaols for lost spirits.¹³

This was perfectly true of fashionable North Ward, with its pleasant access to the view and sea-breezes of Cleveland Bay, and true also of much of the city. The long arcaded frontage of that popular rendezvous for squatters, the Queen's Hotel, distinguished what was then the finest hotel in Australia outside Melbourne and Sydney. Away from the afternoon breeze and other amenities, the workmen's cottages of South Townsville were less suited to a tropical climate. Except for the normal Queensland practice of discouraging white ants by placing the floor level on stilts several feet above the ground, these houses made little concession to their environment. Built mainly of wood

Lennon (1849–1938). Originally Burns, Philp's Townsville manager, a conservative and Separation advocate, he left the firm in 1894 after a sharp reprimand for urging pay increases for senior employees, launched his own agency business, turned Labor politician, and in 1907 ousted Cowley from the Herbert seat. Eventually (in 1920) a Labor government made him Lieutenant-Governor in order to force the abolition of the Legislative Council.

*Not the modern electorate of that name, but a short-lived constituency including the Atherton Tableland, Johnstone and Herbert Rivers.
†Born 1862; studied for holy orders; came from Canada to Australia as sub-editor Sydney Morning Herald 1885–9; then lived in London; prolific novelist and writer on Commonwealth affairs; Kt. 1902; Bart. 1915; died 1932.
and iron, situated in poorly drained yards, their kitchens as often as not poky little skillions on the hottest side of the house, they were sadly demanding on patient housewives. Yet there was no lack of demand for housing, and it was said in the eighties that no land had ever changed hands in Townsville without a profit being made. The gas company, which began operations in 1883, paid £2,000 for the two-acre block on which its premises were built, and was not over-charged. By December 1885 £3,600 was demanded for a quarter-acre corner block on Flinders Street, and residential lots in North Ward went for five hundred guineas. Captain Towns should have lived to see this flourishing outcome of John Melton Black’s ‘crotchet of township building’.

Other North Queensland ports shared in the boom. Sugar was the making of half-a-dozen small townships: Geraldton, Ingham, Halifax, Brandon, Ayr, Mirani, to say nothing of the planting stronghold, Mackay, whose total population rose from 1,479 in 1876 to 4,106 in 1886. Even Bowen rallied for a while in the general prosperity, although by 1889 a lapse into decline had prompted the removal of the Northern Supreme Court from these dispiriting surroundings to Townsville. Another struggling community, Port Douglas, although disappointed of its railway, had still its share of the carrying trade for sustenance. But its rival, Cairns, had grown in ten years after 1876 from a rowdy camp among the mangrove swamps to a thriving town of 1,376 inhabitants. It had still a convivial tradition. Gilbert Parker’s sober Canadian soul was shocked at Cairns drinking habits:

It makes one shudder to see the hotels doing a ‘land office business’ at eight o’clock in the morning; to watch men staggering up the streets before the sun has drunk the miasma from ‘the rheumy and unpurged air.’ Cairns, I should think, has one hotel for every store and shop in the place, and it does not let them languish. Not that the town is in the least rowdyish. I have seen no open rowdyism in any place in the North. It seems to be just a steady devotion to the hot and rebellious stuff that wastes no time in killing.

But his second impressions were kinder:

The traveller and writer must not, therefore, be hasty, and say that Cairns is a place of dust and sin. I can count the fingers of my hand twice over before I have exhausted the list of the intelligent and cultured folk that I met at Cairns.

In the main, Cairns was a business-like, go-ahead community, absorbed in land sales and other commerce, and turning from the
influence of its old reprobates to such up-and-coming civic leaders as the young A. J. Draper,* merchant, mining secretary, cane-grower, newspaper owner, and nine times mayor of Cairns. Until the turn of the century, however, Cairns was overshadowed by Cooktown. Few of Cooktown’s 3,500 inhabitants imagined that this handsomely situated port, with its cedar-panelled banks and its three newspapers, with the bêche-de-mer fleet riding in its harbour, Palmer gold and Annan tin reviving, and the New Guinea commerce just over the horizon, was already past its best days. Fire and cyclone, rash businessmen and neglectful politicians, above all a hinterland too remote and uncertain in its rewards to attract a constant inflow of capital: these were the agents of decline that would leave Cooktown by-passed, somnolent, but unquenchably hopeful as the twentieth century proceeded.

Civic growth fostered civic politics. Bowen had mayor and aldermen as far back as 1863, followed by Townsville in 1866, Mackay in 1869, Cooktown in 1876, and Charters Towers a year later. Outside the municipalities the rest of North Queensland came under local government after McIlwraith, supplementing earlier legislation of Griffith’s, introduced the Divisional Boards Act of 1879. Endowed by the government with £2 for every £1 raised by rating (reduced to £1 for £1 after five years), the divisional boards assumed responsibility for health regulations, road-building, and other local works. Ten came into being within a year of the Act’s proclamation;¹⁷ seven others were created during the next decade.¹⁸ These were the direct ancestors of the present shire councils of North Queensland.

Many of these boards established a creditable tradition despite numerous difficulties in their early years. Some operated on scanty incomes, and these were often the biggest areas with demanding development problems. In 1885, a typical year, the Woothakata board raised only £212 in rates, Hann division £308, and Cardwell (an area of nearly seven thousand square miles) £341.¹⁹ Such boards could pay only one salaried official, a

*Alexander John Frederick Draper was born at Williamstown, Victoria, 1863; entered service Bank of Australasia 1879; accountant Townsville 1882, Charters Towers 1882, manager Cairns 1884, when resigned and entered partnership with W. D. Hobson in importing and agency business; launched own firm 1887; alderman Cairns council 1889-1927 (with a few intervals): mayor 1891–3, 1897, 1902, 1918, 1924–7; secretary Cairns Agricultural Association 1885–1905; secretary Barron shire council 1893–1919; owner Cairns Post from 1895; chairman Mulgrave sugar mill 1897–1928; founder-member Cairns Stock Exchange 1906; died 1928.
more-or-less qualified clerk whose jack-of-all-trades duties included rate collecting, sanitary inspection, vermin destruction, and overseership of roads. Not the least of a clerk’s problems was mustering a quorum for meetings. Out-of-town board members were reluctant to spare time from their stations or selections, and even when a sufficient number had promised to attend, floods, illness, or some other emergency could keep one or two members away, and waste the time of the few who turned up. Yet the country divisional boards accomplished a fair amount of business. Government subsidies helped them carry out active programmes of road-making and bridge-building. In most districts the work was let on contract at low rates to local selectors or workmen, who were glad to supplement their own incomes by rough but serviceable improvements to their district’s amenities.

As improving communications made attendance easier, more contestants sought the opportunity of serving on the local authority. There were few repetitions of the situation obtaining at Cardwell in 1884, when only one nomination was received for the six vacancies on the divisional board, and five members had to be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the local police magistrate. Keen contests arose especially in the towns, where allegations of sharp practice by such groups as the Orange Lodge at Charters Towers, the ‘dynamite party’ at Cairns, or the manipulators of the Chinese vote at Cooktown gave a touch of professionalism to municipal politics. In general, however, there seems little doubt that a strong North Queensland tradition of conscientious municipal service dates from this period. By 1891 interest in local government was sufficiently lively to foster the first annual conference of local authorities. This meeting, at Herberton, was so well attended that it was repeated annually for several years.* Despite their tropical environment, North Queenslanders had a better record than many other Australians of active usefulness in local affairs. Among other forms of community activity Volunteer Corps became popular around 1885. The New Guinea annexation and a crisis in India which aroused fears of Russian invasion made many North Queenslanders conscious of their isolation. These perils past, the militia corps sometimes deteriorated into a battleground of local snobberies and quarrels, but the movement

*Meetings were held in 1892 at Townsville, 1893 at Charters Towers, 1894 at Cooktown, and 1895 at Bowen. The present North Queensland Local Government Association dates from 1944.
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lasted quite strongly in some centres until the advent of compulsory military training. Lodges of various kinds were also popular. First in point of time were the Freemasons, whose North Queensland history began in 1865 with a Bowen chapter; they were followed in the same town two years later by the Oddfellows. By the eighties these pioneers were joined by Hibernians, Druids, Foresters, the Australian Natives' Association, even—somewhat incredibly—the United Sons of Temperance Benefit Society at Cooktown.

Vigorously though North Queenslanders looked after the affairs of this world, they were less careful, perhaps, of the next. For the clergy North Queensland was not considered an easy field to till. It is a little difficult, on the available evidence, to assess the strength of the Christian churches in the North at this period. Census figures between 1876 and 1886 suggest a fairly close adherence to old-world allegiances, with Church of England (nominal or practising) accounting for between 40 and 45 per cent of the European population, followed by Irish and other Catholics (25 to 30 per cent) and Scottish Presbyterians (about 10 per cent). Lutherans accounted for about one in fourteen of the population in 1876, being especially prominent on the mining fields. In the next ten years their numbers, growing only from 930 to 1,232, were outstripped by the Methodists, who went from 423 to 3,029 in the same period; their main strength seems to have been centred on Charters Towers, not surprisingly when allowance is made for the strong leavening of Cornishmen among mine managers and engineers. In broad terms, however, there was no significant difference between the religious complexion of the North and the rest of Queensland. Outside the towns clergymen of any denomination were welcomed, even by those who had not the least intention of agreeing with their precepts, and at least from the mid-seventies itinerant 'bush parsons'—chiefly Anglican and Roman Catholic—made systematic efforts to travel outback. Many of the squatters were Anglicans, and although isolation ruled out any faint prospect of their regular attendance at church, their donations to its funds were not ungenerous during good seasons. The Catholic Church struck roots during the eighties in the new sugar-farming centres, and in some of the mining towns.

And yet the odour of sanctity did not cling to North Queensland's reputation. That fervent religionizing which marked the South African frontier and the Bible Belt of the United States
was seldom conspicuous in the Australian backblocks, and North Queensland was no exception. The Sydney *Bulletin* was doubtless exaggerating when it alleged ‘that there was no God north of Rockhampton and no marriage ceremony north of Cleveland Bay’; but that wicked old man Thady O’Kane voiced a common enough view when he wrote: ‘We look upon all Christian ministers as a kind of moral police to keep the kids straight and palaver the women into being good’. It was not a climate in which religious initiative could be expected from the laity. When, for instance, Putt and Corbett, two members of the Tinaroo divisional board, moved that board meetings should begin with prayer, the motion was defeated by seven votes to two: ‘I am afraid we are all too wicked to do any good in that line’, observed the chairman cheerfully.

Shortage of clergy, that perennial complaint of the Australian churches, was doubtless partly responsible for North Queensland’s apathy; but it cannot have been the whole story. The infant townships of the North were seldom left long without a pastor. Holy Trinity, the Anglican church at Bowen, was founded with a resident clergyman two years after the first settlement in 1861, to be joined in 1864 by a Roman Catholic church and convent. By 1873 there were five Anglican and six Catholic churches in North Queensland. During the next decade the Methodists were active, forming circuits at Mackay, Townsville (1876), Charters Towers (1877) and Cairns (1883). Several Presbyterian clergy established themselves. Meanwhile, in 1877 a Papal brief appointed Dr John Cani* Vicar-Apostolic of North Queensland, with headquarters at Cooktown. A year later the Church of England created a see at Townsville, bringing Dr G. H. Stanton† from London to serve as first bishop. Both appointments were well chosen. The bishops adapted well to their new environment. Scholarly and hard-working, Dr Cani made his chief mark in the Central Queensland section of his diocese, and was translated to the new bishopric of Rockhampton in 1882. It was his successor, the Augustinian John Hutchinson,‡ under whose guidance the

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*Born 1836; educated Sapienza University, Rome; D.D., LL.D.; priest 1859; P.P. Warwick 1860–8; Brisbane 1868–78; pro-Vicar Apostolic of North Queensland 1878–82; Bishop of Rockhampton until his death in 1898.
†Born 1835; educated Oxford; priest 1859; various appointments in England until consecrated Bishop of North Queensland 1878; translated to Newcastle 1891; died 1905.
‡Consecrated Bishop of Maximinopolis and Vicar-Apostolic of Cooktown from 1882 until his death in 1897.
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Catholics expanded their church-building programme in the eighties. As for Stanton, he was the prototype of the line of intelligent, down-to-earth, English-born clerics who, becoming enthusiastic partisans of North Queensland, have made their influence felt in many spheres beyond the ecclesiastical. Separation advocate, sponsor of the Poole Island freezing works, he was a man whose democratic manners largely overcame suspicion of his learned English background. Even at the close of his North Queensland career, when he worked on the Geraldton wharves during the maritime strike of 1890, the trade unionists commented that such 'manly opposition' was far preferable to the embarrassed silence of most clergy about current affairs.

But life was much less easy for his parish clergy. In the mining centres especially, the laity took a keen and often forceful interest in laying down the conduct expected of their pastors. High Church principles they abhorred (it is curious that North Queensland has since become the Anglo-Catholic stronghold of Australia), and the Anglican clergy were constantly under surveillance for any sign of Romish practices. In 1880, when St Paul's, Charters Towers, commissioned the local chemist to execute a stained-glass window from designs furnished from Melbourne, even O'Kane was prepared to concede that it was 'a refining and elevating work of art', but this did not stop two churchwardens from resigning in objection to the graven image. In the same year the Ravenswood parish council compelled their rector to hand in his resignation largely, it seems, because of personal quarrels. The same thing happened in Mackay two or three years earlier. Basically the problem was one of finance. The clergy required more for their infant churches than the laity were prepared to think reasonable. As late as 1897, a prosperous time in the mining industry, the Ravenswood folk were complaining that they could not afford £200 a year for the stipend of a full-time clergyman.

Against such difficulties the clergy of different denominations often established a working co-operation hardly affected by their professional rivalry. In the seventies the spirited young rector of Mackay, Albert Maclaren, had begun his first sermon:

You have starved out one man, you broke another man's heart, and you drove another man away. Now the Roman priest will always give me an old coat, the Methodist minister will give me a meal, so you can't starve me out, you can't break my heart, and you can't drive me away.
He was, deservedly, a success among his notoriously tempera-
mental parishioners, although eventually he resigned because they
begrudged the time he spent attending the Pacific Islanders. But
many young clerics, newly out from England or Ireland, could
not stand the pace. Turnover was high in all denominations;
Herberton, for instance, had thirteen Anglican rectors in fourteen
years. The Catholic Church found itself relying greatly on a few
experienced veterans, among them Fathers McDonagh of Charters
Towers, Jules Bucas and James Cassar in the sugar districts,
and William Mason Walsh. Their laity were not the most tractable
flock imaginable, either; there is a long-standing story that the
Irish miners of Herberton refused the ministrations of an Italian
priest and insisted on having one of their own people. At Bowen,
after the Sisters of St Joseph had moved from the town in 1879,
their convent was sold to a contractor for demolition; but the
unfortunate man found his removal party obstructed by several
women, who sat on the verandah abusing the workmen, until
eventually Father McDonagh was obliged to buy back the
building at a price sufficiently high to compensate the contractor
for his trouble.

Despite such shows of partisanship, churches without a minister
quickly languished. ‘Some go shooting,’ wrote A. S. Cowley of
life on the Herbert River, ‘others visiting and many are too lazy
to move out on a Sunday. These things, together with a little
bigotry and intolerance’ were enough, he thought, to account
for the failure of many clergy. Not that North Queensland was
anti-clerical. The ex-convict hostility to parsons which, Russel
Ward says, influenced outback Australians earlier in the century,
ever seems to have been a feature of the North. But the North
looked for a man first, a clergyman after; and it seemed that the
churches too often had lost the power of sharing easily the
people’s hopes and needs. Parsons and pioneers seldom spoke
the same language.

Perhaps if there had been more women in the North, the story
would have been different. But like most outback Australian
communities, North Queensland was a man’s world: the 1876
census revealed only 5,582 women to 21,907 men. The Chinese
and Pacific Islanders were responsible for much of this dispro-
portion, but even omitting them, there were over twice as many
men as women. By 1891 this unbalanced sex ratio was gradually
improving. Women were still very much a minority in such
out-back areas as the Palmer and the Etheridge. Among the
Pacific Islanders men outnumbered women by ten to one, and only a few Chinese had contrived to introduce their wives to Australia. But the masculinity ratio among the European population had fallen from 204 to 138 men to every one hundred women—still considerably higher than the Australian average of 116. The make-up of North Queensland society accentuated, if anything, Australian tendencies towards a predominantly male influence in such arrangements of living as public affairs, housing, relaxation, drinking habits, and religious belief. Even today no woman has ever come close to winning a North Queensland parliamentary seat, nor are there at present (1969) more than a few female councillors on the local authorities.

The first generation of North Queensland women had enough to occupy them at home. Not only the miners’ and selectors’ wives, but also those who were comparatively well off did their own housework, as even in periods of high unemployment domestic servants of any sort were hard to come by. There were a fortunate few, such as Mrs Edward Plant of Charters Towers, whose rich husbands could afford to plan grandly for them. In 1890 she moved into a newly completed mansion, ‘Thornborough’, which besides such luxuries as imported carved mantelpieces and a double roof to allow for air circulation, incorporated servants’ quarters consisting of a parlour, kitchen, three bedrooms, bathrooms, and a butler’s pantry. One wonders how long the butler lasted in the radical Towers. More typical, even for women whose husbands were well above the bread-line, were the arrangements confronting Mrs William Waddell, whose husband was manager for John Moffat at Koorboora:

Infant in arms and with small tired children Mother faced the roughest of conditions. The lean-to kitchen had two iron bars over an open fire for cooking, a gypsy cauldron swung on a hook for heating water and bread was baked in a camp oven, and water was short. The difficulties to be overcome by a pioneer wife were legion. Ants swarmed in her kitchen and over the set table. All food had to be kept in safes with legs standing in tins of kerosene. Flying ants and beetles surrounded the kerosene lamps. Dingoes took the young goats, goannas the hens’ eggs, native cats slaughtered poultry, hawks the young chickens, snakes invaded the house when the rains came, and a rain-water tank tainted by a dead frog could mean disaster. At least Mother’s groceries came weekly from Jack & Newell’s store instead of monthly and a Chinese gardener with a string of pack-horses supplied vegetables.
Like Mrs Waddell, most women went without help, and spent long hours in hot little kitchens centred around a black, wood-burning stove, or scrubbing and sweeping through their plain wooden houses, in the never-ceasing attempt to uphold cleanliness in a land of dust and flies. Meals were a problem. Meat had to be kept from insects in a wire safe, often suspended from a hook in the ceiling where draughts could provide the only means of refrigeration. Fruit and vegetables depended on the Chinese gardeners, or on expensive imports from Tasmania and Victoria. On the coast there were such tropical fruits as pawpaws and mangoes to delight the children, but their parents hankered for the potatoes and apples of a southern climate. Shipping costs usually made these prohibitive.

Many mothers had large families to feed, and to shepherd through the ailments of a hot climate with casual sanitation. But for the most part children grew and thrived, their health and intelligence in no way stunted by their surroundings. Nearly all got some education under the Queensland state school system, although as attendance was not compulsory until 1900 some of the selectors' children found themselves spending most of their time making themselves useful at home. Schooling was based squarely on the three Rs, with a little geography and history by way of culture; though as the history frequently consisted of nothing but a catalogue of British kings and their activities, starting with William the Conqueror, it must have seemed wearisomely remote from the world outside the schoolroom window, the corrugated-iron tank and the spreading pepper-trees, and the goats nibbling placidly in the dusty sunshine. In small and new settlements, it was usual for local enterprise to furnish a 'provisional' school, until the government could ascertain whether permanent numbers warranted the building of a state school. Provisional schools varied greatly; some—and here again the tin-mining centres had a good record—were carefully equipped and painted, but others were woefully crude. At Ravenswood Junction an old packing-case served for a book-cupboard, a second one was the teacher's desk, and the whole school seemed to an inspector 'wretched in the extreme . . . the accommodation for the teacher could not possibly be worse'. But great things came even from the most modest beginnings. A Mackay schoolboy named Fadden grew up to become Prime Minister. The unpretentious, white-anted school that served Bowen in the early seventies produced a brilliant graduate in T. J. Byrnes, cabinet minister at thirty and
first native-born premier of Queensland before his too early
death.* Ravenswood produced a distinguished surgeon in Sir
John McKelvey.† North Queenslanders relished such proof
that a Northern background did not deprive a clever lad of his
opportunities; and those who were children at that time seem
unanimous that the North was a good place to grow up in.

So the second generation of North Queenslanders came to
maturity in a region with a growing sense of community, and of
pride that this community had been created by subduing Aus­
tralia’s tropical northern frontier. It troubled few of their elders
that much of this success had been based on the crude exploitation
of natural resources in a manner which could not go on indefi­
nitely. The mining men, who gutted the best deposits of ore in
the cheerful belief that more discoveries lay waiting, were no
less improvident than the sugar-growers who hoped that, even
if the New Hebrides were depopulated of all their manpower,
there would always be somewhere a supply of docile coloured
labour to work their holdings as cheaply as possible. Prosperity
was secured in the eighties only by mortgaging future stability.
There were still too many people who seemed to regard North
Queensland as a temporary sojourning-place, a field for indis­
criminate exploitation, a source of quick profits to be made by
skinning the outside capitalist, whether he came in the guise of
a buyer of Townsville real estate, a mining speculator, or a
small selector in quest of land to grow, and a mill to treat, his
sugar.

Such an attitude was unworthy of the human achievement of
the many North Queenslanders who had their roots in the country
and were determined to stay. Most of them had come in search of
independence, and they had developed a sense of community
through making habitable a country still regarded by many
Australians as remote and inhospitable. ‘We claim,’ wrote a
Townsville editor in 1891, ‘that North Queenslanders have
already proved that Europeans can live and flourish in tropical
Australia.’ They had measured themselves against the environ­
ment, and preserved their way of life almost unaltered. Indeed,
as the Townsville editor complained:

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*Born 1860; educated Bowen, Brisbane Grammar School, and University of Sydney;
Solicitor-General and M.L.C. 1890–3; M.L.A. for Cairns 1893–6; contested North
Brisbane 1896; M.L.A. for Warwick 1896–8; Attorney-General 1893 until his
death in 1898.

†Born 1881, son of a publican; M.B. Sydney; Medical Superintendent Royal Prince
Alfred Hospital, 1909–11; in private practice at Sydney; Kt. 1933; died 1939.
... in the matter of clothing, in that of hours of labor, in the construction of our houses, and in our social customs we do as our Southern neighbours do in the most abject fashion, as if we had not moral hardihood to strike out on lines suitable to the local surroundings.35

But these changes could come later. What mattered at this stage was to conserve the country’s resources, including the human resources wasted through insufficient attention to problems of disease and hygiene. Research, experiment, and intelligent husbandry would consolidate a North Queensland achievement which was already sufficient to attract the admiration of overseas commentators. A great publicist of Empire, Sir Charles Dilke, was already citing the success of North Queensland pastoralists as an example for Englishmen, who might be encouraged to settle the African highlands for farming and grazing.36 The same decade was to see the move into Rhodesia and Kenya—initiating those fateful attempts to found a ‘white man’s tropics’ among the Matabele and the Masai. But the North Queensland venture was to be worked out under different auspices, and there was more relevance in an assessment written by Gilbert Parker, as he sat in a railway camp at the foot of the cloud-hung range behind Cairns:

I have found men everywhere believing unreservedly in the country, whether it is a devitalised sugar district or a cargoless port. The smallest settlement on the coast thinks its voice is potent at the capital. The hum of its little wheels is the centripetal force of the Universe. Does Mourilyan believe that it represents no figure on the national dial-plate? Does Port Douglas cease to think that it is one of the weights that regulate the political pendulum? Not a bit. Is Cairns willing to let Townsville take precedence in the anticipated Colony of North Queensland? Think it not. But there is no room for ridicule here, there is no cause for sneers. This faith, this envious faith, if you will, seems to me to be the latent strength of the land that bides its nascent time . . . Bad whisky may kill her pioneers; the Chinamen may take money out of the country; the children may dwindle in the miasma of the far north, and mothers may grow wan and nerveless under the exhaust-pipes of a cruel atmosphere, but the march will not be stayed.37

Under the high-flown journalism the Canadian journalist was making a shrewd point. The time of quick and easy fortunes was over in North Queensland. Most men now in the mining and pastoral industries could expect to remain wage-earners. But
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once it had been accepted that white men could live and labour in the coastal tropics, the land still offered the hope of independence to farmers, craftsmen and small businessmen. North Queensland was not yet a ‘big man’s frontier’ and need not become one. Underlying all the smalltown feuds, all the narrow and acquisitive scrambles for public works and government money was the conviction that North Queensland could be developed by a resident yeomanry, despite the climate, despite economic setbacks. Nor was ‘this envious faith’ ill-founded. But the achievement of this aim was to drive a wedge in the North Queensland community between those who finally succeeded in realizing their dream and those who, through one chance or another, found themselves pinned down in the role of ‘wages men’.

1See reminiscences of A. F. Waddell in North Queensland Register, 9 Aug. and 4 Oct. 1952.
2Townsville Daily Bulletin, 6 Apr. 1889; G. Pike, In the Path of the Pioneers, Cairns, [1951].
3Cooktown Herald, 8 Dec. 1880; J. W. Collinson, The Story of Cairns, Brisbane, 1940, p. 76.
5[Cairns Post], Life of A. J. Draper, Cairns, 1931, p. 66.
7Northern Miner, 31 May 1880.
8I know of no complete account of this episode. The Philp MSS. suggest that the firm was interested in cedar on the Barron as early as 1879. Allusions to the disaster occur in Cairns Post, 17 May 1883; A. Meston, ‘Genesis of Red Cedar’, C.C.M. Jan. 1936, p. 17.
9Branch Manager, Cooktown to General Manager, Queensland National Bank, 8 Jan. 1890 (National Bank MSS., Cairns).
11H. C. Perry, op. cit., Ch. VIII. I am indebted to Mr G. Purcell, Department of Economics, Monash University, for information about this phase of the firm’s activity.
12H. C. Perry, op. cit., Ch. VIII.
13G. Parker, Round the Compass in Australia, London and Melbourne, 1892, pp. 232-3.
14Much day-to-day evidence of this survives in the police records described by R. Sharman, ‘The Port Douglas Records’, Quill, Nov. 1961, p. 34.
15G. Parker, op. cit., p. 251.
16Ibid., p. 252.
18Ayr, Cardwell, Carpentaria, Croydon, Johnstone, Tinaroo and Torres.
20A somewhat highly-coloured account of their activities is given by C. Lumley Hill, M.L.A. at Q.P.D., LII, p. 297.
21Sydney Bulletin, 15 Nov. 1890.
22. Northern Miner, 28 Apr. 1887.
23. Port Denison Times, 5 May 1893.
24. Catholic only at Georgetown; both denominations at Bowen, Townsville, Mackay, Ravenswood and Charters Towers.
30. Two women have stood for the federal seat of Herbert, an Independent in 1943, and a Communist in 1951. Each lost her deposit.
33. V. & P. 1887, II, p. 444.
34. Townsville Herald, 15 Dec. 1891.
35. Ibid.
Rather than accept the limitations of their environment, many Northerners believed that development and progress depended on cutting loose from political and economic restraints imposed from outside. The urge towards independence was widespread; but independence from what? From a Brisbane government that starved the North of public works and crippled the sugar industry, said the Separationists. From greedy British investors and the competition of cheap alien labour, said the miners and workmen. From outsiders who did not understand the true interest of North Queenslanders, both would have agreed. But conflict over aims and priorities would thwart both groups from finding self-expression in politics.

Before the eighties, the North had played rather a minor role in Queensland politics. Squatters and miners often seemed intent on following their own affairs, and were content to leave their representation to Brisbane lawyers. These men had to work for their position; one member for Bowen was advised that he should 'try and find out their wants and never tire of telling them individually and collectively that to find out their wants is his mission, and it will do more to ensure his return next time than any other course he can or may pursue'. In particular, Northern constituencies pressed their members for public works—how vigorously one may discern from the plaintive cry of one of McIlwraith's henchmen at election time: 'I beg of you to get the Cooktown Railway work commenced or I will be burnt in effigy and held up to ridicule everywhere, try to save me from this if you can'.

It was John Murtagh Macrossan, who had come a long way since he whipped the mining warden at Ravenswood, who was McIlwraith's factotum in the North. He chose and shepherded appropriate candidates for the Northern constituencies, acted as liaison between McIlwraith and members requiring a little help with their election expenses, shrewdly courted every pressure-group from the Orangemen to the Catholic clergy, from the working miners to the rich squatters, and was
expert in every technique of political legerdemain. His sense of timing was superb, whether it was over the announcement of a new road or railway, or in choosing the strategic moment to swing an election contest by bringing a hundred loyal railway navvies to some part of a constituency where a bloc vote would do most good. But by the mid-eighties, opportunities for manipulation of this sort were gradually decreasing, as more and more North Queenslanders became exercised over issues that cut deeper than the politics of roads and bridges.

Separation was North Queensland's first great controversy. By the end of 1884 along the entire northern coast men were taking sides with increasing fervour. It was not yet a cause which moved everyone; a Cairns public meeting in November 1884 voted by a large majority that the time was not yet ripe to part from Brisbane control. Here, as would so often occur, local issues swayed opinions; gratitude for an inland railway merged with jealousy of Townsville and Port Douglas. In the same week a meeting was called to form a branch of the Separation League at Cooktown. Supporters and opponents turned up in equal numbers, and a badly rattled Mayor found it impossible to chair an indecisive evening which ended with the general confusion of half-a-dozen brawls. The Townsville League, however, claimed great and growing enthusiasm for the cause, while Bowen and Mackay formed strong branches.

Although not the first into the movement, the Mackay planters were among its keenest propagandists, especially Hume Black, the local member, and E. M. Long, who composed a bitter letter to the Governor, signed by many other sugar-growers, accusing the Griffith ministry of caucus methods in politics and corruption and rabble-rousing at elections. The planters made rather embarrassing allies to the cause, especially as J. E. Davidson continued to ply the British authorities with correspondence in which arguments for Separation were mixed up with advocacy of coloured labour. Not all Separationists favoured the import of coolies or Pacific Islanders, but Davidson's unguarded words gave Griffith a pretext for tarring the whole movement with the 'black labour' brush, and so arousing the deepest suspicions of miners and working men against secession.

Her Majesty's Government indicated in January 1885 that they would prefer any means of satisfying the North other than Separation—an attitude perhaps explicable since Griffith, on the security of an undivided Queensland's capacity for development,
was in the process of doubling the colony’s debt by borrowing £10,000,000 by stages on the London market. But the Northerners were undismayed, and in May 1885 after a convention of delegates had met at Townsville (mainly local men, but including representatives of Charters Towers, Mackay and Ingham), Thankfull Willmett, their indefatigable secretary, wrote informing Governor Musgrave of recent progress. The movement claimed fourteen branches, enrolling nearly 1,700 members. Cooktown and Cairns were now in the fold, and there were even branches at the radical mining centres of Herberton and Charters Towers. The slowness of the government in constructing railways was an important grievance to these bodies, which consisted mainly of storekeepers and other businessmen, and support seems to have waned somewhat, once work eventually commenced on the Cooktown, Cairns, and Charters Towers-Hughenden lines.

Meanwhile the fight was carried into Downing Street. Willmett and Griffith were both at the ear of the Colonial Office. On 2 October 1885 a meeting at the Cannon Street Hotel in London formed a committee to lobby for North Queensland autonomy; Harold Finch-Hatton, formerly of Mackay and brother of the Earl of Winchilsea, was a prominent spokesman. Within ten days The Times gave Separation the weight of its editorial attention:

Queenslanders... wield the pens of ready writers; and the prospect of many instalments of correspondence on the scale of Mr. Wilmett’s and Mr. Griffith’s epistles would be alarming... Sugar, as the Board of Trade has found, does not sweeten the tempers of its growers and dealers. North Queensland sugar-planters have always fretted at the obstructions thrown in the way of their importation of coloured labour... Queensland planters, honourable as they are as a body and desirous to do justice by their coolie labourers, have to use instruments in collecting and regulating them; and their tools are not always clean. It is for the Northern colonists finally to decide. Their pretensions to a separate administration may and ought to be repulsed while their circumstances and numbers give no security against the abandonment of a magnificent domain to the cultivation of produce rather than free men.7

Rebuffed by authoritative opinion in Britain, the Separation movement faced a counter-attack at home. Anti-Separation Leagues were formed at Cairns, Herberton, Croydon and the Etheridge, as well as further west at Normanton and Cloncurry—all districts with hopes of railways from the Griffith ministry.
Griffith’s henchman, Arthur Rutledge,* one of the members for Charters Towers, though not himself a Northerner, procured 1,442 signatures to a petition against secession. With contemptuous ease Thankfull Willmett organized a counter-petition signed by precisely 10,006 Separationists. This monster document was shipped to London on 14 July 1886, and although Griffith cast strong doubts on the validity of many of the signatures, a trip North convinced him that his partisans could muster nothing so impressive. August 1886 brought Macrossan forward to move in the Queensland parliament that ‘in consequence of the increase in population, the difficulty of administration, and other circumstances in the northern part of the colony’ the Queen should be requested to make North Queensland a self-governing colony. Introducing the motion, Macrossan made the speech of his life, and was ably supported by Hume Black, Philp, and other Northerners; but the House divided to leave them in a minority of nine against forty.

Against many setbacks the Separationists persisted. Their Charters Towers branch failed to survive a stormy meeting on a hot night in January 1887, when forty 'larrikins' including three future members of parliament, broke up the meeting with their heckling. And when in May 1887 Hume Black and a colleague visited London for Queen Victoria’s Jubilee, they found the new Secretary for Colonies, Sir Henry Holland (later Lord Knutsford) polite but unhelpful. Griffith meanwhile, trying to allay the grievance over public expenditure, brought in a bill dividing Queensland into three areas—North, Central and South—for statistical purposes and for assessing local revenue and expenditure. After avoiding defeat by only four votes, the measure failed to satisfy the Separationists, who called it a mere ‘bill to authorise triplicate ledger-keeping’. Nationhood alone would content them; indeed, one or two ebullient spirits, such as the editor of the Cooktown Independent went further, and saw in North Queensland the nucleus of three colonies, one centred on Townsville, one on the Gulf, and one in the Cape York Peninsula.

But in 1888 Griffith lost office to his opponents, and hopes seemed fairer. During the next year the Separation League sounded out all the local authorities in North Queensland for

*Born 1843; trained for the Wesleyan ministry, but after some years left the Church and studied law; M.L.A. for Enoggera, 1878–83, Kennedy 1883–8, Charters Towers 1888–93, Maranoa 1898–1904; member Federal Convention 1891; Attorney-General 1883–8, 1898–9, 1899–1903; K.C.M.G. 1902; Leader of the Opposition 1903–4; District Court Judge 1906 until his death in 1917.
support. Eighteen of the councils, including all the coastal districts except Bowen and Cairns, were in favour of Separation, some unanimously.\(^{11}\) Two others, while not expressing a view in their corporate capacity, were privately sympathetic.\(^{12}\) Sometimes, however, local grievances came uppermost. The two councils serving the Bowen district would not give their support until the capital of the new colony had been decided.\(^{13}\) Townsville was the object of their jealousy, even though Macrossan had specifically disclaimed any wish to boost his own constituency. A port like Townsville, he claimed, was too vulnerable to foreign invaders, and he suggested that an entirely new site be found for the capital, perhaps at Valley of Lagoons. The Cairns town and shire councils and Herberton, remembering that Brisbane was giving them a railway, coyly declined to state an opinion on a 'political' question outside their normal scope. The neighbouring board of Woorthakata was positively opposed to Separation, as were a majority of the aldermen of Charters Towers and three of the Gulf country municipalities; these were the strongholds of the mining tradition of White Australia, for whom the future of the sugar industry and other 'black labour' employers meant very little.\(^{14}\)

These exceptions were not enough to deter the dogged committeemen of Townsville. Once more busy men travelled about organizing. Separation Leagues were re-formed at Cairns and Charters Towers; their opponents got up petitions at Irvinebank and Herberton. At Charters Towers the reconstruction meeting was confused and excited, and it was agreed to poll the voters of Charters Towers in September 1890. The result was 1,220 to 984 against Separation. Both sides, of course, claimed a victory, the League from having built up such a substantial body of support in a mining centre, their opponents from the more lively satisfaction of winning. Meanwhile the past repeated itself. Sixteen members of parliament drew up a letter in July to the much-enduring Lord Knutsford in Downing Street. But Knutsford was evasive; the Queensland Premier of the day was no more helpful than Griffith; and Macrossan, ill and near his death, brought forward another Separation motion only to see parliament reject it, though by a majority less crushing than in 1886. Enthusiasm began to flag a little, and it was not long before one of the members for Mackay, David Dalrymple,* felt constrained to

*David Hay Dalrymple, born 1840, emigrated from Scotland to Melbourne 1862; in Rockhampton 1863 and Mackay 1865; opened first pharmacy in district;
point out that it was no use expecting Mackay and Townsville to carry Separation unaided, and that progress could be expected only when agitation and propaganda had aroused the other centres of North Queensland.15

But in these years of depression on the mining fields and sugar lands alike, the Separation movement had to compete with a new and very vigorous kind of politics. Since 1886 an outspoken and radical labour movement had grown fast in the North. The gold-miners had begun it. Charters Towers, wrote the Brisbane Worker,
as the most settled and most concentrated place necessarily gives decided tone to the whole north country . . . Unionism at Charters Towers, after all has been said that can be said for local jealousies, means really unionism in Northern Queensland.16

This pre-eminence of Charters Towers was not to be explained in terms of frontier radicalism. It was by now one of the longest-established North Queensland mining centres, the most prosperous, the most populous, the furthest removed from the raw excitements and changeful fortunes of a new camp like Croydon.

On pioneer fields, where all could dream of early wealth, there were few incentives for miners to band together in defence of class interests. Such issues as aroused them to political agitation—an unpopular warden, or a threatened influx of Chinese—resulted only in quick enthusiasms, and the formation of ephemeral leagues and associations that withered swiftly when the immediate cause of their discontent was removed. Elections were stimulated by the excitement of contest rather than serious differences of principles, and more than once the North went to the polls in the spirit of Eatanswill; there was an especially famous affair at the California Creek diggings in 1883, when the ballot papers arrived simultaneously with the rum supplies, so that although every miner voted four or five times on the average they managed to be remarkably unanimous in sticking to the same candidate.

In established mining towns all sections of the community were strongly imbued with democratic and nationalist leanings. From their dislike of the Chinese and pride in their high standard

chairman of Mackay road board; four times mayor; M.L.A. for Mackay 1888–1904; noted for powers of sarcasm; Secretary for Public Instruction 1895–9, 1902–3; for Public Works 1896–8; for Lands 1899; Minister without portfolio 1899–1901; for Agriculture 1901–3; died 1912.
of living, the mining communities were opposed to coloured, or indeed to any form of alien labour; they were also to be found on the side of a liberal franchise, triennial parliaments, state education, and government control of railways. These 'liberal' views were shared by working miners and wealthy mine-owners alike.17 Trade unionism came, at Charters Towers as in Victoria, only as the aftermath of deep reefing. It gained strength especially after the speculative boom of 1886-7 had transformed Towers society. Many of the working miners and their traditional backers, the small shopkeepers, had lost their savings, had sometimes gone bankrupt, and saw no better future than taking the best wages they could on a highly competitive labour market. Stock exchange transactions had left most of the best mines in the hands of absentee owners, in the main British capitalists who, having paid too high a price for their properties, now anxiously looked for quick profits and cheap working. In too many cases this meant a policy of minimum wages and no more expenditure on development or safety precautions than government regulations required.

Here began a continuing conflict of interests between the working miner and his employer. It was not just that the miner had exchanged one boss for another; rather, that instead of the old co-operative partnership, where if he did not have a stake in the claim personally, he at least had employers who were men of his own kind, he now worked for overseas capital and a remote management. (By the mid-nineties sixteen mines employed 1,452 men, and seven—Mills' United, the Bonnie Dundee, and five companies on the Brilliant line—each paid one hundred hands or more.) Admittedly, even in the pioneer years of reefing, wages men had been disputatious. One of the earliest recorded strikes, against a wage reduction on the Palmer in 1879, had been deplored by Warden Sellheim on the grounds that the owners were themselves working miners. But there was by 1887 a feeling that labour organization was necessary to confront the impersonal companies who now owned the mines. There was a growing realization that the day of easy opportunities was over for the working miners. Others had made the profits—the share-pushers, the company secretaries, the mill-owners—but the working miner, after chasing the rainbow's end across North Queensland for twenty years, was now likely to spend the rest of his career on wages, without ever winning to the independence which had attracted so many to the North.
Conditions of work were meanwhile deteriorating. Deep reefing brought new problems of risk and discomfort to the working miners, for Macrossan’s Mines Regulation Act of 1881, which imposed minimum safety precautions and a thorough system of inspection, had been outmoded by later developments. The standards for winding apparatus remained unaltered; safety cages were not made compulsory for deep shafts; ventilation underground, despite a warm climate, was poorly provided in many mines. Most years saw between four and seven fatalities at Charters Towers, and the number tended to increase; in 1888 there were 107 deaths from accidents in Queensland coal and metal mines. The need to bargain with absentee bosses about such conditions combined with disillusion, after the breaking of the boom, to throw working miners back on their own feelings of common interest and solidarity and to favour the rise of organized labour.

The movement began quietly enough in January 1886, with the formation of a Miners’ Accident Association. Six months later, on 29 July, a separate Miners’ Union came into being. Its birth was described fairly sympathetically by Warden Sellheim:

There has been a strike for a few days at one of the mines during the year, but this was hardly connected with the wages question, and arose from other grievances. The settlement of the dispute was left eventually, at my suggestion, to six arbitrators, myself and two miners acting on behalf of the miners, and we found very little difficulty in getting the men to return to work. However, the strike has been the means of causing the formation of a miners’ union, which has affiliated with the powerful Victorian combination, and which I fancy will be beneficial to all in the long run, provided it is carried out on the same prudent lines of moderation and common sense as it has been commenced with. The management is at present in the hands of a clear-headed, sensible and straightforward man of experience ...¹³

The union was slow to flourish during the speculative boom, and by October had only twenty-five paying members. With recession, and the transfer of many mines to British ownership, growth became rapid. ‘Any reasonable thinking man must see for himself the benefit accruing from joining the union,’ urged one spokesman, ‘there was foreign capital being introduced here now, and they would no doubt before long work for foreign wages, and they knew what that meant.’¹⁹ Some feared it meant the employment of Chinese.
By the end of June 1887 branch unions had been formed on the outlying fields, Ravenswood, Stockholm and Black Jack, and the Charters Towers body claimed over one thousand members.\(^{20}\) However, when the Accident Association and the Miners’ Union were amalgamated in September, only 336 bothered to vote on the matter. The Black Jack slump of 1888 threw so many out of employment that union activity was almost brought to a standstill, only to revive with greater militancy as soon as the worst of the depression was over. In May 1889 Ravenswood, previously an apathetic community where trade unionism was concerned, re-formed its branch of the Miners’ Association with over one hundred members after the successful defeat of an attempt to employ Chinese for feeding stone to a battery. Branches of the Association also existed at Croydon, Georgetown, Cloncurry, and the South Queensland fields of Gympie and Eidsvold.\(^{21}\) In July 1889, on the initiative of Charters Towers, these branches disaffiliated from the Victorian section of the Australian Miners’ Association and formed a separate Queensland district. The breakaway arose ostensibly from a dispute over the methods of raising funeral levies, but actually stemmed from the wish for self-determination.

The miners had a number of fights on their hands. At the Day Dawn mine in Charters Towers, the underground workers objected to having to change into company clothes while going on and off shift. This strike was unsuccessful, although as the visiting Irish politician, Michael Davitt, observed:

> This precaution is not generally taken when the mining is in quartz reef, as the carrying away of a ton of stone in order to abstract an ounce of gold is not considered a feat of convenient achievement by any single miner. Where stone is rich in free gold there is some reasonable grounds for adopting such measures, but it is a question whether the want of confidence in skilled working men shown by these regulations does not defeat its own end, and, like many more narrow selfish rules or laws, beget by suggestion the very vice such rules are intended to repress.\(^{22}\)

Wages were, however, the chief cause of disputes, and pay reductions stimulated strikes at Croydon and the Etheridge during 1889.

Unemployment was not confined to the goldfields. Its hand was also on the coastal towns, where the uncertain future of sugar was often blamed for distress, but where the breaking of the boom
in real estate, with consequent unemployment among carpenters, builders, and labourers, was chiefly responsible. Townsville land sales had realized crazy prices during 1887 and 1888. Corner blocks of one acre in one greatly favoured suburban sub-division had gone as high as £2,700—no mean price even by today's standards—and in 1888 a quarter-acre corner allotment on Flinders Street with a very moderate hotel was sold for £16,000, a sum which remained for over a quarter of a century the record for a Townsville real estate deal. Then, as the recession in gold-mining followed the slump in the sugar industry, the reckoning had come. Prices tumbled; by February 1890 Flinders Street frontages leased two years earlier at £5 per foot were going for 3s.23 Nor was this pattern of boom and slump confined to Townsville; the Cooktown firm of Thomas & Madden, who had paid £7,000 for premises in Cairns in 1886, found them valued at only £3,000 in January 1890.24 Land-booming had been a prevalent mania in the Australia of the eighties, but the depression in mining and sugar left North Queensland vulnerable to the slump a little earlier than Melbourne or Sydney.

Unaccustomed to large-scale unemployment, North Queenslanders turned to trade unionism. The example had already been set by the seamen and wharf labourers, following the manoeuvres which led in 1887 to the formation of the Australian United Steam Navigation Company as monopolist of the coastal trade. Organized by E. Y. Lowry,* the wharf labourers at Mackay and Townsville formed unions in July and August 1887, and were soon harassing Burns, Philp with strikes against the employment of non-union men. Cooktown followed suit in October 1888 and Cairns in July 1889; in September these four unions combined with others to form the North Queensland Labour Federation.

During 1890 the spate of union-mongering reached its height. It was especially strong at Charters Towers, where bakers, shop assistants, typographers, and even domestic servants formed unions; but it involved also butchers, builders' workmen and cabmen at Townsville; railway employees at several centres; carriers at the railheads; navvies on the Cairns-Mareeba railway (who in November 1890 registered under the name of United Sons of Toil); general labourers at Geraldton, Cairns, and Townsville; barmen at Cooktown; and, by no means least, a Women's

*Formerly a seaman; organized wharf labourers, Townsville 1887; travelled widely in North Queensland promoting labour movement and eight-hour day; alderman of Townsville; twice a parliamentary candidate; died Nov. 1898.
Union at Townsville. It is rather difficult to assess the effect of all this activity. Union meetings were not always well attended; for instance, an important half-yearly meeting of the Charters Towers Miners’ Association in 1889 drew only about three dozen of the thousand or more members entitled to attend. But the unions formed the perfect vehicle for the transmission of radical and republican ideas, and eventually for forming a Labour Party.

North Queensland unionism got its radical tinge in the main from a group of young Charters Towers men, who, although not themselves working miners, came to influence goldfields politics profoundly. John Dunsford* was one; owner of a struggling fancy goods shop and newsagency, who, having burnt his fingers speculating in the ’86 boom, had leisure to read and disseminate the literature of Henry George, Marx, Bellamy and other socialist thinkers, and so to become the ‘ideas man’ among Charters Towers radicals. ‘Fighting Charley’ McDonald† was a skilful watchmaker, an argumentative, literal-minded bush-lawyer, precise as one of his own time-pieces, a man who delighted in mastering and citing points of procedure and order; but generous, too, and a tireless worker for his beliefs, who cycled hundreds of miles around the Towers to spread his political gospel. The buffoon of the group was John Hoolan,‡ who wrote doggerel verse under the name of ‘Sugarbag’, but was more widely known as ‘Plumper’ for his single-minded advocacy of whole-hog principles. He belonged to a type not yet extinct in North Queensland politics; the sort of man who so enjoyed trumpeting his radical principles and heaping his foes with scurrilous eloquence that his occasional good sense and generosity were often overlooked. A slightly later recruit was Anderson Dawson,§ who had been away at the Kimberley gold-rush, returning penniless in

‡Born 1842; M.L.A. for Burke 1890–4 and 1896–9; Leader of Labour Party 1893–4; independent candidate for Cairns 1899; died 1911. Practically Hoolan’s last appearance in parliament was marked by his suspension for defying Speaker Cowley: ‘Mr. Hoolan thereupon proceeded to the table, and, filling a glass with water, said “Here’s luck all round.” The honourable member then left the Chamber, raising his coat tails as he retired.’ (Q.P.D. LXXIX, p. 668.) Hansard’s way of describing his gesture is perhaps over-decorous.
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A Thousand Miles Away

1887. In many ways the most thoughtful and sympathetic character of all, he was a humane, well-read young man whose chance of future greatness depended very much on his ability to withstand the bottle.

These four and their associates made an immediate appeal to miners and workmen. These hopeful young men in handle-bar moustaches were keen, straight-speaking, assumed no airs or politicians' manners, presented a programme of Utopian simplicity which assumed that men of goodwill throughout Australia could cut themselves free of Old World legacies and apply themselves to re-building society. Their first interventions had been in local politics. In January Dunsford and Hoolan had been ring-leaders of the push who broke up the Charters Towers Separation League's meeting. Two months later they had organized a censure motion on the management of the local School of Arts. Next they formed a short-lived Land Nationalization League, to educate the North in the gospels of Henry George. In July they spread their interests: Dunsford scraped together some capital, and Hoolan was sent off to Croydon to battle with half-a-dozen competitors for the opportunity of founding the town's leading newspaper. Arriving too late, he moved on to Georgetown, where the Mundic Miner soon became notorious for its pungent prose.*

The depression of 1888-9 brought a lull in radical activity; but it paved the way for a brief but enthusiastic North Queensland flirtation with the idea of republicanism. This belief attracted a lot of attention even outside the Labour movement, for its roots went back beyond the rise of trade unionism. Assertive patriots, fearing Australia's interests in New Guinea and the South Pacific jeopardized by Colonial Office sloth, had hinted at going it alone. Many of the Irish on the mining fields disliked royalty as an institution of the ruling English, and Thady O'Kane had often enlivened a dull week by sniping at the alleged miserliness of Queen Victoria, or the more robust misdemeanours of Edward, Prince of Wales.25 Both Charters Towers newspapers in 1887 were anti-royalist and foresaw the coming of a Federated Australian republic. Even in 1892, when the Northern Miner had come under staunchly anti-labour management, it could dismiss the death of Queen Victoria's eldest grandson, the Duke of Clarence, with the thought that 'he was like a chip in porridge—neither good nor

*Often short of funds because of court actions, the Mundic Miner was once printed on brown wrapping paper.
River crossing -- old style. There are still places in Queensland where traffic is ferried in this way. From the Daintree Collection
harm in him', 26 which was a long way from the conventional funeral tributes expected at such a time.

While there is some little evidence of republican ideas at Cairns and Townsville, 27 it was natural that Charters Towers should become the centre of the movement. Not only was it the usual channel for radical thought filtering up from Sydney and Brisbane, but also it had special grounds for disliking the British, whose capitalists were associated with the advent of hard times and falling wages on the field. 'They have in this locality bought up our best dividend-producing mines, and now the working classes feel the disadvantageous difference between the dividends being paid in London instead of on Charters Towers.' 28 So wrote John Dunsford, in explaining the success of the Republican Association founded in Charters Towers on 3 February 1890. The opening meeting attracted fifty people. Explaining the Association's objects, Dunsford in the chair stated that, although there were already in existence North Queensland branches of the Australian Natives' Association, pledged to the furtherance of a united Australia, that body had compromised itself by failing to condemn the nominee Legislative Council, and was in other respects insufficiently radical. Charters Towers should therefore form a Republican Association, with a more thoroughgoing objective of Australian nationhood. One member of the audience suggested, not unreasonably, that since the Australian colonies were too poorly equipped to defend themselves, it might be more reasonable to form a Radical Association, and let the republican ideal sleep until a more suitable time. He went unheeded. The Republican Association was voted into being, Charles McDonald was appointed acting secretary, and a platform adopted in which echoes of Henry George and even of the Chartists mingled with local grievances and policies lifted from the Sydney Bulletin:

Universal suffrage and triennial parliaments.
Direct tax on land values, irrespective of improvements.
Simplified procedure of Law Courts.
Abolition of capital punishment.
Australia for the white man.
Complete general, technical and professional education.
Government issue of all money without intervention of the banks.
Mining boards and inspectors to be elected by the people.
No foreign labour at rates under Trade Union.
Australia to be a democratic commonwealth of free and independent people.

14 Cumjan, an Aboriginal murderer, Croydon, about 1894
In support of the above we solicit the co-operation of all patriotic citizens who, sick of the degradation of politics, desire by constitutional means to build up the Republic of the South Seas, to establish justice, to preserve liberty, to extend the spirit of Australian nationality, and to elevate humanity.²⁹

Two afterthoughts were added to this programme. Perhaps reflecting the influence of a short-lived Land Nationalization League formed in 1887, a clause called for the resumption of all freehold land, and the adoption of leasehold as the only form of alienation. Another addition stated that no Australian legislator should accept titles from the British government. Despite its republican name, and far-reaching programme, the Association’s preference for ‘constitutional methods’ promised nothing revolutionary, and its activities were mainly propagandist and educational. It was not thought incongruous that the local Anglican rector should be invited to address the society on the Christian republic of the future nor that the Northern Miner—although grown conservative since O’Kane’s retirement at the end of 1889—should write in highly favourable terms of the Association’s influence on the working men of Charters Towers.³⁰

A more provocative note was struck for the Association when a fiery young Cornishman, F. B. C. Vosper,⁴ was appointed editor of the Association’s weekly newspaper, the Australian Republican.³¹ An impetuous writer, his editorials sometimes bore bloodthirsty implications which, in normal times, neither he nor the majority of his readers would have wanted to carry into action. For the labour movement, however, these were not normal times. Many radical leaders in 1890 saw themselves as being drawn into an Australia-wide trial of strength between the working class and the capitalists. In North Queensland, as in other parts of Australia, the maritime strike of 1890 and the shearsers’ dispute of 1891 drove a wedge between the Labour movement and many who had previously shown themselves sympathetic, or at least tolerant, but disliked being involved in the inconveniences which followed strike action. While the Charters Towers miners got up a subscription to aid the maritime strike fund, the Northern Miner deplored their militancy; and in some of the ports the

*Born Cornwall 1867; emigrated to Bolivia 1882, Queensland 1883; sub-editor Northern Miner 1889; editor Australian Republican 1890–1; after imprisonment emigrated to Western Australia 1892; edited and founded several newspapers, including Coolgardie Miner, 1894, and Sunday Times 1897; M.L.A. North-East Coolgardie 1897–1901: died 1901.
division between opponents and sympathizers was even more marked.

At Cooktown the strikers suffered their first reverse. On 22 August all the seamen and officers, except the captain and two others, walked off the *Arrawatta*. The sailors had no food or money, and began holding up all foot passengers near the wharf and requesting money for the strike fund. When the local merchants came down to unload perishable cargo, the Cooktown wharf labourers forbade them to approach, and joined the seamen on strike. During a procession of strikers down the main street of Cooktown, police took possession of the wharf and kept the strikers away, while the merchants and their clerks went through the unaccustomed toil of unloading perishable cargo. Twenty-two special constables were sworn in, and public feeling seemed to be against the seamen. Without means in a strange town, the strikers soon hankered to get back to the familiar surroundings of Sydney, and on 26 August, four days after their walk-off, the crew of the *Arrawatta* submitted to their employers and returned to work. This was hailed as the first defeat of the strikers. It illustrated the difficulty of gaining sympathy in a community as dependent on regular outside communications as North Queensland. Several times in the future striking wharf labourers and seamen were to find themselves clashing with farmers who wanted their produce exported and townspeople who found it intolerable to go on short rations because of an industrial quarrel in which they had no part or interest.

Sides were chosen inland, as at the ports. The maritime strike led to the formation of a Townsville Employers' Association in August 1890; next year Charters Towers had a similar body. Meanwhile the young lions of the Republican Association were running into opposition. Outwardly their following seemed enthusiastic as late as October 1890, when one meeting on the working of the limited liability laws attracted 400 men, and another, convoked by Dunsford, Dawson and Vosper in opposition to Griffith's new coalition government, concluded with three cheers for an Australian Republic. But the cheers were becoming a little perfunctory; and in November some hostile critics broke into the *Republican* office by night and pied the type of a forthcoming issue. The Australian Miners' Association was finding business slack, not merely at outside centres like Croydon, but even in Charters Towers, where in March 1891 the Union had only 543 names on its roll—less than half the 1887 number—
and owed £107 to the Australian Labour Federation for a maritime strike levy. Moreover, the 1890 elections for the Charters Towers hospital board had finished with the candidates for the Miners’ Association at the bottom of a poll.

Perhaps the leading radicals of the Towers were too engrossed in building up Labour on a Queensland-wide basis. For by 1890 the North Queensland Labour Federation had combined with five other districts to form the Australian Labour Federation, with Charles McDonald as president of the general council. Despite its name, the A.L.F. was almost entirely a Queensland organization, centred on Brisbane, where it began publishing the Worker under the able editorship of William Lane. By the end of 1890 the A.L.F. had drawn up a political programme and a scheme for trade union nomination of parliamentary candidates which, in setting the standard for the whole Queensland Labour movement, reflected the influence of Lane and other Brisbane men. Theirs was the main role in stiffening outback radicalism with the idea of a planned programme and some form of socialist philosophy. They were the minds who gave direction to the unionists of Charters Towers and other North Queensland centres when their interest was re-kindled by the shearsers’ strike of February 1891.

The shearsers’ strike, despite its eventual defeat, seems to have rejuvenated the Labour movement on North Queensland mining fields, touching popular sympathy far more closely than the maritime strike in the previous year. This seems at first surprising, because North Queensland was cattle country without any first-hand interest in the wool industry, and relations between squatters and towns were generally good except for occasional small squabbles on the municipal level about the distribution of rates between town and country properties. But ‘freedom of contract’ and the other issues in the shearsers’ strike reflected that same growing division between bosses and officialdom on the one side, and working men on the other, that the miners were experiencing at Croydon and Charters Towers. The Charters Towers Volunteer Corps, made up in the main of clerks, stockbrokers, and businessmen, one or two of whom at least had dabbled in the Republican Association, now found themselves opposed to the Labour movement over the shearsers’ dispute, and willingly volunteered to preserve order in strike-affected areas. Trimly uniformed and stoutly armed, they were sent off to garrison Winton, but somewhat to their disappointment, saw no action at all.
These were men who felt they had something to lose by a breakdown in existing patterns of law and order; for some of the labour leaders were preparing for violent change. The Charters Towers secretary of the Australian Labour Federation wrote in March 1891: ‘... if the Government and squatters fire on us, then I think the result will be a civil war.’ In the *Australian Republican* young Vosper penned a challenging, but slightly incoherent, editorial entitled ‘Bread or Blood’, in which he asserted that it would be ‘better to see the last squatter and the last member of this hateful Government butchered ...’ than for the shearers to yield, and ‘every man, his horse and rifle should fight to the bitter end. ...’. Haled before the circuit court on a charge of seditious libel, Vosper survived one trial when the jury failed to agree, and was acquitted at a second hearing in October, on the grounds that although the editorial was a seditious libel, it had not been intended as such. (This narrow escape taught him nothing; next year he was gaol ed on a charge of inciting miners to strike, and afterwards took himself and his fiery journalism off to Western Australia, where, to efface the disgrace of having his head shaven by the prison barber, he became noted for never trimming his shoulder-length hair. Meanwhile, the *Republican* folded up, probably about the middle of 1891.)

As the shearers' strike developed into a long struggle, interest revived in the Labour movement. Enthusiastic open-air meetings, not merely at Charters Towers but at out-back mining camps such as Muldiva and Montalbion, expressed sympathy with the strikers, and provided a forum of speakers who stressed the need for concerted and disciplined action by the Labour movement. Local and particular organizations such as the Republican Association fell into decay, and the emphasis was cast on building up the unions as the basis of Labour's entry into parliament. Among other workers for the Labour cause, William Rawlings, an official of the Charters Towers Miners' Union, had considerable success in organizing the base metal miners of the Herberton area, and Charles McDonald was indefatigable in visiting the small camps of fossickers west and south of the Towers. In the ports, too, Labour began to make itself felt as a political force. In the Townsville by-election of 1891 after Macrossan's death, a not particularly strong Labour candidate polled 44 per cent of the vote. This upswing towards Labour was common in all the outback areas of Queensland, and it was accentuated in the North by growing concern about one possibility: the restoration of
To some extent, the rise of Labour in North Queensland was a reaction against the vocal Separation movement, which to many working men seemed to disguise a campaign for the return of Pacific Islanders to the coastal canefields—and perhaps to other jobs in which they would compete with white Australians. Already it had become one of the chief concerns of the Townsville General Labourers’ Union to prosecute employers for breaches of the Polynesian Acts.35

At the background to the Separation movement there had undoubtedly been some pressure from the growing discontents of the sugar-growers. At the end of 1888, the driest year most planters had ever experienced, their complaints stirred the Queensland Government into appointing a Royal Commission to report on the state of the industry. Its chairman was the everlasting William Henry Groom,* wily spokesman of the Darling Downs and sworn foe to any move which would favour sugar interests more than his wheat-farming constituents. Balanced against him was Alfred Cowley, already regarded as a rising young parliamentarian and the most able pleader for coloured labour. The Lepidus of the trio was H. E. King,f once an important power in politics as member for Ravenswood (where he had extensive mining speculations), but now retired to a Brisbane legal practice. King had recently been wooing the voters of the south Queensland sugar port of Maryborough, and it soon emerged that he sided consistently with Cowley. Nevertheless the Commission sought out evidence diligently. During January and February 1889, in those summer months when the tropics are usually out of season to visiting politicians, they covered the entire coast from Mossman to Brisbane, examining 154 witnesses and asking 9,781 questions. These witnesses seem to have been a genuinely representative cross-section of the sugar industry, in no way hand-picked. Almost all, however, told the same tale. A heavy investment of capital had been followed by declining prices and profits, owing to the competitive effect of subsidized European beet sugar on world markets. It was impossible to pay sufficient wages to recruit white labour, and doubtful whether Europeans

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*Born 1832; nine times mayor of Toowoomba; M.L.A. for Drayton and Toowoomba 1863–1901; Speaker 1883–8; Federal M.P. for Darling Downs Mar.–Aug. 1901, when he died.

†Born 1832; M.L.A. for Wide Bay 1870–4, Ravenswood 1875–83; Secretary for Mines and Public Works 1874–6; Speaker 1876–83; unsuccessfully contested Maryborough 1888; Crown Prosecutor, Central District Court 1890–1910; died 1910:
in any number were interested in or capable of fieldwork. Great planter and small farmer would soon be off the lands, unless the government promised some relief. Almost all concluded with the same plea: 'Give us back our Kanakas.'

It has usually been assumed, even by the most reputable historians, that the main group behind the cry for coloured labour were the Mackay grandees wishing 'to establish a plantation society based on semislave labour free from the control of governments'. This is not the case. By the nineties the old system of large, heavily capitalized estates worked by gangs of between forty and two hundred Islanders was doomed, and the planters knew it. Technological advances had made milling a specialized occupation, and by concentrating on this aspect and sub-dividing their land for lease or sale to small farmers, millowners saw some possibility of spreading the risks of sugar production, and perhaps of at least paying interest on the heavy debts contracted during the boom period. Partly because of the labour situation, but mainly because of high pioneering costs and low returns, no planter—not even the great Colonial Sugar Company—could afford to stay in business on the plantation system. Airdmillan had swallowed £200,000 of British capital. Hambledon was £180,000 in the red, and still making no profit at all. Mulgrave was in the hands of the Bank of Australasia, its overdraft £140,000, and its managing director off to try his luck as a storekeeper on the Croydon goldfield. Pyramid, according to Robert Philp in 1892, after costing £160,000 was on offer by its mortgagees for £10,000—without a taker. Smaller properties had already gone under. Records of the Queensland National Bank in Cairns reveal that in 1886 Bauer's mill and plantation (the Bloomfield River Sugar Company) owed the Commercial Bank of Australia £39,500 and other creditors £4,600. Sale of land and assets realized only £9,200, but the company eventually paid ten shillings in the pound. All these were properties in districts opened during the McLlwraith boom of the eighties.

Even if white labour had been available in sufficient quantity, the bigger companies in general lacked the resources to pay white labourers, engaged on what had hitherto been scorned as a Kanaka's job, a wage sufficient to compete with other classes of work, particularly mining. Nor were the small farmers better able to do without their four or five Pacific Islanders apiece. Cane prices were down to 10s. a ton, for although the Australian
colonies to which Queensland exported her surplus received little beet sugar, the plantations of Java and China were pressing for a greater share of the market. Without cheap labour the North Queensland farmer felt himself unable to match the low costs of production in Asia. ‘The rate of wages that old hands demand and insist upon is much more than any selector can afford’, wrote an impartial observer in 1890. Nearly every witness at the Royal Commission believed either that white men were physically incapable of working in the canefields or that they were too unreliable and independent. Only one instance was cited of a cane-cutter on wages staying a whole season at his work, and he was an Italian employed on the Burdekin Delta.

Cowley and King required little convincing. Other relief measures—perhaps some form of commercial agreement with Victoria and New South Wales—although desirable, would be mere palliatives. Coloured labour alone could save the sugar industry. Groom, of course, dissented, claiming that the government-subsidized central mill system had not yet had a fair trial. Where central mills had been established on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales, white labour was working the canefields with no ill effects, either human or economic. Hard though this argument was to refute, Groom himself weakened it by adding a characteristic piece of special pleading; if the traffic in Islanders were resumed, surely his Darling Downs farmers were entitled to a *quid pro quo*, such as a heavy tariff on imported wheat. But, except by asserting, as some did, that the Northern climate was much fiercer than that of the New South Wales canefields, it was impossible to get round the fact that, in one part of Australia, sugar could be grown without coloured labour. The advantage which the New South Wales industry had enjoyed was mainly that small farming had been carefully fostered by one milling company (Colonial Sugar) during the relatively prosperous seventies, whereas in North Queensland the farmers had been obliged to fight for their markets, and were now trying to establish themselves in the face of depressed prices and a heritage of over speculation by plantation investors.

Colonial Sugar, too, had been far less venturesome in the North. Despite their willingness to mill cane for the selectors on the Herbert, they were not yet convinced that white labour alone could sustain the Queensland sugar industry. ‘We think,’ reported the chairman of the company in March 1889, ‘that vested interests will be too strong for the introduction of Kanaka labour
Separation and Radicalism, 1884–1901

to cease: but in the meantime no money is being spent in extensions... Vested interests were not strong enough, as emerged later in 1889 when Cowley followed up the Royal Commission by moving in parliament for a five-year extension in recruiting. This had been urged by an influential conference of sugar-growers at Townsville, attended in May by delegates from the Johnstone, Herbert, Burdekin, Mackay and Bundaberg; support came also from the Johnstone divisional board and the Bundaberg chamber of commerce, as well as a petition from 156 farmers and selectors who declared the Islanders ‘more tractable than other coloured races, fair workmen, and the least likely to enter into competition with Europeans’. Even although Griffith was in opposition, the government of the day was against change. Macrossan had assured the Townsville Trades and Labour Council that there would be no extension, and the Legislative Assembly rejected Cowley’s motion.

Unable to find solace from either of the Queensland political parties, Colonial Sugar determined to cut their losses. The coloured labour issue was but one of the grievances accumulating from the conduct of successive Queensland governments. In the first place burdensome terms had been imposed on the Victoria mill when it took over certain agricultural selections; then the government had advanced finance for the two central mills at Mackay, working in opposition to those erected by private enterprise; and lately crippling taxation had been imposed, both through the levy of high tariffs on imported machinery and in 1890 by a dividend tax subjecting the company to a tax on its profits while individual planters and millers escaped. All these pin-pricks had resolved Colonial Sugar to close their factories and gradually to withdraw from North Queensland. For a start, however, each of their three estates would be worked on a different principle. As it was thought possible to obtain sufficient Asiatics for the working of one property, the mill at Goondi, on the Johnstone, would be worked for some years by coloured labour. Homebush, near Mackay, would be sub-divided among farmers; but the biggest mill—Victoria, on the Herbert—would be closed and removed to Fiji. Such plans suggest that Colonial Sugar, far from being an influential power behind the scenes, saw no hope of getting their own way with the Queensland Government. Instead, the acting-chairman permitted himself the tart comment that Colonial Sugar’s difficulties ‘will, when the history of the company’s experiences in Queensland comes to
be written, furnish an instructive lesson for those who would venture upon the experiment of any manufacturing enterprise in that colony.43 Colonial Sugar, largest of all the North Queensland sugar-growers, could see no future in the plantation system.

Other planters held the view—expressed several times by Robert Philp—that the South Sea Islands would before long become too depopulated to serve as a labour supply. Already the cost of an Islander’s importation and upkeep was increasing, especially for time-expired men no longer under contract, who demanded wages of £20 or £25 a year. There was, therefore, a growing inclination to try Griffith’s notion of sugar-growing as a sort of peasant economy, with the selector’s wife and children representing the cheap labour formerly provided by the Islanders. It was not, to be sure, an especially attractive proposition for the families of potential ‘cane cockies’, and the planters’ instinct told them that it might be advisable to recruit a peasantry of this sort from overseas. Co-ordinated through Robert Philp’s agency, the Burdekin and Herbert planters agreed in September 1890 to send C. V. Fraire, of Townsville, to Italy, where he would indent labourers for the canefields from the farming districts of Lombardy and Piedmont. (There was a longstanding prejudice that these people made better settlers than Southern Italians.) After two years’ service, the Italians would be entitled to lease or purchase a smallholding, and could set up as cane-growers under an assured contract to the mill. The planters were anxious to unload their estates, and their mood was well expressed by Charles Young of Kalamia, near Ayr:

We hardly expect the Piedmontese to be a success as ‘gang’ labourers while they work for us, whatever they may be afterwards when working for themselves; but we hope that when they understand plantation work they may be induced to import the cheap and reliable labour necessary to work the mill properly, and to grow cane at a price per ton that will enable the factory to pay working expenses and interest.44

It took Fraire a considerable time to recruit emigrants to the required number, and it was December 1891 before the Jumna landed 320 Italians at Townsville. The experiment met with no great success. The Italians disliked their working conditions—and they had arrived just in time for the wet season. Unsettled by reports that wages of ten to twelve shillings a day could be had in Townsville and Charters Towers, while their indentures bound them to eighteen shillings a week and keep for each married
Separation and Radicalism, 1884–1901

couple, some broke their engagements and went elsewhere; one dogged group tramped 150 miles to Cairns, where they were succoured by a local doctor. All found a hostile reception from local working-men, whose spokesmen objected to ‘a horde of Italians . . . being brought here in a democratic country at the people’s expense to please the banking and monopolistic syndicate who are living on interest and care little by what means their bank balances increase.’ Their intolerance was understandable, though deplorable; in August of that year a strike of miners at the Etheridge had been broken by the employment of Italians as non-union labour at lower wages. Fear that Italian competition would undercut existing standards made the Labour movement as hostile to the newcomers as they had been to the Pacific Islanders. An equally unpleasant narrow-mindedness on another side was shown by a Cairns paper, which in campaigning for the restoration of Pacific Island labour, lumped the Italians with Chinese, Malays and Javanese as ‘objectionable elements’ in the community. By the time Griffith arrived on a cabinet tour of North Queensland during the Christmas vacation of 1891, the Italian experiment seemed doomed to failure, if only because working-class opposition was so vocal that the Italian government was reluctant to encourage further emigration.

Griffith and his ministers had an instructive tour. At Cooktown the wharf labourers hooted and heckled them about the Italians. Elsewhere they were met by several deputations of farmers, who bemoaned their hardships and urged the restoration of Pacific Island labour. Cowley, now Minister for Lands, had to give a discouraging answer. No one could be more sympathetic, he said, but the majority of Queensland voters had spoken against the traffic, and its resumption could not be expected. Griffith said nothing, although a boatload of Herbert River farmers, who rowed out to beard him on board the official steamer, were thoroughly primed with whisky and sent home with lavish assurances of goodwill. Then, on 12 February 1892, within a month of his return to Brisbane, he issued a startling manifesto proposing the resumption of Pacific Island labour under stronger safeguards than previously. The decision was his alone, and his cabinet were informed of it only shortly before the announcement. Cowley, the minister most concerned, certainly had no inkling of any such plan; otherwise he would not have denied the possibility so firmly during the Northern tour, as, although a bigoted partisan, he was scrupulously honest.
It seems unlikely that Griffith was swayed by Colonial Sugar, as some Labour papers alleged at the time. That firm was still bent on shedding its North Queensland interests, although instead of removing the Victoria mill to Fiji, it was now prepared to consider sale to a co-operative of growers. In judging the Premier’s volte-face there seems no reason to go beyond Griffith’s own explanation that he had aimed consistently at supplanting large estates worked by gang labour with independent small farmers. (It was, after all, through this class that Griffith could hope to build up his voting strength in the North.) But this aim had been frustrated, and Griffith named two villains: first, a few old-fashioned planters who refused to co-operate, and second, the leaders of the Labour movement who had made the smallholding experiment unworkable by demanding excessive wages for white labour, and by stirring up feeling against the Italians. He could see no other course than for the farmers to require Pacific Islanders, and for the Government to provide them.

By the beginning of 1892 Griffith was considerably embittered towards the Labour movement. Instead of backing his liberal—often advanced—views, they had turned against him, comparing him in the Worker to Judas and Satan, and greeting his public appearances with hoots and groans. The tragedy was that there was no point of contact between the two radicalisms. A bookish, subtle man of the cities, Griffith had no sense of community with, or insight into, the crude, direct mateship of the outback unions. A lawyer with a whig’s belief in private property, Griffith had inherited from his nonconformist background the common nineteenth-century belief that ‘a stake in the country’ was the hallmark of a good citizen, and the desirable reward of a useful life. The landless men of Labour saw no merit in these notions, and thought the existing distribution of property an unjust system that set man against man.

Their mounting hostility to Griffith and his colleagues had reached a peak over the shearing disputes of 1891. Against the Labour men were ranged not merely the banks and the politicians, but many of the unionists’ own brothers: selectors and shopkeepers, clerks and craftsmen who were struggling to maintain a decent living within the existing framework of society, and resented the strikers for involving them in costly quarrels over issues which had never been thought important until the unions raised them. Alarmed by this rising of the outback against the city, of labour against property, judges and politicians had
become vindictive, and the strikers had received scant mercy or understanding. It was not surprising that the embattled unions were unwilling to treat the Italian sugar-workers fairly. And while they protested vehemently against the resumption of Pacific Island labour, they had expected no better from the Griffith ministry. It gave them some sardonic amusement that the same parliament, which in 1889 had rejected Cowley's plea for five more years of coloured labour, now accepted Griffith's plan for its indefinite resumption—except for the three Labour members, a few liberal-minded individuals such as Sayers, M.L.A. for Charters Towers, and most of the Darling Downs members.

Now North Queensland Labour men came to think more kindly of Separation. This surprised nobody; almost as soon as Griffith's manifesto was out, the separationist Mackay Mercury had calculated

... if Kanaka extension is agreed to, the agitation for Separation will be shown to be entirely foreign to the question of coloured labour, and we shall draw into our camp the miners and other, at present, anti-Separationists.47

Sure enough, it was not long before Labour stalwarts like John Dunsford were forgetting past performance in breaking up meetings of the Separation League, and putting themselves forward as veteran advocates of Northern self-determination. Their motives were not hard to discern. Labour could reasonably hope to win several seats in North Queensland at the next elections. Mining constituencies—Charters Towers, Kennedy, Woothakata, Burke, and Croydon—represented six seats, of which Labour could capture at least four, and perhaps all. The pastoral electorates of the west would be almost solid Labour. The ports were less certain, but promising. In a Brisbane parliament the more numerous representatives of the city and the nearby farming areas could nullify Labour successes in the north and west; but in a North Queensland legislature Labour might soon become dominant.

The 1893 elections justified this line of thinking. Despite strenuous opposition—at Charters Towers it was alleged that miners were dismissed for voting Labour48—the pastoral and mining constituencies returned a bevy of Labour members. Hoolan, temporarily leader of the group, had clowned his way to the suffrages of Burke three years previously, and now increased his majority. 'Fighting Charley' McDonald stormed Flinders;
Billy Browne, an old hand from Charters Towers who had lost an eye as an underground worker, won Croydon; at Charters Towers Dawson and Dunsford ousted a popular Liberal member, Bob Sayers. The Miners’ Union organizer, William Rawlings, took Woothakata over divided opposition; the absence of preferential voting in Queensland also favoured George Jackson in Kennedy.* Next year another Labour candidate won a by-election at Townsville. These eight Northerners were joined in the Brisbane parliament by nine colleagues, all but three from mining and pastoral areas. Labour began in Queensland as the party of the outback.

They found the Separation question still lively. The Northern movement had been reinforced by a second group, the Central Separation League, who sought the formation of another colony based on Rockhampton. Macrossan's death in March 1891 had left the Northern movement without an acknowledged leader, and from then on there was a tendency for the Central Queensland League to make the running. Under continuous pressure much of Griffith's previous hostility was eroding, and in June 1892 he introduced into the Legislative Assembly a rather cumbersome plan for the partition of Queensland on a federal basis, with a common senate and a house of representatives, and individual single-chamber parliaments for the South, Centre and North. During the passage of the bill through the Assembly, Central Queensland was dropped from the scheme, so that the final plan provided North Queensland with its own legislature of thirty-two members, while in the Queensland federal parliament there would have been eight North Queenslanders in the Senate and nine in the House of Representatives. Almost it was a blueprint in miniature of the Commonwealth government of Australia. This too ingenious project did not capture public imagination, however. When the Legislative Council rejected it, there were

* Browne was M.L.A. for Croydon from 1893 until his death in 1904; leader of the Labour Party from 1901; Minister for Mines in the Morgan coalition ministry from Sept. 1903 until his death.


George Jackson was born 1856; arrived Ravenswood 1871; became mill-owner, chairman of Dairymple divisional board, president of Ravenswood Miners’ Association; M.L.A. for Kennedy 1893–1909; chairman of committees 1903–7; Minister for Mines for a few months in 1909.
no outbursts of protest and petitioning from the North. The majority feeling seems to have been that, since Griffith had acknowledged North Queensland’s claim to self-determination, a more acceptable scheme would soon be brought forward.

Or perhaps he was only stalling for time? By 1893 he had stepped out of politics to become Chief Justice, and McIlwraith’s ponderous weight was blocking the movement for Separation. Several of the Northern leaders, such as Cowley (now Speaker), Philp, Byrnes, Dalrymple and Chataway* had accepted, or would shortly accept office under a Brisbane government, from which position of vantage they could further the interests of the North. Their enthusiasm for Separation did not immediately vanish, but it tended to dissipate itself in petty wrangles about the exact boundary of the proposed new colony and in uncertainties about the reception to be given the new converts on the Labour side. Motions for the separation of Central and North Queensland were rejected in August 1893 by a two-to-one majority. McIlwraith declared bluntly that Separation was ‘dead’, and Byrnes prophesied that it would lead to a Labour-dominated regime in the North. On this occasion he was the only Northern member to vote against Separation; but some of the others were beginning to get cold feet, and by March 1894 the member for Bowen told his electorate:

At one time the working men of the North were pronounced anti-Separationists, but since the general election they seem to have come to view Separation as the best thing that could possibly be brought about. How are we to account for this sudden change of front? It is implied that Separation meant destruction to the sugar industry. If the issue were Separation and destruction to the development of a tropical Queensland, I would let Separation sleep until people came to their senses.

Despite these forebodings, the idea of Separation continued to simmer for several years in the Mackay and Townsville press. When an ideal has been vigorously urged long enough, it is apt to continue its impetus for a while independently of changes in the political and economic climate. As late as 1898 a Charters Towers meeting passed resolutions urging Separation before

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*Born 1852; arrived Australia 1873; in business at Eton, near Mackay 1877; then commission agent at Mackay; proprietor Mackay Mercury and for a short time also Cooktown Courier; M.L.A. for Mackay 1893–1901; Minister for Agriculture 1898–9, 1899–1901; died 1901.
Queensland entered the Commonwealth; but there were only sixty people present, and voting was close.

The prospect of a North dominated by Labour receded somewhat after 1894. Unsupported by funds, the wharf labourers' unions and the associations of miners on the depressed base metal fields faded to nothingness. Partly because of its failure to take up the responsibilities of an official parliamentary opposition Labour did not succeed in deepening its impression on the voting public at the 1896 elections. They lost Woothakata in that year to John Newell, and their seat at Townsville to a popular publican. Achieving the respectability of a small grazing property, Plumper Hoolan shortly afterwards left the party. Perhaps it was this slight falling off of strength, perhaps simply the realization, after four years of Labour in politics, that the party was not merely a collection of wild-eyed revolutionaries, but a responsible group of politicians who might before long be trusted with the administration; by 1897 ministerial supporters were again willing to forget party allegiances and join Labour over the Separation issue.

On 23 September of that year William Kidston, Labour member for Rockhampton, moved for the conduct of a referendum on the question concurrently with the next general election. This motion was lost by twenty votes to fifteen, those in the minority being all Labour men except the Darling Downs veteran, W. H. Groom. Most non-Labour members disliked the referendum as a socialist device, and claimed that public opinion had already expressed itself clearly enough—although there was some disagreement about how public opinion had expressed itself. Meanwhile G. S. Curtis, the leading Central Queensland Separationist, had moved an amendment calling for immediate self-government for the North. This went to a vote on 15 October, twenty members siding each way. The Speaker was A. S. Cowley, and his casting vote went unhesitatingly for Separation. There had been some cross-voting. Of those who opposed the referendum scheme six, including Philp, Newell, and John Hamilton* from northern electorates, voted with the Labour men for Separation, while David Dalrymple of Mackay abstained. On the other hand Separation was opposed by Groom and three Labour men, one of whom, Anderson Dawson of Charters Towers, had never been an enthusiast for the cause.51

*Born Victoria 1842; studied medicine at Edinburgh; practised as doctor on Gympie, Palmer, and Hodgkinson fields; champion swordsman, swimmer, and boxer; M.L.A. Gympie 1878–83; Cook 1893–1904; died 1916.
Pack mule, Irvinebank, 1906

Funeral of John Newell, Herberton, 1932

By courtesy of the Royal Queensland Historical Society

By courtesy of Mrs M. Allan
16  *Telegraph Hotel, Ingham, 1882*  

*Townsville about 1880*  

By courtesy of the Oxley Library  

By courtesy of the Royal Queensland Historical Society
Once again, through an odd alliance of Labour men and their staunchest opponents, Separation had been voted through the Legislative Assembly. Again nothing came of it. Opponents whipped up a petition by twenty-five members of parliament who had been absent during the vote, claiming that the motion had been passed through a surprise division, and did not represent the true opinion of a majority of the House. The ministry ignored the motion until November 1898, when twenty-one members (including for the nonce Anderson Dawson) addressed a letter to the British Secretary of State for Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, requesting him to give effect to the Assembly's resolution. Chamberlain was no stranger to this sort of request: in Western Australia the miners of Kalgoorlie were seeking the same court of appeal in their attempt to cut loose from the unwanted control of Sir John Forrest at Perth. But the North Queensland movement was running out of force. The politicians had increasingly little backing from their public, and it was easy for Brisbane to claim that improving communications and public works had stilled the cry for Separation. Joseph Chamberlain made no bones about refusing to intervene.

Separation was dying; and in its place Federation had become a cause dear to most North Queenslanders. Possibly some old Separationists swung behind the movement because the draft constitution prepared by the Federal Convention of 1897-8 allowed for the division of Queensland into two or more states of the Commonwealth. But other motives were at work. North Queensland had not been in existence long enough to become entrenched in parochial interests. Most of its inhabitants were drawn from other colonies within Australia, or from other countries. Traditions of mateship and the Labour movement were strong among the recently nomadic miners. The pastoralists who sent store cattle into the Melbourne and Sydney markets, and breeders off to the Northern Territory, had no great respect for colonial boundaries. The ports and the sugar industry saw nothing but gain from easier access to southern markets. Even veteran sugar-planters such as J. Ewen Davidson and Thomas McCready, firm believers still in the absolute necessity of coloured labour in the tropics, were keenly active in the cause of Federation.

The Federation vote in the sugar districts was largely a vote for interstate free trade and some form of protection against imported sugar on the Australian market. As for coloured labour,
the sugar-growers argued that every year saw an increasing risk of unfriendly interference from a Brisbane parliament where Labour was steadily on the ascendant, and life could be no more uncertain under the Commonwealth. Only a small minority stood out against Federation, unable to credit that the rest of Australia would tax its sugar in the interests of the sugar producers. Almost their sole allies in the whole of North Queensland were, oddly enough, a few individuals on the extreme left wing, such as Charles McDonald and the Charters Towers Eagle, who held Federation suspect as a middle-class device for diverting attention from the needs of Labour, and perhaps enabling capitalists to organize themselves more efficiently. Such narrow views had little effect. Led by Dawson and Dunsford, the inland mining centres amassed big votes for Federation and a White Australia; nor were the coastal ports less enthusiastic. Final figures were:

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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percentage of Yes votes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bowen</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairns</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charters Towers</td>
<td>2,438</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Croydon</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>35</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Herbert</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>172</td>
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<td>1,376</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woothakata</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Queensland</td>
<td>9,179</td>
<td>1,970</td>
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<tr>
<td>North-west</td>
<td>978</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>13,239</td>
<td>13,296</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>5,440</td>
<td>9,531</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34,328</td>
<td>28,654</td>
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The Northern vote was the decisive factor that brought Queensland into the Commonwealth. Commercial jealousies had divided Brisbane and the Darling Downs, and, as in New South Wales and Western Australia, the outback vote carried the
day for Federation. In casting this vote, North Queensland had chosen to solve its own problems in conformity with the general Australian pattern. The sugar industry would accept the arbitration of the whole continent on its future conduct, structure, and economic framework. The frontier radicalism of the miners and their associates would merge into the Australia-wide Labour movement. Improved communications would lessen the remoteness of the North, and dissipate the sense of neglect and grievance on which the Separation movement thrived. Distinctive political remedies—whether Separation or republicanism—were no longer sought after. North Queensland had advanced from a go-it-alone parochialism to a willing acceptance of the identity of its interests with those of the rest of the Australian community. The next stage in its transformation would see the transition from the wasteful exploitation of pioneer economy to the husbandry of resources and growing co-operation between governments and producers.

1See the B.A. thesis by John Fowler ‘Queensland 1860–88: Political, Social and Religious Comments’, which makes use of the recently discovered Palmer and McLlwraith MSS. The quotation is from Forrest to McLlwraith, 9 Sept. 1883.
3Cairns Post, 27 Nov. 1884.
4Towers Herald, 6 and 11 Dec. 1884.
5V. & P. 1885, I, p. 389: E. M. Long and others to Governor of Queensland, 13 May 1885.
6Ibid., p. 377: J. E. Davidson and Sir J. B. Lawes to the Secretary of State for Colonies, 14 Jan. 1885.
7The Times, 12 Oct. 1885.
8Q.P.D., XLIX, pp. 437 et seq.
9Q.P.D., LII, pp. 481 et seq.
10Cooktown Independent, quoted in Northern Miner, 7 Sept. 1887.
11Unanimously in favour, Townsville, Ayr, Hinchinbrook and Hughenden (town); in favour, Cloncurry, Cooktown, Croydon, Daintree, Dalrymple, Douglas, Einasleigh, Hughenden (shire), Johnstone, Mackay, Pioneer, Ravenswood, Thuringowa and Thursday Island shires.
12Cardwell and Tinaroo shires.
13Bowen and Wangaratta.
14Charters Towers, Burketown (after earlier neutrality), Carpentaria and Normanton. But it should be noted that a number of inland mining areas were in favour of Separation.
15Mackay Mercury, 19 Jan. 1892.
16Worker, 5 Sept. 1891.
17At the 1883 elections for Kennedy all five candidates, including the conservative Thomas Buckland, had pledged themselves against McLlwraith’s plan for a privately-built transcontinental railway, against coolie labour, and in favour of triennial parliaments.
18V. & P. 1887, III, p. 370.
19Northern Miner, 30 May 1887.
21 [Ibid.; see also Northern Miner, 22 July 1887, where it is claimed that 1,707 have joined out of 3,000 eligible; but also ibid., 24 Sept. 1887, which states that only 1,013 members were qualified to vote on the amalgamation of the Miners' Union and the Accident Association.]
22 [Charters Towers Daily Herald, 15 July 1889. By March 1890 the Georgetown branch was defunct, but another had been formed at Herberton.]
23 [M. Davitt, Life and Progress in Australia, London, 1898, p. 289.]
24 [Northern Miner, 18 Aug. 1887; Port Denison Times, 8 Feb. 1890; North Queensland Register, 6 July 1914.]
25 [General manager, Q.N. Bank to branch manager, Cairns, 21 Jan. 1890. (National Bank MSS.)]
26 [See, for instance, Northern Miner, 30 Apr. and 17 Oct. 1887; 11 July 1890. Its main rival, the Charters Towers Daily Herald, also advocated a Federal republic of Australia; see its editorials for 15 May and 26 Nov. 1889.]
27 [Quoted in Northern Mining Register, 18 Jan. 1892.]
28 [Cairns Post, 26 Oct. 1889, describes how a majority of the Cairns Debating Society voted for a republic.]
29 [Ibid., 30 Apr. 1890.]
30 [Ibid., 4 Feb. 1890.]
31 [Ibid., 5 May 1890.]
32 [Some files of the Australian Republican are held at the Public Library of Victoria, Melbourne.]
33 [Northern Miner, 23 to 27 Aug. 1890.]
34 [Worker, 21 Mar. 1891.]
35 [Quoted in Northern Mining Register, 28 Mar., 4 Apr. 1891.]
36 [P. D.T., 8 Mar. 1890.]
38 [Quoted Brisbane Courier, 23 Feb. 1901.]
39 [R.C. 1889, appendices 28 and 31 show that whereas Queensland retained most of the New South Wales market, it provided only 25 per cent of the raw sugar, and 44 per cent of the refined, imported into Victoria. The rest came from a variety of sources, including Mauritius, the Netherlands East Indies, Hong Kong and the Philippines.]
40 [V. P. 1891, IV, p. 34.]
41 [E.g. the Colonial Sugar Refining head office to the manager, Goondi mill, 7 Mar. 1888: '... in climates like that of the Johnstone it is impossible for white men to work systematically in the cultivation of cane'. (Goondi letter book, No. 1, p. 6, C.S.R. office, Sydney.)]
42 [Colonial Sugar Refining Co., Chairman's Statement for the half year ending 31 Mar. 1889.]
44 [Colonial Sugar Refining Co., Chairman's Statement for the half year ending 30 Sept. 1890.]
45 [V. P. 1891, IV, p. 5, Young brothers to Colonial Secretary, 12 Sept. 1890.]
46 [North Queensland Herald, 9 Dec. 1891 (E. Y. Lowry).]
47 [The text is most readily accessible in C. M. H. Clark, Select Documents in Australian History 1851-1900, pp. 216-20; from Q.P.D., LXVII, pp. 8-9.]
48 [Mackay Mercury, 13 Feb. 1892.]
49 [Q. P. D., LXXXIV, p. 887; the statement was made by Anderson Dawson, who may not have been meticulously accurate in his details, but should have known.]
50 [Q. P. D., LXX, pp. 767 et seq.]
51 [P. D.T., 31 Mar. 1894.]
52 [Q. P. D., LXXVII, pp. 932-45; LXXVIII, pp. 1278-1408.]
53 [V. P. 1898, III, p. 823.]
See remarks of J. V. Chataway M.L.A., in *Mackay Mercury* 19 Aug. 1899; also ibid. 22, 24 and 31 Aug., 2 and 5 Sept. 1899; Brian Fitzpatrick is mistaken in supposing that ‘the Queensland planters’ were ‘hostile to the idea of federation’ (*The British Empire in Australia*, 2nd ed., Melbourne, p. 251.)

Figures taken from the *New Eagle*, 9 Sept. 1899.

Townsville Bulletin reported *Mackay Mercury*, 22 Aug. 1899: ‘North Queensland understands what an important bearing on its future the Federal union of the Australian States must have... It certainly seems quite probable that the federal battle will be won by the North Queensland vote’. See also *Croydon Mining Record*, 9 Nov. 1906.
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During those years when the coloured labour issue was fought out, it was by no means certain that the sugar industry would retain its supremacy as North Queensland’s main avenue of primary production. An unpredictable labour supply combined with tight credit and low prices to discourage newcomers from cane-growing. Many acres of the most accessible sugar lands were in any case kept out of use by absentee speculators, who had bought in anticipation of a land boom and now maintained a bailiff on their properties to conform with the land laws and look after such meagre improvements as existed. Even for men of little capital there was, however, no shortage of land available in North Queensland. The Act of 1884, which reduced by between one-fifth and one-third of their acreage many pastoral runs in the Kennedy district and at the same time eased the terms on which Crown lands could be taken up by resident smallholders, encouraged many to dream of yeoman independence. Many men, particularly ex-miners, were attracted by grazing. Some ran beef cattle for butchering, but the majority were dairy farmers, living within easy reach of one of the large mining centres such as Charters Towers or Ravenswood, and frequently supplementing their incomes by a little prospecting or droving. Selectors on the coastal lands and in certain favoured areas along the inland rivers went in for growing a variety of products. Often they were content with growing maize or potatoes for local consumption, but the more ambitious ventured into export crops, such as coffee, rice and fruit.

In the long term none of these developments had any lasting effects on cultivation in North Queensland, and sugar emerged virtually as a monoculture; but in the decade after the passing of the 1884 Land Act it could not have been foreseen that sugar would be the only form of agriculture to develop a sound marketing system, nor that the small grazier would be brought to ruin by the coming of the cattle tick and to a lesser extent by the series of poor seasons culminating in the big drought of 1902. Not every North Queenslander would have accepted Russel Ward’s
assertion: 'The plain fact is that the typical Australian frontiersman in the last century was a wage-worker-who did not, usually, expect to become anything else'.1 The plain fact was that the typical North Queenslander at this time still expected that the land would be generous and provide him with at least a modest opportunity for self-improvement. North Queensland was surely a good example of a frontier community; there, many were reacting against the recent transformation of mining to a trade for wage-earners and taking to the land in the hope that, as primary producers, they would maintain their independence. This does not imply that selectors in North Queensland were either experienced or provident husbandmen: often they had neither the skill nor the means to plan improvement policies. A valuable role was performed by the Department of Agriculture, formed by the Queensland Government in 1887 to school primary producers into better methods of land use and stock-rearing. Among the first to benefit from the department's activities in North Queensland were the dairy farmers. Many smallholders had gone in for dairying, in the mistaken belief that previous experience counted for little. By 1890 there were over one hundred and fifty dairymen in the Charters Towers district alone, and others were to be found on every mining field and coastal region in the North. Their methods, it must be confessed, were slapdash, despite their willingness to work long hours at the one form of primary production that never admits a day off. It was usual to milk only once a day, and to allow calves to run with their mothers. Few selectors chose their breeding stock with the least regard to quality, 'anything in the shape of a cow being considered fit for a milker'.2 Pasture growth and fodder conservation were almost completely unknown. Many of the dairy buildings were mere shanties in an advanced state of dilapidation. 'During the whole of my travels,' wrote an expert observer, 'I have not met with a dairy thoroughly worthy of the name.'3 But the dairy farmers were willing to learn better, and when two travelling dairies were equipped by the Department of Agriculture to instruct farmers in up-to-date methods of making butter and cheese, the influence of Hume Black, then Minister for Lands and Agriculture, saw to it that one of these travelling dairies was dispatched to North Queensland. In two years after June 1890 it traversed the entire coast from Mackay to Cooktown, and inland as far as Hughenden. Everywhere its demonstrations were keenly attended by local dairymen, and the quality
and range of produce at once showed a substantial improvement. Probably the best results were at Bowen, where the selectors, many of them old-established families of German origin, had already made a name for a good grade of butter which they exported to all the major towns in North Queensland. On the Herbert River, too, prospects were promising enough to stimulate schemes for a butter factory; and everywhere the travelling dairies had such a good effect that forecasts of a North Queensland export trade in dairy produce were freely made.

The small grazier who concentrated on beef cattle also found himself provided with export markets, although this trade was still largely the domain of the big squatter running ten thousand head or more. It was only for a brief period around 1890 that prospects clouded somewhat for the beef market. In that year, when Queensland sent almost half a million cattle to the other Australian colonies, the market seemed near saturation point. Prices were low, one or two colonies were protecting their local pastoralists by imposing import duties, and over-production suddenly became a common word in the talk of Queensland cattlemen. The solution lay in providing killing centres closer to the cattle lands of western and northern Queensland. In North Queensland there were a few attempts to set up boiling-down works, but these were no great advance on that first short-lived project around which J. M. Black had founded Townsville, or for that matter the tallow factories which had saved many New South Wales squatters from bankruptcy half a century ago. Wiser entrepreneurs followed the way shown by Robert Christison and, with better luck than he, undertook to freeze meat for shipment to Great Britain. Such ventures would benefit the small cattleman no less than the squatter.

Townsville, as terminus of a railway stretching 250 miles into North Queensland pastoral country, was again favoured over rivals. In 1890 a meat extract company started business there at Alligator Creek, the site of the old boiling-down works of the eighties. Beginning with an annual intake of about twelve thousand cattle, Alligator Creek was processing over fifty thousand by 1898. Two years later the Queensland Meat Export Agency Company, a firm already operating near Brisbane, opened the Ross River freezing works at Townsville, treating annually between twenty and thirty thousand cattle. Other districts followed these successful examples. Two station owners in the Charters Towers district, John Deane and Joseph Woodburn—
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one a practical engineer and mining magnate, the other an experienced cattleman—built the Burdekin meatworks at Sellheim, where the Townsville railway crosses the river. In its first year (1895) the works operated as a boiling-down plant, from which the meat was converted to fertilizer; the main profit was from hides, tallow, and neatsfoot oil. After a disastrous—and acutely noisome—attempt at canning, the proprietors rapidly improved and extended the works, producing meat extract by 1898 and frozen carcasses early in the next decade. North Queensland's fourth major enterprise came in 1895, when the Bergl company, a firm with well-established ramifications in the British retailing trade, set up a freezing works at Merinda, near Bowen. Although the want of an inland railway was a considerable drawback, a gratifying number of station owners found that droving stock to Merinda gave them better returns than either of the two Townsville meatworks.

Old-fashioned methods fared worse. When in 1894 Alderman J. H. Isbell of Bowen purchased part of the old Poole Island equipment to start a boiling-down works, he found the townspeople no more tolerant of bad smells than they were in the legendary days of Captain Towns. Protests from his fellow aldermen were followed by a lawsuit, and finally an injunction to abate the nuisance compelled Isbell to shut up business in 1897. Cardwell, a less flourishing community, was only too glad when the Scott brothers of the Valley of Lagoons and other hinterland pastoralists financed a boiling-down works which opened there in 1895. The project was handicapped from the start. Boiling down did not pay as well as freezing for export, and few cattlemen saw much incentive to walk condition off their beasts over the steep ranges behind Cardwell, which, despite the confident assertions of one or two experienced drovers, were hardly better travelling than they had been in Dalrymple's day. Although the works at one time employed sixty men, and were used by cattlemen as far away as the Etheridge, they ceased operations after 1900, and had not worked full-time for some period before. Other short-lived killing centres included a meat extract works converted from an old sugar-mill at Mackay, and a boiling-down plant at Biboohra*, near Mareeba, both of which started in 1897. In all, the meatworks of North Queensland were processing over 40 per cent of the 345,711

*The Biboohra works were re-opened as a killing centre for a few years around 1913.
cattle treated in the whole colony during 1898. Most stockowners went over quickly and gratefully to the opportunities provided by the meat export trade, and although some complained that the middleman took too great a profit, the overlanding trade to New South Wales had shrunk to one-sixth of its previous extent by 1895, before any serious problems of disease quarantine had arisen to complicate matters. Smallholders with a few head to dispose of could share these markets with men whose yearly turnoff ran into four figures.

It was at this point, when their marketing problems seemed settled for many years, that the graziers of North Queensland met disaster from an unexpected quarter. More than half their cattle were wiped out in the space of three or four years by an epidemic of Texas fever—otherwise known as tick fever or redwater. This fever is carried by a small cattle tick, *Ixodes bovis*, which flourishes most readily in warm, humid coastal country such as the eastern seaboard and the Gulf lands of North Queensland. After incubating on the ground for between three and six weeks, the young tick attaches itself to the host animal and remains with it for about three weeks; then, dropping off to lay its eggs, renews the cycle of life for the next generation. Their ability to multiply can be gauged from the report that forty thousand ticks were counted on one bullock in the Cardwell district. The eight-day fever transmitted by *Ixodes bovis* is characterized by high temperature, breaking up of the red corpuscles, and wasting of condition. In some cases, beasts have been known to survive the effects of the fever itself, only to succumb afterwards to exhaustion. Those cattle that survive, while not immune from further attack, have generally been found to take the fever less often and less virulently than herds exposed for the first time. Cattle tick has been probably the most costly insect parasite ever to afflict Australian primary production.

The spread of this parasite was difficult to trace because many cattlemen were very reluctant to admit any connection between outbreaks of redwater fever and the incidence of tick, and some even claimed that *Ixodes bovis* was merely one of a number of species whose existence had been known for years to experienced stockmen. It was, in any case, only about 1890 that experiments in Texas discovered the role of the cattle tick; and until Australia was in the throes of an epidemic, not much publicity seems to have been accorded to this find. It seems generally accepted that a cargo of Indonesian cattle brought to Darwin in 1872 introduced
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the cattle tick to Australia. When, however, the Northern Terri-
tory was stocked in the mid-eighties, although one or two of the
overlanders sustained losses from what has since been identified
as tick fever, infection was insufficiently widespread to excite
comment or concern. It first appeared in Queensland in 1888,
when two brothers droving a mob of 270 cattle westward from
Townsville, to stock a run in the Gulf country, lost all but one
hundred of their beasts not far from their destination. This
isolated outbreak had no immediate sequel. Through seasonal
extremes from flood to drought the trouble lay dormant, even
after the opening of the Townsville meatworks had brought
several thousand cattle every year out of the potentially infected
Gulf country, along the most frequented stock routes of North
Queensland, to the humid lowlands of the east coast where tick
might have flourished.

Quite suddenly, disaster struck. From the end of 1893, and
increasingly throughout the next year, disquieting rumours
began to filter down of infected pastures in the Gulf country,
where cattle were struck down by a fatal disease sixteen or eighteen
days after their arrival. Definite information was scanty. Pas-
toralists whose cattle were infected kept their mouths shut, as
if the disease were a source of shame. They feared a long stint
of quarantine regulations shutting them off from their markets,
and preferred to hope desperately that the epidemic would be
over quickly. On the contrary, its spread was relentless. By
July 1894 the tick were in the Croydon area, where one cattleman
lost one-third of a mob of nine thousand. Alarm had by now
reached Brisbane, and in September a stock inspector named
Pound arrived on the scene of the trouble to investigate. Guided
by reports from Texas, Pound soon demonstrated that the ticks
were responsible for this epidemic; but to many stock-owners
this was a new idea, unworthy of belief. The government thought
otherwise, and on 31 October 1894 imposed six months’ quaran-
tine on the whole colony north of 21 degrees south and west of
144 degrees east—practically all the Gulf and Flinders country.

Control, however, was almost impossible. As P. R. Gordon,
chief stock inspector for Queensland, complained: ‘Stockowners
with few exceptions, instead of assisting, have raised obstacles
in the way of the Government . . . They persistently denied
infestation even after inspection . . .’ Many clung with a stubborn
optimism to the view that a scare had been got up. Tick would
not survive away from the coast; flooding would exterminate
them; grass fires would finish them; officialdom had diagnosed wrongly; and was interfering unnecessarily. Their refusal to face the facts had its reward. By April 1895 the tick had spread beyond the quarantine line, and the prohibitions lapsed. September found the epidemic on the western side of the Burdekin, among such stations as Maryvale, Bluff Downs and Southwick, and spreading with plague swiftness along the stock routes towards Townsville. Next month a bullock team from Southwick brought the infection to the Burdekin Delta, so that by Christmas nine-tenths of the herds on Airdmillan station were dead, and their owner was preparing his papers in bankruptcy.

All through that terrible summer the stench of dead cattle hung heavy over the stock routes and watercourses of North Queensland. The lush grasslands of the coast had become the worst death-trap of all. No longer sceptical, graziers experimented frantically in the search for a dip that would kill this hardy parasite. Sulphur, arsenic, oils of various kinds were all recommended and tried, as often as not harming the cattle as much as the ticks.

During 1896 Texas fever spread down the coast into the Bowen and Mackay districts. Inland many famous stations, the choicest selections of pioneer days, were brought low. Carpentaria Downs was losing two hundred cattle weekly. At Oak Park, Lyndhurst, and Maryvale, the stock were ‘dying like flies’. Old Edward Cunningham, now at Woodhouse station on the Lower Burdekin, saw his twelve thousand good Shorthorns reduced to eighteen hundred. A government official sent in 1899 to make a conservative estimate of stock losses took tallies from many station owners, and reported that cattle numbers on those properties had fallen from 526,360 to 235,063 as a result of tick fever.

The lucky properties were those where only one-third of the stock had died. They faced a future where the condition of their beef bullocks would be subject to tick worry, where stud bulls could no longer be imported without grave risk of immediate infection and death, where the cost of dips and sprays would be added indefinitely to their working expenses. But once the epidemic had run the first fury of its course, the bigger pastoralists were left with the resources to survive. Maryvale station, though losing three-quarters of its fourteen thousand cattle, still retained a sufficient nucleus from which to breed up again; the owner of a hundred dairy cattle who suffered proportionate losses was at once handicapped in winning his daily livelihood, and was probably already at the limit of his financial credit. There was in
fact some evidence to suggest that heaviest losses were sustained by the owners of cattle subject to frequent handling, such as dairy cows and bullock teams—in short, the class of small selectors who had been turning to grazing during the eighties and early nineties.

When eventually the graziers had some respite from the tick plague, it was only through the onset of a series of years too dry to encourage its spread. During a succession of light years after 1896 cattle numbers continued to fall steadily, reaching their lowest in that most memorable of Queensland drought years, 1902. It was in that year that sheep were pastured on the coastal lowlands of Ingham and Proserpine for the first time in a generation, as desperate western pastoralists took to the railways to evacuate their flocks from the bare plains beyond Charters Towers. But the rank coastal grasses gave little benefit, and the experiment scarcely warranted the expense. Coming after the tick plague, these bad years were enough to drive more smallholders out of cattle-grazing.

Nearly all the larger pastoralists were forced to enlarge their debts, although neither the Queensland National Bank, brought near ruin after thirty years of over-lavish loans, nor the North Queensland with its capital at no more than £100,000, could afford to be very generous with accommodation. Several of the larger pastoralists, however, were saved through having diversified their investments during their years of prosperity. Mining investments or income from town property carried them over their worst period of losses. A number of stations turned a modest profit on the export of cavalry horses to India and South Africa. This traffic had begun in 1893, to meet a temporary condition of over-supply in the local market. J. S. Love,* stepson of the geologist Logan Jack, took the foremost role in promoting a trade which shipped about two thousand horses from Bowen to India in 1893–4. Returns were not good, with purchase prices in India around £25 and freight alone absorbing £14, and the trade remained insignificant until the Boer War of 1899–1902 created a sudden demand for remounts. In one year, 1900, over five thousand North Queensland horses were supplied for army use, half to South Africa and half to India; another twelve hundred went to China, where British contingents were in action against the nationalist movement known as the Boxer Rebellion. Several

*Born 1861; after 1917 proprietor of Valley of Lagoons station; died 1933.
stations around Bowen and along the Burdekin benefited considerably from this trade. But such possibilities were not for the small grazier, and many were forced to look for employment as railway workmen, labourers, or often as mill-hands, cane-cutters and in other jobs with the sugar industry. A number managed to survive in business, but there was no more talk of developing North Queensland as an exporter of dairy produce.

Instead, it was the turn of agriculture. Tilling the soil had been considered by some Northerners as a menial calling, fit only for Chinamen and Pacific Islanders, but this attitude was by no means universal. At Bowen, since the earliest years of settlement, there had been a community of farmers who had tried in turn cotton, sugar, maize, fruit and vegetables, and regretted only the slowness of governments in helping them to find a market. A feeling common among this first generation of selectors was expressed in 1900 by Gideon Pott of Bowen, reviewing in old age his pioneer experiences:

I have been living on the Don for thirty-three years, and in that time I have seen a great many ups and downs. If we had a line of railway to some market I should have been a great deal better off. I have reared a large family of ten, amongst them are six sons. Those I cannot keep on the place. I have enough property to have given each of them sufficient to make a living on, but on account of having no market for what we could grow, they had to go to other pastures. In fact, two of them have gone to South Africa.⁸

Want of markets, and not any innate dislike of farming, drove the younger generation off the land. There was indeed no corner of North Queensland too remote to attract a few selectors prepared, if they could, to wrest a living from the land. Even in such a demanding environment as the Etheridge mining district, a few agricultural selectors along the Gilbert River battled with the seasons for many years. One such isolated settlement of farmers survives to this day on the Bloomfield River, seventy miles north of Cairns. Their main contact with the outside world is a small boat which meets the weekly Cairns-Cooktown shipping service off-shore. Since before 1890 a handful of settlers, mainly of Scandinavian origin, have cultivated a wide variety of crops, including fruit, maize, coffee and tobacco, while a small saw-mill has operated intermittently for many years on the red cedar and other cabinet woods of this area. Such is the quality of the soil that some farms have been worked constantly for seventy years
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with the assistance of very little fertilizer. Lacking many amenities and amusements, the Bloomfield River farmers have preferred, over any easier and perhaps more remunerative life, to keep their isolation and their independence. In the nineties, with a more limited range of economic opportunity, a considerable number of North Queenslanders seemed to prefer the hardships and toil of farming, even with uncertain markets, to the more certain but limited rewards of wage work.

Yet if farming were to be in North Queensland anything more than a living for a few marginal sharecroppers, export markets would be needed. Among the first to set a successful example as cultivators beyond the subsistence level were the Chinese. Sugar-growing had attracted few among them, apart from the ill-starred Hop Wah concern, although in the later nineties several of them sub-let lands from Colonial Sugar at Hambledon and elsewhere. They disliked wage work, although as contract labourers for European growers they served a useful purpose on the Mulgrave and the Johnstone. Their preference was for small-scale cultivation of a sort requiring little initial expense. Market gardening, the traditional standby of the Chinese in Australia, was almost their monopoly in the eighties and nineties. Few Europeans seemed anxious to enter such a meticulous and laborious business, and except for an Italian at Charters Towers none seemed able to maintain competitive prices. Cheap labour was not the sole reason for the Chinamen's success. There was a significant anecdote (one might almost call it a parable) in the 1892 report for the Department of Agriculture. A North Queensland dairyman leased half his land to a Chinese market gardener, retaining the other half for his own cows, the sole supply of milk for a nearby township. When a year of drought came, the dairy farmer was completely without fodder, and since he had to turn his cattle loose the community went without milk. But the Chinaman, who had taken the trouble to sink two wells for irrigation, reaped a first-class crop of green vegetables. Too often it seemed that the capacity for inexpensive forethought was what distinguished the Chinese cultivator from the European.

Nor did the North Queensland Chinese confine themselves to cabbages and lettuces. During the eighties they ventured into several other lines of production. Although unnaturalized Chinese could not own freehold land, it was not difficult for them to obtain a 'clearing lease' from Europeans who had purchased land during the boom of the early eighties, but lacked capital or
desire to cultivate it. Such leases gave the Chinese tenant a five-
year term in return for cutting down the timber and paying a
modest rent; £1 an acre yearly was usual. As an effortless means of
improving their properties, this system suited many Europeans,
especially absentee owners who were glad to have some return
for a precarious investment. Even resident landowners often
leased to the Chinese, as after the timber had been felled there
followed a period of several years before the stumps rotted away
and the land was fit for ploughing, during which time the China-
men’s hoes kept the soil under cultivation. Around Cooktown
and Port Douglas Aboriginal raids discouraged settlers from
raising cattle, but not from sub-letting to the Chinese.

During the eighties rice had been cultivated by Europeans in
the neighbourhood of Cooktown, but the growers had been
disheartened by repeated failures to establish a mill—or perhaps
it was the usual Cooktown story of procrastination and indecisive-
ness—and the rice had been used only for ensilage. But in 1887
R. O. Jones, a pioneer settler on the Mossman, established a
rice-mill on his estate and sub-divided the lands to Chinese
tenants, of whom he had at one period two hundred. Drought
blighted a promising start; but in the next year Tom Behan set
up at Stratford, on the Barron River behind Cairns, a mill whose
performance seemed for a while to promise a profitable alter-
native to the sugar industry. Behan himself hoped to take advan-
tage of the tariff of a penny a pound on imported rice, imposed
originally as a way of raising revenue out of the Chinese and now
kept up as a means of compensating local growers for the cheaper
labour of overseas competitors.

For a while there was some enthusiasm for this method of
growing rice by the central mill system. The Cairns Chinese
invested £1,000 in Behan’s mill; a few Europeans joined in
cultivation; the Italians coming away from the Herbert River in
1892 seemed interested; and in that year there were actually 858
acres around Cairns and 172 near Port Douglas under rice, out of
a Queensland total of 1,113 acres producing 33,380 bushels.
Then the industry stopped growing. At first it was complained
that the wrong strains of rice were marketed to please the Queens-
land customer, and in 1893 the government went to some trouble
to import the favoured varieties from India, and to distribute
them at cost price to local growers. The response was disappoint-
ing, except for a minor revival around Cooktown. In 1896 the
area under rice was half the 1892 figure, and the Stratford mill
was working at no more than quarter-time. Returns continued low except in 1898, when a spurt of activity produced 33,540 bushels from 708 acres at Cairns; about six-sevenths of the entire Queensland crop, and about one-eighth of the amount required by the colony. Otherwise, the story was one of steady decline. Either it was impossible, even with Chinese growers, to compete with imports from low-cost countries overseas; or else importers and consumers formed a prejudice against the home-grown article. Since only the Cairns Chinese were involved, nobody in authority thought it worth while to investigate carefully the reasons for this disappointing show.11

Yet, as one experienced Cairns official admitted: 'if there were no Chinese in the district there would be no land under cultivation.'12 The crop most favoured was banana-growing, attractive because the quickly-ripening banana could be harvested within nine months of planting, an important consideration to a tenant on a five-year lease. Since the sixties, when the Government Botanist, Walter Hill, had made experimental plantings at Bowen and Cardwell, bananas had been grown in many parts of North Queensland, but in commercial quantities only with the development of an export trade south after 1885. Through contacts with the Chinese community in Sydney and Melbourne, North Queensland growers were able to tap these markets, and production increased rapidly. From 58,690 bunches in 1884, output grew to the peak year of 1890, when the Cairns district produced 15,654,788 bunches of the 22,002,092 bunches grown in the whole colony of Queensland. Two factors limited expansion and may have discouraged Europeans from venturing into the industry. The A.U.S.N. Company, which had the monopoly of the coasting trade, saw no reason to adapt its shipping to this perishable cargo. All too often fruit was left to rot in a humid and badly ventilated hold, or piled on deck to become an easy temptation to pilferers. Arrived at Melbourne, the cargo was often fit only for the manure depot, and on one notorious occasion the Melbourne wharf labourers had to use pumps to remove the remnants of a shipment of Cairns bananas from a ship's hold. Questioned by the 1889 Royal Commission, the Company's manager could make few suggestions for improvement. Perhaps there was a tendency to feel that too much trouble need not be taken over the Chinamen's produce.

Marketing difficulties were not the only limit to growth. Impermanent tenants on their land—usually leased to them by
banks who had foreclosed on the previous owners—the Chinese banana-growers were anxious to make their pile and return to their homeland and do not seem to have cared overmuch when it emerged that continuous cropping for five or six years had a tendency to exhaust the soil. Perhaps some allowance must be made for the bias of European observers, but the Chinese seem seldom to have tried either rotation of crops or systematic use of fertilizers, nor did they make any effective attempt against damage by fruit-fly. When one district began to flag, the banana-growers responded by moving to virgin lands elsewhere. Between 1888 and 1891 their plantations spread along both branches of the Johnstone River, where their flat-bottomed sampans and tall junks, both fashioned by local craftsmen, lent an exotic touch to the river traffic.

After 1896, as European landowners resumed the banana plantations for sugar-growing, two groups of Chinese migrated from the Johnstone, one returning to the Cairns area—where the 1898 production of 37,771,462 bunches stood for many years as a record for any Queensland district—and the other proceeding south to the Tully River, where the absence of a sugar-mill promised no competition for land. Settling in some numbers between 1901 and 1903, the Chinese remained on the Tully until the disruption of shipping services in World War I and the development of competitive banana-growing in districts nearer Brisbane. The last Chinese settlement in this line was undertaken by a syndicate which leased one hundred acres at Lethebrook, in the Proserpine district, between 1913 and 1918. Marketing difficulties, and at the last a destructive cyclone, drove them away, leaving only the name Banana Pocket to mark the scene of their endeavours.

Maize was another crop in which the Chinese did well. At first Cairns and Port Douglas were the main centres of this industry, but it later became the means of opening up much of the Atherton Tableland. Here the prominent mining men of Herberton had taken up a good deal of country, which at first some attempted to farm for themselves. The dry inland mining centres depended largely on horse, mule and bullock transport, and often needed to import fodder. Maize costing six shillings a ton at Port Douglas sold for thirteen shillings after freighting to the silver town of Montalbion, and there was a clear incentive to cultivation around the infant settlement of Atherton, which was so much closer to market. But early attempts at maize-growing
Disappointments, 1885–1902

failed, because of a blight attributed by some settlers to a want of lime in the soil. Wheat was successfully cropped by John Newell in 1892, but on too small a scale to encourage further trials.

By the nineties the Europeans were glad to leave farming to the Chinese. More painstaking in the use of hoe and spade, more persistent in hawking their produce, they fared better. Between 1890 and 1899 the acreage under maize on the Tableland increased from 1,083 to 2,756, its yield from 30,927 bushels to 103,675. The farms of some three hundred Chinese growers ringed Atherton for several miles, and for some years the most substantial building in the town itself was the joss-house. Despite their considerable achievement in clearing the scrub and preparing the way for future settlement, the Chinese at Atherton had their detractors. They had a less peaceable reputation than their countrymen elsewhere, and the police were called several times to quell pitched fights between two rival factions. Perhaps as a consequence they gave the Chinese a bad name as opium addicts, who corrupted their Aboriginal employees with the habit and cheated them of their wages. This contrasted with their reputation at Ayr and Mackay, where the police reported them honest and generous in their dealings with the Aborigines, and local editors held up their industry and perseverance as a model to less enterprising Europeans. Perhaps the difference between the two groups of Chinese lay in the eyes of the beholders. A sugar-growing district, accustomed to a multi-racial society, might take a more tolerant view of such neighbours than the Tableland community, at that time centred on Herberton, a town with a marked anti-Chinese tradition.

At the present day, when families of Chinese origin have been successfully integrated into the North Queensland community, it comes as a shock to encounter the vicious overtones of racial hatred emerging from some of the journals that circulated on the mining fields around the turn of the century. The term ‘unspeakable Chinaman’ came as readily and naturally to Anderson Dawson as ‘Asian neighbours’ would to a modern politician. Snarled the Charters Towers Eagle,

In British Papua any publican who sells grog to a coloured man, loses his licence . . . While here on Charters Towers every dirty, lecherous Asiatic can range up alongside the white customer, use the glasses out of which you and I will have to drink later on, breath
unmentionable microbes into the barmaid’s face, put his fingers into the plates of the counter lunch, and generally have a rattling good time of it, all for a ‘zac’!16

The easygoing sugar towns were viewed with deep suspicion. Dark hints of leprosy and foul epidemics at Townsville and Cairns were somehow associated with the aliens. Perhaps the most vivid feat of imagination in the *Eagle* was a report of a banker’s wife in a North Queensland coast town (unspecified) who disappeared for two years until the day when a cyclone destroyed the home of Wong Sing, ‘AN OPIUM DEVIL’, revealing the woman with half-a-dozen other wives and daughters of prominent townsmen, half-naked, mumbling, gesticulating victims of the drug.17 Presumably such nonsense was meant to be taken seriously; fortunately, it very seldom was.

Most people found little to complain of in these hardworking self-sufficient Chinese, and they met nothing in the shape of enmity except for the occasional larrikin throwing stones, or small boys stealing fruit out of devilment. The Chinese rarely competed for European jobs, and social contact was at a minimum. There could be no closer ties—and no active cause of friction—with a group who kept up all their alien customs, and for the most part were steadily determined to return home.18 Their way of living was generally unpretentious. In dress the Chinese wore the conventional blue cottons and straw hats; ‘in wet weather they used rice-straw capes and looked like so many small hayricks paddling the muddy road’.19 Their distinctive pig-tails survived much teasing by Europeans, but vanished almost overnight on the proclamation of a Chinese republic in 1912. Their modest houses of split palings and thatch stood amid meticulously weeded gardens; a neglected garden was a sure sign that the occupant had left the district.

Their recreations rarely impinged on the rest of the community, except at such festivals as the New Year, when their street parades with fireworks and a spirited replica dragon were a great draw for everyone, especially the schoolchildren. Many were keen gamblers, but this was an activity they preferred to carry on in private; so too was opium-smoking. About this habit W. O. Hodgkinson made some pertinent comments:

The average Chinese, however, is not an habitual opium-smoker, the consumption of the drug holding the same moral relation with the alien as that of spirits does with the European. Like the public-houses
Disappointments, 1885-1902

of the European, the opium shops of the Chinese are haunted by men
given to its excessive indulgence, and it is from this class that the most
repulsive examples of its effects are perceptible, and that the petty
larcenies and graver crimes originate.20

Like the bush publicans who encouraged shearers and station
hands to squander their cheques on bad liquor, there were Chinese
storekeepers who plied their fellow-countrymen with opium
and an extremely potent drink called ‘samshu’, and so took the
profits of the Chinese farms and plantations from those who had
put in all the labour. Many Chinese also supplied opium to
Aborigines in return for services of one kind or another. But so far
from exercising a corrupt influence on the European community,
the Chinese in general were anxious to avoid as much as possible
any outside interest in the opium habit. Many, indeed, were too
thriftful and self-respecting to become addicts. And the harshest
critics of the Chinese could not deny that in promoting the
growth of fruit on the coastal lands and maize on the Atherton
Tableland, in clearing the heavy scrub and rendering the land fit
for cultivation, the Chinese achieved pioneering work for North
Queensland.

Cultivation by European settlers was given considerable
encouragement by the Department of Agriculture, which for
more than half of its first fifteen years in existence (1887-1902)
was under the control of a minister from North Queensland.
Experimental stations in tropical agriculture were set up in 1889
at Mackay and at Kamerunga, in the foothills behind Cairns.
After the provision of a laboratory in 1897, the Mackay station
came to specialize in sugar culture, but the Kamerunga experi­
ments ranged over the acclimatization of a great number of
tropical products, from pasture grasses to rubber. Many of these
imports grew satisfactorily under nursery conditions, but not a
great deal of commercial production resulted. Labour and
marketing problems were the great deterrents. Tobacco required
curing and packing; rubber or tea-planting, a guaranteed supply
of cheap labour. It was, however, in the attempt to foster coffee-
growing that these difficulties became most tellingly apparent.

Before 1890 one or two selectors had reared a few coffee shrubs
on their holdings around Cairns; one of the first was Joe Kipling,
reputedly an uncle of the poet. It was not until the Kamerunga
nursery had made successful plantings of both Arabian and
Liberian coffee that cultivation was more widely attempted. Of
reasonably easy growth, with a promising market at hand not
only in Queensland but elsewhere in Australia, coffee-growing was protected by an import tariff of sixpence a pound and seemed to have many of the same attractions as sugar. From 1894 a number of growers concentrated seriously on this crop, especially in areas where the lack of a mill discouraged cane-farming. The Swallow brothers of Hambledon, who converted 35 acres of their sugar lands to coffee, found that, with the employment of Cingalese labour, the processing of coffee was less costly than sugar; but on their departure from Hambledon in 1897 the attempt was abandoned. School children on holiday earned pocket money by harvesting on other estates.21

One of the biggest plantations was started on the Russell River by two aristocratic young men named de Moleyns—the family name had been Mullins three generations back in county Kerry—brothers of Lady Hopetoun, the wife of Australia’s first governor-general. They must have been almost the last of the British aristocracy’s younger sons to seek their fortune in North Queensland, before the White Highlands of Kenya and Rhodesia offered more compelling attractions, and they were not bad representatives of their kind. Even the local Labour member of parliament was known to praise their hard work in developing the industry and to concede that such men should not have their unfortunate background held against them.22 Another notable coffee estate was formed at Bingil Bay, forty miles north of Cardwell, by four brothers named Cutten. After relying for some years on South Sea Island labour for fruit-growing, the Cuttens had gradually come to depend entirely on the services of Aborigines, whom they found adapted well to the change to coffee-growing. For some years their plantation became something of a showplace, with its Aboriginal employees surprising visitors by their steady application as they harvested the berries from the neat rows of shrubs whose layout had been planned with the aid of a surveyor’s theodolite.

Coffee-growing was not solely a black labour industry. Towards the end of the century growers in the Cairns district were employing European men, and even women and schoolchildren, to gather the harvest, and hopes were raised that here, at last, was a line of tropical agriculture which would not depend on the uncertainties of the White Australia policy. By 1900 the Cairns district was producing about 40 per cent of Queensland’s requirements. Then, as with the rice industry, progress faltered. Blame was east on the Commonwealth tariff which replaced the Queens-
land duties in 1901, but in fact the reduction was only 1d. lb. and hardly affected the outcome. The real trouble came from the competition of imports from countries with low labour costs. The Australian consumer had been persuaded to pay a little more for his sugar, because the cane-growing industry was already well established in Queensland, and its fate involved much capital investment and the votes of many sugar-farmers; but the coffee industry was too small to win the same protection. Although development in the Mackay district brought production over 150,000 lb. as late as 1913, North Queensland growers found no encouragement to persist. The smaller men went over to sugar; the de Moleyns brothers moved off to New Guinea; the Cuttens, ageing and discouraged, lived on their capital and produced a modest quantity of fruit for local markets. Had they won the support of a wholesale firm even half as powerful as Colonial Sugar, governments might have backed the local coffee-growers against the competition of importing houses, and North Queensland might today supply Australia.

The marketing problems which frustrated coffee-growing militated against most other tropical products. The same heavy rainfall that fostered the selectors' crops turned the dirt roads into impassable morasses, over which, for weeks at a time, no wheel could turn. One such heavy wet season isolated settlers on the Mulgrave for sixteen weeks. Such conditions turned the reckoning of delivery dates for produce into a guessing game, besides tending to make farmwork unattractive to white employees. Even when their produce had reached the wharves, growers had to allow for the high cost of coastal shipping freights, the possible prejudices of consumers against a little-known local product, the influence of importing houses in promoting their own wares. All things considered, the wonder was not that attempts to diversify agriculture in North Queensland failed, but that so many men were prepared to undertake tropical cultivation. It was the presence of these selectors who formed the basis for the sugar industry, which prevailed through a combination of Government protection, organization of marketing on a suitably large and detailed scale, and development of the central mill system in which provision was made for the overcoming of growers' difficulties in getting their produce off the land. And it may be doubted whether so much solicitude would have been shown to the sugar industry if it had not already had over quarter of a century in which to grow, to attract heavy investment
from Sydney and Melbourne, and to prove its capacity for attracting the settlement of a resident yeomanry in the undeveloped North.

2V. & P. 1891, IV, p. 652.
3V. & P. 1892, IV, p. 628.
4G. Pike, *Over the Years*, Townsville [1959], p. 34.
7At Charters Towers the rainfall for 1902 was 4.29 inches, compared with an annual average of 24 inches.
8V. & P. 1900, III, p. 585: ‘Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on certain proposed railways—the Bowen extension’ (Qu. 1431).
9V. & P. 1893, III, p. 915.
11R.C. 1889, Qu. 1628-1706; *Northern Mining Register*, 8 June 1892.
12R.C. 1889, Qu. 2020. (Evidence of Isaac Duffin, Crown Lands Ranger.)
13V. & P. 1901, IV, p. 1329.
14*Port Denison Times*, 7 Feb. 1891.
15V. & P. 1900, III, p. 523.
16*Eagle*, 1 April 1899.
17Ibid., 30 Sept. 1905.
18Or, as Governor Norman expressed it to the Chinese citizens, whose band was allowed to take up the rear of a Charters Towers procession of welcome: ‘Pecuniarily I hope you will reap the reward of your untiring industry, and take with you the means of comfortable livelihood to the land you belong to, as I suppose you intend to go back’. (*Northern Miner*, 30 April 1890.)
20V. & P. 1882, II, p. 760.
22*Q.P.D.*, LXXXV, p. 1820: Mr. Givens (Cairns): ‘It may be objected that the owners are of a very aristocratic nature and all that, but I fail to see why a man who belongs to the “upper ten” should not be assisted so long as he is willing to take off his coat and become a hard-working individual’. 
Government intervention on two fronts saved the sugar industry for North Queensland. Whether the sugar-growers could have carried on without Pacific Island labour or not, Griffith’s manifesto of 1892, by permitting the resumption of the Kanaka traffic, restored confidence to farmers, millers, and their financial backers, and so encouraged subdivision and expansion. It remained for his old rival and new colleague, Mcllwraith, to ensure that the benefits of cheap labour reached the small farmer by developing the central mill system to a point where a market was available for every significant group of growers along the coast of Queensland. No longer critical of the allegedly demoralizing effects of state help on the selector, Mcllwraith now declared himself a convert to the encouragement of smallholders, and in 1893 brought forward legislation to authorize the financing of central mills by debentures backed by a government first mortgage on the mill itself and the lands of farmers supplying it with cane. Authority for construction would be granted in any district where sufficient cane was available for profitable working; this was a lesson learned from the experience of the North Eton at Mackay, where much of the early loss had arisen because the mill had worked nowhere near full capacity. If through inefficient management substantial losses were met on any central mill built under the 1893 Act, the government would be empowered to take over the running; otherwise management was vested in a committee of directors elected by the growers. After principal and interest had been met on the debentures—a process expected to take about fifteen years—the mill would be handed over to the growers as a co-operative venture. These proposals met with general approval in the Legislative Assembly, except for one or two radicals who grumbled that it was merely a scheme to allow land speculators to unload their holdings profitably. The only major amendment came two years later, when the government took the final step of issuing debentures itself instead of merely guaranteeing debentures held by private capitalists; nearly all the new central mills were thus financed directly by the Treasury.1
Half a million pounds were allocated for the new central mills, and of this amount slightly over £300,000 went to North Queensland. Three mills were erected in the area around Mackay, which already contained the North Eton and Racecourse co-operatives. Of the new ventures, Pleystowe and Marian took over the equipment of existing privately-owned mills closed through the depression at the end of the eighties; the other, Plane Creek, served an area recently opened for selectors. Other mills were opened at Proserpine, the Mulgrave, and on the Mossman River behind Port Douglas; all three districts had been the scene of an attempt to found a plantation mill during the eighties, since the failure of which selectors had remained in these districts making what living they could from maize and fruit-growing. In each of these districts the provision of a sugar-mill rapidly attracted further settlers from outside. Some came originally as construction workers or mill-hands, saved money and took up land. A number of former shearsers from Western Queensland found their way to the Mossman, and in both that district and the Mulgrave lands were taken by dairymen whose cattle had been killed off by the tick pest in 1895–6. A number of young men from other Australian colonies, and even from overseas, came to sugar-growing as one of the more promising lines of agriculture offering in the Australia of the nineties. Where possible, these newcomers got experience in the sugar industry before striking out on their own; thus R. D. Rex in his memoirs relates that he was eighteen months with Colonial Sugar at Goondi before taking up a holding at Mossman. Proserpine attracted a number of settlers from Bowen, including several of Danish or German origin, such as the Muller, Hinschen, Grosskreutz and Faust families. Here the coming of a sugar-mill was largely due to the generosity of the grazier, G. A. Waite, who offered 3,000 acres as pledge for the sugar works, and chaired the meetings which requested government assistance.

The omens were not altogether auspicious for these new districts. Cane prices remained low throughout the nineties, averaging 10s. a ton and sometimes less; at Proserpine in 1900 the farmers received 7s. 6d., and it was not a year of heavy harvest. Transport facilities were seldom adequate, as the new mills had neither time nor resources to lay down a sufficient mileage of tramways, as some of the wealthier private companies were beginning to do. It was heavy, time-consuming work to cart cane to the mill over the boggy tracks of the humid sugar districts.
At Proserpine the roads were so difficult that many commodities were imported from Mackay by boat, and this meant a limitation on bulky cargo; one or two residents recall that as young children they seldom had fruit to eat, even although fruit-growers were established fifty miles away at Bowen. In districts like Proserpine the plough was the main implement for preparing the land, and settlers lightened their work on occasion by holding ploughing matches, with the prize to the fastest and straightest worker; but some condemned the way in which selectors, to get their cane in quickly, left trees standing in the cane-fields and ploughed a contour around them.

The same quality of improvisation revealed itself in the management of one or two of the mills. Some, like Mossman, were successful from their first day, and soon became centre of a thriving settlement. But by 1903, spurred by a section of the farmers who disliked seeing a cherished enterprise going into the red, the government had been obliged to take over the running of Plevstowe and Proserpine mills, because the managements had not been business-like, relied too much on verbal commitments, and lost money. At Mulgrave, where a considerable amount of land had been tied up among absentee owners since the speculations of the early eighties, the scattered settlers quarrelled over the choice of a site. Even after the mill was built, it was not until the masterful Cairns businessman, A. J. Draper, moved in and secured election as chairman of directors that a decisive programme was adopted by the Mulgrave company, and even then a minority of malcontents continued to resent for a few years this intervention by an outsider. Soon, however, the Mulgrave mill was centre for a flourishing sugar district. It was a natural choice for many of the packers who, until the completion of the Mareeba railway in 1893 put them out of business, had plied from the coast to the Herberton mineral field by the range route now followed by the Gillies Highway. It was not long before a neat rectangular township grew up beside the Mulgrave mill. Originally christened Nelson after McLwraith’s successor as premier, the settlement, like so many North Queensland townships, later changed its name and, as Gordonvale, commemorated a pioneer settler and storekeeper.

Older-established areas were no less attractive to new selectors, and, despite their incessant grumblings at the competitive effect of the government-sponsored central mills, the surviving milling companies found applicants for their land as fast as they could
subdivide it. By the mid-nineties small-farming had become the core of the sugar industry in almost every part of North Queensland. In 1892 sixty-eight growers farmed 3,243 acres on the Herbert, and 143 selectors held 4,351 acres at Mackay. Two years later it was estimated that all but 110 of Queensland's 1,387 cane-growers were smallholders on less than ninety acres each. A few plantations continued in business under the old system, but all were operating under financial strain. On the northern side of Mackay, Farleigh, Nindaroo, and Habana survived until the dawn of the twentieth century, only to succumb to cold, dry seasons, low prices, cane-grub and couch grass. At Hambledon, near Cairns, hospitality still flowed freely although its founders, the Swallow family, were from 1890 managers under a new owner, and were glad to supplement the estate's income by coffee-growing and sub-letting to Chinese farmers.

In 1897 this plantation, and Macknade on the Herbert, were purchased by the Colonial Sugar Company, which was foremost of all mill-owners in encouraging settlement by farmers. Even before the restitution of coloured labour they had encountered a brisk demand for their Homebush lands near Mackay, and this had opened their eyes to the possibilities of subdivision. By September 1893 Homebush and Victoria mills had enough suppliers among the small growers to work at maximum capacity, and demand was also healthy at Goondi; in all the firm had by that date let with an option to purchase over 7,500 acres. Settlers were allocated blocks of thirty acres, with the right to another thirty when the first area was under cultivation. The land could be bought outright at £5 an acre after three years if cash were paid, or after five years on terms. The company advanced three-quarters of the cost of all work done by the tenant from the time he began scrub-felling to the harvesting of the first cane crop. It was the tenant's responsibility to cut and load the cane for the mill, payment on delivery at the company's tram-lines ranging from 11s. to 12s. 6d. a ton. The only limitation on these liberal terms was a strong preference on the company's part for men who had been in their employ, or could produce credentials of previous experience in the industry. Undoubtedly it was in the company's self-interest to dispose of its lands in this way, so shedding the risks of cane-growing, including the difficulties which would recur whenever the supply of coloured labour was again reduced or abolished. But in its realistic abandonment of the old plantation system, and active encouragement of the settlement of men likely
to have some competence in cane-growing, Colonial Sugar gave an encouraging lead to other mill-owners.

On the Burdekin Delta a role probably of equal importance was played by John Drysdale,* managing director of the Pioneer mill at Brandon, eight miles from Ayr. With a lower rainfall than other sugar-growing areas, the Lower Burdekin industry had been developed during its plantation period by a system of drains irrigated by pumping from the channels and lagoons of the delta. Such a method was unreliable in drought years, and could not be afforded by smallholders. Although an official report of 1890 claimed that most farmers had well-improved lands and comfortable homesteads, few attempted the cultivation of sugar, but instead kept to maize and so met strong competition from the diligent Chinese.7 Griffith's manifesto restoring Pacific Island labour was hailed with delight, especially as the Pioneer company immediately announced its intention of subdividing and letting its lands—an example tardily followed after a year or two by the other plantations in the district. Sugar-farming on a settler basis only became possible, however, when the sub-artesian deposits of the Lower Burdekin were tapped. Drysdale, a qualified engineer, proved the extent of this supply and during the nineties introduced the spear system of irrigation still in use today. The principal feature of this system was a deep bore, containing a pipe of about six inches diameter terminating in a perforated copper tube or spear. One or more of these bores were connected to a centrifugal pump near the surface, and the water was channelled through the canefields along open ditches. During the nineties the Ayr district, with over five thousand acres under irrigation, contained well over half the artificially watered acreage in the whole of Queensland (5,078 acres in 1896 out of 8,368 in all Queensland). By 1897 many newcomers were taking up farms in the district, and its future seemed assured.

Elsewhere farmers were going on to the land in some numbers. Even on the Johnstone, which because of its dense humidity and bad reputation for fever was considered the district least suitable for white settlement, a newspaper report of 1895 estimated that 200 selectors were settled around Mundoo, between Geraldton and the Mourilyan mill.8 The Italian migrants also, whose arrival in December 1891 had seemed so ill-omened, soon turned out to be hardworking and successful settlers on their own account.

*Born 1847; arrived Burdekin Delta 1884 after purchase of Pioneer mill by his four brothers; died 1928. A memorial to him stands at the main intersection of Ayr.
Obtaining land on the Herbert, and later in the Cairns and Geraldton districts, they overcame their dislike for the climate and soon adapted to their surroundings. As early as 1892 their well-constructed houses with gaily painted doors and window-sills were contrasted favourably with the bush humpies and tents which sufficed many Australians. Within a few years they were finding means to bring their friends and relations to join them, so founding the Italian community that has played so prominent a part in the North Queensland sugar industry. It was at Mackay, however, that the process of subdivision was furthest advanced, through the early lead given from 1891 by Colonial Sugar at Homebush, E. M. Long at Habana, and one or two other enlightened plantation owners.

Although this new generation of small farmers threw themselves unsparingly into the hard work with axe and plough which their properties demanded, nearly all were thankful to use the services of coloured labour. It was for their benefit, and not for the continuance of the big plantations, that Griffith had reversed his line on coloured labour. As the Mackay Mercury pointed out to critics of the new policy, coloured labour was merely a means to establishing a system of 'huge central factories and planting farmers':

... Let them clearly understand what we ask for. It is not to swamp the country with aliens, that we know the country will refuse; it is not to establish for ever and ever a right to import coloured men to work in our fields, that also the country will refuse. It is rather that a system, that has been in force for five-and-twenty years, shall be tolerated for a short time longer in order that the industry may be built up so that it shall be capable of employing exclusively white men, so that it may give work and homes to many thousands more whites than it does at present to white and black combined.9

This line of reasoning carried conviction in some quarters which had formerly opposed coloured labour. Even in Brisbane various clergymen, literary societies, and other Griffith supporters conceded the wisdom of continuing, under adequate supervision, the import of Pacific Islanders.10 Events proved that under the new system the small farmers in fact received useful help over a series of low-profit years. By the beginning of 1899 the 1,950 Pacific Islanders in the Mackay district, instead of working for a few big plantations, were distributed among 436 employers, and although even small growers on sixty to one hundred acres
continued to refer to themselves as ‘planters’, their outlook and scale of operations were far removed from those prevailing in the industry during the seventies.

Supporters of the Griffith policy could point to a steady expansion of the sugar industry throughout North Queensland, following the re-introduction of Pacific Islanders. In 1892 there had been 23,623 acres under cane in North Queensland, producing 31,052 tons of sugar. Ten years later the acreage had doubled to 46,291, and sugar production, despite a dry season, had more than doubled to 69,486 tons. In 1892 the North produced slightly less than half Queensland’s sugar; in 1902 it yielded over ninety per cent, and although this was a record due to abnormally bad seasonal conditions in the South, even in ordinary years the North was responsible for about two-thirds of the State’s output. All districts showed progress, although this was least marked at Mackay and the Burdekin Delta. Mackay, where most of the available sugar lands had already been pioneered, went from 11,778 acres to 16,369 after touching a maximum of 21,350 acres in 1898; the Lower Burdekin rose only from 2,555 acres to 3,156, after a peak of 5,208, again in 1898. Both areas had suffered four years of below-average rainfall, during which it appears that some of the old plantation lands were allowed to go out of cultivation.

North of Townsville growth was faster. Ingham’s acreage under cane went from 4,786 to 8,902 during the ten years after 1892; on the Johnstone the increase was 3,354 to 6,071; Cairns rose from 1,150 to 6,669 over the same period, and the Mossman area went from nil to 3,810 acres in the six years after 1896. Of course, this increase was not solely due to the admission of coloured labour. Some of the better sugar lands had been held without use since the slump of 1883, and were made available for purchase and cultivation when demand revived in the nineties. There was a marked, if gradual, improvement in the types of cane planted. The planters in the seventies and eighties had brought every available breed of cane into Queensland, and with them almost every variety of plant disease known to science. The experimental stations at Mackay and Kamerunga introduced new varieties of cane, improved by a careful process of selection before release to the small farmers, who came increasingly to rely on this source of supply during the nineties. A government-sponsored expedition in 1895 resulted in the propagation of several canes of high quality from New Guinea, especially the ‘Badila’ variety, which soon came to be the staple of North Queensland cane-farming.
But after every allowance had been made for these factors, most North Queensland planters and farmers still contended during the nineties that the labour of Pacific Islanders was essential for their industry. Unable to afford European labour because of sugar prices which remained low, not because of any chicanery by the refineries or the millers, but because of glutted world markets, they were obliged to take on coloured labour or go out of business. It was a quandary that could only be resolved by a shift in the economics of sugar. Meanwhile, it could at least be said that Pacific Islanders seldom competed with white men in any other field. An analysis of the 1891 census showed that, of 9,402 Islanders then in Queensland, 7,311 were labourers in the sugar industry and another 997 farm servants. Most of the others were classified as ‘servants’ or ‘labourers’; a few were gardeners, fishermen, or still somehow retained in the pastoral industry. Of those who had become independent, forty-nine (including two women) were described as farmers, with four fruit-growers, three schoolmasters, three butchers, one shopkeeper and one gold-miner. In themselves they hardly constituted a serious threat to the Australian workingman. But working-class fears of alien competition were not to be soothed by statistics.

Many sugar-growers would in any case have denied that Pacific Island labour was especially cheap. Estimates furnished to an inquiry in 1901 stated that, after allowance had been made for passage money, rations and maintenance, the upkeep of one Islander cost 12s. 4d. weekly at Mackay, and 13s. 4½d. at Cairns, about 40 per cent of the wages for a white labourer. Time-expired Islanders had usually become shrewd enough to demand more, earning between £20 and £35 a year with keep in 1895. When, however, some Herbert River farmers absconded from the district without paying their Islanders, and the Inspector of Polynesian Islanders insisted on guaranteed wages from those employing time-expired men, the Halifax Planters Club (which included many of the original small farmers of the eighties) at once saw their chance. Members of the Club offered a standard rate of £16 a year, and by the beginning of 1897 this reduced figure, ‘essential to continued solvency’, ruled on the Herbert and was being introduced on the Johnstone and in other Northern districts. The secretary of the Halifax Club hoped eventually to eliminate entirely ‘the suicidal policy of competing with each other for the boys’ services’ in every district from Bundaberg north, and pointed complacently to his own district’s experience.
The Last of the Black North, 1892–1906

Under the restricted wage our boys have been more contented and have worked better than ever before; it has done away with the restless fever for more money which was demoralizing them previously. They at first stood out for higher figures but at length gave way in a mass, and we have had no difficulty with them since.¹²

It was cant of this sort that gave some justification to the critics of the sugar industry.

There was cant, too, on the other side. Wild allegations of ‘slavery’ were uncalled for. The most objectionable features of the old blackbirding days had been swept from the seas. Government agents were more conscientious and efficient, and hostilities between islanders and recruiting ships became far less common, although in the early nineties there were one or two cases of ships being fired on harmlessly from the shore. At the sugar ports medical officers ensured that recruits were old enough and strong enough for their duties; this process of selection was no mere formality, and Islanders under standard were returned to their homes. On the canefields medical attention was less satisfactory. The Pacific Island hospitals founded by the Griffith government in 1884 were soon all running deficits, despite the imposition of an annual levy on employers. In 1889, when it seemed probable that no more Islanders would be coming to Queensland, the hospitals at Ingham and Geraldton were closed, and Mackay, burdened with a deficit of over £11,000 at the end of 1890, soon followed; the buildings were thought suitable for handing over to the Education Department. Penalties for neglect still placed sugar-growers under an obligation to provide free medical attention for their Pacific Islanders, and most employers, either from humane motives or simply out of need for an efficient work force, did what they could to honour their responsibilities. But when work was pressing and roads were bad, it had to be an urgent case of necessity before the doctor was summoned out of town to a sick Islander, and many ‘minor’ complaints received only the first aid that could be provided on the spot.

Although the death rate among non-Europeans never again reached the tragic heights of 1884, it still stood at 36·38 per thousand among Pacific Islanders for the years 1899–1903, slightly more than three times the Queensland average for those years. A certain amount of wastage through sickness was taken for granted, and there was also more venereal disease than formerly. Undesirable consequences were becoming apparent from the unbalanced sex ratio among the sugar-workers, especially
the Pacific Islanders. During the nineties some urged the mitigation of this social problem by encouraging the immigration of Pacific Island women, but as the decade wore on the position deteriorated. The 1891 census revealed 826 Pacific Island women in Queensland, as against 8,602 men, and an assessment made in 1898 gave only 379 women to 8,049. The disproportion was slightly less in Northern districts than in South Queensland. It would not appear that many Pacific Islanders married outside their own people, although a few took Aboriginal wives. Those who returned to their native islands unattached seem to have been absorbed without difficulty back into their community. In the New Hebrides and the Solomons there is little to suggest that traditional ways of life were in any way altered by the plantation workers returning from Queensland.

Recruiting figures in the years after 1892 confirmed neither those who forecast that North Queensland would be swamped with coloured labour nor those who expected the supply of Pacific Islanders to fail. As in the eighties, the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands continued to be almost the only sources of Pacific Island labour. The sole exception was a party of 191 brought from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in 1895, but for some reason this group was spared further contributions. After 1890 the supply of New Hebrideans tended to dwindle, although old hands returning for a further spell of labour kept up numbers. The Solomons, however, provided the majority (53 per cent) of all Pacific labour recruited for Queensland after 1892. Some employers considered these Islanders more excitable, less hard-working and less tractable than the Tanna men from the New Hebrides. Such comparisons were impossible to prove, and should not obscure the fact that to most farmers the Pacific Islander was a welcome employee, whatever his place of origin.

But the number employed in Queensland never reached the peak of 1883. From 7,580 in 1889 total Queensland numbers rose to 9,362 in 1891, as the result of a last-minute rush to engage labour before the operation of Griffith's ban. The Pacific Islands population, reduced by repatriations during the 'closed season' to 7,489 in 1894, rose steadily to 9,841 in 1902. This made nonsense of hopeful assertions that dependence on coloured labour was declining. North Queensland followed a very similar trend. After slipping to 4,216 in 1889 the number of Islanders rose to 5,659 in 1891, fell to 3,621 in 1894, and recovered to 5,686 in 1902. Within individual districts, however, there were
The Tast of the Black North, 1892-1906

variations. Mackay, and to a lesser extent the Burdekin Delta, employed fewer Islanders during the nineties than previously. The newer areas beyond Townsville meanwhile committed themselves more heavily to coloured labour. On the Herbert River, after falling to 530 in 1894, Pacific Island numbers rose over the thousand in 1899 and reached a peak of 1,259 in 1903. In the Cairns area Islanders increased from 127 in 1894 to 844 in 1904; the previous maximum had been 473 in 1890. Hardly any were employed before 1895 around Mossman, where between 1902 and 1906 numbers averaged four hundred. In these districts there was not the least evidence of a trend away from South Sea Island labour, but rather the contrary.

Other non-Europeans supplemented the Pacific Islanders. In the polyglot North Queensland of 1898 there were also 7,261 Chinese, 3,210 Japanese, 322 Javanese and 1,598 others. Those working in the sugar industry were mainly Japanese, Javanese, and Indians. The Chinese sometimes took work as contract labourers, but their preference for working in organized teams was unsuitable for the small farmers, and they were mainly engaged in the banana and rice-growing industries on their own account. The Japanese first came to Geraldton in 1889, and to Ingham and Mackay in 1892 as a result of arrangements made during the suspension of Pacific Island labour. The bulk of them came to North Queensland before 1898, when the Queensland Government concluded an agreement with the Japanese authorities imposing a passport system on emigrants to the colony. While about one-third of them went to the pearling fleets off Thursday Island, the remainder were distributed all through the sugar country of North Queensland, between two and four hundred to a district. Painstaking workers, they were the mainstay of the remaining plantations. Often their thrifty habits enabled them to improve their way of life. It was noted on the Burdekin Delta that most Japanese could afford a horse, trimly harnessed but ridden in a stiff, awkward manner like a sailor ashore. Others went into business as laundrymen or restaurant-keepers, and along Flinders Street in Townsville some set up shop as importers of fans, teaspoons, porcelain bowls, lacquer cabinets and 'all the quaint artistic things that ensnare the soul of a woman'—particularly the miners’ and graziers’ wives holidaying at Townsville as a respite from the inland. Of other non-European races, Malays were regarded as tractable hard workers; and Javanese were well thought of, though the Dutch
authorities did not encourage them to emigrate. In the last years of the century there was an influx of Indians around Cairns. British subjects, their entry could not easily be prohibited, but few came direct from India to North Queensland; most had originally been introduced to the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales. All these elements combined to give some colour to working-class fears that Australians were being squeezed out of the 'black North'.

These fears were whipped up by the radical press, which lost no opportunity to blame the alien labourer for any outbreak of disease or crime in the sugar towns. Sanitation was poor in most North Queensland townships, and though an outbreak of dengue in Cooktown in 1897 could be put down to local conditions, the cases of bubonic plague in 1900 at Cairns and Townsville could only be blamed on a breakdown in normally efficient quarantine measures taken with migrants from Asia. Horrified press reactions were sometimes evoked by reports of leprosy among Asians and Aborigines in the sugar towns. Crime, or at least disturbances of the peace, probably increased among non-Europeans during the nineties, although the evidence is not conclusive. In the plantation era there had often been pitched battles between two groups of Pacific Islanders, but these were almost always much in the nature of sham fights, often fought with grass spears as an entertainment for the white population. Now there was a growing record of brawls around the sugar towns, both between different groups of Pacific Islanders, and between them and other races.

Along the Herbert River, a district in no way abnormal in its mixture of races, there were at least four serious riots between 1889 and 1892. In October 1889 a daybreak affray at Ripple Creek involved Malayans carrying guns and New Hebrideans with bows and arrows; the latter, more familiar with their weapons, injured five Malays before peace was restored. Six weeks later Victoria plantation was the scene of a fight between Solomon Islanders and New Hebrideans, in which about fifty of the participants were wounded, half of them seriously enough to require admission to the Polynesian Hospital at Ingham. Several battles between Javanese and Pacific Islanders followed an incident in May 1890 when a Javanese was stabbed in the back. And in December 1892 two hundred Melanesians were involved in an inter-island fight centred around Macknade. The men from Malaita, in the New Hebrides, had the most turbulent reputation,
which perhaps a knowledge of their native customs would have gone far to explain. It has been suggested, for instance, that some murders resulted from their belief that children born within doors had to be propitiated with the blood of the first passer-by.16

Trouble also flared up sometimes between labourers and their employers. In September 1889, while the sergeant of police and clerk of petty sessions from Geraldton were making an arrest at Mourilyan mill, they were roughed up by a group of eighty Malays, who began threatening to kill the white men. The mill manager armed his Pacific Islanders who, accompanied by most of the white men in Geraldton (sworn as special constables for the occasion), set off in pursuit of the Malays, who were pacified after four had been shot by Islanders and eighteen arrested.17

Another story from about the same period comes from Mulgrave mill:

One Islander in a gang had caused trouble by his consistent refusal to work. He was tackled by a white overseer employed by the mill and when the Kanaka was subdued, three of his mates joined in and rolled the white overseer over the river bank, whereupon the latter shot the original troublemaker. Following this, about fifty Kanakas marched towards the mill, armed with cane knives, in search of the overseer. They were stopped by Constable Maher, a black tracker and a bootmaker, armed with rifles. Peace was restored, but the white overseer was obliged to leave the district.18

Incidents of this sort were not uncommon throughout the nineties, and cases of robbery with violence and other assaults were on the increase.

At the back of these outbreaks were usually liquor or opium, now easily obtainable in the 'Chinatown' quarter of the sugar towns, where all comers could also gamble their pay on such exotic games as fan-tan and da-do. Bad blood sometimes resulted; thus the all-night riot at Mourilyan in November 1900 between Japanese on the one side and Malays and Javanese on the other was attributed to a gambling quarrel. Few other interests, however, were available to entice alien workers in their leisure hours from the companionship of the gambling ring. Because of discouragement from plantation owners, it was not until the late eighties that missions concentrating chiefly on Pacific Islanders were established in the Mulgrave, Herbert and Mackay districts, and even these were short-staffed and under-financed. (The Christian churches were thus a little late in the field; on the Herbert
a resident Buddhist priest had arrived to look after the Javanese as early as 1886, well before any other clergymen except a transient Anglican.) Some successes the missions had, but they were chiefly among time-expired Pacific Islanders rather than more recent arrivals under indenture.

'Black labour in North Queensland' therefore became the subject of Australia-wide controversy during the nineties, not merely because the rise of Labor and the coming of Federation provided politicians with a catch-cry of White Australia, but because growing social problems were emerging in this multi-racial society. Nor were these problems lessening with the passage of time. It is difficult to agree with the authors of *South Pacific Enterprise* when they suggest that 'the trend towards white labour and away from Kanaka labour was manifest' by the nineties, or that

... While considerations of conscience and humanity played an important part in the extinction of the Kanaka system, and while the decisions of the new Federal Parliament hastened the change and ameliorated the consequences, the main reason for the decline in coloured labour was economic. Hoe culture was giving way to plough culture and the white man was proving a more productive worker, even in the tropics.¹⁹

The fact is that Northern sugar-growers believed themselves unable to obtain enough white labour for their needs, and in 1901 there were more non-Europeans at work in the North Queensland canefields than at any previous time in their history. Although in the decade after Griffith's manifesto plantation culture had yielded place to the small farmers, not more than 15 per cent of Queensland's sugarcane was grown by white labour exclusively, and most of that was in southern districts.²⁰

It had yet to be proven that the North Queensland sugar industry could survive without coloured labour. Nearly all the assertions and counter-claims about the performance of white men in the tropics were partisan statements by sugar-growers, Labor politicians, or other men with an axe to grind. The first neutral observer to look at the problem was Dr Walter Maxwell, who was brought from Hawaii in 1900 to act as director of the government's sugar experiment stations and allied enterprises. Shortly after his arrival Maxwell was requested to compile a report for the new Commonwealth government on the labour question in the sugar industry.²¹ A useful, although not entirely
scientific, document (it contains some very questionable use of statistics), Maxwell’s report suggested that the cane-growing areas of Queensland could be divided into three sections; the South, where white labour was available and in the process of supplanting coloured workers; Mackay, where the proportion of non-Europeans was more slowly declining; and the more northerly regions, where Maxwell doubted whether white men could ever satisfactorily replace the present system. Maxwell pointed out that although the Cairns area paid the highest wages, with labourers averaging 35s. 4½d. a week as compared with 29s. 11d. at Mackay and 27s. 10½d. in more southerly districts, it seemed impossible to recruit a permanent labour force. The reports of the Government Labour Bureau for the late nineties to some extent support Maxwell’s impressions. At Bundaberg, in southern Queensland, there was in each year an excess of workers seeking plantation and agricultural jobs. But at Mackay demand exceeded supply, especially at the peak of the crushing season in July and August. Farmers complained that they could not find enough European workers, nor were men willing to stay on the job even if their employers paid their fares up from Brisbane. There was some evidence to suggest that out-of-work travellers tended to avoid the far North. The ‘tucker track’ followed by many took them along the coast from Rockhampton as far as Townsville, but they then made off inland along the railway line to Charters Towers and Hughenden, avoiding the sugar-growing areas where they would be offered ‘black man’s work’.

White labour had nevertheless been given a trial in many parts of North Queensland. But the conclusions to be drawn from these experiments were not clear. As proof of the impossibility of recruiting a permanent white labour force, Maxwell cited the example of the Mulgrave co-operative mill, near Cairns, which in order to keep up a staff of eighty-eight white employees during the crushing season had been obliged to take on no less than 409 hands for short periods, because climate and health would not allow European workers to stay on the job. (Maxwell made no comment on the surprising fact that there were over four hundred men available to seek employment at one mill alone.) In 1901 the work of loading cane on to trucks was entrusted by the Mulgrave management to a contractor who brought a number of men and youths from Bundaberg for the job; after a few days nearly all these threw in their jobs, and Hindus had to be employed in their
place. Coloured labour advocates claimed this episode as proof of the difficulty of finding white men for the North; the Labor party retorted that the white men had been under-paid and under-age, and hinted that the case had been faked up for propaganda purposes. The truth of the matter seems to be that, while Pacific Islanders and Asians continued to be employed in the sugar industry, many white labourers would feel an automatic emotional distaste for taking on the same work, especially at a time when both base metal and gold mining offered higher wages and better hopes of quick wealth.

If a time came when sugar-growers could afford to pay better money, and the allurements of mining faded; if, too, improved working conditions, more attention to public health, and greater knowledge of tropical hygiene made living conditions more attractive, then it would be possible for white labour to carry North Queensland. As it happened, nearly all these conditions were fulfilled in the first years of the twentieth century. But in 1901 not everyone who doubted the possibility of North Queensland’s sugar industry surviving without coloured labour, was necessarily blinded by selfish prejudice. Even the abolitionists conceded that the sugar-growers might be harmed, but counted this a lesser evil than the continuance of a traffic in non-European labour, even in its modern, well-regulated guise. Any decision to ban coloured labour would be to some extent a leap in the dark.

But the leap was taken. The new Commonwealth Parliament, which in part owed its being to North Queensland’s enthusiasm for Federation, was dominated by spokesmen for White Australia. Even the Herbert seat, comprising the whole sugar coast from Mackay north, had by a narrow margin returned a Labor man, F. W. Bamford.* The working men of Townsville and Cairns gave him his victory, but even at Mackay his opponent’s majority was not large. Within the House of Representatives coloured labour had no advocates except one or two elderly city merchants. Outside they had the cautious advocacy of Robert Philp, by now premier of Queensland and fearful, in a period of drought and low primary produce prices, of any move which might mean slack

*Born 1849; came to North Queensland 1886 as inspector on construction of Cairns-Mareeba railway; then publican at Bowen; established Democratic Leagues at Bowen and Ayr 1896; alderman 1896, mayor of Bowen 1898; contested Bowen seat 1896 and 1899; M.P. for Herbert 1901–25; Minister for Home and Territories 1916–17; joined National party 1917; Chairman of Committees 1923–5; died 1934.
business in North Queensland. Petitions flowed south from groups of farmers, Chambers of Commerce, and other interested parties urging that the Commonwealth Parliament should not be precipitate in ending Pacific Island labour. There was even a lunatic fringe, much publicized by their opponents, who talked of ‘resorting to civil war rather than submit to the expulsion of the kanakas’. Such gestures were futile; so was the more temperate form of lobbying. Legislation was successfully introduced in October 1901 prohibiting the introduction of Pacific Islanders after 31 March 1904, and providing for their repatriation by the end of 1906. But the sugar industry would not be left defenceless. A protective duty of £6 a ton was imposed on sugar imports, and an excise of £3, of which £2 would be refunded on sugar manufactured from cane grown and cut by white labour. The burden of finding the extra wages that the sugar-grower would have to pay white men would be shared by the whole community.

The North was uneasy, and for some years editors continued to bemoan a ‘breach of faith’ and belittle the available white labour. The first reaction of many sugar-growers was to make the most of the few remaining years of coloured labour. In several districts north of Townsville employment of Pacific Islanders reached its peak in 1903, and in the whole of Queensland the proportion of cane cultivated by white labour increased only from 15 to 25 per cent between 1902 and 1905. Yet during these last years of coloured labour, race relations deteriorated considerably in North Queensland, and every year proved the unlikelihood of building a stable society on the sort of multi-racial lines existing in the sugar industry.

Many old hands assert that in the years after 1901 crime and insubordination increased among non-Europeans, and for what they are worth legal statistics confirm this impression. In 1898 when Pacific Islanders made up 1.72 per cent of Queensland’s population, they underwent 5.5 per cent of the convictions for criminal offences; by 1905 over 7 per cent of the state’s crimes were sheeted home to them. Between these years four of the eight men executed for murder were Pacific Islanders. This may mean merely that judges dealt more severely with non-Europeans, but in at least one case (Gosaro, a Solomon Islander from the Herbert River, executed in April 1905) there were strong reasons to

*The rebate was replaced by a bounty in 1903, and increased to a £3 bounty on a £4 excise in 1905.
believe not merely that the wrong man was hanged, but that until almost the last moment Gosaro did not realize the nature of his sentence.27

Attitudes hardened among the white community. During a debate in 1901 when the Mackay town council resolved to ask for a stronger police force one alderman mentioned that he never went fishing beyond the outskirts of town without carrying a revolver. In 1904 after the Herbert River district had been disturbed by cases of murder and rape, as well as by two strikes among Melanesian workers, plans were afoot among some residents to form an armed association of vigilantes. On the local railway, white passengers and others were segregated, and this led to one or two unpleasant incidents. On one occasion a Chinese storekeeper had his arm cut while being evicted from the ‘Europeans only’ compartment; on another the Japanese government inspector, an army officer with all the prestige which that implied, was bundled out of the first-class section and forced to sit among a crowd of Pacific Islanders. Protests from the Japanese consul brought an apology.28 There was a nasty savour of apartheid about such episodes; nor were the Islanders such tractable workers as formerly. Unruliness was reported from several quarters on the Herbert, and on the Mulgrave the Pacific Islanders had become so unreliable that the local mill was giving them every encouragement to break their contracts and return home. Moreover, the average cost of each Pacific Islander was now 24s. a week, which represented no great saving over white labour. It was high time to end the Pacific Island labour system, and the Federal Government sought to hasten its passing by increasing in 1905 the rebate and excise duty on sugar.

Yet the departure of the Pacific Islanders during the summer of 1906–7 revealed another side to the story. Many had been kindly treated, had adapted to European customs and lived so long away from their native islands that North Queensland had become home to them. The Commonwealth tried to temper the winds of change in such cases, and permission to stay was given to Islanders who had lived in Queensland since 1879, bought freehold land, or married women not of their own race. This still left many who were deeply affected by their uprooting. The Ingham doctor, an outspoken character, officially recorded the death of one Buka Buka islander as due to ‘broken heart’. From the same district there is another account of a more spirited deportee haranguing a crowd of Islanders in protest:
He vigorously claimed they had built up the white man's sugar industry, and illustrated his arguments by drawing attention to the surrounding canefields which were the result of kanaka labour. In a final burst of tearful indignation, he declared: 'White fellow no more want black man, use him up altogether, chase him away, plenty kanaka no money, go back poor', and with a gesture of supreme contempt he broadcasted through the crowd a handful of coppers he had been holding...  

A few Islanders tried to avoid their fate by going bush. One is reported to have lived in the hills south of Cardwell for thirty years before being found and sent to an Aboriginal reserve. I have myself met an Innisfail man who, as a youth, concealed a favourite servant for several weeks in the bush, bringing him food in the way that Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn provisioned the negro Jim. But most of these fugitives were unable to stand the loneliness, and eventually gave themselves up for repatriation with the rest.

They were sorted into two groups. The New Hebrides men were sent to Brisbane for shipment, the Solomon Islanders to Cairns. With them they took their 'boxes', the collections of valued possessions which were their rewards for service in the canefields. Many were their attempts to smuggle guns and ammunition out of the country, but the Customs officers were awake to most of their dodges, and few seem to have succeeded. Others took more innocuous goods: stoves, sewing machines, kerosene lamps and clothes of every kind from red shirts to tweed trousers. By January 1907 embarkation was complete, and 4,391 Pacific Islanders returned to their places of origin, a little wealthier, perhaps a little wiser, but soon to fit in with their old society, out of sight and out of mind so far as Australia was concerned. There remained in Queensland as many as 1,580 Islanders, mostly in the North, where a few worked on in the sugar industry; as late as 1911, 8 per cent of Queensland's cane was grown by coloured labour, and there were pockets of Pacific Island settlers in every district from Mackay north. Almost all were old hands, so far assimilated with their surroundings that their staying presented hardly any problems.

Other forms of coloured labour were also on their way out. The Malays and Javanese were not replaced as they finished their indentures. Since 1898 Japanese immigration was controlled by a passport system, and by the time of the 'Kanaka exodus' most of the Japanese had also left either for their homeland or for the
Thursday Island pearling fleets. The Chinese were ageing and gradually returning to their ancestral villages, although some of the most prosperous had become naturalized, among them Sue Chin, who with 800 acres under cane in 1913 was Australia’s largest individual sugar-grower. One alternative to European labour remained. The Australian Aborigines had never come under the same regulations as other forms of non-white labour, and they had been employed at agricultural tasks in increasing numbers not merely by the Chinese, but by European cultivators such as the Cutten brothers at Bingil Bay. After the Pacific Islanders went, a number of sugar-growers along the Herbert began to employ Aborigines for fieldwork. The usual wage was £1 monthly, with tobacco, food and clothing found. One observer noted that ‘the prohibition of opium had been a factor in greatly improving the standard of black workers, and in some cases they received up to £5 monthly’. To the growers’ annoyance, the Federal Government refused to recognize Aborigines as white labour for the purposes of the cane bounty. The movement to employ them fell off sharply, and the Aborigines were left to the mendicant role towards which they had been drifting over recent years.

Humanitarians, in their zeal for the Pacific Islanders, had somewhat tended to overlook the Aborigines. Their numbers were so small in many parts of North Queensland as to support the comfortable theory of ‘a dying race’, but tribally organized Aborigines survived on the Cape York Peninsula, the Atherton Tableland, and on the coast as far south as the Herbert, in numbers sufficient to warrant the attention of Christian missionaries. Several difficulties confronted the interested churches, not least that of establishing contact with a people whose social customs and habits of mind were so alien that many Europeans believed (wrongly) that the Aborigines had no religious beliefs of any description. Even more disheartening was the degrading influence of some Europeans and Asians over mission natives. The men who put liquor and opium into Aboriginal hands were not merely rough bêche-de-mer fishers after recruits or women. They included also respectable publicans of Cooktown, whose business friends on the local Bench would be sure to let them off with a nominal fine; settlers around Atherton and Mackay who found these the cheapest means of paying Aboriginal labour; mailmen whose good nature got the better of their social conscience. Aborigines yielded to these enticements the more readily.
because the missions, already suspect by interfering with Aboriginal traditions, offered few attractions to sweeten the process of conversion. Tobacco was forbidden on several missions, and even food supplies were sometimes short because, through bad luck or judgement, almost every North Queensland mission was founded on very poor land.

Between 1886 and 1891 four missions were started on the Cape York Peninsula. The first arose on the Bloomfield River holding of an unsuccessful sugar-planter, L. G. Bauer. The mission was turned over in 1887 to some government-subsidized Lutherans from South Australia. This mission never prospered. Repeated flooding ruined whatever crops grew on the poor soil that had bankrupted Bauer, and the Aborigines were often lured away to the tin-mining camps and bêche-de-mer fisheries. The withdrawal of the Queensland Government subsidy in 1899 was soon followed by the closing of the mission. Another Lutheran mission started in 1886 at Cape Bedford fared much better, although its site (on barren dune country) was equally unpromising. Not content merely with giving the Aborigines a solidly efficient Lutheran education, the missionaries learned the local dialects thoroughly, and were careful to respect all customs compatible with Christianity. Pastor Schwarz, a magnificently bearded patriarch who died in Cooktown as recently as 1958, always ensured that marriages celebrated in the mission chapel conformed to tribal rules of kinship. A similar willingness to meet Aboriginal custom existed at Yarrabah, on Cape Grafton, where two Church of England missionaries named Gribble—father and son—were in charge at various times from 1887 to 1959. Both at Cape Bedford and Yarrabah, problems arose through the nearness of a large town (Cooktown and Cairns respectively). Even at the Batavia River on the western side of the Peninsula, the Mapoon mission founded in 1891 was not too remote to escape trouble with white men.

Several government investigations between 1895 and 1897 led to the appointment of an eminent pioneer anthropologist, Dr W. E. Roth,* as Northern Protector of Aborigines.34 His attempts to ensure reasonable working conditions for Aborigines made him enemies among the Cooktown people, and his anthropological studies were condemned as obscene and a waste of taxpayers’ money by ignorant and petty-minded members of

*Born 1861; brother of H. Ling Roth; Northern Protector of Aborigines 1897–1905; later in British Guiana; died 1933.
parliament. Not a man of conciliatory temperament, Roth found his work so beset by feuds that when, in 1905, he offered his resignation in order to go to South America, the government gratefully accepted it. After that North Queensland came under the custody of the State Department of Aborigines, who chiefly devoted their energies to rounding up the sorry remnants living in the blacks’ camps on the outskirts of Northern towns, and removing them to the kinder, though artificial, sanctuary of Palm Island. This took some time, and it was not until the influenza epidemic of World War I had drastically reduced their numbers that the transfer was general. Many people on the Atherton Tableland can still remember the dramatic (but in no way lethal) spear-fights between the Tolga and Ravenshoe natives over errant women. But in most parts of North Queensland it was thought advisable to have the Aborigines, especially the children, safely under government or mission supervision. Certainly there was no thought of encouraging their employment on low wages in the sugar industry, or in any other line where they might compete with white men and be themselves exploited. The right of labouring under the North Queensland sun was to be, after 1906, entirely a white man’s prerogative.

For by now the North was considered the front line of Australia’s defence; and it remained to be seen how far the united Australian Commonwealth would view Northern development as a responsibility of the whole community. So far there was a tendency to concentrate on the Northern Territory, and (with the very important exception of the sugar tariffs) to leave North Queensland’s fate to the North Queenslanders. Since the Commonwealth Government sounded the knell of coloured labour in 1901, their chief problem had been the use of white men in the canefields. Results, of course, had varied. It was useless to expect a drunken city-bred unemployed to stand the pace, and there were many failures among men recruited from Sydney and Brisbane. But there was already coming into existence a self-reliant breed of European cane-cutters; men like James Hood of the Herbert who boasted without contradiction that he would back his gang against any coloured team nominated; experienced farmers’ sons from the Northern Rivers of New South Wales, who had worked among cane all their lives with no worse effects than a sunburned nose. These men were shortly to be reinforced by surplus labour from the mining fields, where the long golden afternoon was at last drawing to a close. Meanwhile, millers and
The Tast of the Black North, 1892–1906 255
growers were finding that, with the aid of the Commonwealth
tariff and a world-wide rise in cane prices following European
agreements on the marketing of sugar-beet, they could at last
employ European labour, and so qualify for the government
bounty. The change from coloured to European workers would
require some adjustments among the sugar-growers, both in their
attitudes towards their employees, and in the conditions provided
for work. Warily, contentiously, growers and cane-cutters,
millers and mill-hands came to grips with the problems of
reconciling White Australia not merely with the continued
prosperity of the sugar industry but with the settlement and
development of Australia’s northern frontier.

3Mr E. G. Lascelles, Proscrinc.
5V. & P., 1893, III, p. 917. But the Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator, 15 July 1892,
gives 73 farms of 3,194 acres as the figures for the Herbert. Note that these figures
are exclusive of company-owned acreages.
6Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator, 15 Aug. 1893; Colonial Sugar Refining Co.,
Report (half-yearly), 30 Sept. 1893.
7P.D.T., 12 Mar. 1891.
8Ibid., 9 Feb. 1895.
9Mackay Mercury, 6 Mar. 1892.
10D. K. Dignan, 'Kanaka Political Struggle' (B.A. Hons. Thesis, University of
Queensland, 1955).
12Cairns Morning Post, 25 Feb. 1897.
14Queenslander, 26 Nov. 1895.
15R. Shepherd, 'Herbert River Story', Herbert River Express, 4 and 11 May 1957.
16B. H. Molesworth, op. cit., Ch. XII.
17P. D.T., 21 Sept. 1889; report from Cairns Chronicle.
18Mulgrove Central Mill: Fifty Years in Retrospect, Cairns, 1945, pp. 108-9 (reminis-
cences of Ernest Sues).
19Colonial Sugar Refining Co., South Pacific Enterprise, Sydney, 1956, p. 32.
20C.P.D., XIII, p. 790.
21V. & P., 1901, IV, p. 275.
22Ibid., p. 278.
23Ibid., 1898, II, p. 715; 1899 1st session, p. 1325; 1900, IV, p. 689; 1901, IV, p. 1075.
25Age (Melbourne), 8 Oct. 1901.
26Barron Valley Advocate, 10 May 1905.
27Courier, 18 Apr. 1905.
28R. Shepherd, 'Herbert River Story', Herbert River Express, 4 May 1957.
29C.C.M., Mar. 1937, p. 15.
30Mr E. C. Lacaze.
31North Queensland Register, 10 Mar. 1913.
32For an account of this family I am indebted to Miss Constance Mackness’s
unpublished history of the Clump Point area, and to Mr L. Alexander of Charters
Towers.
C.C.M., Mar. 1937, p. 17.


Q.P.D., XCVI, p. 658.


17 Chinese with opium pipe, Palmer goldfields, about 1877

From the Daintree Collection
Indian Summer on the Goldfields, 1890-1913

Goldmining had ended its pioneering phase with the great slump of 1888-9. There was no longer much demand for the qualities of the pioneer prospector. His easy readiness to shift from one find to another, his free spending, his willingness to take big chances benefited nobody but the speculators. It was now time for the planned development of known resources with adequate capital. Many of the best miners, rejecting a lifetime on wages, were off to Western Australia, South Africa, or New Guinea, where new discoveries were still to be made. Others continued to hope that, even on fields that had been worked over for twenty years, hidden deposits might still lie waiting for the fortunate or the discerning.

Small rushes fed these hopes over a number of years. On the range country at the edge of the Atherton Tableland there were strikes at Culpa in 1889, Mareeba in 1893, and Balcooma in 1896, but all were short lived. The Etheridge was a prolific source of such finds. There was still alive in Cairns as lately as 1959, alert and able to enjoy his game of cribbage in the evening, Galloway Johnson, founder of the Percy rush in 1892. Two inexperienced young prospectors in 1895 found payable gold on the very racecourse at Georgetown, where hundreds of miners must have passed before them, intent probably on another form of speculation. As late as 1907 the discovery of alluvial and reef gold at the Oaks was of real value in revivifying the Etheridge. But while these finds kept alive the flame of optimism among many old hands, they contributed only an insignificant fraction of North Queensland’s output of gold. Prospecting was mostly the small-scale endeavour of men growing old, men whose discoveries no longer had the power to bring excited hundreds hastening to the scene, and whose main concern was to stay independent of wage work and the last resort to the charity of an old men’s home.

The most encouraging centre for prospecting was Coen, high up on the Cape York Peninsula, where the abortive rush of 1878-80 had left standing a solitary loop-holed log hut as mute
witness to the spirited opposition that could be expected from the local Aborigines. These hazards had not discouraged occasional prospectors from drifting north to try their luck. Several prospecting areas were pegged out in 1886, and within three years a one-street township of tents and bark huts had struggled to life, with a hotel, store, butcher, twenty-six European miners, and about the same number of Chinese fossickers and woodcutters. In 1892 the Coen goldfield was officially proclaimed, and within the next few years the erection of batteries and a cyanide works gave the northern Peninsula a permanent base for prospecting expeditions. Discoveries followed. Bowden and Cairns reported gold and antimony on the Starcke River in December 1890. For a while two hundred men were gully-raking in the neighbourhood, but with so little success that the field was abandoned by 1894. Twice it revived, in 1895 and 1898, each time relapsing into dereliction after a few years. Throughout its life it produced little more than four thousand ounces of gold, less than an average-sized mine on the main reef of Charters Towers in one good year. Even shorter-lived was William Baird's find on the Batavia in August 1892, of which the most that could be said was that it left in destitution none of the 150 men who rushed there to average a return of three to four ounces apiece.

A more rewarding discovery was credited to John Dickie, one of the oldest and hardiest of the Peninsula battlers, who opened up the Hamilton field fifteen miles south-west of Coen in August 1899. Named for the local member of parliament, the Hamilton offered both reef gold and alluvial, but was at first kept back by a fierce drought. With the breaking of the season, the township of Ebagoolah was hastily put together at a good spot for permanent water—this showed that somebody had learned from experience, as most previous mining towns had gone where the gold was best, without regard to civic amenities—and a rush of miners, estimated at between five and eight hundred, set in during the early months of 1900. Within the first year they found gold worth over £45,000, nearly all of it alluvial. For a 'poor man's field', however, the distribution of ore was too patchy. 'One man got 160 ounces out of a small hole this week—the next claims all round are getting very little,' wrote one prospector, 'But that is Ebagoolah all over. You get a lot, or nothing.' Those with the eyes of faith compared the field to Croydon at the same age, undeterred by a complete absence of outside capital. With only a shovel and tomahawk as equipment, some miners contrived
to sink shafts stoutly timbered with logs eight feet long and eight inches in diameter, which had been cut and barked half a mile from their claim, and then carried to the shaft by sheer manpower. But long life was not destined for Ebagoolah, and a decade sufficed to exhaust the field’s most accessible gold, and leave it unpeopled, save for a few persistent old fossickers.

The early years of the century saw several more finds on the Peninsula, most of which survived barely long enough to find a name on the map. There was a small rush in November 1902 to Potallah, eighty miles south of Ebagoolah. This lasted only until the following July, when a report by John Dickie of payable gold had two hundred men making off for the Alice River, thirty miles further. Sufficient reefing claims were taken up here to warrant the proclamation of a new goldfield, the Philp, and a townsite, Imooya; but only about thirty men remained by the end of the year. They must have been the most interesting collection of veterans brought together in one mining camp. They included John Dickie, with a quarter of a century’s experience in every corner of the Peninsula; Henry Harbord, who pioneered the Limestone rush in 1887; Pat Fox, the tough old squatter whose party retrieved gold worth £1,800 from one crushing that must have been worth several years of battling after cattle in the Cape York backblocks; even James Venture Mulligan himself, grey-bearded now but ever hopeful. They stuck at this hot, quiet outpost for a year or two, but the returns of gold soon ceased to justify their work. After a severe outbreak of fever in 1905, when it was the experience—and quinine—of these old hands that held the community together, men began to drift away from the Philp, and within a year it was deserted.

Several other discoveries were made around Coen, but hard conditions and remoteness extinguished whatever poor prospects existed in these fields. For similar reasons, it was only during a few years of exceptionally high prices that attempts were made to work the deposits of wolfram on the Pascoe and tin on the Archer, reported at this period by prospectors on the western watershed of the Peninsula. Quite unnoticed went a geologist’s report of 1902 suggesting the presence of bauxite on the western coast high up towards Cape York. The development of Weipa was left for over fifty years, to a generation more interested in strategic materials than in the restless search for gold that animated so many of the first generation of North Queenslanders.

Such a scale of values would have astonished North Queens-
A Thousand Miles Away

Before 1900 the base metals were considered a useful standby for prospectors, but yielded hardly one-tenth of the region's income from mineral wealth. Gold was the standby whose value the fluctuations of overseas markets could scarcely move, and among the gold-producing centres Charters Towers was far and away pre-eminent. Throughout the nineties and the early years of this century over two-thirds of North Queensland's gold came from this one field. Croydon followed at a distance, with Ravenswood and the Etheridge next, until after 1901 Ravenswood's production doubled, while Croydon slid into a decline. The Palmer and the Hodgkinson contributed comparatively little.

All these minor goldfields led a rather hand-to-mouth existence. Except for Croydon and Ravenswood they lacked the railway that would have brought cheap freights, and perhaps attracted outside capital. Working under high costs with local finance, each of these fields tended to proliferate a lot of small, under-capitalized, badly-worked mines, whose owners had to take quick profits from the richest seams, without considering future development. Concerted action to provide a dam or modern crushing machinery would have alleviated some of these difficulties, but the mine-owners were individualists all, and rarely co-operated. Instead, hopes rested on that figure of plenty, the outside capitalist. Charters Towers provided a deceptive model. Because reef gold had been found at depth on the Towers, sometimes in quantities large enough to recompense even British capitalists purchasing mining properties at inflated values, every other mining field cherished the hope that testing at depth would reveal wealth in similar deposits. It was seldom that mining policy was directed towards the economical working of the comparatively shallow deposits already identified.

Ravenswood was the exception that proved what could be made of a second-class goldfield. Here the experience of a number of intelligent mine managers, schooled by years of studying the problems of Ravenswood's tantalizing geology, led the field into a modest revival during the nineties. Mine managements eschewed high living and lavish dividends, and profits were re-invested in modern mining machinery. A number of properties were brought under one management by the most astute of all Ravenswood's mining men, A. L. Wilson. Raising British capital to form the New Ravenswood Company, Wilson acquired a number of mines from the Queensland National Bank, which had been left holding
Indian Summer on the Goldfields, 1890–1913

them after the 1888 slump. By integrating the management of several properties, Wilson was able to keep all his men in employment and to embark on a planned programme of improvement and development. Dams were provided to combat dry seasons, old machinery was scrapped for new as soon as occasion required, and tramways and hauling apparatus did away with the old methods of shifting ore by hand. The results were a small boom that lifted Ravenswood for several years, and while much of the credit was due to Wilson, ‘the uncrowned king of Ravenswood’ as he was often called, his careful methods were by no means unique in this field.

Croydon presented a contrast. Apparently blessed with greater resources—in 1896 it produced 43,018 ounces of gold, as against 12,420 at Ravenswood—Croydon lost its opportunities through inefficiency. Granted that its progress had been retarded first by the depression and drought of 1888–9 and next by the bank crash of 1893, its methods of work still seemed inexcusably backward. Of 134 mines at work when the geologist W. H. Rands visited the district, half were still operated on the old-fashioned, man-powered windlass, and only twenty-seven used steam-driven winding gear. Rands wrote:

The workings of many of the mines somewhat resemble rabbit warrens: only just the richest stone has been followed and worked out, and often it requires three or four separate workings to get the stone from the working face to the surface, and the profit is to a great extent swallowed up by this unnecessary work; whereas if the mine had been properly opened out by sinking a good working shaft and driving fair-sized levels, the poorer grades of stone could have been won at a profit.4

It was not only the small miner without capital who came under these strictures. The syndicates and companies of Croydon tended to abandon work immediately returns began to diminish, without exploring their holdings; made no attempt to repel the inflow of water by pumping; and instead of co-operating to provide the field with a decent water supply, each muddled along with its own insignificant dam that usually dried out by December. Even when a few mines were sold to outside interests in 1895, the situation improved very little, and a disastrous fire that destroyed most of the main block of the town in May 1897 was a further setback. It was only for a year or two after a Charters Towers syndicate opened out the Golden Gate line of reef that Croydon enjoyed a
short flush of prosperity, and by 1901 this too was fading. From that date the field was continually on the decline, and by 1907 the shallow ground was reported to be exhausted. Only a few company-owned mines were still paying their way along the Golden Gate, and here success was tarnished by the fact that these mines had one of the worst records for phthisis in Queensland. Although the gold simply did not exist to turn Croydon into a successful deep-reefing field, careful and co-ordinated management along the same lines as Ravenswood would have avoided the wastage of resources that shortened its career as an active producer.

Much the same could be said of the Etheridge, where the scattered extent of numerous shallow reefs destined the field to be a 'poor man's diggings'. One pocket of gold-bearing ore would be worked for two or three years, then, as returns dwindled, attention would shift to another deposit, more easily worked. The story of the Percy was the story of a good many Etheridge workings:

The first surface crushings paid well, but with the miners’ usual reckless mode of trusting to Providence for future crushings, which never seem to have turned out well, there was seldom if ever any balance to work upon. Consequently the storekeepers shut their books and refused credit.

Working on such limited capital, it was small wonder that many miners kept to the old-fashioned windlass and greenhide bucket, and abandoned mine-shafts as soon as values began to fall. The Etheridge was a district of Micawbers, waiting for a railway or an outside investor to turn up.

In the event, neither produced much benefit. In 1902 an Adelaide investor named Lindsay took up considerable areas of ground, and talked grandiosely of building a railway to Georgetown, so that the heavy sulphide ores and concentrates with which so much Etheridge gold was mixed could be hauled away cheaply for treatment. Lindsay did not deliver the goods, and the Etheridge waited for its railway until 1907, when the Chillagoe Company extended its line to Charleston, or Forsyth as it was re-named, and bought up several of the most reliably producing mines. By this time the gold deposits of the Etheridge were so ravaged and depleted that it seemed doubtful whether the company would ever recoup the expenditure considered necessary on machinery and transport. Salvation came too late to benefit
Indian Summer on the Goldfields, 1890–1913

either the Etheridge or its capitalist. Nor was there much to note
in the history of the Palmer and the Hodgkinson during these
years. On the Hodgkinson the modest success of one syndicate
breathed a faint spark of life into the old Kingsborough township;
but from the Palmer came only the returns of a few old pros­
spectors, many of them elderly Chinese gully-raking a creek for
the third or fourth time, and occasional rumours of outside
investment which never managed to lead to anything.

What a contrast was Charters Towers, that proud, vigorous
city whose 25,000 inhabitants modestly called it ‘The World’!
The second city of Queensland, it claimed to have carried the
state’s finances through the critical year 1902, when drought and
labour problems assailed most primary production and the
Queensland Government ran so short of funds that many senior
civil servants had to be retrenched. As the shafts went deeper
along the Brilliant and Day Dawn lines of reef, it seemed that the
reserves of gold were illimitable. When the Brilliant Extended
cut a new reef at 2,000 feet in December 1893, this was held to
prove the existence of enough deep gold ‘to guarantee the per­
manence of the field for another half-century’. Another reef was
cut in the same mine at 2,558 feet in December 1896, although
for a while working was held up through the action of some
unknown malcontent who exploded twenty-five pounds of
dynamite in a steel bucket on the edge of the shaft, wrecking the
top fittings and closing the mine for some months. A further
boom came in 1902 when the Queen Cross, previously thought
to be worked out, located a rich new seam. Meanwhile, estab­
lished mines continued a tally of unceasing productivity. ‘Month
after month,’ wrote Warden Macdonald in 1897, ‘the golden
stream has flowed on with a calm stateliness, impressive from its
very monotony.’ By the end of that year forty registered com­
panies on this field had paid out over three million pounds in
dividends.

Behind this facade of prosperity, some disquieting features went
unregarded. It was seldom thought necessary to point out that the
total paid-up capital of Charters Towers mining companies in
1897 was £3,857,693 (having been written down from £4½
million in the previous year), so that output had yet to match
investment. And over three-quarters of the three million in
dividends had been derived from seven mines, including three
properties on the Day Dawn line and two on the Brilliant. Where British capitalists had paid high sums for a mine during
the 1886 boom, they got their money back slowly, if at all. The Day Dawn Block and Wyndham, purchased in August 1886 for £442,000, had paid only 20s. 3d. per share over the next sixteen years. The No. 2 Queen paid only 36 per cent in twenty years; the Mosman yielded no dividends at all. Control even of the British-owned mines was almost completely vested in local directors and capitalists, and their influence on methods of working and development were not altogether beneficial.

On the credit side, it was generally conceded that underground working was efficient, even although the shafts of many mines were too small, having been driven originally with no intention of plumbing as deeply as the levels beyond two thousand feet. Considerable effort was made to meet problems of ventilation, and the installation of Capell fans did something to relieve working conditions in which the underground temperature often stood at 105° Fahrenheit. Once ore was brought to the surface, however, its handling was often inefficient and extravagant. Usually the ore was dumped to the ground, shovelled by manpower into carts, and transported some distance to a stamping battery across the dusty streets of the town. In Warden Sellheim's opinion, Charters Towers had too many mills: 'Instead of working a group of mines as one concern, a system to which to a very large extent the marvellous expansion of mining in South Africa is due, almost every little mine here must have a mill of its own.' But in fact few of the mines owned a mill; the stampers were often the property of one of the local directors, who skimmed a profit of between 6s. and 12s. per ton of stone. This practice was roundly condemned by a visiting Johannesburg mining engineer, William Blane, in 1901:

... It is difficult to speak temperately on the subject. The ruling price paid for milling in Charters Towers is 14s. per ton. This is more than double what it should cost. The marvel is that any mining company or community survives it ... It may be argued that mining companies are not able to have their own mills, but it is difficult for any one to understand why companies with such margins to throw away cannot have mills, when private individuals who do not own a mine can afford to build them ... This state of things is probably the worst of its kind anywhere ... The amount crushed by the mills is absurdly small—2 tons per stamp per day being considered good work. Public mill-owners are cautioned by their customers not to rush the stuff through for fear the gold may be lost by rapid transit over the plates, and mining companies owning mills seem to have the same idea. It may be said at once that this idea is wrong.
The toll taken by the mill-owners was a hardy little racket, which lasted almost until the last days of Charters Towers. It was only in 1909 that one mill lowered its charge to 4s. 3d. It would be difficult to estimate how much the millers side-tracked which might have been re-invested in the more effective development of the mines.

Unenterprising and conservative management was also apparent in the treatment of ‘tailings’, the residues left after ore had been treated in the crushing-mills. Mining companies showed little interest in attempting to recover the gold remaining in the tailings, and were in the habit of selling them to a pyrites works for calcination and chlorination. A cheaper and more efficient method of extraction was introduced in 1892; this was the McArthur-Forrest cyanide process. Although used with some success at Croydon from 1894, the McArthur-Forrest process met with apathy or hostility from most mine managers in Charters Towers, and it was not until one or two small, independent firms had garnered a neat profit from the purchase of tailings for cyanidation that progress resulted.* Previously tailings had been dumped over a period of twenty years into the Gladstone and Millchester Creeks that ran from Charters Towers to the Burdekin. With the realization in 1897 that these sands would repay treatment by the cyanide process, a rush set in for pegging mineral lands along the creeks and several miles down the Burdekin. With a gold content ranging from two pennyweight to several ounces per ton, these river sands repaid the cheap process of cyanidation at 5s. a ton. By 1899, when gold production in Charters Towers reached a record figure of 319,572 fine ounces, slightly over half this figure was due to gold recovered from tailings. Yet few of the mining companies benefited from this boom. Except for the rare company owning a cyanide plant, most managements sold their tailings by public tender, and thus lost the profits from what should have been a department of their own business. The cyanide operators, on their side, often lost money through having to cart their sands considerable distances between the crushing-mill and their plant; many of their works were moreover small and crude. By 1902 the bulk of the river sands had been worked out, and cyaniding became limited to treating the output of the mills as they became available.

*See the comments of G. Blainey, ‘Technology and History’, *Business Archives and History.*
By 1900 the need for economical treatment should have been growing plain to the mine managements. Production from the deep mines had levelled out and was showing a slight tendency to decrease, which was obscured by the expectation of further discoveries like the Queen Cross. This optimism was not altogether fatuous. Charters Towers gold had been found mainly in parallel reefs lying one above the other, the majority of them not extending much over 1,000 feet. Their discovery had been usually a matter of chance during the sinking of vertical openings, for it was usual to test only those new formations that showed promise when exposed. \textsuperscript{13} That the Queen Cross would prove to be the last of these finds was something for which past experience had not prepared Charters Towers. But in the view of a competent observer like William Blane, working costs at £3 per ton of stone were ‘phenomenally high’, and amply attested the lack of competent mining engineers. ‘Unless the best men are obtained and allowed to carry on work in the most advanced methods,’ he warned, ‘it is difficult to see how the district, even with a reef averaging £4 6s. 7d. per ton, can survive another decade . . .’ \textsuperscript{14} And, drawing on his experience of the Rand, he urged that there should be some amalgamation of mining companies and centralization of management, to ensure the purposeful development of the deep levels.

His advice went unheard in a community which still believed in 1903 that ‘the prospects of the field never looked brighter’. \textsuperscript{15} Co-operation would have gone against the grain with the Towers mining men, and because of the over-capitalization of most properties in the eighties, no single management had the means, even if it had the inclination, to buy out its competitors. The most powerful of the Towers magnates was probably Thomas Mills, a hard-bargaining Londoner who, by taking up mining leases along the streets of Charters Towers, had ‘gridironed’ and so gained control of a sizeable section of the Day Dawn reef; and his talent was rather for share-promotion than mining engineering. No other mine-owner had the means to seize control of the field, even if public opinion had been less sensitive than it was about monopolists. The one portent of a more efficient order of things was the establishment, in 1900, of the Charters Towers School of Mines. Even this was belated—it had been urged on the Towers for over twenty years—but it provided at last a nucleus of young men trained to better standards of mining than the old ‘rule-of-thumb’. Charters Towers held its School of Mines
in considerable prestige, and could have been no prouder of its young men if they had been university graduates.

Working conditions in the deep mines varied considerably. All had built changing houses for the men coming off duty (if only as a check on pilfering); a number provided showers and lavatories. Conditions underground, though fairly closely regulated by a number of pieces of legislation culminating in the great Mining Act of 1898, were sufficiently hazardous; of about 2,100 underground miners employed on the field, 71 were killed and 364 injured in the ten years 1891–1900. But the underground miners had their compensations. Usually the first to hear information about new and promising developments, they used their information to dabble on the stock exchange, undeterred by the fate of the small investors in 1888. Some—but by no means all—found more direct ways of helping themselves to the wealth of the Towers. There was more gold sold to the banks than ever went through the batteries and the cyanide works, and loyalty among workmates meant that few miners were ever convicted of pilfering. As Norman Dungavell writes:

When gold was free, and it often was, in those days, a few deft hammer strokes shed the quartz and shaped the metal to a convenient size and shape. Most miners smoked pipes, a pennyweight or two could easily be covered by Derby or Havelock tobacco in a reasonably capacious bowl. This was considered good beer money. Other miners with greater temerity carried larger pieces under the armpits, between the buttocks, in the mouth, in crib bags, in billy cans, in waterbags, and the red puggy clay used for holding and sticking the candles to the wall was often a handy hiding place.

Mill employees were also exposed to temptation, and it could be said in their justification that the mill-owners with their excessive charges hardly set an example of commercial morality. The average miner was sufficiently moral to resist the more flagrant forms of wrong-doing, but sufficiently easygoing not to inform on a less scrupulous mate.

The risks and hazards of his calling gave the underground miner an added zest for all his recreations. Boxing and cock-fighting had been the favourite sports of the seventies, but the next generation of miners preferred cycling—introduced about 1892—and, above all, Rugby football. The great days of this game on Charters Towers dated from 1892, when Harry Speakman, who had played half-back for England and captained Queensland,
came to live on the field for eight or nine years. Under his tuition the local players reached a high standard. Four teams came into being—the Rainbows, Queens, Natives, and Tourists—whose fortunes were followed with the most intense partisanship, each team having its stronghold in a different section of Charters Towers. Players and spectators would come by foot or cycle from the outlying mining camps, as far as thirty miles away, and throughout the winter months Sunday afternoons were consecrated to the sport. After producing a number of well-known players, such as the Richards brothers and ‘Dandy’ Egan, the Towers reached the zenith of its sporting fame when its team won the country championships at Brisbane in 1908, defeating all comers.18

Apart from sport, music was the most popular activity on Charters Towers; a heritage partly from the Welsh and Cornish element among the miners. From an early stage the Towers boasted one or more brass bands. These were a favourite form of musical expression in many mining communities, and no Saturday night was complete in Charters Towers without two rival brass bands competing with the Salvation Army for the attention of the crowds. For technical ability, however, some hearers considered that the brass bands of Herberton and Irvinebank ranked highest in North Queensland. The specialty of Charters Towers was choral singing. The first Eisteddfod, held in 1889, was largely contested between church choirs, with the United Wesleyans judged first for their ‘Hallelujah Chorus’. But a more secular interest soon showed itself with the formation of the Charters Towers Liedertafel* in 1892, which, although originally intended as a somewhat socially exclusive organization, soon found a following on a more popular basis and gained a wide reputation. It formed strong backing for subsequent Eisteddfods, which brought into prominence one or two singers who later achieved some measure of fame on the professional stage. Perhaps the most notable of these was Gladys Moncrieff, who in 1907 shared the prize for the soprano solo, ‘O for the Wings of a Dove’. But even among singers who had not attained competitive standard, a keen choral tradition grew up that lasted many years on Charters Towers.

While men no longer made over their cheques to the publicans with the order to ‘Hold this till it’s all drunk out’, a tradition of

*Renamed the Curlews during World War I.
generous spending and lavish hospitality survived in strength on Charters Towers and the other mining fields. Gregory Mathews, a young jackaroo on Bluff Downs Station, found it a pleasant place on his periodical visits:

One often heard stories of men who had acquired wealth quickly by lucky speculation. Then they would build nice houses and blossom out into leading entertainers. I remember one man who bought a very nice house from a less fortunate family, and there was a great house-warming party, everybody of any social standing being invited to it, irrespective of whether the host and hostess had known them previously or not. I was one of the gay young bachelors who were invited. We were met by our host in full evening dress. He was standing on the verandah steps, saying, 'This way to the drinks, ladies and gentlemen.' The verandah ran round three sides of the house, and on each wing he had a 'bar' complete even to golden-haired barmaids. We passed on from bar to bar in a state of great satisfaction ... It was a most enjoyable evening; but unfortunately our thanks were lost on our host and hostess, when the time came to say farewell, as the former was lying in the garden and the latter in the hall ... 

Once when I had come in from the station and was staying at the Crown Hotel, a man, faultlessly attired in riding clothes from England, rode up to the hotel at 10 o'clock in the morning, and, leaving his horse with the groom, ordered a bottle of champagne, drank half a glass, threw a couple of sovereigns on the counter, and then walked out. He merely did it to impress us with his importance. Judge of our surprise when, in the afternoon, we saw this same man being driven in his carriage-and-pair along the street, dressed as a miner and smoking a clay pipe, while the coachman in livery was smoking a fat cigar.19

Perhaps the most glorious evening in Charters Towers history was Mafeking night, for many Towers men had gone to the Transvaal after gold in the nineties, and popular sympathy was strongly against the Boers. 'The Exchanges closed down,' wrote an eye-witness, 'and men never known to drink before were quaffing champagne and cheering with the best of them.20 From the balcony of Collins's Hotel a popular tenor, supported by two jockeys, led the Mosman Street crowd in a series of patriotic songs, while church and fire bells pealed, Cornish and Welsh miners sang glee s, and the thousands in the streets blocked all traffic, cheering, roaring choruses, and occasionally clearing a space for fights. 'That was a night indeed, and how our heads ached the next morning. But it was worth it.'21

Behind these outbreaks of ebullience lay a solid record of civic progress. In contrast to their previous deplorable water supply
the people of Charters Towers had since 1890 the benefit of the Burdekin scheme, probably the best in North Queensland. (An interesting order of priorities was shown by the fact that the Burdekin Brewery, whose beer quenched the thirst of Towers miners, was in business seven years before the town got its water supply.) Gas and electricity lit their city; their businessmen could converse after 1891 by telephone; their morning paper, the *Northern Miner*, became in 1895 the first in all Queensland to be printed by linotype. Along Mosman Street banks arose with colonnaded porticos and opulent panelling, hotels added a second storey with a long verandah-balcony, shops thrive and expanded. It was a lively scene that greeted an up-country visitor from the Atherton Tableland:

... About 10 o'clock every morning from everywhere the ladies flock on foot, in buggies of which there must be thousands, in little pony sulkies drawn by little ponies driven by Amazonian damsels, and keep moving up and down the streets all day, passing in and out of the shops... till it's time to go home to get the afternoon meal ready. Then at night about 8 o'clock the men come out and move slowly in squads, or stand in groups all over the streets, and the oyster-saloons, fruit-stalls and the like, not to mention circuses, theatres, armies and churches are then as busy as can be. About 11 o'clock everyone goes God knows where to bed, and the next day the same thing starts over again... but Saturday night licks all the others put together, for both the women of the morning and the men of the evening, with the children who have been at school during the week chucked in, congregate after tea and fill the streets and shops to overflowing, and the buses and cabs and such things go some other way on their rounds.22

So the week ended on Charters Towers, and at midnight on Saturday the thud of stampers in the crushing mills ceased, to resume at midnight on Sunday. 'Any old hand will recall that both at the starting and the terminal poundings the whole of the sleeping population awoke to the call of the stampers';23 they were the background and the life of Charters Towers.

On a smaller scale every mining town of any consequence had the same zest and sociability, although drunkenness had decreased greatly since the early nomadic days. Croydon at the turn of the century was still sufficiently prosperous to support six blacksmiths, five drapers, three newspapers, three solicitors, four watchmakers, even two lady music teachers. As at Charters Towers, dance halls, shooting galleries, a town band, and billiard saloons amused the leisure of miners on a Saturday night.
Indian Summer on the Goldfields, 1890–1913

The same tradition of an open-air Saturday evening where everyone met their friends and strolled about the shops flourished at Ravenswood, where the evening customarily began with the arrival of the mail train at dusk: ‘... half the male population squatted on the rails of the bridge close to the post office, and when the letter delivery window opened it was the signal for the crowd to rise as one just like, as one old timer put it, “a flock of galahs taking wing”’. The only draw which could entice many indoors on a Saturday night was the visit of a theatre company. The fare offered was not sophisticated: ‘The Silver King’ was a favourite melodrama, ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ was another. Even the tough-minded socialists who ran the Eagle praised as a ‘really good show’ the Fitzmaurice-Gill company’s presentation of *The Bank of England*, which played to spontaneous applause from crowded houses. It was a wonderful farrago, with a bank clerk hero in love with the daughter of one of the directors (an aged earl); moustache-twirling villains; kidnapping; one of those classic scenes where the hero was strapped to a barrel of gunpowder; and finally rescue through the intervention of Sherlock Holmes and a somewhat unexpected American widow who became Mrs. Holmes. Perhaps Hollywood has not corrupted popular standards to any great extent.

Even in these opening years of the twentieth century, when the mining communities spent their money and took their amusements with a gusto which is still a lively memory for many, the first signs of decay were beginning to show in the gold-mining industry. It was not merely that the outside fields were beginning to show lower yields; that could be blamed on outmoded working methods, and the failure of the government or outside capitalists to probe the deep reefs which even geologists and mining men thought must exist on the Hodgkinson, the Croydon, and who knew how many other fields? But on Charters Towers itself, even when allowance was made for the exhaustion of the accumulated tailings for cyaniding, there was after 1903 a slow but steady fall in the output of the rich central mines. Some attempts were made to compensate for this by re-opening the neglected ‘outside’ reefs south and west of the Towers, and the Broughton, Rishton and a new settlement at Liontown came to life for a few years.

These developments could not arrest the decline; each year from 1904 to 1907 saw production between twenty and thirty thousand fine ounces lower than the year before. Opinion in the mining industry was largely unconcerned, and a variety of plausible
theories attempted to explain away the figures. A more efficient method of working was being adopted, wrote one warden, with the emphasis on exploration and development before exploitation.\textsuperscript{26} The proven mines on the field were producing as well as ever, wrote another; it was just that no spectacular new deposits were inflating figures abnormally.\textsuperscript{27} It was, indeed, hard to form a clear picture of the mining scene on Charters Towers, for as one famous producer started to wane, another would light upon a good seam and appear to recover. The dividend list for the field was the most reliable barometer, and its report was sobering; from £456,958 in 1903 aggregate dividends fell steadily each year to £100,980 in 1908, while over the same period gold production went from 285,771 to 162,270 fine ounces. The optimists were whistling in the dark.

Most mine managers were sustained by the long-held faith that on Charters Towers values improved with depth. Along the Brilliant line of reef payable shoots of ore were being found at depths of up to three thousand feet, and although the expense and difficulty of working was increasing in proportion with depth, the example of the South African Rand fed hopes on the Towers. Several properties on the Brilliant line were cheered by the expectation that a continuation of the Day Dawn reef ran parallel to the Brilliant, several hundred feet further underground; but where the second reef was picked up, it seemed destitute of payable ore, and the managements were obliged to take to exploration once more. One or two companies had modest success with old properties which had been left in the 1888 slump without thorough working, but their contributions could hardly arrest the decline. One by one the great mines of Charters Towers reached their finish. The Queen Cross in 1904 paid dividends of £220,000 and employed 250 men; but its next year’s dividend was its last, and by 1910 only fifteen men earned their wages from this mine. Between 1903 and 1910 the staff of the Brilliant Central was reduced from 275 to 40, the Band of Hope from 110 to 25, the Victoria and Queen from 104 to 2. Such decreases were a general trend, relieved by the two or three successful mines that found it necessary to take on more hands as they went deeper. In those same years the Brilliant Extended enlarged its manpower from 120 to 447, and Mills’ Day Dawn United from 46 to 243.

The result was that unemployment among miners, as the played-out properties closed down, was to some extent masked. In fact

\textbf{19} \textit{Bullock team fording the Barron River, about 1880}

From the Daintree Collection
20 Trafalgar claim, Coen

Both by courtesy of the Royal Queensland Historical Society

Brady's coach
employment continued to increase steadily on the field as a whole until the peak year of 1905, when the number of miners rose sharply from 2,959 to 4,285; \(^{28}\) after that a decline set in, but as late as 1910 there were still 2,631 men at work in the Charters Towers mines, almost as many as there had been in 1903. Because, however, many established mines were laying off more and more men each year, a considerable number of miners experienced temporary spells of unemployment, and not all of these were content to go back to underground mining when they found their next job. Conditions at the deep levels were often uncomfortable, and the incidence of miners' phthisis was apparently increasing, although it was difficult to gauge because sufferers were usually reluctant to divulge their illness. Of all the Charters Towers mines, the Brilliant Extended, which employed the most hands, had the most unhealthy reputation. \(^{29}\) Such circumstances increased the urge among many miners to look elsewhere for a job, especially as the ultimate future of the field became a subject of growing uncertainty.

Two men, Frederick Martindale and William Niven, formed an Unemployment Association which did much to meet these problems. Niven was secretary of the organization, and Martindale a proprietor of a barber's shop, in the window of which notices could be placed of available opportunities. \(^{30}\) By 1906 they were receiving a considerable number of applications for men from the sugar-growers of the coast, who, confronted with the loss of their coloured labour, were anxious for a reliable supply of Europeans with the background and physical capabilities required for cane-cutting and fieldwork. These qualifications were met by the miners. Hot and humid conditions were nothing new to underground workers, and most of those who tried cane-cutting expressed a distinct preference for open-air work. An added attraction was the possibility that, after a few years' experience in the canefields, the ex-miner might have a chance of taking up land in the sugar districts on his own account, and at last breaking free of his deteriorating status as a 'wages man'. Martindale was fully alive to these possibilities. In 1908 a group of miners meeting at his shop organized themselves into a settlement party to take up land at Boar Pocket on the Atherton Tableland:

When the land was balloted for, and every man knew his number, those who could afford it went up the year before to fall enough scrub to burn off and start the farm. The miners made good farmers as their
heart and soul was in the land after being in the mines all their lives...

From 1910 opportunities were also plentiful on the sugar lands, and during these years the exodus from Charters Towers and the other goldfields towns became pronounced. In three years the number of miners employed at Charters Towers fell from 2,631 to 985 in 1913, the total population from 22,035 to 17,159.

As returns fell, a note of despondency, tempered by occasional snatches of frantic optimism, crept into the successive annual reports of the mining wardens. Every remaining mine was at work driving shafts in hope of picking up some new reef, but despite government subsidies, results were on the whole unrewarding. The situation had got beyond the power of individual effort, and illustrated the wisdom of the South African, Blane, who in 1901 had preached unheard the virtues of cooperation and co-ordination. At this eleventh hour development on a scale big enough to meet the crisis could be planned only by Thomas Mills, the tough Londoner who owned what was almost the last dividend-paying mine on the field. The consensus of mining opinion suggested that a shaft sunk in Lissner Park, just south of the town centre, would pick up the Day Dawn and Brilliant lines of reef at between three and four thousand feet. These reefs, if ore-bearing, and worked by a sufficiently well-planned shaft with modern equipment, would give the Towers a new lease of life. But such a venture would take four or five years to test, and the cost was estimated at £183,000, with perhaps a further £20,000 for a treatment plant.

Local interest was keen, especially after Mills amalgamated his own Day Dawn United with the Brilliant Deeps, one of the few other paying mines, and approached the government with a scheme to sink this shaft. His terms were a pound-for-pound subsidy, and a grant of over three hundred acres—an area considerably larger than any previous mining lease, but one justified by the extent of the project. A commission of inquiry, however, reported against the proposal. Most of the other mine managers of Charters Towers claimed that the scheme, even if practicable, would benefit only Mills and his shareholders, who, it seemed, could guarantee the raising of no more than £25,000 in ready capital. This was oddly disappointing, considering the wealth that had been won from Charters Towers in past years—as late as 1912 dividends totalled over £36,000—and the State
Treasurer, a cautious city-dweller, felt himself justified in turning down the proposition. But to this day residents of Charters Towers think that a shaft sunk in Lissner Park would open up the field once more, and date its decline from the refusal of this government aid. Certainly it was from this time that more and more families left the field. Increasingly it became common to see the plant and machinery of some formerly prosperous mine advertised for scrap iron.

It is easy enough, at this date, to explain why the goldfields of North Queensland did not survive longer. In the first place the boom of 1886-7 left many of the best mines over-capitalized, so that managements had to concentrate on chasing dividends rather than improving their working methods. No one company was rich enough to absorb the others and impose co-ordinated working on the main Charters Towers reefs, and voluntary co-operation was rare among the individualistic mine managers. The example of Ravenswood showed how a smaller, poorer field could be made productive through careful planning; indeed, as late as 1925, Ravenswood mines would still show a modest yield when the main line at Charters Towers was finished. The basic problem of gold-mining as a stable industry was that the true mining man seldom got beyond regarding his profession as something of a gamble. As one of the more articulate working miners put it, after thirty years' experience on almost every field from Croydon onward: 'Of course there is always the glorious uncertainty. If there were not, I would not be in it.' This attitude was all very well for the pioneer gold-seekers, but it scarcely made for a stable future.

Yet after allowing all this, and after recognizing that most of the dividends won from North Queensland gold were not re-invested in the district, gold had nevertheless served the North well. Communications between the ports and the inland would have advanced very slowly if there had been only the pastoral industry to stimulate railway-building and government expenditure. Private investment would have come less readily. Most important of all, gold had attracted and held a resident white population in North Queensland during the long period when the sugar industry was struggling to establish itself with the aid of coloured labour. All through the years when the sugar-growers had needed cheap labour to attract capital, to undertake the heavy pioneering work of clearing and establishing their properties, to tide them over the era of low sugar prices and
inadequate government protection, the goldfields were fostering a white Australian population who had come to regard the Australian tropics as their home. And, by what may only be described as the most fortunate of coincidences, mining declined only when the sugar industry had solved its marketing and labour problems and was ready to receive an intake of acclimatized white Australians. The gold industry’s most important contribution to North Queensland was not in dividends but in the miners and their families.


3Cf. the remarks of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire and report upon the laws relating to mining for gold and other minerals, V. & P. 1897, IV, p. 207: ‘There can be scarcely a doubt that new deep sinking goldfields of untellable richness will be discovered in several auriferous districts of the colony—as, for instance, the Palmer, Hodgkinson, Etheridge and Croydon.’


6Queenslander, 2 Nov. 1895.

7Ibid., 5 Jan. 1895.

8V. & P. 1898, IV, p. 34.

9Day Dawn P.C., £813,000; Day Dawn Block and Wyndham, £425,000; Brilliant £361,883; Mills’ Day Dawn United, £292,500; Victory, £255,925; Brilliant and St. George, £240,000; Victoria, £196,000. Figures from North Queensland Register, Mining History of Charters Towers, March 1897.


11V. & P. 1895, III, p. 452.


14W. Blane, op. cit., p. 345.


16Statistics given in V. & P. 1901, IV, p. 440.


18Ibid., pp. 34-9: ‘no team crossed their line in any of the above matches.’


20J. Black, North Queensland Pioneers, Charters Towers, 1931, p. 34.

21Ibid; at Bowen the relief of Ladysmith was similarly celebrated with free beer and demonstrations against suspected pro-Boers.

22Barron Valley Advocate, 26 July 1905.

23New Eagle, 5 May 1906.

24G. Pike, Over the Years, Townsville [1959], p. 35.


26Ibid., 1907, II, pp. 1042-3.
I am not sure where the increase came from, but the number employed on the Etheridge and Croydon fields was falling during that period, and some miners may have migrated thence to the Towers.


N. Q.R., 14 March 1953.


N. Dungavell, op. cit., p. 4.

Gold, even at the end of the nineteenth century, was no more than one of the objectives sought out by mining men in North Queensland. The base metal industry was beginning after 1897 to recover from a slump of several years, during which tin had fallen to £31 a ton, lead to £10 and copper to £50. Overseas the nineties were going out in wars and rumours of wars, and these meant good times for the metal market. Booms at Broken Hill and Mount Lyell illustrated the fortunes to be made by shrewd investors. Speculators scanned the map of Australia for undeveloped areas which promised likely returns, and soon lighted upon the Walsh and Tinaroo field lying at the back of Herberton. There in the rough country behind the Featherbed Range were half-a-dozen struggling little mining camps, whose names would shortly become the alluring highlights of many a prospectus. The ore deposits were fairly low-grade, but they seemed extensive: if treated locally on an unprecedentedly large scale, they might yield rich rewards. Surely the surface had hardly been scratched: if only overseas prices continued to hold firm...

At present the district depended largely on the propositions held by John Moffat and his associates, whose capital had pioneered the Chillagoe region in 1887 and kept it alive in the difficult years between. Chillagoe itself was little more than a station homestead. The main centre of this section of Moffat’s empire was a raw, goat-infested settlement called Calcifer, a hybrid name allegedly composed of the chemical terms for calcium, copper and iron. This consisted of no more than a bank, two pubs, and several galvanized iron shacks, including the ‘Calcifer Wallop Shop’, which sold soft drinks over the counter, and—so everyone said—more potent brews through the back door. A blast furnace set up by the Moffat interests gave the township its sustenance, and time itself was measured in Calcifer on a piece of steel slung in a tree and beaten with a hammer at 8 a.m., 1 p.m., 2 p.m. and 6 p.m.—the limits of the working day. Further west, Muldiva was a ghost town, Dargalong entirely abandoned and Zillmanton almost so. Activity was greatest
around a shallow group of mines bearing names chosen from the popular musical comedies of the day, Ruddigore, Iolanthe, Girofla. It was Girofla which gave its name to a one-street settlement serving this area. With growth, however, the township was rechristened Mungana, a name that many years later shook a Federal government and jeopardized the career of one of Australia's ablest politicians.

Almost from the start, the atmosphere of over-smart speculation and queer business deals hung over the Chillagoe field. Its beginnings were innocuous enough, and even showed a far-sightedness which previous mineral investment in North Queensland had often lacked. John Moffat held his Chillagoe leases on a twenty-one-year term dating from 1894. After investing £46,000 in the district, he realized that because of distance from the railhead at Mareeba and other developmental costs, its efficient exploitation was a task for large-scale capital, beyond his means to command. In 1897 he sold his Chillagoe interests to a Melbourne company, retaining only a holding of 25,000 shares. The new principals were C. W. Chapman and John Smith Reid. Reid was a former North Queenslander, a printer's devil on the old Port Denison Times, who had carried his type to the Ravenswood and Hodgkinson rushes and founded their first newspapers, before drifting off south to follow his calling at Silverton and Broken Hill during the eighties. Here he won wealth by promoting a much-needed private railway connecting those centres to the South Australian system. Keen to repeat such a profitable success, Smith Reid was now plunging deep into promoting a mining railway in Tasmania, and his thoughts turned readily to the North country that he had left twenty years ago. A line from Mareeba to Chillagoe and Mungana would not merely serve his own company's properties, but would tap the intervening country and carry traffic from the dozens of other mines that time would surely bring to life.

Reid and Chapman sounded the Queensland Government, and found them sympathetic. With the aftermath of the Queensland National Bank crash still sounding in their ears, the ministry was unwilling to spend its own revenue on pioneer mining railways, and was prepared to give the Chillagoe Company every reasonable facility. 'If the line were going through gold country,' said Robert Philp, 'he would hesitate about giving the concession asked for; but it was only copper country, and it was a pure speculation whether anything were made out of it. . .'."
In December 1897 parliament approved the construction of ninety-five miles of railway from Mareeba to Chillagoe, with gauge and standards to be of government specification, and with government right of purchase after fifty years of company running. For £1 an acre, double the customary fee, the company had a fifty-year mining leasehold of two thousand acres, exempt from the usual regulations specifying the number of men to be employed; it also leased 1,156 acres under normal conditions for twenty-five years. The railway wharf at Cairns was let to the company for twenty-one years. Most controversial of all, government approval was secured for the erection of an ore-reduction works above Barron Falls, generating electricity from the flow of the river.

Protests followed. Always on the lookout for evidence of the government’s involvement with the capitalist combines who were alleged to run Australian business, the Labour party thought they saw proof positive in the favours granted to the Chillagoe Company. The Barron Falls scheme was particularly vulnerable to attack, since many people in Cairns were worried about the possible pollution of the Lower Barron, as well as the ruination of a beauty spot which had come greatly into favour since the building of the Mareeba railway. The company tried to answer both points of criticism, but their technical explanations failed to still every doubt. Labour hostility went further. The vague instinctive fears of the old-fashioned prospectors welled up in their speeches. The company would use its privileges to screw down wages, the country should not be handed over to outsiders but left to be scratched over by independent working miners. The whole project of constructing a private railway was roundly condemned, even although the government could not possibly finance such a line. Certainly it was no field for the small prospector, considering the problems of transport and development; but when ‘Plumper’ Hoolan, in the most sensible speech of his whole parliamentary career, recognized these factors and announced his support of this attempt to develop the field adequately, it cost him the support of the Labour Party, and eventually his seat in parliament.

And in point of fact, despite their wrong-headed reasoning, Labour’s opposition proved justified. The Chillagoe Company had promised to develop the district by spending between £300,000 and £400,000, but it turned out to be curiously inefficient about testing its holdings before laying out its money.
Its test shafts were sunk in the wrong places: ‘small, pockety garnet formations have been worked as if they were permanent bodies, while big lodes, having ironstone and gossan cappings, containing carbonates of copper on the surface, with every appearance of sulphides below, are practically untouched’. The directors, however, preferred to publicize the report of a geologist named Stewart, brought up by Smith Reid from Broken Hill to state, on 30 June 1900, that no less than half a million tons of proven ore lay in the Chillagoe holdings—enough to yield 17,000 tons of copper, 1,500 tons of lead, one million ounces of silver, and a small quantity of gold. Such good news sent Chillagoe shares spiralling on the Melbourne and London stock exchanges, and it was the easiest thing in the world for the company’s directors to unload the greater part of their holdings at fat profits.

Meanwhile, John Moffat was entrusting other ventures to his new partners. Sixty miles south of Chillagoe was Mount Garnet, where Albert Vollenweider and his mates had found a copper-bearing outcrop while looking for lost horses one morning in 1883. Vollenweider’s freehold had passed seven years later to John Moffat, who did little in the way of development until the revival of copper prices in 1896. In that year a prospecting party under George Waddell reported to Moffat rich promise of silver and copper in the Mount Garnet lode. Within a year the Mount Garnet Freehold Mining Company was formed, with Moffat as managing director, and Chapman of Chillagoe as chairman. From the derelict silver town of Montalbion, now merely home of a few Chinese gardeners and prospectors, Moffat removed the smelters in order to start work at Mount Garnet, but it soon became apparent that better equipment would be needed. This meant better transport, and the Mount Garnet company, with the habit of railway-building growing on them, envisaged a light line sixty miles across poor country to Lappa, on the Chillagoe line. Meanwhile, as an immediate answer to their transport problems, the firm engaged the services of Abdul Wade, a veteran Afghan camel-master from the Western Australian goldfields. For several years the drab landscape took on an exotic touch as the laden, ungainly teams, urged by brown men in turbans, trod their majestic splay-footed way between mine and railhead.

Before the Mount Garnet company could put its plans before parliament, other syndicates were hastily forming to get into this lucrative business of mining railways. In 1898 a brash young
A journalist from Melbourne, Randolph Bedford,* was at the Queensland Government with another proposition. The Chillagoe-Bedford syndicate held a few blocks in the Mount Garnet area, and proposed constructing a line thence to Mareeba, through the rich scrub and farming districts of the Atherton Tableland. It was an attractive proposal, and Bedford produced an impressively varied list of shareholders, including one or two Labour politicians, the Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, and the great John Moffat himself. But Moffat, for one, wrote to the Minister for Mines denying all connexion with the Chillagoe-Bedford; and the Queensland Government, which was more cautious about railway syndicates than its opponents credited, turned down Bedford’s proposals. Instead, a government line was authorized between Mareeba and Atherton, and a bill introduced to parliament permitting the Mount Garnet Freehold Company to construct their line along the road trodden to Lappa by Abdul Wade’s camel teams. Although, unlike Bedford’s Atherton line, this railway would cover country almost entirely useless for anything but mining, it would be cheaper to construct; and few doubted that the mineral prospects alone were sufficient justification. Only the Labour party objected. ‘If this is granted,’ exclaimed one member, ‘the Chillagoe Company will completely encircle the whole of these districts, and every man, woman and child will be under their thumb; nobody will be permitted to live in the district without their permission.’ He exaggerated, of course, but perhaps the unsavoury example of some of the great mining companies in the United States provoked this fear. Most Labour speakers, however, were tediously irrelevant, and some showed an odd tendency to confuse the Mount Garnet company with a shadier group operating at the same time, the Admiral Sampson Chillagoe Company.

This Admiral Sampson concern played the dishonest share-pusher almost to the point of caricature. A Sydney company, it had gone through the usual motions of finding a board of directors with some claims to respectability. The chairman was a wholesale fruitmonger, Sydney alderman, and M.L.A., and the board included two Queensland Legislative Councillors, one of them formerly a popular mining warden at Croydon. Busiest in pushing the company’s affairs were the secretary, Moore, and a bustling Irish director, Patrick Duffy. In 1899 the Admiral

*Born 1868; journalist at Melbourne from 1889; M.L.C. (Qld.) 1917–22; M.L.A. for Warrego 1923–32; died 1941. Author of autobiography, Nought to Thirty-Three.
Sampson had picked up a number of leases near Chillagoe, on which, at their request, the Queensland Government Geologist instructed one of his most capable young men, Benjamin Dunstan, to prepare a report. During the five months that Dunstan’s report was in preparation, Moore and Duffy kept firing off impatient letters urging haste, and beseeching the Minister for Mines, Robert Philp, to order a voluminous report that would at once satisfy the sharebrokers; but Philp, in his driest Scots manner, refused to interfere with the geologist’s work. Eventually, in November 1899, Dunstan’s report was ready, confirming the presence on their ground of promising ore deposits, some of which assayed 7 per cent copper. This was too tentative and academic for the Admiral Sampson syndicate. While Duffy bombarded Dunstan with jaunty, confiding letters offering him ‘any suitable, pleasant, agreeable position in the company’, Moore tackled Dunstan’s superior, the Government Geologist, with a series of questions. Their general drift could be summarized by two extracts:

Cannot Tartana be briefly described as being to all appearances a second Mount Lyell, with its combinations of gold and silver, with **large bodies of high and low grade copper ore**? . . .

Can Mr. Dunstan say with any degree of confidence that the properties warrant the construction of railways, smelters, etc., employment of the very best mining manager procurable, such manager having before long one of the grandest and most promising properties in that line to be found in Australia?

The Government Geologist stiffly refused to provide an answer to these leading questions, but Duffy went on with his correspondence undeterred. They were re-forming the Admiral Sampson under the name of North Chillagoe Mining, they would offer Dunstan the job of general manager at a good salary, they had voted the Government Geologist—so Duffy informed that startled official in February 1900—a parcel of shares, which would be worth two to three thousand pounds if he held on to them. (*P.S. You might look at those questions again. Some of them are very reasonable.*) By this time Duffy’s antics had become something of a scandal, and it was thought necessary to appoint a Supreme Court judge as Royal Commissioner to enquire into his dealings with the Mines Department. The Department and its geologists had their good name cleared completely, but there was no vindication for the seedy share-pushers who had tried to batten on to the Chillagoe boom.
The suspicions hanging around the name of Chillagoe after this episode deepened further when the original Chillagoe Company found itself in Queer Street late in 1901. Despite heavy selling on the London market, Chillagoe shares had remained fairly buoyant on the strength of Stewart’s report of June 1900, which assessed their property so optimistically. A year later, when base metal prices had passed their peak and started to fall, it seemed desirable to enhearten the investing public with another report, this time from a visiting American expert named Weinberg. But this second report was far less encouraging. Weinberg’s estimate of the ore reserves (excluding Mungana) was a mere 173,631 tons, less than half Stewart’s figure. Where Stewart forecast 17,000 tons of copper, Weinberg predicted little more than 4,000, and where Stewart hoped for a million ounces of silver and gold, Weinberg expected less than one-fifth that amount. The share market flagged at this unwelcome news, and no time was lost in sending up a third expert, Danvers Power. But Power’s view was even gloomier than Weinberg’s. He estimated the ore reserves of Chillagoe at no more than 75,000 tons, and of Chillagoe and Mungana combined at slightly less than 140,000. True, he put the returns of copper and silver slightly higher than Weinberg—5,696 tons and 331,937 ounces respectively—but his remarks on the management and developmental policy were damning. It had been a mistake to proceed so extensively with permanent expenditure before the ore bodies had been adequately prospected. The smelters were in the wrong place; insufficient reserves were on hand to keep them at work, and the company would have to cart ore from the richer outlying mines at Zillmanton, Redcap, and Ruddigore. Certainly, Power concluded, the prospects warranted further expenditure; but the company had already squandered most of its capital on building the railway and working the poorer ground around Chillagoe, and its debts were already formidable.

Press and shareholders were loud in their criticisms after the release of Power’s report in November 1901. The management conferred to find a way out of their quandary, and came up with a proposal that each of the directors should exert their personal credit to raise another £50,000. Old John Moffat vetoed the scheme. Alone of the directors, he had kept his shareholdings intact throughout the boom, although it was estimated that, by unloading at a well-chosen time, he could have cleared at least two-thirds of a million. ‘If the shares were worth their top price
I would not sell,' he said, 'and if they were not, I could not sell.'

But, although honest, he was not soft; he stood to lose enough by the continued drop in Chillagoe shares, and would not pay more money to redeem the poor judgment of his colleagues. In private life so shy that it was said he had once hidden in a hall cupboard for an hour to avoid meeting unexpected visitors, he nevertheless had the personality to dominate the stormy meeting of shareholders that voted down the original plans for reconstruction. It was largely on the strength of Moffat's good reputation that the New Chillagoe Company was created in 1902 to raise an extra £137,796 in capital, and work the mines and smelters.

Meanwhile, Chillagoe itself was transferred almost overnight from vigorous youth to a virtual ghost town. The young clerk of petty sessions at Thornborough saw the after-effects of the Chillagoe slump more clearly than any of the clever gentlemen of the Melbourne stock exchange, for it was his job to cope with the exodus of unemployed from Chillagoe:

... in the town of Chillagoe in December there were probably 1,800 souls, and on New Year's Day there was not a drink sold in any of the hotels in Chillagoe, the town being so deserted from the closing down of the mines. This has caused a great number of those unemployed to come to Thornborough and pass through the district in search of work ... The majority of these wanderers betook themselves to the sugar districts of the Mulgrave and the Mosman. All were strangers to the district, and in some cases, being Russian Finns could not speak a word of English. The charity of the miners assisted a great number, otherwise I am sure a lot would have suffered severely.

Nor were these the only calamities that, after all, justified the forebodings of Labour politicians about the new mining companies. Trouble was not long in coming to the Chillagoe Company's associate at Mount Garnet. Here £68,000 had been spent in equipping two dams and a smelting works, whose operations began on 22 January 1901. At first it seemed that this venture promised well for the new century, with North Queensland's copper resources at last receiving efficient and adequate treatment on the spot. Work was proceeding energetically on the railway, and meanwhile the smelters were kept going with coke supplied by Abdul Wade's camel teams, supplemented locally by gangs of Italian charcoal burners. Around the smelters lay great heaps of hard charcoal, each estimated to be twenty feet
high and three hundred tons in content. A little way off the township of Mount Garnet grew fast, despite a bad typhoid epidemic and high living costs. Eighteen hundred men were believed to make a living in this district, as besides copper production there were numerous small parties after tin. Handicapped by the big drought of 1902, these miners worked sixteen hours a day to clear their accumulated pay-dirt when at last the rain came, and lifted tin production on the Walsh and Tinaroo field to its highest figure since the mid-eighties.

Even while they took their reward, the copper industry was stumbling into disaster. Production was still good, with copper worth £27,500 going through the smelters during the first quarter of 1903, but Mount Garnet shares were cheap on the stock market in the aftermath of the Chillagoe debacle, and debenture holders in the company were fearful for their interest payments. When the discredited company directors failed to gain shareholders’ approval for a scheme of reconstruction, the property was taken over by trustees for the debenture holders. These hard bargainers refused to postpone their interest payments even when a new company, floated to take over the assets and liabilities of the old concern, managed to raise a further issue of capital. While investors wrangled, the heart went out of Mount Garnet. The copper ore was found to give place to zinc at depth; the mine manager resigned; the smelters closed, and as men streamed away from the unlucky township many of its shops and houses were swiftly dismantled for reconstruction in some more hopeful locality. At length the mine was let on tribute to the New Chillagoe Company, who worked it for flux ore for a number of years. But the best of the ore had been worked out, and the smelters never re-opened. Mount Garnet stayed alive, but its pulse beat sluggishly. Tin scratchers, a few maize-growers and other selectors provided its livelihood; but it would have strained belief to recall that, for a brief year, Mount Garnet had ranked second only to Charters Towers as the biggest community of the North Australian inland.

The main copper producers during the first ten years of the century were Arbouin, O.K., Mount Molloy, and the Chillagoe-Mungana group. Of these only O.K.—allegedly named from the label on a jam-tin—was an entirely new find. First sighted by an incurious stockman, the O.K. was developed after 1902 by W. J. Munro and a group of Cairns businessmen with somewhat conservative ideas of management. Although by 1905 the mine
was paying £25,308 dividends on copper production worth £161,248 (nearly half the entire output of North Queensland), the directors were content with second-hand smelting equipment from Mount Garnet, and had not ventured on providing a light railway to the railhead at Mungana. Instead Abdul Wade and his camels, unemployed since the completion of the Mount Garnet line, were put to work carting O.K. copper until in 1905 Abdul, moving with the times, replaced the beasts with traction engines. Arbouin was run by interests connected with John Moffat, until in 1903 the property was sold to the Stannary Hills tin company; they installed a rope tramway, but it was not until the purchase of the concern by the Scottish North Queensland company at the end of 1909 that substantial machinery and smelters were introduced and, re-named Cardross,* these mines became a major producer. Mount Molloy was named for Patrick Molloy, a teamster plying between Port Douglas and Montalbion, who had come across the original outcrop while looking for stray bullocks. For four years while prices were good he worked it as a one-man show, then let his claim lapse during a dull season with the intention of resuming work when the market revived. But shrewd old James Mulligan, in partnership with a Burns, Philp manager named James Forsyth,† had already filed their application for the claim—a legitimate manoeuvre, but one which some people thought close to claim-jumping. They sold Mount Molloy to a Melbourne syndicate, who mismanaged it and went out of business. Forsyth resumed the claim, disposed of it to yet another Melbourne company, and by 1903 it was one of North Queensland's leading producers.

With copper prices at £90 a ton by 1906 it was a confident time for the mining industry. Nor was tin neglected. Herberton, half-deserted by 1896, had lost its status as a municipality; but after a few quiet years prices recovered, by 1901 the Great Northern had re-opened and put up a new mill, and within two or three years numerous small shows were at work at Watsonville, Bakerville, and all the neighbouring centres. Irvinebank, the only centre capable of turning out tin ready for the metal market, seemed assured of a settled future. Three big mines, the Tornado, the

*Also known as Klondyke for several years. North Queensland townships changed their names with bewildering frequency.

†Born 1852; manager for Burns, Philp's Normanton office 1880 and especially associated with the firm's mining ventures; M.L.A. for Carpentaria 1899-1907, Moreton 1909-12, Murumba 1912-18; died 1927.
Governor Norman (an extensive low grade deposit) and the seemingly inexhaustible Vulcan fed the London mill that was John Moffat’s headquarters. Moffat’s Irvinebank company also controlled most of the mines at Koorboora, and conducted sluicing operations in favourable seasons on the Tate River, where they purchased the winnings of the many old prospectors who scratched a living from the alluvial. Drawing capital not merely from his mining investments but also from his share in inventing and marketing the Moffat-Virtue shearing machine, the old Scot had stretched his investments by 1907 west to Cloncurry and south to the tin deposits of Kangaroo Hills, in the range country behind Ingham; he had also invested heavily in Mount Molloy copper. But Moffat had by no means a monopoly. Almost as widespread were the holdings of the Stannary Hills Mines and Tramway Company, an Adelaide-based firm launched by the flour-milling firm of John Darling, whose interests at Stannary Hills, Eureka Creek, and Herberton employed 365 men in 1906.

There was room still for numerous small promoters: James Venture Mulligan planning a reducing works on the old California Creek diggings in 1904, or a hydraulic sluicing property out north at Mt Spurgeon in 1906; Cardwell Peters, so-named as the first white child born at that historic port, who in 1908 with two mates developed the Tommy Burns at Sunnymount, near Lappa; and many others. Wolfram was another lure for prospectors. Values were erratic, as only a small quantity would suffice to fill the European market, but in years of good prices it was eagerly bought by the storekeepers who were still the main financial prop of the old hands. Wolfram Camp (near Thornborough), Mount Carbine, Bamford, and Mount Perseverance were all centres of intermittent activity, almost entirely by individual prospectors until the Irvinebank company bought into Mount Carbine in 1906. Overseas capital came only in 1911, when the Société Française des Metaux Rares erected a plant at Wolfram Camp.

To mining men a great attraction of the Walsh and Tinaroo district was the ability of prospectors and working miners to co-exist with larger concerns employing wage labour in some quantity. Most of the mining companies were prepared to buy from and mill ore for the tin scratchers, and, despite the ramifications of the Irvinebank and Stannary Hills interests, the field was still essentially a ‘small man’s show’. This meant that the
emphasis was on the production of minerals as a raw material, with no plans for refining and industrial development beyond the stage of smelting. Nor could further progress be expected. On most properties the machinery, although efficient enough, was not the most modern available. The Chillagoe railway had been expected to serve as the means of introducing better working—at its inauguration one enthusiastic mining warden had compared its influence to the Nile, fertilizing a whole district—but it had not served the purpose.

Instead, the Chillagoe Company, working their inferior deposits unprofitably, were still having trouble. In 1904 they defaulted on interest payments to their debenture-holders, but managed to persuade a committee representing these interests to accept a lower rate of interest for three years unless and until profits improved. Smith Reid, now chairman of the company, managed to raise another £87,500 in capital, and then appealed to the Queensland Government for permission to extend the company’s railway to the Etheridge. Given access to that under-developed field, gold, copper, silver-lead and tin might all flow into the Chillagoe Company’s coffers, and relieve its patient shareholders. If the Queensland Government refused, the company would have no option but to close its smelters and cease work in the district; an unhappy course, since its mineral lands would then remain undeveloped until the expiration of their special lease in 1947, and great hardship would be caused the small companies and prospectors who had been sending their ore to the Chillagoe smelters. The government saw the force of this reasoning, reflected that the Etheridge had yearned many years for a railway, and passed the necessary legislation, again with some criticism from Labour members who saw favouritism in the company’s good treatment. In 1908 the line was completed to Charleston which, true to the odd North Queensland habit of re-naming everything, was now to be known as Forsyth.

Meanwhile, other mining interests were laying branch lines as tributary to the main Chillagoe system. The Stannary Hills company built an insecure-looking two-foot line across the ridges between the Chillagoe railway at Boonmoo and its main mines; five years later, in 1907, this zigzag line was extended to Irvinebank, where its advent was celebrated by a picnic at which John Moffat and his wife entertained 1,000 guests. In 1907, too, the Mount Molloy company put down a line to Biboohra, near Mareeba. (It was during the construction of this line that James
Venture Mulligan, at the age of seventy, involved himself in a fight, received an unlucky blow, and died as the result.) Belatedly the government got around to completing its line to Herberton, and in 1910, a quarter of a century after the battle between the ports had made Cairns the starting-point, the first train steamed into Herberton. A little piqued about its long lack of convenient transport, Herberton drew some consolation from the plans of the Mount Molloy company to develop the Empress copper lode, railing the produce to the Molloy smelters. It looked as if this spate of railway-building would assure the base metal industry of stable marketing. At any rate the businessmen of Cairns were confident enough in 1906 to form a stock exchange dealing almost entirely in base metal properties 'over the range'.

These boom years saw the last of the old nomadic way of life when travellers moved from job to job, and grew restless if they stayed too long in one place. Most big mines had a fairly rapid turnover of employees, as men still liked to leave a wages job to go after tin and wolfram on their own accounts, or—increasingly after 1905—to move down to the coast during winter and spring, finding employment in the sugar-mills and canefields. Some employers, such as John Moffat, understood and accepted this walkabout tradition, made every effort to create jobs irrespective of economy, and gave generous handouts to swagmen. Others were less tolerant, and sowed for themselves the seeds of future labour disputes. But the habit of travelling possessed others beside the miners. Hawkers, cheapjack auctioneers, dentists, stage shows, even the first moving picture exhibitors were on the move among the mining camps of the country behind Cairns. So, too, were occasional clergymen such as the unfortunate evangelist Todd, who preached hell-fire to the miners without much response until the Saturday night when he began denouncing the loose women of Croydon, whereupon the angry menfolk hustled him and told him to leave town. A far better reception was accorded the Brotherhood of Saint Barnabas, a group of Church of England priests founded late in 1901 by Aneurin Vaughan Williams, the rector of Herberton. Modelled on a similar brotherhood formed in Central Queensland a few years earlier, the clergy in this body took vows of poverty and obedience, and set out to traverse the mining camps of the North. Originally the Brotherhood consisted solely of Williams and one other priest, who worked an area of 11,000 square miles by horseback, buggy, and occasionally by railway. Welcomed hospitably
even by many who did not share their convictions—for the North was still a little suspicious of organized religion*—the Brotherhood won such acceptance that in 1908 G. H. Frodsham,† the energetic Bishop of North Queensland, was moved to stump Great Britain for recruits. Several young Englishmen were moved by his appeal: ‘O for a band of men that will preach like apostles, ride like cowboys, and having food and raiment, will therewith be content’,14 and the Brotherhood grew, to add its individual, largely Anglo-Catholic element to a district which to some pastors still seemed rather a graceless wilderness. There were never enough clergy of the right sort—tireless and not easily shocked—and few laity with time or inclination to reinforce them.

For life was still hard in most parts of the Walsh and Tinaroo field. Only about Herberton was there a settled, welcoming look, as the town drowsed in the winter sunlight with just enough activity to prevent people from leaving. Irvinebank, too, a little complacent and conservative after twenty years of constant returns from John Moffat’s mill and mines, enjoyed Saturday nights which were a prosperous miniature of Charters Towers, with brass bands, busy hotels, and an open-air jeweller selling his wares by Dutch auction. On Saturday nights, too, Moffat’s homestead was open to all his staff, who made up small dance parties in the big dining room, or stood around the grand piano, or browsed among the books in the cedar-panelled library; there was almost every amusement at John Moffat’s place except strong drink, for the old Scot had seen too many men take to the bottle in the outback mining areas.

Beyond Irvinebank, however, the new townships which owed their existence to the mining revival of the last ten years still had a raw edge of impermanency about them, and their amenities were few. Chillagoe, ‘a village which might have been built any time before Noah’s Ark’,15 had many examples of hessian-and-iron architecture, and even the officers’ quarters were none too luxurious. Poor sanitation still caused outbreaks of typhoid, and the water supply was heavily impregnated with lime—‘but,’

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*At the 1910 referendum on the provision of Bibles in State Schools, Queensland as a whole voted ‘Yes’, but in North Queensland only Bowen, Townsville and Cook favoured the measure. Every other district returned a substantial ‘No’ majority, and Woothakata—the electorate including the Walsh and Tinaroo mining field—had the highest ‘No’ vote in Queensland, with 988 for and 2,130 against the measure. †Born 1863; B.A. Durham University 1888; D.D. 1903; priest 1889; worked in Yorkshire until coming to Queensland 1896; Bishop of North Queensland 1902–13; returned to England and died 1937.
shrugged one observer, ‘Chillagoe-ites don’t drink water as a rule’. The outlying centres had even less charm. O.K. had the name of a brawling, noisy township, where even if man could not be drunk for ever

On liquor, love and fights,

he could, if so minded, go near enough if he was willing to substitute two-up for love. Stannary Hills, wrote a visitor, was ‘the roughest hewn township I have yet seen . . . only enough even moderately even ground for half a dozen houses and a school, the rest being let into the face of the hill in all directions’. Almaden, where 1,000 railway construction workers were gathered in 1907 for the building of the Etheridge line, was full of drunks on pay Saturday, and ‘pickpockets and spielers’ were attracted to the place. Old prospectors noted with disapproval that the boom of 1906–7 seemed to bring in ‘a younger and rougher element’ who were much given to cheating at two-up. With such working conditions and such elements in the community, it was not surprising that grievances stirred and rankled, and disputes followed between management and labour.

Hours and conditions, rather than wages, were the cause of most discontent. Unskilled hands drew 8s. daily, miners in dry ground got 10s., in wet, 11s., and engine-drivers were paid 11s. or 12s., but received no overtime for anything under an extra half-day. Cost of living was high, however, and the minimum working week was 48 hours. Dust was a threat in some mines, and the Zillmanton and Mungana group had a nasty reputation for damp. Although the problem of heavy water had been solved by pumping, the Lady Jane at Mungana had a particularly bad name, even before May 1909 when a fire broke out in its underground workings, filling the shafts with foul air and smouldering for many months, until in 1914 the pumps were shut off and the mine flooded. Despite these and similar hazards union activity was almost unknown on the field, except that the electorate had twice returned a Labour member. It had been represented since 1902 by ‘Mick’ Woods, formerly an engine-driver with the Chillagoe railway, and an honest working-class representative, but unenterprising, and compromised in some eyes by following William Kidston when that Labour leader coalesced with the Liberals. He was soon to be challenged by two vigorous young newcomers to the district, able, tough, and not too fastidious in their methods. The base-metal country of North Queensland
was about to launch the political careers of Edward Theodore and William McCormack.*

Son of a migrant Rumanian tug-boat operator, Theodore was a thrusting young man, largely self-taught (he left school at 12) and ‘already widely versed in Socialist literature’. He energetically seized his opportunity in mid-1907 when the price of copper slumped sharply. Inflated through over-trading, the world copper market had been easily hit by a New York financial panic, and within a few months prices had tumbled from a peak of £100 a ton to under £60. Tin and silver lead prices fell at the same time. Most mine managers reacted by tightening up on wages and disciplinary conditions, arousing discontent, and creating favourable conditions for Theodore’s plan of uniting the nomadic workers of the North into one effective trade union. His Amalgamated Workers’ Association, formed towards the end of 1907 at Irvinebank, had branches within six months at O.K., Mungana, Stannary Hills and Herberton. At first not taken very seriously—the story is that John Moffat laughingly told Theodore to ‘go away and be a sensible fellow’ the first time that the young man appeared with a log of complaints—Theodore’s union soon became effective through its determination to stop at nothing in securing recruits. As the Worker rather coyly put it:

... this union has had reason to exert its power of putting on a certain amount of social pressure, even to a high degree of tension, to induce non-members to take their share of duty in respect to their fellow workers. And so long as they do not overstep the boundary line, few will be disposed to complain.20

If one may believe all the stories, some non-members were persuaded to join after a stand-up fight, others after losing their money to Theodore at two-up. One miner at Irvinebank who refused to strike found himself followed home from work every afternoon by a group of unionists whistling the ‘Dead March’

*Theodore was born 1884; left school at the age of 12; mining around Australia from 1900; came to North Queensland, 1906; M.L.A. Woothakata 1909-12, Chillagoe 1912-25; Treasurer 1915-19; Premier 1919-25; unsuccessfully contested Herbert seat in Federal House of Representatives 1925; M.P. for Dalley (N.S.W.) 1927-31; Federal Treasurer 1929-30 and 1931; later invested in Sydney newspapers and Fiji gold-mines; Director-General of Allied Works 1942-4; died 1950.

McCormack was born St Lawrence, Queensland, 1879, son of a small grazier; general secretary of the Australian Workers’ Association 1909-10, and A.W.U. 1910-12; M.L.A. for Cairns 1912-30; Speaker 1915-19; Home Secretary 1919-23; Minister for Lands 1923-5; Premier and Treasurer 1925-9; Leader of the Opposition 1929-30; died 1947.
from Saul. By such means the A.W.A. had 1,348 members enrolled by February 1909, had taken over the Chillagoe railwaymen, and was making its presence felt throughout the whole district. Poor, bewildered ‘Mick’ Woods, heckled into incoherence by his constituents at Stannary Hills, lost his parliamentary seat to Theodore in 1909.

Meanwhile a series of strikes unsettled the whole industry. In October 1908 the navvies on the Etheridge railway successfully struck for better wages. Between January and April 1909 the Vulcan at Irvinebank stopped work. A five-week strike at the O.K. mine in October-November 1909 eliminated the narrow reserves on which the mine was turning at a period of poor returns, and led to its closure shortly after. Within three years O.K. was dismantled and abandoned to the white ants. The men at Koorboora were on strike for four months in 1911 and nine months in 1913–14. Bosses and miners were soon deeply at odds. Most managements stubbornly refused conciliation, and sometimes took vindictive steps against union officials. Theodore, for his part, lost no opportunity to stir up feeling, even to the point of giving publicity to some ill-founded allegations that the Great Northern mine was in the habit of pilfering from stone entrusted by small concerns to their battery for crushing. Old John Moffat, saddened by the upheaval in the once friendly mining field, left for the South in 1912; his deputies, worried by falling profits as even the Vulcan’s returns grew poorer, took a tougher line with their workmen, and more trouble followed. Not only among the Moffat properties, but on practically every part of the field tin and copper returns had gradually fallen since 1908. Most of the ore-bodies in the district were turning out to be comparatively shallow, and employers could not afford to be generous, even had they so wished.

The gravest blow to the stability of the field was, in the last resort, dealt not by militant trade unionists but by the Chillagoe Company. Since its last financial crisis in 1905 the management of this company had contrived to keep their heads above water, but not to make profits. They seemed unable to settle to any one line of development, but to swither uncertainly from one enticing prospect to another, each one guaranteed to set the dividends growing. Their smelters had a limited capacity for ore, and in 1906 they found it necessary to convert them to the Huntington-Heberlein process, which had been pioneered in Tasmania just too late to be adopted when the smelters were being built during
that first flush of plentiful capital five years earlier. Working mainly on ore purchased from other producers, the company found its running costs inflated by dear fuel, as the shipping freights along the Queensland coast were high on New South Wales coke and coal. At first the company hoped to offset these expenses by developing a bonanza in the Etheridge. They bought into several gold and copper propositions, and in 1911 purchased the Einasleigh mine, which was none other than Daintree’s ‘Lynd’ discovery of 1867, recently re-opened and developed by Melbourne finance. But none of their properties showed sufficient promise, and although for a while there was talk of extending their line to Georgetown or to Gilberton, where the prospects would be better, the Queensland Government was beginning to lose patience.

Eventually it was decided to tackle the problem of fuel by developing a closer source. Untapped coal deposits had been found in several parts of North Queensland: behind Bowen, behind Cooktown, and, most convenient of all, at Mount Mulligan, named for the discoverer of the Hodgkinson goldfield in which the coal seams were situated. Raising another £180,000 from the stock market, the Chillagoe Company this time decided against building its own railway; instead, the Queensland Government agreed to construct a line from Dimbulah, west of Mareeba, through Thornborough to Mount Mulligan. The line was approved in 1913, but progress was slow because of strikes and labour shortages. While opening up the Mount Mulligan deposits, the company continued to depend on expensive imported fuel. This increased its losses on the Chillagoe smelters at a time when almost every penny of capital was pledged to developing Mount Mulligan. In February 1914 its representatives came yet again to Brisbane, this time requesting a £30,000 government loan to allow smelting to continue. The Treasurer, a cautious Southerner, refused; and the Chillagoe Company reacted by immediately discontinuing the purchase of ore, shutting down its copper smelters, and cancelling all contracts.

Consternation filled Chillagoe. The company had in many cases been partner to poor men working small mines, and for many prospectors had been their market for lead, gold and copper. This sudden closure threw many out of work, drove the main storekeeper of Chillagoe into bankruptcy, and caused a mass exodus from the field. A sense of resentment was not pacified when publication of the Chillagoe Company’s balance-sheet
for 1913 revealed a debit of £32,519, of which £21,811 was set down to the inexplicable category of 'reconstruction expenses'. A management which could go through large sums in that way ought to have had the means—many thought—to maintain the smelters which meant so much to the welfare of the district.22

This débâcle left the rest of the field somewhat jittery, and morale was not improved when the Mungana company determined to flood the Lady Jane, so throwing a few more men out of work. The outbreak of World War I in August 1914, instead of stimulating production, filled storekeepers and other buyers with fears of an unpredictable overseas market, so that for some weeks ore buying ceased almost entirely. The Mammoth company at Cardross closed down through inability to find a market. The government completed its railway to Mount Mulligan only in time for the disappointed inhabitants to leave as the Chillagoe Company stopped work on its now useless coal mine. At the same time, natural resources were found to be dwindling throughout the field. The Tate River, constant supply of alluvial tin for fossickers during thirty years, was reported to be giving meagre returns. The mines about Irvinebank were becoming decreasingly productive. Even the great Vulcan, deepest of all Australian tin mines, had reached blank ground at 1,220 feet, although there remained some higher levels to be worked out. One by one the rough mining townships were falling quiet, as their inhabitants left for more rewarding pursuits. Only the old prospectors, too old and too optimistic to change the habits of a lifetime, stayed camped among the ridges and gullies, working a little mineral and taking the storekeepers’ credit for their tobacco and tea until values improved and buying resumed. The younger men, except for those employed by the surviving mining companies, were shifting, either to join the Army or to find more profitable work in the ports and sugar industry.

Seven years previously the Herberton-Chillagoe district had seemed the most thriving, promising, and soundly-based of all Northern Australia’s base metal producers. Its condition in 1914 was a sorry aftermath to the enterprise, endurance, and occasional heroism of those pioneers whose discoveries and perseverance had proved the worth of the field. No certain prosperity could be founded on the production of raw material for export, dependent on the uncontrollable price fluctuations of an overseas market. Theodore was partly right when he sought to explain the plight
of the industry because '... it was largely dependent upon the whims of outside capitalists. According as they desired to extend or reduce their activities, the industry was prosperous or otherwise'. But this hardly went far enough in its analysis. The fact was that North Queensland was still regarded primarily as a source of raw material for exploitation, and only occasionally, if at all, as a region in which Australians were trying to find a firm basis on which to build a community in which economic advancement was possible for all. Firms such as the Chillagoe Company were mainly after quick dividends. Their failure could not be attributed to inexperience, for most of the directors were men well known on the Broken Hill and Mount Lyell fields. But they spent too much of their attention on playing the stock market, and not enough on prospecting their ore-bodies before their capital was spent; there was too little contact between the governing body in Melbourne and the managers and engineers on the spot; there was, in short, too common an impression that because the North was simply a producer of raw material, research into the mineral and human problems of the environment was unnecessary. John Moffat, who lived near his work and knew his workmen, avoided many of these errors; but even his kindly, patriarchal régime could not entirely compensate for the North's paramount need—public and private capital, spent by authorities with the patience and the intelligence to do their research before they laid out their money.

2Q.P.D., LXXVIII, p. 1781.
3Sydney Bulletin, 23 Nov. 1901.
4V., 1900, III, pp. 903 et seq.
5Q.P.D. LXXXIV, p. 850.
7Ibid. p. 388.
11[Cairns Post], Life of A. J. Draper, Cairns, 1931, pp. 92-3: Trinity Times, 4 April 1906.
13Wild River Times, 18 May 1904.
14R. Fraser, A Historical Sketch of the Diocese of North Queensland, Townsville, 1958, p. 9.
15New Eagle, 5 May 1906.
16Trinity Times, 27 June 1906.
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A Thousand Miles Away

17 Ibid. 18 April 1906.
20 Worker, 1 Aug. 1908.
21 Q.P.P. 1911-12, III, pp. 1017-1136.
22 North Queensland Register, 16 Feb. and 29 June 1914.
23 Q.P.D. CXIX, p. 2821.
The Farmers Take Over, 1906-20

The decline of mining left farming as the mainstay of North Queensland, just as the diggers of Ballarat and Bendigo had turned free-selectors in the sixties, or the gold-miners of Western Australia were, during these same early years of the twentieth century, opening up its wheat belt. In North Queensland agriculture had changed from the try-everything enterprises of the early selectors to a high degree of specialization. For all practical purposes, sugar was the only crop grown on the North Queensland coast, with maize and dairying the two specialties of the Atherton Tableland. This development owed much to close and well-regulated co-operation between government and private enterprise. Government intervention financed the co-operative mills, provided the means of transport, finally secured a fair and efficient machinery for marketing and price-fixing. But among the farmers the success and prosperity depended on individual merit and enterprise, and there was still a role for the privately-owned mills and refinery in the sugar industry, with adequate safeguards to ensure that their workings benefited producers and consumers. This co-operation of interests, so signally lacking in the mining industry, secured North Queensland.

At the same time the district's problems of health and environment were for the first time subjected to scientific investigation. The departure of the Pacific Islanders and other aliens had not rid North Queensland of its reputation as a home of tropical diseases. Dysentery, plague, and leprosy still appeared occasionally, especially among Aborigines. Less widely publicized, but affecting a far greater number of North Queenslanders, were filariasis, hookworm, and sprue. The Australasian Medical Congress had recognized in 1902 the necessity for a research centre in tropical diseases, and the energetic campaigning of Bishop Frodsham eventually secured the establishment of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine at Townsville, under the directorship of Dr Anton Breinl. Originally housed in an empty storehouse provided by the Townsville hospital, the Institute moved in 1913 to permanent premises, where a small group of
able young researchers under Breinl produced the first authoritative evidence on the capacity of white Australians to adapt to tropical conditions.2

Their findings were on the whole optimistic. Contrary to Gilbert Parker’s gloomy expectation that no family would survive to the third generation in Cairns, they found wharf-labourers, cane-cutters, and other outdoor workers, themselves North Queenslanders and the sons of North Queenslanders, leading active lives without ill effect, and rearing healthy children. The eradication of disease, careful eating and drinking habits, and—especially important for women—the provision of better living conditions than the badly-ventilated wood-and-iron workmen’s houses that stood, four-square, uncompromising, and appallingly hot, in the canefields as well as in the suburbs of Cairns and Townsville: these improvements were unquestionably necessary to make North Queensland completely fit for its inhabitants. But climate and environment held no threat for those who lived temperately and sensibly. The old myth of a ‘North unfit for white men’ was finally exploded.

Even before the Institute had come into being, North Queensland was turning into a community of farmers. The Atherton Tableland was much favoured for settlement. Its cool, bracing climate contrasted noticeably with the humid coastal country between Cairns and Innisfail,* and even the most dubious observers of tropical conditions conceded that white men might survive as cane-cutters, if they had selections of their own on the Atherton Tableland where they could pass the summer cultivating maize or dairy-farming. The Chinese could no longer hope to keep their near-monopoly of Tableland agriculture once the railway from Mareeba to Herberton was in being, and although this was many years in coming—even when Robert Philp’s government bestirred themselves, there were the usual local squabbles about the precise route—in June 1903 the line at last extended to Atherton. The opening day began spectacularly about four o’clock in the morning when some larrikin dynamited the triumphal arch erected across the line to meet the first train with the Governor of Queensland. It was a graceless act, for the coming of the railway spelt awakening and transformation for

*The name of the township on the Johnstone River was changed from Geraldton to Innisfail in 1910, after a Russian ship with cargo for Geraldton, W.A., set its course for Geraldton, Qld., and finished up at Cardwell. See Dorothy Jones, Cardwell Shire Story, Brisbane, 1961, p. 303.
The Farmers Take Over, 1906–20

the district. On those Irish-green highlands there was good promise for dairying, and no problem of cattle tick. Experiments with introduced paspalum grass proved rewarding, and from 1904 a number of selectors began freighting dairy produce to a factory at Cairns. Some selectors played with notions of coffee-growing, but despite a yield of half-a-ton of coffee berries to the acre, prices were too discouraging for this to continue. A surprisingly numerous group of optimists spent a lot of time pressing for a sugar mill, brushing off unworthy doubts about the suitability of the climate.3

The experimental period on the Atherton Tableland ended in 1907, when the Queensland Government threw open for selection over 35,000 acres of scrub lands south and east of Atherton. Four large blocks were allocated for settlement by groups of experienced farmers from other states. Some Victorians and New Zealanders were attracted, but the greatest influx came from around Lismore and Casino in the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales. Interest was also healthy in North Queensland, particularly among the miners, who sometimes showed resentment at the encouragement of newcomers to the North, but in the main got on well with their new neighbours. They needed all their co-operation and enthusiasm. The work of scrub-clearing had previously been relegated to aliens, but the temper of the new settlers was decidedly against coloured labour, and when several Hindu leaseholders showed up in 1908, they were the target of considerable feeling. Dairy-farming was the means of assuring that, just as the sugar industry was learning to do without coloured labour, so the Atherton Tableland would be developed as a White Highlands; or, as the Tableland Examiner put it more simply:

The advent of the Cow
Will rid us of the Chow.4

In fact, the Chinese, who were ageing and gradually decreasing in number, were individually tolerated until most of them left the district during World War I, when their leaseholds were terminated and the land resumed by the government for the settlement of ex-servicemen.

Meanwhile, the new settlers lived an existence whose hardships, if not comparable with the first generation of North Queensland pioneers, were sufficiently demanding of their qualities. Axe and spade were in many instances their main imple-
ments in preparing the virgin scrub for farming. Even where the timbercutters had removed the tall cedar and silky-oak during the eighties, secondary growth made clearing unpleasant, slow and monotonous work. It was the government’s intention to provide the Tableland with railways, but these were slow in coming. Officials of the Railway Department were not over-enthusiastic about the capacity of such lines to pay, South Queensland districts competed for priority, and the railway did not reach Millaa Millaa until 1918 and Ravenshoe until 1925. Meanwhile, those settlers too poor to afford a sulky or a buggy of their own found it necessary to walk every time their business brought them to town, over roads dusty and rutted in summer, and glutinously boggy in winter.

But they persevered; and the scrub went down each year, to be replaced by a settled, tidy landscape of green pastures that became every year more like Gippsland than the conventional idea of North Queensland. The co-operative principle, which had proved of such benefit to the sugar industry, was clearly suited for dairying. In 1909 the Tableland had been provided with its first butter factory through the enterprise of W. C. Abbott, who followed this up in January 1913 by initiating a conference of producers to plan the establishment of a much larger co-operative concern. Completed in April 1914, the factory produced 180 tons of butter in its first year—ten times the amount of Abbott’s pioneer plant in its first year—and continued to grow with the expansion of the district. By 1919 production had increased to 571 tons, and a branch—which eventually became the headquarters for the district—was opened at Malanda, twelve miles from Atherton. Meanwhile, the Atherton Tableland had become virtually the sole maize-producing district in North Queensland. The departure of the Pacific Islanders had reduced the demand for maize as human nourishment, but in a cattle-raising district the case was different. In 1916 the Atherton Tableland produced 937,085 bushels, about 30 per cent of Queensland’s crop for that year; but a decline ensued, because the high moisture content of Tableland maize led to storage problems which took some years to overcome.

In one respect the Atherton Tableland did not fulfil expectations. Few of its farmers had either time or inclination to work as cane-cutters. However, the sugar industry was amply supplied by migrants from the southern States and overseas and by miners leaving the depleted inland fields. Overseas migrants
were coming to Australia in quantity at this period, especially between 1910 and 1913, and a surprising number were prepared to come straight to the North. Cane-cutters from New South Wales and Victoria had been working at Mackay as early as 1902, returning south for the 'lay-off' and travelling north in May in the traditional manner enshrined in the *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. At first many of these men were of mixed quality, for the work attracted no small number of unemployables, including middle-aged tradesmen (out of work through drink), epileptics, and others unsuited to the life. Miners from North Queensland found themselves preferred by mills and farmers. For some years many divided their time between the canefields and the mining districts, but the prospect of saving enough to start farming on their own account gradually settled a large number of ex-miners in the sugar districts. Chillagoe men tended to go to Mossman and Cairns, Charters Towers miners to Ingham, and Ravenswood veterans to Proserpine and the Burdekin Delta. Nor was it merely the young and discontented who moved, for there were even old men of seventy who tramped to the coast in search of jobs. The transformation was completed in many instances by ex-miners taking down their houses and having them freighted by rail from the mining towns to their new homes. Publicans, editors, and storekeepers followed their customers, and even halls and churches were transplanted to the new districts. The growing demand for sugar lands led to the sub-division of new estates and the provision of more co-operative sugar mills with government backing. South Johnstone, in the Innisfail district, and Babinda, twenty-five miles north on the Russell River, were both erected under this arrangement in 1915, and in the previous year the Drysdale Brothers erected the Inkerman mill at Home Hill, on the south side of the Burdekin Delta, where the alluvial lands selected by Sir Thomas McIlwraith were at last under occupation by sugar-growers.

With this new influx of cane-farmers, North Queensland was well on its way to becoming the yeomanry of small-holders visualized by Griffith. It was through the efforts of these patient, hard-working 'cane cockies' that a firm foundation was established for the sugar industry that has been the mainstay of North Queensland prosperity during half a century. These men were pioneers, but it was pioneering in which the whole family took part; they went through hardships and difficulties, but they were spared isolation. Usually they had little enough to start with.
Until the mills were working, the men of the family kept themselves in whatever jobs were offering. They carted materials for the new roads and bridges, they laid bricks for the mills, they took on fencing, they ran a troop of goats for mutton. Their wives kept a clutch of chickens, and each week drove a sulky eight, ten or twelve miles to market. Occasionally tradesmen from the township brought around supplies, but the meat and butter were hard to preserve, and families often went hungry. Wallaby stew and the eggs of scrub turkeys often figured on their diet, and when these failed the outlook was bleak; one pioneer of Home Hill recalls a Christmas dinner of sardines and bread. The farmers’ sons became keen hunters, shooting wild duck, geese and pigs, taking fish, and even, in some families, trying the little bush hedgehogs—like sucking pig, they reported, only oily.

Recreations, although rare, were accessible. Occasional film shows were beginning to find their way North, and farmers’ families travelled miles to gaze at stories of a Wild West which in reality was hardly more stirring than their own part of the world. Spirited country dances, lasting all night, brought the young people to Ayr or Ingham on a Saturday evening. Older folk would go visiting on a Sunday afternoon, drinking endless cups of tea while the hot sun sank lower, and the loud, emphatic voices of the men on the front verandah argued politics while their wives got out of the way—‘just in case a free-for-all developed’, they always said, but in fact this was a pretext for a cosy gossip about children, and ailments, and prices, and the flies, and the new schoolteacher.

And in the morning work began again. Many farmers grubbed, ploughed and planted their land by hand, made mistakes through ignorance, learned the hard way how to set their cane-plants or yoke a plough-team, and worried whether the local storekeeper would extend their credit for an extra £5 or £10. With all these difficulties solved, there would still be the unpredictability of seasons to consider. The northern coast was visited by cyclones in 1911 and 1913, drought in 1914–15, floods in 1917, and in 1918 the grandfather of all cyclones flattened houses and took lives from Innisfail down to Proserpine. Through all these setbacks, despite fluctuations and uncertainties, the sugar industry continued to grow. In 1906 North Queensland had grown 964,056 tons of cane on 57,954 acres; in 1917, a record-breaking year, there were 1,843,331 tons from 78,013 acres. Different districts had undergone different vicissitudes. North of Townsville the
acreage under cane had fallen for a few years after the departure of the Pacific Islanders in 1906, recovering only with the opening of the new mills and the demand stimulated by World War I. Mackay and the Burdekin Delta, originally less completely dependent on coloured labour, had prospered more steadily. But production figures suggested that the North had weathered the adjustment to European labour remarkably well.

Two factors nevertheless made the transition somewhat tough for many cane-farmers: cane prices and labour disputes. Cane prices were fixed by the mills, and they in turn were influenced by the Colonial Sugar Company, who held a virtual monopoly of sugar purchases with only one small competitor at Bundaberg. In practice prices varied perceptibly from one mill to the next, depending on seasonal conditions, efficiency of milling practice, and the type of cane harvested. To growers, these variations were often inexplicable and irksome. Farmers supplying the C.S.R. mill at Hambledon complained in 1906 that their old contracts condemned them to a smaller price than their neighbours whose cane went to the co-operative Mulgrave mill; but in 1915 the balance had gone the other way, and the Mulgrave management was coming under fire. John Drysdale had a running feud with his suppliers on the Burdekin Delta between 1911 and 1913, until eventually a conference fixed prices to the satisfaction of both parties.

The want of any impartial price-fixing mechanism caused general discontent. Criticism, much of it unfair, was levelled at Colonial Sugar, whose monopoly was alleged to give them the opportunity of profiteering at the expense of both producers and consumers. Little truth seems to have justified these allegations, and an exhaustive Federal Royal Commission which toured the cane districts in 1912 found that Colonial Sugar owed its pre-eminence to high efficiency rather than any form of malpractice. But the management of Colonial Sugar was at that time too proud and patriarchal to bother about conciliating the public, and seemed to welcome no progress in the industry except that pioneered by themselves. They had predicted calamity when the Pacific Islanders were deported; they resented the establishment of co-operative mills as a form of government-subsidized competition; and they were frankly hostile to any form of price-fixing. They led the privately-owned mills in opposing a 1913 move in the Queensland Legislative Assembly by a number of non-Labour members from the sugar districts, who combined,
with the Labour Opposition to carry a motion urging the creation of district boards with power to regulate cane prices. This motion suggested the setting up of a tribunal representing growers and millers in any district where requested either by the mill or by two-thirds of the cane-growers. Colonial Sugar claimed that competition between mills kept prices fair, and that lower costs arising from technical improvements by the mills were passed on to the grower. But the company’s stiff-necked attitude towards public relations lost it a fair hearing. Government apathy ensured in 1913 that no action was taken to set up price-fixing tribunals, but 1915 brought a change in ministry, after an election when every sugar-growing constituency in the North swung to Labour.*

The new government lost no time in bringing down an Act. Provision was made for the establishment, at the request of a majority of cane-growers, of a board in any sugar-growing district, consisting of a civil servant, two growers’ representatives and two millers’ representatives, with power to assess a minimum price for sugar-cane during the forthcoming season. A central board was set up at Brisbane to hear appeals from local boards; in practice appeals became standard practice, and the central board exercised a good deal of responsibility. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth Government had placed an embargo on the export of sugar at the beginning of World War I, and the Queensland Government took power to acquire all raw sugar manufactured within the state. An agreement was then ratified under which the Commonwealth purchased the sugar from the Queensland Government and arranged for its refining and sale by wholesalers—in practice, largely through Colonial Sugar. After the war the Commonwealth Government withdrew from the scheme, because of constitutional difficulties, but the basic arrangement continued and is still in operation. The Queensland Government purchases all sugar produced in Australia, including the New South Wales crop; and the refining companies act as agents with the duty of refining and distribution, taking their profits on the efficiency of their methods. Cane prices at the mill are assessed on sugar content, so that the most efficient producers receive the highest amount. Both the Queensland Government and Colonial Sugar played an enterprising role in the introduction and propagation

*According to the North Queensland Register, 14 September 1914, the sugar towns were going Labour because of the organization of sugar workers into unions, and the farmers were completely divided about the best policy for the industry.
of new and improved breeds of cane, and in educating farmers
to better habits of land use.

The labour situation was less easy of solution. There was
inevitably a latent antagonism between the mill-hand or the
cane-cutter who was still an itinerant worker without property
of his own, and the small farmer who was struggling to keep his
status, could not afford to be generous with wages or conditions,
and was proud of his few, hard-won acres which the other lacked.
Even in the sugar-mills conditions were poor, and it seemed as
though the crude amenities left over from the days of alien labour
were still maintained without change for Europeans. At Goondi
mill the men were required to wash their mess kit with bagging
in greasy water. W. H. Gunning, a trustworthy eye-witness of
conditions at Mackay, has recalled:

The accommodation was very poor at some mills, six men to one
room provided with stretchers, no mattress or pillow, buy your own
kerosene lamp. At the Mill Kitchen at the beginning of the crushing
each man was given one tin plate, one knife and fork and spoon, one
enamel pannican, to be returned at the finish of the season. Approxi­
mately 100 men would sit down to each meal. The long dining table,
which sometimes was covered with oil cloth, was provided with salt,
pepper, Golden Syrup, no butter, no jam, no sauce. There was a
serving hatch at one end of the dining room where you received your
choice, roast meat, corned beef, or stew, with potatoes in their jackets
or a slice of pumpkin or sweet potato, whichever was the cheapest.
At the other end of the dining room there was a tub of hot water to
wash your plate, etc. before backing up for the sweets, consisting
mainly of sago, rice and blancmange, all eaten with the addition of
golden syrup. These standard diets soon became very monotonous.
The hot water tub became very greasy as it cooled, and 100 plates had
been passed through the mixture—the fastest eater always had the
cleanest utensils.12

Trade unions had been formed among the sugar workers from
1905, but they were mostly local in their operation, and lacked
continuity of management. The members were all seasonal
workers, so that even the secretary and president often left the
district during the summer. It was always open to a mill manage­
ment to refuse work to known trouble-makers, a potent
deterrent in areas where the mill was responsible for engaging
cane-cutters. By 1910 the organization of capital and labour was
far advanced. A meeting of growers at Townsville in 1907 had
formed the Australian Sugar Producers’ Association; confronting
them was the Amalgamated Sugar Workers' Union, a body whose strength was as yet untired. Following the migration of ex-miners into the sugar industry, the leaders of the Amalgamated Workers' Association came down from Chillagoe to enlarge their activities by bringing about a merger between the sugar workers and their own experienced and confident organization. William McCormack, general secretary of the A.W.A., was responsible for a series of circulars and publications which paved the way for an amalgamation conference in December 1910 between the two unions and a few smaller concerns. The result was that Theodore and McCormack gained all the sugar workers for their A.W.A. To demonstrate the advantages of the new order, the A.W.A. lost no time in presenting a claim for better conditions, higher wages, and a 48-hour week (some mills worked 70 hours). Some of the government-owned and co-operative sugar mills treated these demands sympathetically. But E. W. Knox, general manager of Colonial Sugar, refused to meet the union, saying that his company never discussed questions of pay and conditions with outside bodies: and the Australian Sugar Producers' Association was also hostile.

After fruitless negotiations, a strike was called in July 1911. It was a determined and well-organized affair; at Mackay 400 men formed a strike camp at Balnagowan, where they allocated strike pay and ran a butchery for the maintenance of the men. The mills brought up 'free labour' from the southern cities, and free fights were common, especially after closing time on pay Saturday. But the strikers had a good case and the none-too-silent approval of 'Billy' Hughes, Acting Prime Minister of the Commonwealth at the time. In August the strike ended with the concession of most of the union's demands. Shortly afterwards the sugar workers came under the scope of an Arbitration Court award guaranteeing a minimum wage. The next few years, until the establishment of Cane Prices Boards, were financially difficult for growers, obliged on the one hand to provide wages and conditions of a legally-fixed minimum, and on the other to accept whatever prices the mills cared to offer for their cane. World War I increased their troubles, because while sugar prices were pegged, the North Queensland industry was confronted with a growing labour shortage, which enabled the sugar workers (since 1912 merged with the Australia-wide A.W.U.) to demand better wages and conditions with considerable prospect of success. In 1916, following a somewhat generous wage award by Acting
Justice Dickson, most mills south of Townsville closed in protest, and a number of growers refused to harvest their cane. They were only partly mollified by the new deal offered by the formation of Cane Prices Boards, and in some areas, such as Proserpine, a certain amount of land went out of production.

The involvement of the sugar-growers in a complex wage-and-price structure was a necessary symptom of the decreasing isolation of the North. Sugar was linking North Queensland in growing interdependence with the rest of Australia. Conscious of its nationhood, the young Australian Commonwealth was much exercised about its under-populated tropics, and North Queensland was the one area where a white population 'under standard conditions of life' had established itself. As the Federal Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry stated in 1912:

The problem of the sugar industry to-day ... is primarily and essentially a problem of settlement and defence ... If the ideal of a White Australia is to become an enduring actuality, some means must be discovered of establishing industries within the tropical regions. So long as these regions are unoccupied they are an invitation to invasion as well as a source of strategic weakness. The supreme justification for the protection of the sugar industry is the part that the industry has contributed and will, we hope, continue to contribute to the problem of settlement and defence of the northern portions of Australia.

Some there were who still doubted whether the sugar industry had ensured the permanent settlement of North Queensland. Officials of the A.W.U. complained that non-European labour was far from eliminated in the North, and one estimate from this source put the number of Asian workers in 1916 as high as 2,000. This was clearly an exaggeration, but there remained a few Chinese, a score or so of Hindu cane-cutters in the Johnstone River district, a number of Japanese employees working on the tramways for one or two Burdekin Delta mills. In 1919 a judicial award forbade entirely the employment of coloured cane-cutters.

There was still some tendency for regional differences to persist in the areas north and south of Townsville. E. W. Knox, the manager of Colonial Sugar, had the impression that farmers in the Herbert, Johnstone, and Cairns areas were more interested in trading and selling their farms than in settling permanently. In contrast, the farmers of Mackay, Proserpine, and Home Hill, although 'on poorer country', showed a stronger desire to make their homes in the North. The result was that cane-farms on
the Herbert and Johnstone were gradually falling into the hands of foreign immigrants, particularly Italians. In 1916, on the Herbert and Johnstone, 316 farms were owned by men of British origin, 103 by Italians and 42 by other nationalities; but among the cane-cutters, from whose ranks new farmers were usually drawn, there were 169 British and 621 foreigners, of whom over half were Italian. In some quarters, these migrants were becoming the target of racial prejudice. The hostility so long directed against Pacific Islanders and Asians was all too easily rationalized in terms of economic self-interest, and transferred to foreigners of any sort.

The rise of the Italians should have been neither surprising nor unexpected. The immigrants brought to the Herbert River in 1891 had made the most of their opportunities, after the initial difficulties of adjustment, and had over the years sent back to Italy for their kinsmen. As J. M. Bertei has indicated, with the passing of the Pacific Islanders the sugar industry came to offer good prospects to hard workers with small capital:

By economic co-operation, Italians were soon able to possess many farms; to the Italians, economic co-operation meant a pooling of resources to purchase farms. This was done by a number of cane cutters (usually not more than six) forming a group and saving their earnings until such time as they had saved enough to pay the deposit on a farm; then one of the group would be placed on the farm, while the rest of the group would continue saving to put each other on farms. As one Italian was placed on a farm, his place was taken in the group by a newcomer. Thus, cane-cutting became the first step towards land-owning. Therefore, the sugar industry became attractive to the land-hungry Italians . . .18

The most considerable influx of Italians was not until the years after 1921, when restrictions on immigration to the United States turned many towards Australia. Already, however, they had staked their claim to the districts where they would play a prominent part. The Johnstone, in particular, offered scope for development. Most humid of all the sugar districts, it had supported the strongest concentration of non-Europeans, whose going had not yet been made good by the settlement of farmers of British descent. Here in particular the Italians would do useful work in the consolidation of the sugar industry. But in these early years there were those who feared that their settlement might in some way compromise the ambition of developing Australia’s tropics as an outpost of national security.
Equally questionable was the wisdom of channelling North Queensland’s development so exclusively through one industry. Official investigators in 1916 found it ‘asserted on all hands that on the northern littoral at the present time no other crop can be profitably grown’. The traditional industries of North Queensland offered no likely alternative, save for the somewhat exceptional conditions on the Atherton Tableland. The beef cattle industry had staged a gradual recovery after 1902, and beef prices were not unrewarding until after World War I; but problems remained. Cattle-duffing continued to annoy landowners in the country behind Bowen, until in 1919 eleven men joined forces to raid the property of a family of brothers who combined grazing and butchering. Here the vigilantes found sixty of their cattle with disguised brands and earmarks. Police were called and a thorough muster revealed nearly four hundred ‘strangers’ running with the duffers’ livestock. But the brothers were merely fined ten pounds each for trespass under the Stock Act, and this ridiculous penalty did nothing to change their unneighbourly habits. Cattlemen looked back to the great days before the tick epidemic with inveterate nostalgia. Writing in 1912, A. H. W. Cunningham counted his rising expenses on Strathmore station: wages 25 per cent higher, taxes and rents 20 to 30 per cent more, and all the costs of keeping down the parasites:

... as soon as cattle get together in any numbers the tick worry them to death and as there is no dip mixture that will keep cattle free of ticks any longer than 18 days ... we not only can carry less cattle, but the cost of building dips and yards and mustering for dipping is additional.

One or two men were experimenting with a solution. William McDowall, of Christmas Creek station,* had begun about 1911 to breed cattle from a splendid white Brahman bull imported from the Melbourne Zoological Gardens, and offered in the first instance to the Queensland Government, which had refused it. Although the unorthodox lines of this beast, with its high-ridged hump and heavy dewlaps, were regarded askance by many cattle-breeders, the Brahman variety and its crosses had the merit, already demonstrated in Texas, of strong resistance to tick, and a hardy capacity to survive dry seasons. The main criticism levelled at this breed was an assertion that they ran wild and were difficult

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*West of Ingham and north-east of Charters Towers.
to handle, but advocates of the Brahman not merely denied this, but claimed that young beasts bred from this strain in fact gained weight faster than Herefords or Shorthorns. Regardless of criticism, McDowall slowly bred up a Brahman cross-bred herd, and by 1918 was exhibiting at Townsville Show a highly satisfactory four-year-old bullock sired by a Brahman on a Devon-Hereford cow. He gained few converts, however, until the drought of 1924. Meanwhile, a second Brahman bull from Melbourne had gone to the Port Douglas district, where its progeny spread into a number of herds, of which one bred by Louis Fischer in the comparative isolation of the Daintree achieved the best quality.

Most cattlemen kept to established breeds, in part because standards for export were determined by the four surviving meatworks—the Bergl works near Bowen, Alligator Creek and Ross River at Townsville, and the Burdekin works at Sellheim*—and since most North Queensland livestock were destined for export freezing, stock-owners were understandably reluctant to tamper with established herds. Like the sugar-growers, their access to export markets was already sufficiently disturbed by labour disputes. The Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union, a militant organization, had experienced some difficulty in gaining access to the Northern meatworks, and their organizer, Crampton, told a story of resource over difficulties:

> When the managers refused Crampton admission to the works he splashed across the tidal flats and crawled in through the thick jungle. Conditions inside were indeed bad, but the men and boys followed the union organiser barefooted across the mud to hear the gospel . . . By 1910 Crampton was able to announce that the contract system was abolished at the two big works . . . By the end of 1912 the butchers had secured an agreement with the meat export companies providing for preference to members of the union.22

Considering the shark-infested nature of the waters close to a meatworks, this was heroism. But the union outlived its heroic age, and with wartime shortages of labour grew clamorously assertive. Strikes were called on the easiest of provocations, and Cunningham of Strathmore was not altogether unjustified when he complained in 1919:

> *The Burdekin works closed, after years of poor prices, in 1929. In 1933 a meatworks was established at Queerah, near Cairns.*
The two largest works in North Queensland are closed and have been so for the greater part of the last two years owing to strikes. The strikes are not against the bosses but against the awards of the Arbitration Court... unless the conditions suit them the men will not carry out the awards of the court and no steps are even begun to compel them to do so...

Generally relations deteriorated between employers and unions towards the end of the war. Respectable people blamed the machinations of the I.W.W., but there had always been a tough, practical edge to Northern radicalism which owed nothing to imported ideologies. The old struggle between the 'wages men' and the men of property was taking on a new acerbity as, with the decline of mining and the stabilization of the sugar industry, North Queensland ceased to be a land of hopeful chances for those who lacked capital. Frequently strikes were called with a complete absence of concern for the welfare of the rest of the community. There had been waterside workers' stoppages in 1916 and 1918, resulting in shortages of some foodstuffs in Mackay; and a strike of sanitary employees against the Townsville City Council in 1918 ended in the Council's complete surrender after anonymous parties had begun going around at night emptying the accumulated filth on to the streets. These incidents were but the prelude for the Townsville riot of 1919, which arose out of a strike among the meat-workers.

The Alligator Creek works had been the scene of a strike over pay in May 1919, and four weeks later a second strike was called, apparently for no other reason than as protest against the continued employment of members of the A.W.U. who had not stopped work during the first strike. At daybreak on the morning of 28 June, a group of strikers went out to the railway yards at Stewart's Creek, where 500 cattle were pastured awaiting the end of the dispute, pulled down the paddock fence, and chased the cattle until they scattered in all directions. On the following afternoon two members of the strike committee were arrested—as it turned out, unjustifiably, as they had in fact tried to restrain the more hot-headed element among the unionists. That night a noisy crowd gathered under the Tree of Knowledge in Flinders Street to hear several orators denounce the authorities, after which the crowd moved off to the lock-up, ostensibly to encourage the arrested men with a rendition of 'The Red Flag'. Many of the police were disabled with the influenza epidemic then raging throughout Queensland, but five of those who remained barri-
caded the lock-up and sat tight whilst the crowd gave three groans for the police and threw stones on the galvanized-iron roof. A sergeant went out to parley, but before half-a-dozen sentences had been exchanged somebody threw a punch at him, and there was the sound of a shot. Believing his superior to be wounded, an impetuous young constable grabbed a rifle and fired off a shot into the crowd, to be answered by return fire and a massed rush by the demonstrators, who began tearing down the lock-up fence. It was not until the police fired their revolvers into the crowd, wounding nine men, that the attack ceased and the mob gradually dispersed.

Feeling ran high for several days afterwards. On the following morning the two arrested strike leaders were released on bail, and did what they could to pacify their followers; but their first open-air meeting got out of hand, and the crowd raided several shops in search of rifles and other goods. Police reinforcements were sent up by rail from Brisbane, but their arrival was delayed by the refusal of the railway employees to take them further than Charters Towers.* Meanwhile a seaman’s strike, called independently of these occurrences, had been in progress for five weeks, and Townsville was running short of flour and butter. With all these untoward incidents and the influenza epidemic, Townsville had rather the air of a beleaguered city; as its leading newspaper commented sourly: ‘The history of North Queensland’s principal commercial city for the last nine months is quite on the level of some West Indian negro republic’. This breakdown in civic order was in fact to be the last and worst. The leaders of the A.M.I.E.U. established control over their followers, submitted their troubles to a compulsory conference called by an Arbitration Court judge, and in future kept their disputes within the industry. Within eighteen months, however, beef prices had tumbled below their pre-war levels. They would remain desperately low for the next two decades, until the outbreak of World War II. In the face of competition from Argentine and North American chilled meat, overseas beef exports were no longer profitable for Australian producers. Even with its industrial disputes settled, the meat trade would offer no new contribution to the diversification of North Queensland industry.

There remained mining. From the goldfields, admittedly, there

*At this time Brisbane was connected to Townsville by rail via Rockhampton, Longreach and Winton, but the line was too roundabout for normal passenger and commercial traffic.
was little to hope. Production steadily fell, as the last Ravenswood mining company wound up its affairs, the Croydon reefs returned a steady tale of disappointments, the Etheridge was left to old fossickers. In the deep mines of Charters Towers managements scratched around the last few remunerative pockets of ore, and gradually went into liquidation. Expenses were increasing faster than the value of gold, nor was Charters Towers free from the industrial disputes bedevilling other North Queensland industries. One by one Mills' Day Dawn, the Brilliant Extended, the Bonnie Dundee took their last ore. Edward Theodore, now Treasurer and Deputy-Premier, found himself besought for meagre sums of government assistance by mine managers who, ten years earlier, would hardly have deigned to speak to him. The government was in fact helpful, but nothing could save the Towers. As one by one the mining companies went into liquidation, the pumps that had kept down water in the deep levels were taken out of commission. Quietly the waters filled the old shafts and workings, interpenetrating from one mine to its neighbours, so that the last managements on good ore made haste to exploit everything accessible before the water rose to their level. The crushing mills that had been the pulse of Charters Towers' prosperity fell silent. There was silence in the old stock exchange where the vendors and the brokers had chaffered and haggled; silence on the empty blocks where halls and houses had been removed for reconstruction in the sugar towns; silence around the old mine-shafts where, far below, the quiet waters made an effective barrier to any future exploitation of the central reefs of Charters Towers.

But the Towers could not become a ghost town. It had become too solidly established during the days of its prosperity, and would remain alive, partly as a centre for neighbouring cattle stations, but largely because of its advantages as a site for schools and public institutions. The end of the war had seen the foundation of three well-known church schools, Mount Carmel, All Souls, and Thornburgh, which, together with their appropriate girls' colleges, attracted boarders from all over North Queensland. Steps were also on foot for the establishment of an Eventide Home, completed in 1927, where the veterans of North Queensland could spend their last days among familiar surroundings. Charters Towers had a useful life before it still, but it no longer took pride of place in the economy of North Queensland.

Stronger hopes were entertained of the base-metal industry. Private capital indeed was chiefly interested in cutting its losses.
John Moffat sold the Mount Garnet railway to the Queensland Government in 1914, hoping to apply the proceeds to the development for wartime purposes of the zinc deposits in Mount Garnet. This proved a failure, and in 1916, as liquidator for the Mount Molloy company, he sold that line to the government in addition. Meanwhile, negotiations were in train for the purchase of the Chillagoe Company's railways to Mungana and Forsyth, their smelters, mining leases, and all their holdings except the Mount Mulligan coal mines. The driving force behind these moves was Edward Theodore. That cynical young man—surely the closest that Australia has ever come to producing the Great Gatsby—had become curiously infected, during his career as a union boss around Chillagoe, with the veteran miners' boundless optimism in the chances of striking it rich through mining. In his eagerness to acquire the Chillagoe properties for his government, and to show how efficiently his government could develop the mines where private enterprise had failed, he was willing to spend twice as much as the £450,000 for which his leader, Ryan, eventually negotiated the deal. In parliament he scouted suggestions by an old mining member, Forsyth, that prices for copper would fall after the war, and drew eloquent pictures of the 'mighty future' awaiting the district. The Legislative Council, largely comprised of Theodore's political enemies, was less easily convinced. A Select Committee elicited the information that the local Inspector of Mines believed there was not sufficient ore available, or likely to be found, to warrant government purchase of the railways and smelters; and even the Railways Commissioner, sworn to official neutrality, admitted that

The purchase of the line appeals to me less in the light of a business proposition than as a means of ameliorating the conditions of living on the mineral fields. I take it that it is desirable to keep some population in this section of the State.²⁷

But 'developing the North' was always a good catch-cry when a government wanted to spend money. After two years of stonewalling, the Legislative Council's objections were overcome, and Theodore, at thirty-five Australia's youngest State Premier, won new popularity among his Chillagoe constituents as preparations to re-open the smelters and set the mines producing awoke the town to life.

Theodore's judgment was, of course, wrong. There was in fact a quick fall in base-metal prices shortly after the end of the war,
and after their first two years of operation the re-opened smelters showed ever-growing losses. The main volume of ore supplies came from the Mungana mines, the Lady Jane and the Girofla. Abandoned by their pre-war owners, these properties had been taken up in 1918 by a new company, whose holdings were acquired three years later by the government. It was a deal much on the same pattern as previous acquisitions of company-owned mines by the government. The most significant difference was that a Royal Commission in 1930 found that Theodore and two of his cabinet colleagues had a pecuniary interest in the transaction. 28 The justice of this finding has been disputed—it came at a peculiarly convenient time for Theodore's political enemies—but it is at least certain that Theodore formed too optimistic a view of the ore reserves at Mungana, and committed the Queensland Government to a worse deal than he realized. Either from over-optimism or from the politician's urge to bolster the waning fortunes of his own constituency, Theodore altogether involved the government in considerable unprofitable expenditure on the Chillagoe-Herberton field. When the Vulcan ceased work in 1920 after paying £117,000 in dividends, a state-owned treating works became the mainstay of Irvinebank; a state battery crushed the miners' wolfram at Bamford; the state provided the district's railway services at an ever-growing loss.

Theodore's leaping imagination also aroused a momentary hope for the neglected settlement on Port Denison. Bowen during the first two decades of the twentieth century owed its subsistence to a nicely balanced mixture of activities. The port exported sugar from Home Hill and Proserpine and meat from Merinda, with the wharf-labourers and other workers in many cases owning small farms on which they cropped tomatoes, oranges, and other produce. Partly in order to provide competition for private enterprise, partly to set North Queensland on the road of secondary industry, Theodore in 1920 announced plans for the establishment of an iron and steel works at Bowen. Fifty miles south-west the Bowen River coal deposits promised a fuel supply for many years, and iron ore would be imported from the Yampi Sound deposits in Western Australia. The first part of the plan was duly carried out, and Collinsville—named for the local member, a supporter of Theodore—became the centre of a state-owned coal-mining industry whose output, worked without outstanding efficiency, was freighted by rail to Bowen for shipment down the coast. But the iron and steel works never came
into being. Irked by Theodore’s legislation to raise the rentals due on the leaseholds of pastoral companies, a mission of three Queensland businessmen had been dispatched to London between May and July 1920. Partly as a result of the impression conveyed by this delegation, the financial houses of Great Britain had refused to float the Queensland Government loan from which Theodore hoped to finance the Bowen project and other ventures. Theodore broke the boycott by borrowing in New York, but was obliged to forgo some of his cherished schemes. Among the sacrifices was the Bowen iron and steel works. Once again, Bowen suffered disappointment; and it must have been an added vexation that two of the three men whose delegation had queered Theodore’s pitch in London were Sir Robert Philp and Sir Alfred Cowley, who for so many years in the Legislative Assembly had been the staunch watchdogs for Townsville.

The finger of misfortune seemed to touch every mining venture in North Queensland. A few new discoveries were made—gold at Mount Peter in the ranges behind Cairns in 1916, tin at Ewan, on the Kangaroo Hills field behind Ingham in December 1918, gold again at the Billy Hughes reef behind Proserpine in 1919. None of these finds led to anything important, though the old prospectors went on searching hopefully. Meanwhile the coalmine at Mount Mulligan was worked consistently, only to gain a dreadful notoriety on 19 September 1921 when 75 men lost their lives in an underground explosion heard thirty miles away. Caused by the previously unsuspected presence of firedamp, the explosion resulted in a Royal Commission which severely censured the administration of the mine. Eventually the Mount Mulligan colliery was acquired by the State Government, so giving the Queensland taxpayers yet another hostage to fortune in the North, for the long-term prospects of the mine’s reserves were quite uncertain.

Sugar, then, was to reign unchallenged in North Queensland. Mining was at a low ebb, cattle prices depressed, and other tropical crops had vanished with the passing of the Chinese. Bananas, maize, and rice were being grown in southern Queensland and New South Wales, in districts closer to the main centres of consumption. Only sugar had survived through the tender protection of its marketing arrangements both by private enterprise and government legislation. It was a line of specialization whose growth prospects were plainly restricted, for the industry’s expansion was limited to the purchasing capacity of the Australian
market, with surplus production exported at whatever unprofitable price was obtainable. But a strong postwar demand kept local prices up, and between 1919 and 1921 the cane-farmers reclaimed the ground abandoned after the Dickson award of 1916, and expanded further. New districts were developed. The lands on the Haughton River came under cultivation after 1920, when a privately-owned mill was transferred from Bundaberg to Giru, twenty-eight miles south of Townsville. Theodore, after a gruelling official tour in May 1922 from Innisfail to Cardwell by rail-motor, buggy, and horseback in soaking rain, agreed to the establishment of a co-operative sugar mill at Tully, in the heart of this high-rainfall area. He was also inspired to press forward vigorously a programme of railway construction to complete the missing links in the railway system. In 1924 this aim was fulfilled, and with the government's reluctant acquisition, a few years later, of the private mining railways to Irvinebank and the Etheridge, Cairns with its hinterland came within two days' travelling distance of Brisbane.

The North's dependence on the expensive freights and erratic deliveries of coastal shipping was reduced, and there were signs already of better things to come. Since 1921 Qantas had been operating its pioneer aviation service in the west of Queensland. It would not be many years before Tom McDonald, flying a Gipsy Moth of World War I training type, would be ranging out from Cairns to bring supplies and medical attention to the weirdly-improvised airstrips serving cattle stations and mining townships over a wide radius of the North. The old days of North Queensland's isolation were departing. By the twenties, with problems of transport and distance largely overcome, its three main ports—Mackay, Townsville and Cairns—equal in amenities to any provincial centre in Australia, and its dominant sugar industry based on a population of farmers who had come to stay, North Queensland had become essentially the community of the present day.

No set of events marked more clearly North Queensland's diminishing isolation, its sense of closer identification with the rest of the Australian Commonwealth, than World War I. There is an illuminating character about North Queensland's first attempt to participate in this war. Following the introduction of compulsory military training in 1909, a citizen force battalion known as the Kennedy Regiment was raised in North Queensland. This force had orders in case of war to reinforce the garrison
at Thursday Island. As soon as news was received in August 1914 of the outbreak of hostilities with Germany, the Kennedy Regiment mobilized and requisitioned the steamer Kanowna for transport from Townsville to Thursday Island. Hearing on their arrival of the proposed invasion of German New Guinea, the officers then called for volunteers for service beyond Australia, and about five hundred men (half the regiment) responded. Despite grumbling from the crew, who had at no time been consulted, the Kanowna was pressed into further service, and the Kennedy Regiment volunteers moved on to Port Moresby. Here on 4 September they were joined by the main body of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force under Colonel William Holmes. Greatly to the Kennedy Regiment’s disappointment, Holmes ordered them back to Townsville, on the grounds that many of the men were too young and unfit for tropical campaigning or even for garrison duties. Nor was the Kanowna properly equipped for service: ‘Supplies of clothing and boots were non-existent or unsuitable, food supplies were deficient, there were no tents, no mosquito-nets, no hammocks, and the shipboard accommodation was hopelessly inadequate . . . ’. Indeed, on the way back to Townsville the firemen finally mutinied, and the troops had to stoke the ship back to port.

This episode revealed several North Queensland characteristics. There was the ever-present interest in the South-West Pacific, which led the Kennedy Regiment to covet the distinction of being with the first Australian force into New Guinea. There was the go-it-alone patriotism, the impetuous willingness to take chances, like miners after a new find, which betrayed the Regiment into under-preparation, and compelled superior military authorities to reject their services out of hand. But there was also a determination to persevere against disappointments. Many of the Kanowna expedition afterwards joined the Australian Imperial Force, and, in the words of an official war historian, ‘some of their names will ever be preserved in Australian history’. Among North Queenslanders who saw distinguished service in the war were Captain H. Quinn, after whom Quinn’s Post at Gallipoli took its name; Major F. W. Toll, who commanded the 3rd battalion of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force which eventually took over the garrisoning of New Guinea; and Philip Sellheim’s son, Victor, a surveyor who ended the war as a major-general.

The role played by North Queensland in its contribution to the
war effort matched in quality and enthusiasm any other part of the Australian Commonwealth; but its details were essentially similar. Similar, too, were the returned servicemen’s organizations which after 1919 played a prominent role in community life in the North Queensland townships. Hardly a settlement was too small to honour its fallen with a war memorial, usually in the form of a statue of an Anzac at attention. North Queensland’s most notable and characteristic legacy of World War I was probably the Scartwater Trust. On the initiative of A. H. W. Cunningham of Strathmore, a number of North Queensland graziers formed a committee which, after early bureaucratic opposition, secured a well-chosen run on the Suttor and Belyando Rivers. This property, named Scartwater, was stocked with heifers donated by neighbouring pastoralists, with the object of building up a herd from which the profits might be applied to the benefit of ex-servicemen and their dependants. By 1927 the property was free of all debt, with assets including 7,000 head of cattle and improvements costing about £8,000. From 1929 the trustees, under Cunningham’s management, made annual grants to the Townsville branch of the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia, to be applied to deserving purposes, including scholarships for the children of servicemen. The Scartwater fund has continued to prosper to the present day.

Perhaps more than any conventional war memorial, it exemplified the characteristic North Queensland reaction to the impact of two world wars. But in general, in its post-war character as in its war effort, North Queensland after 1920 was becoming ever more closely assimilated with the rest of Australia.

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1Of 15,000 people between Townsville and Cooktown examined for hookworm in 1918, Dr E. R. Waite found 20 per cent of European origin and between 75 and 95 per cent of Aborigines afflicted. (N.Q.R. 18 Nov. 1918).


3For the development of the Atherton Tableland, I have drawn on the files of the *Barron Valley Advocate* 1904–8, the memoirs of T. McGeehan, and H. Borland, *From Wilderness to Wealth*, Cairns, 1940 (all held by the Atherton Shire Council).

4Tableland Examiner, 23 July 1909.

5Of twenty-five pioneer families described in the *Home Hill Observer* during 1961, eleven were migrants from the goldfields, eight new arrivals from the United Kingdom, four from other areas of Queensland, and two had been employed on pastoral properties near the Burdekin Delta before the Inkerman estate was cut up for sugar-growing.


*Q.P.D.*, CXVI, pp. 2502, 2729 et seq.


A. H. W. Cunningham to Bernard Mullin, 27 May 1912 (Strathmore MSS).

*Common Cause*, 17 March 1922 (account by a Left-wing writer, differing in some details from other sources).

For the account of Scartwater, I have used material held by Mr E. Cunningham at Strathmore station, and *C.C.M.*, June 1933, p. 43.
Inheritors*

One hundred years after settlement, North Queensland was securely established as a ‘white man’s tropics’. Prosperity was evident at every point from Sarina to Mossman. Only the Peninsula bore a touch of the earlier wilderness, and here the hope of mineral wealth buoyed up expectations for the near future. Elsewhere the raw crudities of pioneering had been replaced by almost every amenity of city life: bullock-waggons and mule-trains gave way to motor transport and aircraft, hessian safes to refrigerators, isolation to the contact of telephone, radio and even television. If North Queensland was an Australian frontier, it was not a frontier which seriously modified or altered the national character. Instead the aim has been to use every device of science and technology to create a community reproducing the Australian pattern of life almost in its entirety.

This achievement has been largely based on the sugar industry. More and more this industry became concentrated in the North; since 1920 the area has consistently produced about three-quarters of Australia’s sugar, and in 1965, for instance, was responsible for 1,644,492 out of a Queensland total of 1,883,364 tons of sugar. Of North Queensland’s nine hundred factories producing an output of $319,532,000 in 1965–6, the twenty-two sugar mills were responsible for $137,492,000, or nearly half; the only other major producer was the Townsville metal industry complex drawing on Mount Isa and the far inland, with an output worth $73,773,000. Few other regions of Australia could boast a string of communities so evidently prosperous as the sugar towns of North Queensland. The industry had justified the fifty-year-old hope that it would ‘contribute to the problems of settlement and defence of the northern portions of Australia’.

The importance attached by North Queenslanders to the sugar industry was well illustrated during the 1950s, when the method

*Particularly in the writing of this chapter, but also for much helpful comment on other aspects of this book, I am greatly indebted for local information to the kindness of Mr Austin Donnelly, of the Townsville Daily Bulletin, and Cr W. O. Garbutt, of Ingham.
of handling sugar for export was altered. Previously raw sugar had been bagged, transported by road or rail to the nearest port, and then loaded into ships’ holds by wharf labourers. This involved considerable man-handling on the wharves, and was heavy, unpleasant work. It was perhaps not surprising that the North Queensland waterfront had a lively tradition of strikes and stoppages over pay and conditions. During the twenties bitter clashes were aroused over the methods of recruiting waterfront labour.\(^3\) In some ports, such as Cairns, lumpers had to spend much time waiting, without any certain prospect of a job, and complained of favouritism and victimization on the part of stevedores. Their employers claimed freedom to recruit the most efficient gangs, and opposed the union formula of a rotary system ensuring a share of work for all members. During the thirties and forties conditions improved gradually, but a tradition of strike action persisted. This in turn irritated sugar-growers and exporters, whose business was often inconvenienced by strikes over issues which seemed to them petty and meaningless. In every respect there was much to be said for introducing a system of mechanical bulk-handling: improved working conditions, quicker turn-round of shipping, and a reduction of working costs which would eventually offset the considerable capital expenditure required with a somewhat difficult cargo such as sugar. The main drawback was that it would concentrate sugar exports at five terminal points, leaving the other ports with diminished business and unemployed labour.

The State Government and Colonial Sugar, as the appropriate authorities, eventually chose Cairns, Mourilyan (near Innisfail), Lucinda (an outport of Ingham), Townsville and Mackay. This decision caused some considerable disquiet and protest in the unlucky ports. Bowen in particular had hoped to serve the Home Hill area to the north and Proserpine to the south, as had been the case in the past; instead, she lost the one to Townsville and the other to Mackay. This supersession by her richer neighbours, followed by two destructive cyclones in 1958 and 1959, seemed to augur badly for the consistently unfortunate mother-town of North Queensland. In fact, however, the loss of sugar seemed to stimulate development in other directions. Some comfort might be drawn from the fact that between 1954 and 1961 Bowen had one of the fastest-growing populations in North Queensland. The district was also the scene of an experiment in regional planning which deserved imitation elsewhere;
with the active co-operation of local authorities, State Government and University of Queensland experts undertook a detailed regional survey, from which blueprints might be drawn for the district's future development. Smaller ports which lost a share of the sugar trade were, however, hit harder. Port Douglas, for instance, seemed limited to its tourist potential, which was considerable but (some would say mercifully) undeveloped.

As with its exports, so in other respects the North Queensland sugar belt reflected the Australia-wide tendency to centralization. Recently the big towns have spread fastest. Townsville, Cairns, and Mackay carry double the population they had thirty years ago, whereas small centres purely dependent on farming, such as Babinda, Gordonvale or Tully, have tended to stand still or to grow very slowly. Simultaneously, there has been a recent tendency for the average size of sugar-farms to increase. This trend towards consolidation is favoured by the rising costs of mechanization, and it has been argued that, if a system of mechanical cane-harvesting came to be widely adopted, North Queensland's pattern of farming might gradually change. The plantations might re-appear in modern guise, with mechanical slaves instead of the muscle-power of Pacific islanders. This might occur if North Queenslanders ceased to be attracted to cane-farming; for wider educational facilities offer the young Northerner a more sophisticated range of job opportunities than the simple choice between going on the land or remaining a 'wages man'. But small-farming is unlikely to disappear. Mechanical harvesting need make no difference to the costs of farming, if cutting were done by contract. The cane-growing community would not welcome radical change in the present structure of the industry, which has been achieved only after much argument and compromise between producers, millers, and consumers. No political party is anxious to tamper with the small-farming basis of the sugar industry, since the growers are a politically alert group whose electorates can swing either way. The present system has a strong appeal to migrant families from Southern Europe, whose hunger to own land and consuming urge to work long hours and endure hard conditions as a way of self-betterment can be met without too much sense of competition with older inhabitants. Indeed, the industry seems to be one of the more successful roads to migrant assimilation. Finally, the plain fact is that, after a century of propaganda about developing the North, Australia has found the sugar industry by long odds the
most successful and stable means of settling Europeans per­manently in the tropics.

This is no longer merely a reflection of the sugar industry’s
greater influence in securing the protection of capital investment
and government action. Politicians and private investors alike
have often expressed pious hopes that other industries would
flourish in North Queensland. And there have been successes.
The Atherton Tableland has grown sleekly prosperous from
dairying, maize and peanut-growing, and pig-raising; marketing
of these products has been controlled since 1923 by government
boards elected by growers. Tobacco-growing has a more
chequered history. An attempt to foster the industry near Mareeba
after 1928 was hit severely in 1932 when the Commonwealth
Government revoked the high tariffs of its predecessor, and
stability came only with the establishment of a factory in 1947.
A second scheme planned to place War Service settlers at Clare
on the Lower Burdekin, using irrigation. But the settlers were
plagued for several years after its inception in 1949 by variable
seasons, inflexible water supply schedules, and high indebtedness
to the Queensland Agricultural Bank. The industry survived,
and in the 1965–66 season the North produced 12,224,000 lb.,
or slightly more than five-sixths of total Queensland output.
The only other form of agriculture of any note was a pocket of
tomato-growing around Bowen, which produced slightly less
than one-third of Queensland’s commercial product of 897,000
bushels. Cotton, maize, bananas, and pineapples were all
attempted, but the North Queensland output was only a fraction
of the State total. Tea-growing experiments at Innisfail were
consistently successful, but had yet to be proved commercially.
Marketing difficulties, it seemed, stood in the way of any diversi­
fication of the North’s agriculture.

Of the traditional North Queensland industries, cattle-grazing
emerged during World War II from a long period in the doldrums,
and has since done well from the fifteen-year Anglo-Australian
meat agreement of 1950, followed by high prices on the American
market in 1959–60. Like pastoralists throughout Queensland,
Northern graziers found their security of tenure limited by State
government land policy. For years no freehold was granted, and
whenever pastoral leases expired, the land was shorn of a con­siderable part of its acreage to provide blocks for new settlers.
Demand for such new blocks is very keen, but only newcomers
with a fair sufficiency of capital have much chance of succeeding
honestly. Meanwhile, established pastoralists contemplating improvements to their properties are discouraged by the thought that any marked increase in productiveness will excite the attention of the Land Court when their leases are next due for renewal. Nevertheless, the post-war years have seen a general pattern of improvement and some slight increase in stock numbers, although in carrying 1,061,198 out of the Queensland total of 5,929,998 beef cattle, North Queensland is not as heavily stocked as in the nineties before the coming of the cattle tick. One encouraging factor is the presence of a fairly high proportion of resident owners in the district, including several such as the Allinghams, Atkinsons, Clarkes, and Cunninghams, whose families have now followed pastoral pursuits in North Queensland for a hundred years.

Livestock improvement has been a subject of controversy. Pioneer experiments in breeding cattle from part-Brahman ancestry have been followed by a more general acceptance of the new breeds. Their owners claim for these beasts the virtues of greater hardiness, tick resistance, and heat tolerance, without loss of weight or quality. Many pastoralists, however, swear staunchly by the traditional Devon-Shorthorns and Herefords, and the subject is still one of the quickest ways to start a lively argument. Advocates of the ‘Brahman’ breed were among those who formed plans for cattle fattening on artificial pastures on the moist coastal lowlands around the Tully and the Herbert. Since the nineties brought cattle-tick and the spread of sugar-growing, cattle-raising had languished on these lowlands, but it had never vanished entirely, and these proposals suggested interesting opportunities for expansion.

Mining was still a potent lure in North Queensland, despite a long history of booms that ended in disappointment. Sanguine hopes were aroused by the re-discovery of rich bauxite, estimated at 200 million tons, at Weipa on the Cape York Peninsula in June 1955. It soon became apparent, however, that the Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation’s development of these deposits would affect few North Queenslanders except those actually employed at Weipa; these included a number of Aborigines from a nearby mission, who thus became some of the few members of their race to earn the standard basic wage. But although a model of modern production methods and living conditions, the settlement at Weipa, like almost every other North Queensland mining town before it, was simply a producer of raw material. A month
after the first bauxite was shipped away, in March 1963, for smelting at Bell Bay in Tasmania, it was announced that the refinery at which the bauxite would be processed before smelting would be set up at the Central Queensland port of Gladstone. It was impossible to treat the bauxite in North Queensland because of the absence of suitable fuel.

North Queensland was not usually thought likely country for oil prospecting, nor were its coal reserves promising. In 1958 the State Government determined to close Mount Mulligan as unprofitable, and two years later to sell Collinsville to private enterprise—a decision taken after a long period of friction with militant trade unions. Other forms of mining were at a low ebb, except for tin, which had revived during and since World War II through dredging operations near Mount Garnet. The end of the base-metal empire was perhaps symbolized when the Chillagoe smelters were sold for scrap in 1950. Gold, apart from a little activity during the depression of the thirties, hardly counted except in the hearts of a dwindling fellowship of old prospectors.

In sum, the economy of North Queensland was still that of a primary producer for export, just as it had been throughout its history. Like almost every other part of Australia, North Queensland sought to attract industry and to diversify its production. The quest for private investment and public works was no less keen than when Gilbert Parker wrote in 1889 of the 'envious faith' which spurred North Queensland communities to push developmental schemes. One sign of this energy was the promotion of a flourishing tourist traffic, aimed mainly at fugitives from the winter cold of New South Wales and Victoria, but not without an eye to visiting Americans and similarly prosperous travellers from overseas. Most visitors found, during hospitable entertainment in the North, that they were invited to admire the achievements of man no less than the splendours of the scenery. As early as 1935 the Barron Falls, behind Cairns, was harnessed to the uses of hydro-electricity. Further upstream, about twelve miles from Atherton, Queensland's first major dam for irrigation purposes was completed at Tinaroo Falls in 1958, and filled to its capacity of 330,000 acre feet in March 1963. Its waters were channelled inland to tobacco-growers on the headstreams of the Walsh River. A more ambitious scheme envisaged the damming of the Burdekin at the gorge where it breaks through the Leichhardt Range. The State Government set up a statutory
authority to oversee the scheme; but the economics of the plan have been attacked on several sides, most trenchantly by Colin Clark, and the Commonwealth Government has not been sufficiently convinced to proffer the necessary financial help. Many North Queenslanders, anxious for the development of their resources, disputed these views; but the basic problem of opening markets for North Queensland produce remained a formidable obstacle.

Transport has improved markedly since the war, although coastal cyclones can still bring everything to a standstill. Nearly every substantial town in North Queensland is connected by Australia’s major airlines to the southern states and to New Guinea. Many formerly isolated cattle stations now possess airstrips, served by Flying Doctors based at Charters Towers and Cairns, and by a locally based and financed airline, Bush Pilots, with a considerable reputation in the Cape York Peninsula as friend, carrier, and lifeline. Behind Cairns, where once the roads were the curse of mule and bullock teams and the despair of the first motor traffic, the steep ranges have been traversed by a series of bitumen highways completed since 1926: the Gillies, Palmerston, Kuranda, Cook, Rex, and Mulligan tying a wide circle of country from Cooktown to Innisfail and inland beyond the Atherton Tableland to the entrepôt at Cairns. The main highway south through Townsville and Mackay to Brisbane has been under bitumen since 1964.

Of all transport facilities, the railways were probably the most criticized, especially by stockowners who complained that their cattle lost a good deal of condition on the slow journey from railhead to meatworks. Many of the smaller lines behind Cairns, to the Atherton Tableland and the mining country beyond, lost revenue and were either scrapped or reduced in services. Even the main trunk line from Cairns to Brisbane incurred some unpopularity through its slowness and the disruptions which occurred almost every summer by the flooding of a low-level crossing of the Burdekin near Ayr. Against this, the Railways Department could claim to have kept cattlemen solvent during the depression by holding freight rates at an uneconomically low level. During the critical war years 1942 and 1943, thanks partly to some unusually good behaviour on the part of the Burdekin, supplies were kept going uninterruptedly to the civilian population and to a heavy concentration of armed forces in North Queensland. A recent programme of modernization
brought the air-conditioned *Sunlander* and *Inlander* express to Northern lines and extensive improvements to overcome the problem of flooding, especially the high-level Burdekin bridge completed in 1957.

Townsville, at any rate, was fully conscious of its dependence on rail transport. Much of its prosperity stemmed from the day when it had wrested the Charters Towers railway from Bowen. By the time Charters Towers passed its peak, the line had already been extended to Cloncurry, and eventually touched the edge of the Barkly Tableland that stretches over the Northern Territory border. This enabled Townsville to tap the resources of the far west, particularly the mineral wealth of Mount Isa and Mary Kathleen and the cattle of the Northern Territory. Neither of these industries was altogether satisfied with the burden of rail freights involved through the use of Townsville as an outlet. ‘An alarming share of the wealth of Cloncurry and Mount Isa has been wasted on the long railway to Townsville’ wrote Geoffrey Blainey in 1960, pointing out that a port on the Gulf of Carpentaria would have suited the mining industry much better.

Some western cattlemen interested themselves in a scheme to develop the Channel country of south-western Queensland as fattening country, using stock routes running south from the Barkly Tableland and the Gulf country to the New South Wales railhead at Bourke. However, after much bickering, which culminated in the refusal of the World Bank to advance a loan for the purpose, the State Government persuaded the Federal authorities to underwrite the complete reconstruction of the railway to Mount Isa.* A few months earlier, in June 1959, the opening of a copper refinery at Stuart, six miles from the centre of Townsville, tightened the links between port and mining industry. These developments confirmed the status of Townsville as the metropolis of the North; so, too, did its choice as the site for a university college opened in 1961, and its acquisition in the following year of North Queensland’s first television station.

Television and the university college: how far Townsville had come from its pioneering origins! And how differently North Queensland had turned out from the expectations forecast a hundred years previously! Many had prophesied that its natural resources would demand a conventional pattern of tropical development, with a European minority exploiting the labour

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*The State Government had to find one-third of the cost, as well as interest payments on the Federal loan.*
of other races. Instead, the Australian way of life has been deliberately fostered in North Queensland. By the 1960s there were many respects in which the North seemed indistinguishable from the rest of Australia. North Queenslanders bought from the same chain stores, heard the same radio and television programmes, even worked the same office hours, without any concession to the midday heat which enticed other races into the siesta habit. The environment no longer seemed a problem. Those who told Gilbert Parker in 1889 that no white family in Cairns would live to the third generation had been compellingly refuted. The Institute of Tropical Medicine at Townsville (closed, a victim to the panic measures of the depression, in 1930, and never re-opened) suggested that a healthy life was open to any person of common sense and moderate exercise, and that only alcoholics and neurasthenics were the worse for the climate. And yet were North Queenslanders entirely without characteristics of their own?

Among the people of the North a strong spirit of communal identification, of belief in qualities which in some way distinguished them from the city-dominated Southerner, was plainly discernible. North Queensland still described itself as the ‘frontier of the future’, and this was appropriate enough for a community offering many hopeful opportunities for research and investment. But it was not a ‘frontier’ in the historic American sense of an outlying region of cheap land shaping the outlook of its settlers until they threw off the habits of thought of older lands and formed a new set of ideals. Nor was it a ‘frontier’ in the way that journalists and authors were still prone to portray it: a remote community full of picturesque eccentrics and tall stories about crocodiles, and gold-rushes, and sting-rays, and conflicts with hostile Aborigines. Perhaps North Queensland was a healthier climate for individualists than Sydney or Melbourne; certainly colourful characters and incidents had marked its past. But to over-stress the picturesque misses the real significance of the solid and often very monotonous achievement involved in pioneering North Queensland. The pioneers were not story-book heroes or supermen. They showed great qualities of endurance and a capacity for risk-taking; but they were frequently short-sighted and careless in their exploitation of the land, and it was the unspectacular qualities of the small farmer, the resident grazier, and the working miner, rather than the dashing speculators and sugar-planters, which laid the surest
foundations for the future. The pioneers took to the North to win an independence and self-improvement promised by cheap land and undeveloped resources, using the aims, techniques, and attitudes of mind already developed in mining, grazing and farming in older parts of Australia. Only the sugar-planters had looked like twisting the character of North Queensland into a new form; and they had neither the numbers nor a secure enough economic foundation to prevail against opposition.

The sugar-farmers who succeeded them at the turn of the century seemed little different in their outlook and way of life from the wheat and dairy farmers of southern Australia. Soon, however, a new element came to the fore. The Italian settlers of 1891 were followed during the next thirty years by a steady intake of friends and relations from their native villages in Lombardy. After 1920 the flow quickened noticeably. Immigration restrictions in the United States turned Italian cultivators to seek their fortunes in Argentina and Australia. Many were drawn to the established community in North Queensland, including, for the first time, Sicilians and other southern Italians. Innisfail, where the decay of the Chinese banana plantations had left land open for selection, attracted considerable numbers. Ingham was next in favour, with smaller groups at Cairns, Proserpine, and the Burdekin Delta. This influx caused some disquiet among the Anglo-Australian inhabitants. Several commentators feared that Ingham and Innisfail were becoming like towns in a foreign country. As early as 1922 the Townsville Chamber of Commerce was deploring the reluctance of native-born Australians to take up cane-farming, so leaving the field open to aliens whose willingness to defend the North might be suspect. The Australian Workers' Union officially adopted a policy of accepting Italian workers in the sugar industry, provided that they had previous experience of cane-cutting and adhered to union rules. Through ignorance of the language and customs, new migrants often transgressed these rules, and friction and prejudice were almost inevitable. As competitors for jobs the Italians were not always welcomed, and there were stories of their willingness to dodge union regulations by fair means or foul. It is said that one gang of cane-cutters got through a considerable amount of overtime on Sundays by starting in the middle of a canefield, and working towards the outside, leaving only an intact outside border to deceive the eye of any passing union official. It is certain that by November 1925 the
Inheritors

millhands at Plane Creek (Sarina) were refusing to handle cane from Italian farms because they said the migrants tended ‘to lower the standards of comfort and conditions in the industry’. In that year the situation warranted the appointment of T. A. Ferry,* a seasoned civil servant well versed in Northern affairs, as Royal Commissioner investigating the migrant influx. He found that Italian cane-cutters far outnumbered British-Australians in the Herbert and Johnstone districts; the majority of cane-growers were still of British origin, but here, too, Italians were gaining, and had almost become a majority around Ingham. His report was not altogether free from prejudice—it accepted the common myth which extolled the northern Italian at the expense of the swarthy and ill-behaved southerner and the ‘unproductive’ Greek restaurateur—but its general conclusions came down on the side of tolerance. In practice racial hostility was kept within bounds until the thirties, partly because in 1925 an agreement between the Australian and Italian governments restricted immigration to Italians nominated by residents in the Commonwealth or possessing £40 capital.

After the onset of the depression, conditions worsened; but much of the violence of those years arose within the Italian community itself, quarrelling over Mussolini’s Fascism (which most of them rejected), or taking to gunfire over somewhat involved feuds which may or may not have had anything to do with the activities of the Mafia. Such excitements affected only a minority, just as there were many who stood aloof when the Communist Party sought to befriend Italian comrades during the late thirties. But the path to assimilation never seemed easy, despite individual cases where migrants and their older neighbours settled tolerantly together. Difficulties increased during World War II when many unnaturalized farmers were interned for the duration, leaving their families to carry on in conditions whose hardship was increased by the tensions of wartime. It was only after 1945 that the remnants of ill-feeling mellowed with the continuing prosperity. By 1959 it was possible for the Queensland centenary celebrations at Innisfail to include the erection of a bilingually inscribed monument presented by the Italian community to honour the sugar industry’s pioneers of all origins. Second generation Italian-Australians absorbed the tastes and

*Born 1877, son of a squatter; Police Magistrate Ingham 1914–16, Cairns 1916–20; undersecretary in various state government offices 1920–4; also headed 1929 Royal Commission on Mining Industry; died 1963.
outlooks of their schoolfellows, and grew up to play the same sports, enjoy the same radio programmes, and drink beer instead of wine. An increasing number married the daughters of British or Irish Australians, and children with names such as Terence Italiano or Colleen Respighi were completely accepted by their cousins on both sides of the family. The standard Australian pattern of life had again prevailed in the North. Perhaps the main traces of Italian influence were the excellent quality of the bread at Ingham and Innisfail, and a tendency, natural enough in a warm climate, for the young inhabitants of sugar towns to stroll of an evening in slow groups about the main streets, greeting each other, chatting and eyeing the opposite sex in a manner vaguely reminiscent of the main square of an Italian provincial town. It seemed to emerge clearly from the Italian experience that, considering the difficulty with which this European element had been absorbed into the culture of North Queensland, it would be almost impossible for any substantial non-European group to win acceptance. It was true that the Australian-born Chinese in Northern towns had long since outlived the bitter hostility of an earlier generation, and were among the most respected sections of the business community in towns such as Innisfail and Atherton; but their numbers were few and decreasing, and they represented no threat to the established standard of living.

The Italian influx had less influence on religious behaviour than might have been expected. Census figures indeed showed a change, for in several sugar districts Catholics surpassed Anglicans as the leading denomination; but as early as 1923 Father Mambrini reported that the religious position was ‘desperate’: many children under five were unbaptized, few marriages sought the blessing of the Church, and 96 per cent of migrants had not been to the sacraments since leaving Italy. Many, eager to build up their farms and businesses, deterred by language barriers and the lack of Sunday clothes, and often living some distance from the nearest church, stayed away and contributed little; but they showed no disposition to quit altogether the church of their fathers, and cheerfully availed themselves of the parish priest’s services as immigration agent. Other denominations also complained that North Queensland in the twenties was a hard field to till. Post-war prosperity, however, reflected itself in church-building. The sugar towns boasted a considerable number of substantial and well-supported Roman Catholic churches and schools, staffed largely by clergy and nuns with Irish names.
The Church of England for its part was also distinguished in North Queensland for its Catholic tradition. Partly from the influence of the 'Bush Brotherhood' of Saint Barnabas, the diocese became a stronghold of High Church practice. This was attributed to the continued intake of English clergy, whose influence might perhaps be discerned in the dedication of suburban churches at Townsville and Mackay to Alfred the Great and Charles I; but it remained no less strong under the first Australian-born bishop, Ian Shevill, under whose régime the North Queensland diocese became remarkable for its originality, both in adapting church architecture to tropical conditions and in proclaiming the first Australian saint. This was John Oliver Feetham,* a highly popular Bishop of North Queensland who was locally canonized fifteen years after his death in 1947.

In politics North Queensland produced several variations on the Australian norm. For a generation after 1915 Northern seats in the state parliament were strongholds of the Australian Workers' Union; it could almost have been said that an A.W.U. organizer carried a cabinet minister's portfolio in his tucker-box. In Theodore, Gillies, McCormack, and Forgan Smith, North Queensland provided Labor with four successive leaders, and Queensland with its premiers for all but three of the years between 1919 and 1942. As in the earlier days of Macrossan and Philp, the North's grievances were in some respects assuaged by the care with which its influential and able politicians promoted public works for the area. Oddly enough, the federal seat of Herbert was less safe for Labor. When F. W. Bamford left the party over conscription in 1916, he continued to be returned for Herbert until his retirement in 1925. Theodore, the chieftain of the A.W.U., stood for the vacancy, but received a severe check to his ambitions through defeat by the narrowest of margins by a Nationalist, Doctor L. W. Nott.† At the same election the neighbouring seat of Kennedy was unexpectedly thrown to a non-Labor candidate by the death, shortly before polling day, of Charles McDonald, member since Federation. But in 1928

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*John Oliver Feetham was born 1873; educated Marlborough, Cambridge, and Wells; deacon and priest at Bethnal Green, London, 1899–1907; Principal of the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd, Bathurst, N.S.W., 1907–13; Bishop of North Queensland until his death in 1947. Known as 'the swagman Bishop'.

†Born 1885, son of a Maryborough sugar planter; served overseas in World War I; M.P. for Herbert 1925–8; later resided in Canberra; M.P. for Australian Capital Territory (Independent) 1949–51; died after defeat in 1951.
Herbert was captured for Labor, and next year the Riordan family, who bore a respected name among many outback unionists, began a hold of Kennedy broken only in 1966.

Perhaps Labour ran some danger of becoming too much of an orthodoxy in North Queensland. At any rate the old direct-action radicalism was by no means dead, and during the later thirties and World War II found expression in a number of splinter groups. Northern discontents were perhaps sharpened by the experiences of the war. Morale, indeed, remained good, even at the height of the Japanese threat when between five and seven thousand evacuees were removed from Cairns, a like number from Townsville, and the engaged girls of Herberton cached their glory-boxes in disused mine-shafts. In the front line of Australia's defences, North Queensland suffered very little damage from attack; three air-raids on Townsville were quite ineffective, and a bomb dumped on Mossman injured a small girl, who later recovered. But the influx of thousands of Australian and allied servicemen, at times outnumbering local residents, gave rise to considerable strain and tensions in the community. The services commandeered housing and telephone services without caring sufficiently what became of civilians affected. Food shortages and water restrictions were embittered by gossip about waste by service personnel. Brawls, larrkinism and road accidents increased, although not out of proportion to an abnormally large population of young men. There were shop-keepers and publicans who took advantage of wartime shortages to profiteer outrageously.

There was, of course, another far more creditable side to the story. North Queensland reactions to the threat of invasion were quite free of the panic which overtook Darwin after the Japanese entered the war. Many who joined the Volunteer Defence Corps were prepared to exploit the unrivalled potential of the North Queensland terrain for guerrilla warfare, and trained efficiently and well. Northern hospitality generally proved equal even to the demands of the war years. But it was an unsettling period, when it was easy to believe that southern Australians might abandon the North to the invader to shelter behind the 'Brisbane line'. Although a report on civilian morale in the summer of 1943 found 'local pride ... strongly developed everywhere, and the citizens ... all intensely proud of the place to which they belong', there was a feeling of dissatisfaction abroad which found expression in a flirtation with new and unorthodox political parties.
In 1944 State elections saw the height of this movement. Cairns that year returned a member of 'the King O'Malley Labor Party', a brother of the colourful 'Bombshell' Barnes of Bundaberg. Mundingburra, an electorate centred among the railwaymen of South Townsville, returned Tom Aikens, the nominee of the Hermit Park Labor Party, which soon extended its scope to become the North Queensland Labor Party. Bowen, partly through the influence of the Collinsville coal miners, but mainly through the peculiar Queensland system of first-past-the-post voting, returned a Communist. The only representative of his party ever to sit in an Australian legislature, F. W. Paterson was a former Rhodes Scholar with a popular reputation as a poor man's lawyer, even among those who differed violently from him in politics. Again successful in 1947, when the Labor and Country Party candidates once more split the non-Communist vote, Paterson was ousted in 1950 when his constituency was abolished for redistribution among its neighbours. His success was not so much a portent of Moscow influence in the North, as a survival of the old irreverent Northern radicalism which chose a man irrespective of his label, and enjoyed cocking a snook at respectable party politicians. Since 1950 North Queensland's politicians, for the most part, have all stayed within conventional party alignments. It is still an area where personality counts for much in a local member, and it has been mainly through endorsing strong candidates that the Country and Queensland Labor parties have been able to reduce Labor's hold on the North in state politics; although, of course, allowance must be made for the continuing prosperity of the sugar industry and the reflection of an Australia-wide swing to the Right since World War II. In federal politics North Queensland (divided since 1949 into two electorates, Herbert and Leichhardt) has mainly returned Labor members, but its constituencies are marginal and have each on occasion gone the other way. The triumphant exception to these generalizations has been the veteran railwayman, Tom Aikens. Blessed with the finest command of Billingsgate heard in the North since the days of 'Plumper' Hoolan, Aikens's success as an outspoken comedian tended to conceal the fact that he was a first-class champion of local wants and grievances, and on many issues a man of more enlightened and liberal views than most of the orthodox politicians. His constituents returned him with resounding majorities until he was in a fair way to graduating as 'father' of the Legislative Assembly; but his party label of
North Queensland Labor Party reflected only his success as a local member and in no way heralded the return of the secessionist party to Brisbane politics.

It is difficult to assess the strength of the New State movement in North Queensland. Its partisans were vocal at intervals ever since Federation, and have been sufficiently active to hold several conventions since the war. The arguments put forward in favour of creating a new state in North Queensland stemmed largely from a belief that the North failed to receive its fair share of public works and developmental capital. A separate state would be able to exercise more effective pressure on Canberra, spend the money with a keener eye to local requirements, and tap new reserves of local patriotism to speed the region's advancement. To leave the North underdeveloped would merely excite the attentions of the teeming millions of Indonesia and points north. Such arguments made light of the difficulties, under Australia's present complicated federal structure, of setting up the administrative machinery of a new state. Nor was it certain that any conceivable increase in North Queensland's population would make much difference to a determined invader in the age of nuclear warfare. At any rate, the New State movement made slow headway, gaining comfort only from a statement in 1959 by the Premier of Queensland (Frank Nicklin) outlining a ten-year programme for Northern development, after which it might be appropriate to think of autonomy. 1969 arrived, but autonomy didn't.

To a sympathetic outside observer, perhaps ignorant of the loyalties and personalities involved, it seemed that the creation of a new state did not come high on the list of North Queensland's necessities. In the North Queensland Local Government Association the region had already a consultative body, meeting regularly to discuss problems of importance, which by exchange of information and democratic argument could wield some influence as an authoritative, but conveniently informal pressure-group. Economically, the future pattern of North Queensland's growth depended plainly on the decision of outside investors and the Commonwealth Government. It would have been possible to build up North Queensland as an exporter of tropical produce, as it probably might have been if developed on the plantation system or through smallfarming by Asian settlers. But most of the potential importers in South-East Asia were not rich in reserves, and it was unlikely that Australian manufacturers would agree to any large-scale admission of the products of Asian
secondary industry. The alternative for North Queensland was either to remain dependent on its established sugar, cattle, and mining industries, with fair but limited growth prospects; or for a more active policy of diversification to be pursued through subsidized industries and public works on a large scale. In either case decisions have to be taken on a national scale. The white man’s tropics in North Queensland is the responsibility of the whole Australian Commonwealth. For the North Queensland community has evolved, after many disappointments, antagonisms, and hardships, into a relaxed, hospitable, well-integrated society of Australians, whose immense faith in their region’s potential deserves well of their fellow-countrymen.

3Q.P.P. 1926, II, p. 1075: ‘Report of the Committee appointed to inquire into the causes and extent of unemployment in the calling of Waterside Workers in the various ports of Queensland and into other matters incidental thereto’.
4Colin Clark, Australia’s Hopes and Fears, p. 88.
5G. Blainey, Mines in the Spinifex, p. 44.
6See the account of an eminent member of the Institute, Sir Rafael Cilento, in R. Cilento and C. Lack, Triumph in the Tropics, Ch. XXXII.
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Professor G. C. Bolton, M.A. (W.A.), D.Phil. (Oxon.) was born and educated in Perth, Western Australia.

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So, blow ye winds, heigho!
A digging we will go,
I'll stay no more down South, my boys,
So let the music play,
In spite of what I'm told,
I'm off to search for gold,
And make a push for that new rush
A thousand miles away.

'The Old Palmer Song', derived from
the Cooktown goldrush, 1873.