

## R.G. Hay

### RISE AS DECLINE ON THE QUEENSLAND COAST.

Cattlemen are not blind, nor averse from beauty in the landscape, though partial to a paddock of fats with grass to their bellies. So, when their land chances to run to the shore, they come to know the place where a little creek nestles under a headland, with a clean stretch of sandy beach, dunes and she-oaks, on the other flank. They use it for the occasional day's fishing, or celebratory picnic. In time, their landlocked friends, employees and former ones who left in good grace, sundry odds and sods, come to have access rights in a loose, informal way. A rough hut or two, a few campsites with safe fireplaces, get put up. Then, a change of owner, a run of poor seasons, unluckily high medical or education expenses and they do a bit of subdividing. A rough track, rudimentary streets, houses with rainwater tanks and windmills, made from such stuff as stands being carted over a rough road, materialise. Residents invite their friends, regular visitors retire there, the local council starts to take a desultory interest in the road. Eventually,

progress being inevitable and technological,  
there's power and phones, a school, single-lane  
bitumen most of the way from the main road,  
a shop or two, and a caravan park. And a bowls club.  
Not being a venturesome pioneer, that's the phase  
in which I get to know, and enjoy, these settlements.  
Pretty, quiet places that, selfish as it may be, you'd  
wish to have stay unchanged forever. But  
towns can't stop time in its tracks any more  
than people can. They boom. I drive past.  
The coastline's long, but finite. Still, I'm  
pushing sixty. I don't think, in my time, quite  
everywhere will be high-rise, and swanky pubs.  
My grandchildren, though, or their kids anyway,  
will have to look in the illustrated history books  
to see what their ancestor meant by writing  
"beach" or "little town" in all those poems.