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THE NORTH QUEENSLAND REGISTER.



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

by

JIM MANION

### ALONG THE LINE

*See James Robertson Chisholm, below.*

### LOUIS BECKE

*George Lewis Becke, who wrote as Louis Becke, was born at Port Macquarie, New South Wales, on 18th June 1855. He was an adventurer whose travels in the South Seas and North Queensland from the age of fourteen to thirty-six provided him with material for over thirty books. His own accounts of his life are fictionalised, and the precise details have yet to be established. His two sojourns in North Queensland are particularly poorly documented. His contributions to the North Queensland Register probably came as a result of his personal friendship with David Green, the manager and editor. It is not generally known that Becke worked on the Townsville Bulletin as a reader when Dod Clarke was editor, Edmund Banfield sub-editor, and David Green reporter. This occurred during his second stint in Townsville in the late eighties, although when his daughter, Nora, was born in Townsville in November, 1888, he described himself as "draftsman," living on the Strand.*

*During his earlier residence in Townsville he worked as a bank clerk, adventured with Reginald Spencer Browne, and courted Caroline Louise Nixon, daughter of Francis Hodgson Nixon, the editor who succeeded Browne at the Townsville Herald.*

*The obituary in the North Queensland Register destroyed another of the biographical myths perpetuated by Becke's own works — that he had first started writing in Sydney in 1892.*

*The obituary confirmed:*

When in Townsville Louie Becke commenced writing and it was there he gathered the material from which he built his sensational story, "The Man in the Buffalo's Hide."

BOREE

*See James Robertson Chisholm, below.*

JAMES ROBERTSON CHISHOLM

*J. R. Chisholm had most of his contributions to the North Queensland Register and later the Townsville Daily Bulletin published under the nom-de-plume of "Along the Line."*

*He was born in Victoria at Vaughan Springs in February 1855 and his early working life was spent in railway construction in Queensland in association with his uncle, who was a civil engineer and railway contractor. He came to North Queensland when the railway was being built from Townsville to Charters Towers, and later lived at a number of towns along the Western railway line beyond Charters Towers, including Pentland, Torrens Creek, Coalbrooke Station and Prairie. As manager of Wright Heaton & Co. he travelled extensively in the western district and thus gained much of the subject matter for his regular column in the North Queensland Register, which ran for at least twenty years.*

*He settled on a property at Stanley, near Townsville, and died in 1927, collapsing in a paddock of his property while inspecting his cattle. His obituary, written by "Cestus" (E. G. Barrymore), described him as:*

*an outdoor man, a man who loved the bush, its moods, its law and its mysteries. He was a dreamer of dreams, this gaunt, tall Australian with a touch of the mystic handed down by his Highland ancestors . . . he wrote carelessly, and with a fluent pen, seldom re-reading his copy or correcting it . . . Mr Chisholm's belief in North Queensland and advocacy of its possibilities was a passion, and he never tired of writing of it, or of trying to encourage the people brave enough to try and work out an independent livelihood.*

FOOTNOTE: Chisholm's identity as "Boree," the writer of "McPhie's Bore," was revealed when the story was republished under his name in the Sydney Mail, June 6, 1906. In this second publication it was illustrated by Sid Long. — Ed.

### E. A. DALY

E. A. Daly contributed short stories and sketches sporadically to Christmas numbers of the North Queensland Register around the turn of the century. A series of his contributions, from March to June, 1905, were signed "Poor Daly."

### E. DOWNS

This name does not appear in the list of contributors to Queensland newspapers, and it is not mentioned in the regular reference books on Australian writing.

### GEORGE ESSEX EVANS

George Essex Evans was born in London on 18th June, 1863, and came to Queensland in 1881. He undertook an unsuccessful farming venture on the Darling Downs, and then for some time he taught in private schools and began to contribute to the weekly papers. Later he gained employment in the Public Service and in this role wrote tourist guides and literature for the Queensland Government Tourist Bureau. His first poems had been written during his farming days and he contributed prose and verse to the press throughout his life. He died in Toowoomba in 1909.

Together with James Brunton Stephens, Evans is viewed as the archetypal early Queensland poet. He wrote five long narrative poems, all on the theme of the eternal triangle—two men and one woman. The best known of these is "The Repentance of Magdalene Despar." He also wrote much patriotic verse, notably "An Australian Symphony." His poetry as a whole contains a strong ethical and philosophical vein. In *Queensland and Its Writers* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1959),

Cecil Hadgraft commented on Evans' work in the style of "The Chant of the Lonely Digger":

In his humorous verse he can relate a ridiculous incident well, but he is not so funny or so witty as Stephens.

#### EX-BUSHMAN

*No information available.*

#### RICHARD HOLT

*Under the pen-name of 6x8, Dick Holt contributed a weekly column, entitled "On the Wallaby," to the North Queensland Register from January 1899 to August 1920. That the viewpoint of swagman, from which he wrote his column, was real and not a literary pose, is confirmed by a yarn which was printed in the North Queensland Register on 12th March, 1923, in "On the Track," the successor to "On the Wallaby." The reminiscence was signed "Libra:"*

Years ago I met Dick Holt, better known to readers of the N.Q. Register as "6x8." Our meeting took place on the Lower Burdekin in '98. We were camped together for the night at the Clare Crossing. Holt was going on to Townsville; I was on my way to Proserpine, and both were travelling as per boot.

*Libra goes on to recall how Holt procured a much-needed hand-out for him from the nearby publican by a series of ingenious lies: that Libra was his brother, that he was deaf and dumb, and that he was ill and that they were on their way to Townsville to procure medical treatment. This necessitated the two swaggies' early departure from the scene, and "long before the kookaburras were awake the following day we had rolled our swags and departed in opposite directions."*

*That the life of a swaggie was variable however, is suggested by a recollection printed in "On the Track" on the 26th November, 1923:*

An imposter at a wayback pub represented himself as 6x8 who contributed to the Register. He promptly secured a week's board and numerous drinks on the strength of his statement.

Then he suddenly disappeared and left the publican lamenting. A few days later the genuine 6x8 turned up at the hotel, and throwing his swag on the verandah, he breasted the bar, called for a drink, and asked the publican for a room. At the same time he introduced himself as the well-known author of "On the Wallaby" and said he would pay for the drink when he unrolled the swag. The publican, who was a burly individual, jumped over the counter, caught 6x8 by the scruff of the neck and bundled him out on the dusty road. "Don't you come here with your 6x8 yarns as I have had quite enough of them. I'll put you in a 7x2," he yelled.

*Yet a later reminiscence in "On the Track" (5th October, 1935) recorded Dick Holt's death in a Tasmanian hospital — "he passed through the press entrance in the Golden Land." In fact, the writer of "On the Wallaby" is an interesting example of the intelligent Bohemianism which was a feature of Australian literary life at the turn of the century and later.*

(C. F.)

#### GEORGE JACKSON

*George Jackson (1856-1938) was born in Manchester, England. He arrived in Rockhampton in 1871 and subsequently joined his brother Thomas and E. H. T. Plant in the operation of crushing mills at Charters Towers and Ravenswood. In 1888 he selected a property on the Upper Cape River which he operated as a grazing farm but he sold out in 1893 when he was elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly representing Kennedy. He held this seat until October 1909 and served as Secretary for Mines and Public Works from 1904 to 1909. He had represented Labor until 1902 and then swung his allegiance to Morgan as a Kidstonite. In 1895 he contributed a number of short stories to the Eagle in Charters Towers. These had Charters Towers and North Queensland settings and included "Edwin West," "Brother Will" and "String Gully." He also contributed to the Boomerang and the Queenslander. The North Queensland Register reported his political activities and published his articles and short stories regularly between 1890 and 1935.*

## J. JINGLE

*No information available.*

## STEFAN VON KOTZE

*Stefan von Kotze, journalist and author, was born in Klein-Oschersleben, Germany, in 1869 and was reputed to have been the nephew of Count Bismarck. His visit to Australia followed travels to Africa and New Guinea, and his globe trotting was carried out in a search for adventure and for literary material.*

*A. G. Stephens had described him as:*

*An astonishing prodigal who cast forth from a Schloss to eat husks with the swine in Australia, and who did eat with Chinese and Kanakas hoeing cane on a North Queensland sugar plantation, yet taught himself in two years such English that he wrote verses still here to be reckoned with.*

*Von Kotze served as a journalist and leader writer on the Northern Miner in Charters Towers under David Green and briefly edited the Eagle in Charters Towers in 1899. The same year saw him as a prolific contributor to the Bulletin in Sydney. His comments on Australian life, which include "Experiences in Early Australian Journalism," were published in Germany as Australische Skizzen in 1903, and subsequently translated by L. L. Politzer as Australian Sketches, published in Melbourne by Pan Publishers in 1945. Von Kotze died in 1909.*

## ARCHIBALD MESTON

*Archibald Meston was born in 1851 and in the seventy-three years of his life achieved a rare mix of occupations, having been a journalist, parliamentarian, civil servant and explorer.*

*He was born in Scotland and came to Sydney with his parents in 1859. The family settled on the Clarence River in northern New South Wales. Here he learnt about farming, but from time to time was able to make extended tours of exploration through the country districts. He was appointed editor of the Ipswich Observer in 1875 and in February, 1881, edited the*

Townsville Herald. From Townsville he moved to Cairns, managing a sugar plantation on the Barron River, and serving on the Cairns Divisional Board. Earlier he had represented Rosewood in the Queensland Legislative Assembly between 1878 and 1882.

*His experience of and interest in exploration, his rapport with the Aborigines, and his bent for natural history were responsible for his commission to lead the government party which explored the summit of the Bellenden Ker Range in 1889. Subsequently he received other commissions, many of them dealing with the welfare of Queensland Aborigines, and he later served as Protector of Aborigines for southern Queensland. He was a man who mixed sporting attainments with scholarly interests and was the author of a number of books, including a Geographic History of Queensland in 1859; Queensland Aborigines, A Proposed System for Their Improvement and Preservation in the same year; and a Queensland Railway and Tourists' Guide.*

#### ALEX MONTGOMERY

*Alexander Esmé de Lorges Montgomery was born in Londonderry, Ireland, in 1847, into an old Anglo-Irish "plantation" family with French connections. Though destined for the diplomatic service, he went to sea and travelled the world before entering journalism in Melbourne at the age of twenty-three. Later he travelled in the Malay Archipelago, and his experience there is reflected in "The Deicides."*

*Returning to Sydney in 1884, he was employed by the Evening News, but soon left it to roam the outback. In 1886 he joined the staff of the Echo and began to contribute to the Bulletin. When the Echo folded, he joined the Bulletin's staff, and became responsible for the page, "Aboriginalities." Some of his novels were serialised in the Australian press and he adopted a number of pen names, including "Montalex," "Sardonix" and "Heretic." In 1897 the Red Page of the Bulletin reviewed his collection of stories and commented that consideration of them:*

*brings the reflection that no one among local writers had a better talent for crisp, clean narrative, with the words cunningly*

chosen and placed to give greatest effect in least compass and the balanced sentences ringing like anvil-strokes.

*FOOTNOTE: W. E. Fitzhenry, in an article entitled "The Men Who Wrote the Bush Ballads," printed in the Bulletin on September 8, 1955, wrote as follows:*

An odd thing about Alex Montgomery, who wrote "A Curious Reminiscence," a macabre piece in which a corpse is dragged in from the stables to drink with old boon-companions, is that he was a mild, spectacled chap who once fainted in the *Bulletin* office at the sight of a cat that had just met an accidental death. The writer of some of the most blood-curdling verses that ever appeared in the *Bulletin*, Montgomery was himself killed by a tram at Cremorne (Sydney) in 1922. — *Ed.*

K. C. N.

*No information available.*

W. A. PEEKE

*W. A. Peeke regularly contributed verse to the North Queensland Register during the 1890's.*

6 x 8

*See Richard Holt, above.*

A. G. STEPHENS

*Alfred George Stephens was born at Toowoomba in 1865 and achieved the distinction of being the first pupil on the roll of the Toowoomba Grammar School. He passed his Senior university examination at the age of fourteen.*

*Entering journalism, he gained experience with a number of papers, ranging from the Darling Downs Gazette in 1884 to the Cairns Argus in 1892, where he was editor and part owner. While in the North he wrote a pamphlet, "Why North Queensland Wants Separation," which was published in Townsville by the North Queensland Separation League in 1893 and in the*

same year by the British Australasian Office in London.

In 1893 Stephens travelled in America and Europe and was employed for a time in London as a journalist for the Daily Chronicle. Returning to Australia, he joined the Sydney Bulletin in 1894 and two years later founded the Red Page, named from the red paper used for the covers of the Bulletin. Under Stephens' guidance this section developed into the prime medium for literary criticism in Australia. Stephens is remembered more for his critical than for his creative writing. He died in 1933.

#### TAIPO

*No information available.*

#### TOWNEY

*The identity of this author is unknown. The pseudonym appears on a number of verses contributed to the North Queensland Register towards the end of 1905.*

