

LIFE IN THE NORTH: RESPONSES TO
LANDSCAPE AND PEOPLE

Nowadays we are familiar with a range of responses to the North Queensland environment, exemplified most strikingly perhaps in the clash between conservationists and developers. Such differences are a feature of the region's history, and can be observed especially in the two stories printed first in this section. Though in "The Cave Skeleton" Archibald Meston shows an undeniable prejudice against aborigines, he is also prepared to record their behaviour carefully and with a certain detachment. He is open to direct experience of them and of the landscape and seems to concede that North Queensland will not necessarily conform to contemporary European ideas. On the other hand, E. A. Daly's perspective in "One of Our Bush Girls" is blurred by prejudice and by standards learned elsewhere. This is true especially of his attitude to aborigines and of his ideal of womanhood, both of which govern the direction his story takes.

Other contributions to this section show a strong sense of regional identity, expressed humorously in the poem by Towney and in W. A. Peeke's "The Man and the Mango," and more seriously in "Night in the Far North" and in "Destiny's Mis-Fire." The first-person narrator of "Destiny's Mis-Fire" maintains his sense of himself as a North Queenslander in a place where the climate is not congenial and the people are not unreservedly friendly. His feelings will be understood by many a traveller from the region today.

Stories and poems in this section have been selected with a view to providing more insight into contrasting life-styles in North Queensland around the turn of the century. "The Mesmeric Schoolteacher" and "The Difficulty of Dan McMilty" are set in small towns, while other works deal with a would-be sophisticated dinner party, and life in the outback and on the coast.

