

## THE PACIFIC: FACT AND FICTION

*In the 1890s Australians seem to have been much more imaginatively aware of their nearness to the Pacific and to South-East Asia than they are now. Tales of this area comprise an easily-recognizable group in literature of the period, and the Pacific is of special significance in North Queensland writing because the region was the obvious sailing-off point. Men sailed from Townsville, Cairns and Thursday Island to New Guinea, the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands and Indonesia, and their adventures en route were often worth recording.*

*The first narrative in this section, "A Pearlshelling Trip to the Coast of New Guinea," is a factual account of such a voyage, first undertaken in a remarkably casual spirit. Returning mariners were often tempted to embellish their adventures, and yarns about sea monsters constitute a recognizable genre, the only purpose of which was to entertain. "Worse Than a Shark" and "The Deicides" are both tales of this type, with the latter being markedly more exotic and fantastic than the former. Louis Becke's ironically named story, "Bringing the Glad Tidings," is written from the perspective, not of the European sailing out into unknown parts to encounter strange peoples, but from that of a European who has settled among a tribe of Pacific Islanders, with whom he feels an affinity. The villains, in Becke's estimation, are the missionaries, who aim not at adapting themselves to their new environment, but at replacing the Islanders' world view with their own. Modern readers might find this viewpoint more congenial than the assumed right to conquest which underlies the other stories in this section, though at a considerable depth. "Bringing the Glad Tidings" is one of Becke's most deeply-felt stories; it is rendered the more bitter by the tragic twist at its close.*