

"DOMINIE'S" LOG

Dunedin Drama Group Tours Central Otago

THIS is a report of a tour of Central Otago undertaken by a group of amateur actors. The play was Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound*, the company all members of the Dunedin Training College Drama Club, travelling under the name of "Dominie Drama Group." The tour occupied 10 days, the play being presented six times—at Milton, Roxburgh, Alexandra, Cromwell, Tarras, and Hawea Flat. There were 15 people in the party, the six men and three women of the cast, the make-up-artist-wardrobe-mistress, the business manager, the producer and his wife, and the owner-driver of the truck with his wife, all except the last three being Training College students. Our transport consisted of a one-ton truck, a baby car and an old touring car. Accommodation varied from frosty motor camps to private billets and the luxury of a guest-house at Hawea Flat, where we ended our tour with three days of ease and plenty. The previous night, at Tarras, most of the party had camped in the hall, cooking food over an open fire outside.

Ours was not the first tour of its kind in recent months, a Dunedin W.E.A. group calling themselves the "Unity Players" having blazed the trail last Christmas with *Night Must Fall*. We received much useful information and advice from them before embarking on our own tour, and since returning have been interested to compare notes. Our route was not quite the same as theirs. We played Roxburgh and Alexandra instead of several smaller places included in their itinerary. Of the places in which both groups had played, both found that Milton was "no good." For some unknown reason, no more than about 60 people came to our performance there, the Unity Players having had only a slightly larger audience at Christmas. Those who did come seemed interested and appreciative, but I fear that for an opening night, especially one of such an experimental nature, quantity even more than quality is required of an audience, so that both groups are agreed that Milton will not be the starting-place for future tours.

They Thought it Funny

One of the most interesting aspects of our whole trip was the way in which audiences varied from place to place. We had a full house at Cromwell, and one almost as good at Alexandra, but at both these places a large proportion of the audience treated the entire play as high comedy, a reaction which at first the cast found somewhat disconcerting, although it left them in no doubts about the audience's enjoyment of the play.

The Tarras hall was the smallest in which we played, the stage being so small that part of the set had to be omitted and new stage moves worked

out at the last minute. These could not all be rehearsed beforehand because of an unexpected power failure lasting for about one hour and ending only half-an-hour before the play was due to begin. The audience, too, had been delayed by the blackout, and the performance that night started nearer 8.30 than 8 o'clock. This audience, which comprised all ages from babies to the very old, like its predecessors preferred to treat the play as a comedy. In spite of this most general reaction, however, it seems that the uncanny atmosphere of the play "got across" to the audiences, as this impression was mentioned in Press reports which appeared in the Cromwell and Alexandra newspapers.



AN AUDIENCE much-to-be-admired

Our last audience, at Hawea Flat, was perhaps the most appreciative of all. This widely-scattered community provided a large and much-to-be-admired audience who turned out on a very frosty night, armed with rugs and hot water bottles, to sit for two-and-a-quarter hours on backless forms in an unheated hall. At the beginning of that night's performance there were a few whistles and jocular remarks flung at the stage from the back rows, but these soon died away, a development which we took to be a compliment to actors, audience and author alike.

Final Performance

The play itself, from the point of view of the cast, wore well. They continued to enjoy performing it throughout the tour, even after weeks of rehearsing and two preliminary performances given at Training College before the end of the term. From the point of view of the three members of the company who worked in the front of the house (ticket-selling, programme-selling and ushering) it remained interesting, somewhat to their surprise, up to the last night. On that occasion, owing to the coldness of the hall combined with fear (this time unjustified) of the embarrassed titterings which usually accompanied the last scene, they suddenly felt unable to sit through another performance. Up till then the play itself, the form of the actors during each different presentation, and the varying reactions of the audiences managed to hold the attention even of those who saw and listened to it night after night

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