

"MEN WITHOUT WIVES"

Play on Northern Loneliness

Good Characterisation

THE CAST.

Lovett GORDON MARSHALL
 Fred ERIC KELEK
 Mrs. Bates AGNES CULLEN
 Channa MERLE DINNING
 Andy JACK BOW
 Jack LEY OUTRIDGE
 Mrs. Abbott JOYCE DOWLING SMITH
 John Abbott RAY KELLY
 Joe Bates LUDOVICK GORDON
 Tom Bates HEARLE
 Clara Bates MILBA LOWES
 Lulu Bates LORNA WATT
 Bob McKee ALLAN WARD
 Dr. Lucas Jones ALLAN BURKE

Play produced by Barbara Sisley.

When the Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society agreed to play Mrs. H. Drake-Brockman's "Husbands without Wives," a play set in the loneliness of North Australia, we had yet another example of the melancholy nature of the Australian theme. Why must we have plays about the unpleasant things in Australia, and not more of the brighter side of life? Probably the logical answer to that is because there are greater possibilities for drama in the former.

This play at any rate, had as its central theme: this loneliness allied to another rather ugly theme, the cohabitation of black women with white men. The stage settings of the play, I feel, do not quite represent the actual conditions that exist on North Australian cattle stations. They generally do live more comfortably than that. But is it within our province to question that aspect? Have we not to accept the play on its merits as a play and not merely as a faithful replica of the conditions that do exist?

I have visited such outposts as this, and the conditions are vastly different from those represented here, but that does not mean that there are not in Northern Australia homes of this type. Nevertheless brushing aside this objection, if such it can be called, we find in the action a very strong line, but it does not link the three acts together. At first one might get the impression that the main theme of the play is not strictly adhered to. In the first act we have the rough conditions fairly well underlined, with the irrepressible Mrs. Bates, in khaki shirt, and man's trousers emphasising the manly, case-hardened women of the

and man's trousers emphasising the manly, case-hardened women of the north. Women to wear the trousers and do a man's work, and accept life as it is. Into this environment comes Mrs. Abbott, a pretty city girl with her husband. "Can she stand the racket?" She is shocked to learn that cohabitation between white men and black women is not merely not frowned upon but accepted as a reality. It shocks her. The second act loses sight of this main theme altogether, but in the last act it links up again in the decision of Mrs. Abbott not to leave it all, merely because of the thought that her husband might go native.

GOOD CHARACTERISATION.

The play flows smoothly and there is much good characterisation. Mrs. Bates is undoubtedly the central character. The hardness of her first appearance is softened as the play proceeds. In the main it was a very good performance though uneven in its adherence to the original concepts of the part. The author has endeavoured to portray her as a woman with a softer side to her nature, despite the hard externals. It was here that Agnes Cullen rather failed to be her real self. But in the main the character was very convincing and very well drawn. Ludovick Gordon as Mr. Bates, her husband, was excellent. Everything about him rang true. Ray Kelly as the young husband could have stood out in stronger relationship to the remainder of the cast. Joyce Dowling Smith did some really good acting as the young woman, who was almost unequal to her task. Ley Outridge played the cavalier stockman, who was as willing to accept the favours of the girls as he was to accept any that might be offered from Mrs. Abbott herself. It was a rather difficult role, and he failed to put too much into it. Merle Dinning caught to perfection the timid character of a native servant unused to strangers. Gordon Marshall as Lovett, the white man who kept a black harem, Milba Lowes and Lorna Watt as the two sisters (daughters of the Bates) were admirably contrasted, and Allan Ward made a hearty and convincing insurance commissioner, and Allan Burke, with his immaculate white shirt which I am sure is not likely to be found in the whole of the cattle country of the north, was quite in keeping with his part. Miss Barbara Sisley produced the play admirably, and there were few fewer protests than usual. It will be repeated this evening.

A.H.T.