

MR. PICKWICK TAKES THE AIR

"WHAT a study for an artist did that exciting scene present! The eloquent Pickwick, with one hand gracefully concealed behind his coat tails, and the other waving in air, to assist his glowing declamation; his elevated position revealing those tights and gaiters, which, had they clothed an ordinary man, might have passed without observation, but which,

when Pickwick clothed them—if we may use the expression—inspired involuntary awe and respect. . . Yes, we all remember the words with which Dickens introduced Mr. Samuel Pickwick in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, and most of us have seen at one time or another what one artist made of "that exciting scene." "Spacious" is probably the word for the world Dickens created—it was never more so than in *The Pickwick Papers*; and something of

its spaciousness will be brought to listeners in a new medium when an NZBS production of *The Pickwick Papers* starts from 4YC next week.

Readers of *The Listener* who remember the item about the NZBS *Pickwick* that appeared in *Open Microphone* soon after it was produced will know that the story is told in seven parts in an adaptation made by John Keir Cross and used first by the BBC. The New Zealand production is by Bernard Beeby, who brought together for it one of the largest casts used by the NZBS. Members of the *Seagulls Over Sorrento* company, Gordon Chater and William Hodge, have leading parts as Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller; John Carson-Parker, now with the New Zealand Players, plays Mr. Snodgrass; William Austin is Mr. Tupman; Donald Crosby is Mr. Winkle; and Brian James is Mr. Jingle. Olive Lucius, who came here with the *Brigadoon* company and stayed for some time working for the NZBS, has the part of Mrs. Bardell; and Bernard Beeby himself plays Tony Weller. Music bridges and sound effects were an important part of the production, and these were done by Roy Melford and Gavin Yates (who also played Mr. Serjeant Snubbin).

Making a Selection

How would you go about selecting your material if you had the job of compressing one of the best-loved books in the English language, 300,000 words long, into seven half-hour episodes? Answering this question in the *Radio Times*, the man who had the courage to do so said that he tried to solve the twofold problem of selection and presentation by inventing characters for Messrs. Chapman and Hall, the original publishers, and letting them present "a few scenes and characters" as they recollect them. So Mr. Chapman (Kenneth

Firth) and Mr. Hall (Kevin Miles) are really the first characters heard in the radio production of *Pickwick*. It is 1837, and they are in a pleasant state of reminiscent enthusiasm about their new publication. Yes, in a way Mr. Keir Cross passed the buck by letting two characters which he had largely invented make the selection for him!

In the result it is Mr. Pickwick's own story which provides the continuous thread so necessary in a radio serial. There has been a general tightening of pace, there is a sense of bustle and turmoil. Even such famous scenes as Christmas at Dingley Dell and such characters as Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen have been left out, though Mr. Keir Cross admits he was tempted down some byways—"particularly to dwell, with true love, on my own personal favourite in all the great gallery: the adorable, eternally adorable old Tony Weller in his immortal mortal combat with Stiggins and that 'ere shepherd. . ."

Charles Dickens was 22 or 23—he was a little vague about it himself when he recalled it later—when Mr. Hall called on him with the proposal that led to the writing of *The Pickwick Papers*. Mr. Hall found a young man "with eyes wonderfully beaming with intellect and running over with humour and cheerfulness." On his part Dickens recognised in his visitor the person from whom he had bought two or three years before the first copy of the magazine in which his first story had appeared—a pretty important and memorable occasion, as any young author will tell you. (Dickens, at any rate, on that occasion "walked down to Westminster Hall, and turned into it for half an hour, because my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride, that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there.")

At that meeting Dickens agreed to write a series of papers, which had been proposed in the first place by the popular comic artist, Robert Seymour, as a vehicle for his drawings. The contract was for 20 monthly instalments of 12,000 words each, at 14 guineas a time.

Phiz Takes a Hand

Before the second number was out Seymour committed suicide, though Phiz—as Hablot Knight Brown called himself—did not have a hand in *Pickwick* till the fourth number. Till then sales had been poor, and Dickens actually agreed to a lower payment for the work; but with the fifth instalment—and Sam Weller—*Pickwick* really started to sell. "There has probably never been such a literary success, before or since," J. B. Priestley has said in a BBC talk. "The country went mad over *Pickwick*—old and young, rich or poor, it made no difference, they all delighted in it, clamoured for it at the bookstalls, and could hardly wait for each new number to appear. When *The Pickwick Papers* finally appeared in volume form—and this was in 1837, when Victoria came to the Throne—it was a colossal triumph, and may be said to have remained a colossal triumph for the following 50 years, when it was constantly reprinted. Its chief characters became national figures; indeed, they became international figures. Quotations from the book became familiar sayings."

The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club will start from 4YC on Saturday, January 16, at 7.30 p.m., and later will be broadcast from other YC stations.



First appearance of Mr. Samuel Weller

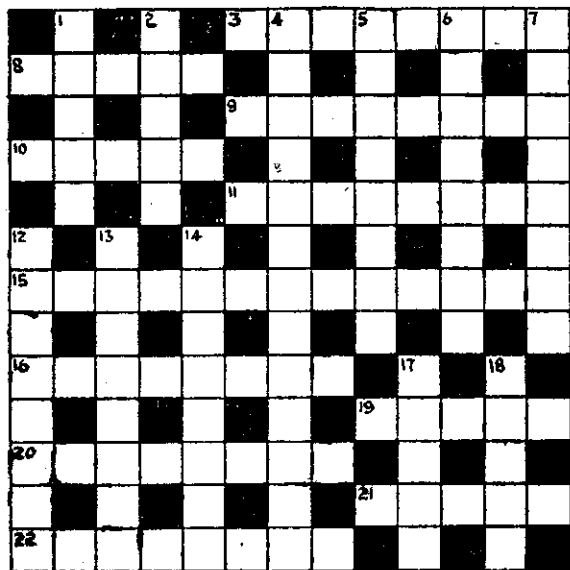
"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

Clues Across

3. I'd remain in the culminating point.
8. As a whole it belongs to you, but in the end it belongs to us.

9. Sting Pop for a filling in his tooth.
10. "Who steals my —, steals 2 down" ("Othello," Act 3, Scene 3).
11. Seaport of Southern Italy.

No. 677 (Constructed by R.W.H.)



15. Lament pet mare (anag.).
16. Soon time for feelings.
19. This lazy creature finishes up by being reluctant, too.
20. Black-eyed Susan obviously didn't have these (two words).
21. Broken panes?
22. She ate it (anag.).

Clues down

1. Here you see us under the morass—it's very phoney.
2. See 10 across.
4. Men retain tent for amusement.

(Solution to No. 676)

M	A	R	T	I	A	L	P	H	A	S	E
I	E	N	I	O	P	L					
N	I	G	H	T	S	T	R	O	P	H	E
A	A	E	S	T	E	G					
R	E	L	I	G	I	O	U	S	A	M	Y
E	E	M									
T	A	W	D	R	Y	C	O	G	E	N	T
	E			S	R						H
L	E	A		D	A	L	L	I	A	N	C
E	T	E	E	S	O	R					
V	E	H	I	C	L	E	O	L	I	V	E
E	E	R	P	N	S	A					
L	O	R	R	Y	S	U	S	P	E	C	T

5. Strikes forcibly upon.
6. Originate.
7. One grill suffices for a dwarf Negro.
12. "My — is made perfect in weakness" (Second Corinthians, 12, 9).
13. Enables.
14. Reserved.
17. "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my — shall I see God" (Job, 19, 26).
18. Saturate.