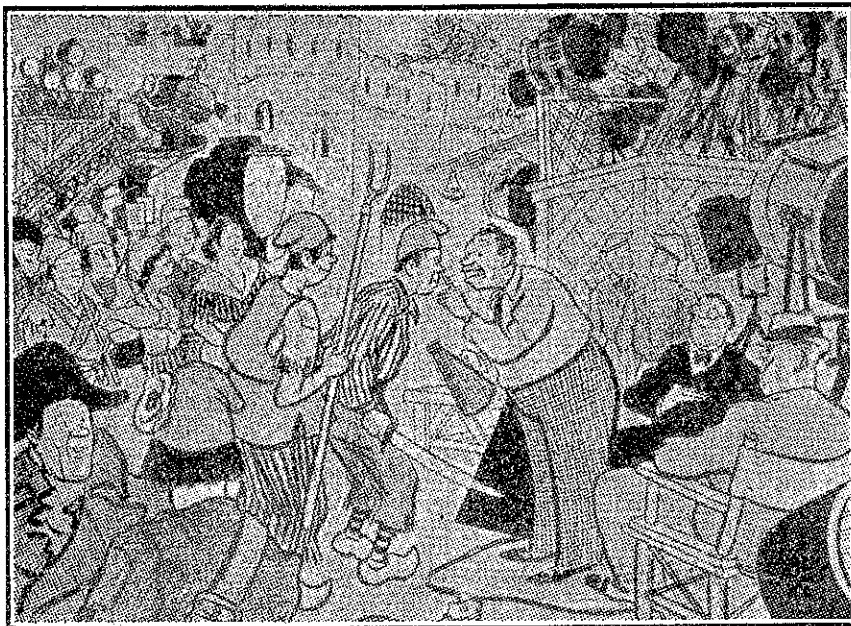


AFTER an introduction stuck on like a false moustache, says the writer of this article, radio's version of "A Tale Of Two Cities," soon to be released by the NCBS, sweeps along to triumph as a masterpiece of the air. But there is a wide gulf, he argues, between false sentiment of the introduction and the true drama of the tale.

By

WILL GRAVE



POINT FOR THOSE WHO PREFACE DICKENS.

... "And next time you storm the Bastille there's no need to shout 'whoopel!'"

SHORTLY, on Sunday evening next, in fact, the NCBS will begin the presentation of the radio dramatisation of "A Tale of Two Cities," by Charles Dickens.

Episodes of the feature, which has been put into script form, acted and produced in Australia, will be heard from all four stations on Sunday evenings.

This, I am told, is part of the Commercial service's policy of raising the standard of the Sunday programmes. The "Tale of Two Cities" is not a sponsored feature. It is a service given free, so to speak, for listeners.

AT a preview last week, I was able to hear some of the episodes of the radio play. It is only fair to say that I went along in a gloomy frame of mind.

Dickens was precious to me. I do not like to think of people monkeying with the masters. There had been the book itself, later the film version most ably done, and now there was to be the radio presentation.

I was prepared for disappointment, and I got it. The first few episodes, brilliantly acted and produced, and employing as well a new form of radio technique, like the "flash-back" in the cinema, were false and unsatisfactory in more places than one.

THEY had not been taken from the story at all. They were an appendage, stuck on to show how Dr. Manette, in 1763, had been sent by the St. Evremonde brothers to the Bastille for his long imprisonment.

They had been written by some Australian script writer with false sentiment floating in a watery mind, or with a cheek permanently enlarged through having a tongue in it.

They were stuck on to the work like a false moustache, and seemed just as theatrical.

IT was after those first one or two episodes that the real Dickens story began. And then, as the real Dickens began and was given in his own words, lit up by brilliant interpretation, I was swept away in complete surrender.

Judged by those episodes I heard after the open-

ing ones, the radio version of "A Tale of Two Cities" should be one of the finest and most worthy productions yet heard on the air in New Zealand.

One scene in particular sticks fast in the mind. It was the trial scene of Charles Darnay in London, when Sidney Carton, brilliant lawyer broken by drink, first notices the resemblance between Darnay and himself, which is ultimately going to enable them to change places in France so that Carton may go to the guillotine scaffold in Darnay's stead, saying—no doubt you remember—"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done."

THAT London court scene lived in the radio version so that you could see it, almost sniff it. The dry tones of the judge gave one immediately the picture of the shrivelled

elderly man poking his head out of his hood to make his comments, and retiring again. The Cockney voices of the witnesses had the real crackle of character, investing the words with a singular potency—so that, to your amazement, this is

Dickens made even better! And the voice of Stryver, one of those pompous legal brethren that Dickens loved to caricature, thunders out splendidly in its bombastic perorations.

IT may be that I am wrong, and most listeners will like those first unreal episodes. They may find them an incentive to hear all of this remarkable production.

If they do, then those episodes will have served a most useful purpose. Much, on that account, could be forgiven them.

On the other hand, that will not alter my conviction that they are strewn far too lavishly with the artificial flowers of melodrama.

PART of their aim is to show the vicious minds of many of the nobility of France. The brothers St. Evremonde have abducted the peasant wife of one of the men on their estate, outraged her, and kept her in their chateau.

Her brother, penetrating to the castle for her assistance, is wounded by the Marquis St. Evremonde in a clash of swords.

Dr. Manette is brought in (Continued on page 41.)

RADIO'S TALE OF TWO CITIES