

Flash Of Lightning

Radio Play That Startlingly Reveals
How Man Can Limit
His Existence

IT is the work of the creative artist to show us life in sharp relief through the lightning flashes of his perception. "Squirrel's Cage," radio play to be presented by the Commercial service at all its four stations next month, does just this. It is the best radio play the service has ever presented.

PICTURE a squirrel in a cage. Once, it was a wild creature of the open, delighting in its freedom. Now it lives in a small box in its cage and when it is awake it runs round and round in the wire wheel.

"Round and round?" says Mary, one of the characters in Tyrone Guthrie's radio play, "Squirrel's Cage."

"Yes, round and round," replies John.

"How awful."

"It likes it," says John. "It thinks it's getting somewhere."

"And all the while," says Mary, "it's just sending the cage spinning round and round. It runs fast and works furiously and thinks it's doing splendidly, and all that happens is . . . Oh, John, set it free! Let it out of the cage and set it free in the garden!"

"No, no!" cries John.

"Why not?"

"You can never set them free after they've been tamed."

"Why can't you?"

"They get so used to captivity," says John, "that freedom makes them afraid."

THIS, in a few sentences, is the theme of "Squirrel's Cage," by the brilliant English radio playwright. Man, proud man, is the squirrel in the cage. Man is the creature tamed by civilisation and put into the cage.

The cage is his office, his job, the little house in the suburbs, the tram that takes him to work and back every day. Even more, it is the conventions that tie him up and hold him fast . . . the horror of doing the things he wants to do for fear of what other people may think.

The freedom that he could have if he had the mind for it, the adventures of travel and thought, are outside the bars. And the bars of the cage are steadily put up around man from the moment he is born, from the first moment his parents say, "Don't, baby," to the time he goes to school and the masters say, "Don't argue," until he marries and goes to live in his suburban villa and travels each day to his office up and down, up and down.

The complete squirrel in his complete cage, going round and round, "thinking he is getting somewhere."



. . . Man, proud man, is the squirrel in the cage.

And if he got his freedom now he wouldn't want it. He has got so used to captivity that freedom would make him afraid.

Until at the end of the play he begets a child of his own and he begins to say to it, "Don't, baby, don't."

The vicious circle is completed. The child will grow up just as his father has grown. You can see that at the end of the play. He too will be trapped in the cage.

NO words of mine can give a true picture of this radio play, the first I have yet heard. It was written specially for radio by Tyrone Guthrie, and acted and produced in Wellington. The playwright brings a new and fresh technique to radio that makes one hope for great things in the new medium.

Part of his technique is an invisible chorus that echoes the words of the characters, that amplifies the words of the parents to the children—"Don't, baby, don't"—and repeats them maddeningly, so that you have the horrible sensation that the whole world is saying,

"Don't, baby, don't!" and the whole world is thinking it.

It is an astonishing effect that could only be achieved in radio. On the stage, it would be as unnatural to our eyes as the Greek chorus, but in radio the invisible voices of the air seem to take on an eerie quality as if they were the thoughts that lie everywhere about us, pressing down on us and burdening us.

The play has been presented in many countries of the world, four times by the BBC, and it has been presented in Australia. It has been translated into several languages.

The production is remarkably well done in places, where the producer (Mr. Victor Lloyd) has evidently had a free hand. It is not nearly so well done in others, for the reason that some of the women's voices are obviously not trained for the work. Nevertheless, the quality of the play always shines through.

Written For The "Record"

By

WILTON BAIRD