

INTRIGUE IN THE NBS

Cardinal Controls A King

TWO or three times a week, since August 24, there has been malice, intrigue, and implication in the production studios of the NBS. People have been saying nasty things to and about each other. They have been encouraged officially, in fact, to be just about as unpleasant as possible.

When somebody has made a particularly cutting remark, one of the men in charge of the studios has actually said: "All right, that's not so bad, but we'll do it again." When a staff reporter of *The Listener* looked in the other morning he heard an authoritative voice saying, "Use a little more venom and don't forget that pause." Taken all round it appeared that the NBS had added a school for scandal to its activities.

But all this has been, and is, in the cause of radio, for the studios in Featherston Street are occupied by a large cast making recordings for a new radio serial, *Richelieu; Cardinal or King?*

The introduction to each episode gives a clue to the dramatic content of this production. It announces that the political power of Richelieu, Minister of State for 17th Century France, is tottering upon its foundations through the concerted attacks of two women. And then the action proceeds.

There are 113 speaking parts in *Richelieu*, and 55 episodes. The cast is probably one of the largest yet assembled

for an NBS performance, but it will be some months before the play is ready for broadcasting. Rehearsals and recording have been going on since August 24 and the whole cast is made up of Wellington players whose ages range from 17 to 58. If the serial, when completed, is broadcast once a week, it will occupy about a year.

Long before rehearsals began, much groundwork had to be done. A casting chart—an elaborate document of several columns—was prepared. This gives, in one column, all the names of the players and their parts, and shows, by a series of dots, the episodes in which each player appears. It shows, too, if one player is doubling or trebling in a part, when he or she is required, and the type of character.

Under two bright lights in the studio the players take their places before the microphone, to be steered through their parts at rehearsals by the producer. After one or more trials, the red light goes on and recording begins.

A player speaks his lines. "No, not quite like that; try it this way. Get more power into it, and don't forget that gasp of unbelief," says the producer. The actor tries again, and meets with approval.

A court guard enters with spurs jangling, but they jangle at the wrong time and the producer shows how it should be done.



SOME of the principals in the cast of "Richelieu, Cardinal or King?" now in production in the NBS studios

"Clank that piece of chain in your hand with every footstep so that the noise will coincide with your paces," says the producer.

The King comes to visit the abbess in her convent. Hesitantly he opens a wicket gate. But he doesn't, actually. Another member of the cast who is not "on" at the moment, does it for him, using a lighter piece of chain and creaking a door. Somebody else takes a few paces on a slab of stone, and the King is in the convent.

There are no bothersome changes of costume or scenery when producing for radio. The sound effects do all that is

required, enabling the plot to move from a royal court to a convent in a second. Players do not have to commit their parts to memory. They read from a typed script. But extreme care is taken not to reproduce the crackle as they turn the pages. There is a technique in page-turning. Each leaf is picked up by thumb and forefinger and turned away from the microphone, so that the illusion of reality is preserved.

Work Under a Handicap

On Episode 15 the other morning, the cast worked under difficulties. Men on

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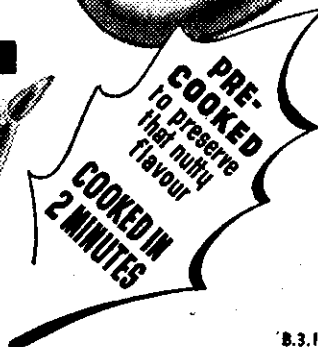
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