

# "THE MAN BORN TO BE KING"

## New Production of Famous Play-cycle

A NEW production of *The Man Born to be King*, Dorothy L. Sayers's famous play sequence on the life of Christ (originally broadcast here nearly five years ago) has been issued by the BBC Transcription Service. The recordings arrived here a few weeks ago, and the opening play, *Kings in Judea*, which tells the Christmas story, will be broadcast from 2YA at 8.0 p.m. on Christmas Eve, Friday, December 24, and from 4YA at 8.15 p.m. on Christmas Day, Saturday, December 25.

When the plays were first heard by BBC listeners during 1941 and 1942 they were broadcast under war-time conditions with all the attendant limitations on studio facilities and adequate time for rehearsal. Nevertheless, they made a deep impression, due largely to what Val Gielgud, their original producer, described as "the very singular atmosphere which the plays in rehearsal seemed to generate." With the return of peace-time broadcasting the BBC has been able to produce the plays under more favourable conditions. The producer of the present sequence is Noel Iliffe, and Miss Sayers was present throughout rehearsals, taking a close personal interest in every stage of production.

It was in 1940 that the BBC Religious Broadcasting Department invited Miss Sayers to write a series of plays on the life of Our Lord, following the success of her Nativity play *He That Should Come*, which had been broadcast in 1938. She replied that she would on three conditions: (1) She must introduce the character of Our Lord; (2) She must be allowed to use the same kind of realism that she had used in *He That Should Come*; and (3) The plays must be in modern speech. Dr. J. W. Welch, then Director of Religious Broadcasting, replied that the conditions were not only acceptable, but exactly what the BBC wanted and had hoped for.

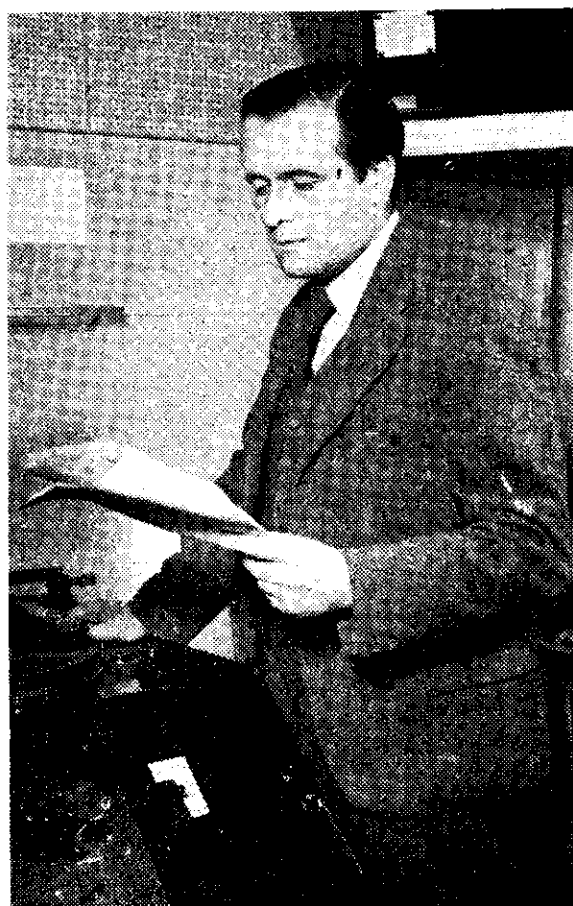
### "Irreverent" and "Blasphemous"

When news of the intended production became known there were protests from some people who, without having either heard the plays or read one line of the scripts, condemned the whole project in advance as "irreverent," "blasphemous," and "vulgar." There was no time to call together the BBC Central Religious Advisory Committee before

the first play was due to be broadcast, but copies of the second and third were sent to members, who are ordained representatives of every important denomination in England. They were asked to comment on the scripts by post, telegram or telephone, and the replies left no doubt about the opinion of these religious leaders. They ranged from a prominent Evangelical's telegram: "Plays magnificent praise God and go ahead my overwhelming approval anyway," to the verdict of a Jesuit priest: "The plays are excellent go ahead."

A wide listening public was subsequently attracted, partly because of the freshness in treatment of the Bible story and the use of a modern style of speech. In the published version Miss Sayers included detailed notes on the characters as a guide to the producer, and it is interesting to see how she visualised the Biblical characters. Philip she sees as "an ingenuous young man, of an engaging and puppy-like simplicity"; Matthew with "his common little soul converted as thoroughly as that of any Salvation Army penitent," but with "his common little wits in full working order"; Caiaphas as "the complete ecclesiastical politician—a plausible and nasty piece of work."

*Kings in Judea* tells the story of the Wise Men who came to worship the infant Messiah, and of the events leading to Herod's order for the massacre of the innocents.



BBC Photograph

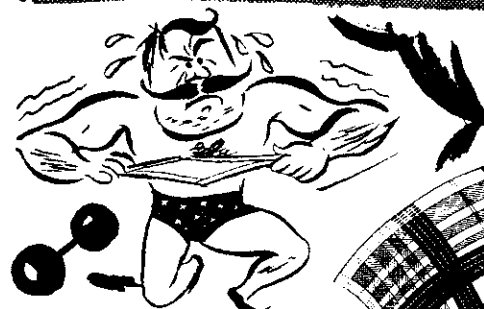
NOEL ILIFFE, producer of the new BBC presentation of Dorothy Sayers's religious drama *"The Man Born to be King"*



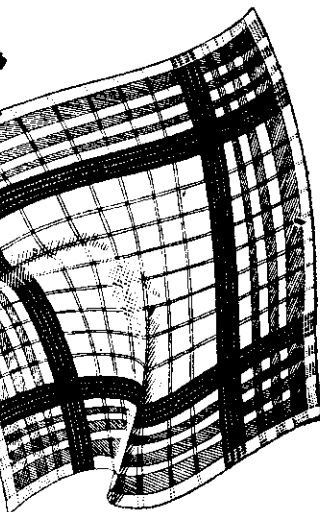
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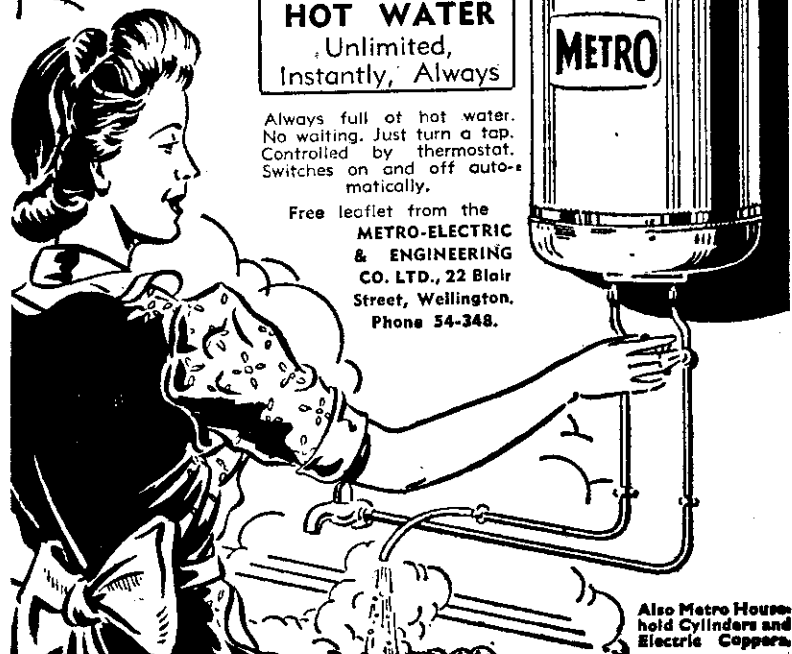
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