

WANTED: A National School Of Drama

English Actor Sees Promising Amateurs

NO genuinely English theatrical company has been seen on the New Zealand stage for a good many years, and it will probably be a year or two more before shipping space becomes available for enterprises proposing to visit New Zealand. That, at least, is the belief of Captain Templer Powell, a London actor, producer, theatre manager and soldier, who visited *The Listener* office the other day. Captain Powell has spent many years in London and in the Army and his plans for his stay in New Zealand, he told us, are indefinite at the moment.

He has been here long enough to see how the theatre is faring in the absence of visiting professional companies. "I am grieved to think that you in New Zealand

man playing Romeo, Harcourt Williams, had a mishap and young Powell took his place, playing the part later in London. After work in the Provinces, with occasional London appearances, he told us, he accepted an offer, in 1908, to visit Australia and New Zealand as leading man to the comedian Frank Thornton in *When Knights Were Bold*, as the private secretary in *Charley's Aunt*, and in other productions. Then Edward Terry engaged him for a trip to Canada, and later he went with H. B. Irving, a son of Sir Henry Irving, on a tour of Africa, playing second leads.

New Zealand theatregoers will remember Leon Gordon's *White Cargo*, the play with the "strong meat" theme which raised first-night eyebrows a few years ago. Captain Powell secured the rights for this play for Great Britain and produced it at the Playhouse Theatre for close on three years. Now, he has a new play by the same author called *Undesirable Lady*. This, at the moment, he says, is under consideration by the Tait-Williamson organisation in Australia.

Links with New Zealand

Always, says Templer Powell, he has maintained links with New Zealand. He was able to entertain an All Black team at the Playhouse and, during World War II, he helped to organise Lord Bledisloe's centennial matinee to raise money for comforts for New Zealand troops.

"But actually," he says, "my family was connected with New Zealand between 1836 and 1840, through my grandfather, T. F. Cheesman (Templer Powell is the captain's stage name), who was third officer on H.M.S. Buffalo, sometimes second officer, and sometimes in command. This ship came to New Zealand to get spars for the Navy and also carried many important people to New Zealand and Australia, including Captain Hindmarsh, first Governor of South Australia, and Mrs. Hobson and family, wife of the first Governor of New Zealand. Eventually the ship was wrecked in the Bay of Islands."

While he is here Captain Powell will present his grandfather's original logs and diaries to the Turnbull Library.

Discussing his war service briefly, Templer Powell mentioned, that he had volunteered four times. The first was in 1901 when he went to South Africa. In 1914 he served on the staff of 2nd King Edward's Horse in London, assisting in its formation some days before war was declared. He accepted his first commission in the Regular Army as a First Lieutenant in the 4th Battalion Lancs. Fusiliers, and went to France in 1915. He was gassed and became an experimental patient in England. He returned to the front but later was sent on a diplomatic mission to America, receiving a special mention in his Army record. He resigned after the war, but in 1938 answered a call for officers to strengthen the reserve. Then he was with the War Office and later organised N.C.O.'s and officers for the "Grey's Inn" command in London, and a company of the 3rd City of London Home Guard Battalion.



Spencer Digby photograph
CAPT. TEMPLER POWELL
"It is a great pity"

land are so far away from England that it is not easy to bring the latest plays with the best artists," he said in an interview. "But I have seen some most promising amateurs in local productions, and I feel that it is a great pity there is not a national school of drama here with a national headquarters."

To use his own words, Captain Powell looks on himself as a "New Zealand Londoner," or a "London New Zealander"—he is not quite sure which suits better—because he came to New Zealand from England at the age of eight. He went to the Christchurch Boys' High School and Canterbury College and, while studying for law, did some pupil teaching at the St. Albans School, Christchurch. After seeing service in the South African War he returned to England and began a stage career with very second-rate touring companies. Eventually he became a member of the Society of West End Theatre Managers.

Recognition by Chance

As has happened so many times, an accident gave him his chance to gain recognition as an actor. In about 1905 he was engaged to play Paris and understudy Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* in a big production in Manchester. The



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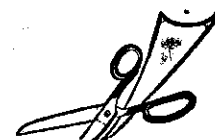
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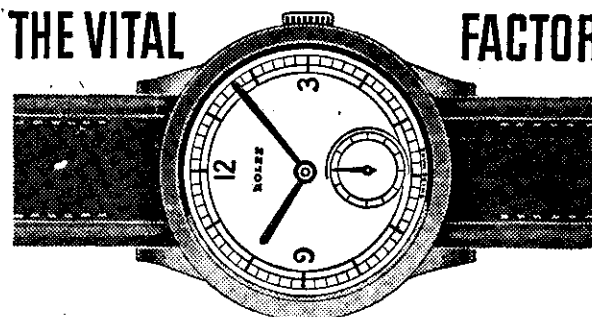
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