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CHRISTMAS cards this week from plenty of interesting people—and a letter, too, that gives promise of something rich and plummy in the dramatic line.

It was from New Zealand's brilliant young playwright Merton Hodge . . . you may remember that I mentioned some weeks ago that if he could get a company of players together he'd tour New Zealand and Australia in a series of plays, mainly his own big London successes.

Well, the company is now practically a reality, but there's a catch. Merton can tell it in his own words. . . .

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"ORGANISING a company here presents no great difficulties, but I must get the backing. I would never attempt a tour without several thousand pounds in the bank to keep the show going. In your article you said, 'It was an idea of mine' . . . it is, but I must have support."

"There'd be no difficulty about a company. Miss Violet Vanbrugh would go out to New Zealand and Australia under suitable auspices. (Her daughter, Prudence, as you probably know, lives in Sydney, and I have discussed the proposition with her. She thought it an excellent idea.)"

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Dabbling



In a letter to Trevor Lane to-day, Merton Hodge, famous New Zealand playwright, says he has a company of distinguished stars pre-

★ pared to present plays in New Zealand. But ★ there are other difficulties . . . and that is where a National Theatre Movement in this country could help. What do YOU think of the scheme put forward on these pages?

I THINK it would be a grand idea if this tour could be arranged. With Merton Hodge directing the plays and the company, Violet Vanbrugh, distinguished member of a family well loved in this part of the world, and possibly Godfrey Tearle in the leading parts, supported by several lesser but first-rate English artists, the season could be a thorough success.

Merton has several excellent plays of his own to make up a good repertory season. His first outstanding success, "The Wind and the Rain," presented here a year or two ago by a none-too-brilliant company, would take on fresh lustre if performed by West End stars; then there is "Grief Goes Over," received unenthusiastically in London but rapturously in New York, where Sybil Thorndike played the lead, "Men in White," the outstanding hospital play that has also been filmed in Holly-

wood, and "The Island," a splendid play that ran in London for the greater part of this year.

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"I would be nothing short of scandalous if lack of funds and organisation should prevent these stars from making the trip from London."

IF ONLY WE HAD A NATIONAL THEATRE MOVEMENT IN NEW ZEALAND!

Yes, I know . . . you're going to point out that it has taken donkey's years for London to acquire a National Theatre (and they're still wrangling about it). But I don't quite mean a movement like that.

London has a hundred and one legitimate theatres, concert halls and the artists to

fill them. It has the Old Vic for Shakespeare and Sadler's Wells for opera and ballet. There's Covent Garden and the Queen's Hall and plenty of cinemas, where the pick of continental films is shown every night.

So I rather agree with the people who oppose the building of a big and expensive national theatre on the inconvenient and noisy site in Kensington. But the theatre's half-built, so it's too late to lament.

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BUT in New Zealand here the case is quite different. I think there are quite a few people who occasionally tire of endless revues, who would often prefer something a little more elevating at the cinema than a Joan Crawford drama or a Laurel and Hardy comedy.

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A New Zealand national theatre as I see it would encourage and sponsor the appearances of important American and European stars and plays, persuade famous people to embark on lecture tours of this country, bring out such outstanding foreign films as "Un Carnet de Bal" and "Mayerling."

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SO you see I'm not suggesting the putting up of a grand building the size of the Wellington Railway Station and the appointment of all sorts of people with big salaries and important-sounding titles.

There are plenty of theatres and halls in every town now. What we want is some organisation that can contact overseas people, arrange tours and look after the financial end of things. And if Australia were to have a similar movement the business of luring "big names" out to the Antipodes would be infinitely simpler.

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AMERICA is crazy about lecture tours and all over the country are little local organisations that sell the tickets, book the hall and handle the publicity before the lecturer arrives. You saw the statements in the papers last week made by Anthony Eden in New York. Well, he's on a lecture tour of the United States right now—and assured of a colossal season. New Zealand's Hector Bolitho toured America this year; so did Beverley Nichols, Lady Asquith and Duff Cooper.

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HERE'S an instance of what I mean in a letter I had this morning from Dan O'Connor, the entrepreneur who managed the tour of the Viennese Boys' Choir a year or two ago and who is now to look after the new Vienna Mozart Boys' Choir. He writes:

"For some years Henry Hayward and I have been trying to persuade H. G. Wells to make a lecturing tour of these countries. Mr. Wells says that he finds it an effort to prepare a lecture nowadays, and is becoming increasingly nervous before audiences. Nevertheless he agrees to give a few lectures on his visit to Australia in January and I am hurrying across to Sydney to make arrangements. There is just a chance that I may after all persuade him to come to New Zealand."