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BL 9



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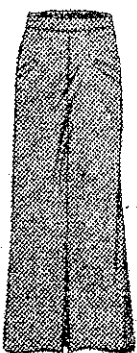
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The Sea Devil

INSIDE STORY OF TOUR

(Continued from page 8.)

DURING the Count's week in Wellington there went begging a real "human interest" story. After over twenty years, there was a reunion between Colonel Harcourt Turner and Count von Luckner. The real significance of that will be appreciated best by those who know the full history of the Count's celebrated escape from Motuihi Island, Auckland, in December, 1917, and its repercussions.

Colonel Harcourt Turner was commandant of Motuihi Island, and it was in his launch that von Luckner and his crew made their get-away in broad daylight, subsequently commanding the scow Moa, in which they reached the Kermadec Islands, where they were recaptured. Colonel Turner was court-martialled and dismissed the army, a penalty that was regarded by many in official circles as far too severe. While in Auckland making arrangements for the tour, the Count asked me to do all I could, when I returned to Wellington, to see if Colonel Turner was still here, and if he would receive his one-time prisoner.

Subsequently, Count and Colonel came together once more, at the Hotel St. George, where von Luckner was staying. It was a frank and altogether friendly reunion, and I never saw the Count more genuinely glad to see anyone. Many times during the tour he was at pains to express the opinion that Colonel Turner's administration was not responsible for making possible the famous escape. There were not enough guards on the island, declared von Luckner, and those there were were, for the most part, inexperienced youths. He repeated this during some lectures, and added that if anybody was to blame it was the then Minister of Defence.

THERE has been much comment on the attitude of returned soldiers to the Count's recent visit. In Auckland they gave von Luckner a wonderful reception, and Major-General Sir George Richardson acted as "sponsor" for him during the whole of his stay there. In Wellington, Colonel Cowles, president of the Wellington branch of the R.S.A., approved tentative plans for an official reception to the Count by the Association, and also agreed to introduce the visitor from the stage at his three lectures. But meantime the Austrian trouble broke, and, as a result, the executive of the R.S.A. refused to do anything "officially" and Colonel Cowles, had, of course, to abide by that decision. Although this attitude was adopted by the R.S.A. branches wherever the Count spoke, it left the returned men free to do as they pleased individually, and in all places they composed the majority of the audiences at the lectures, and of the Count's visitors.

AS is always the case with celebrities travelling through a country, the people who sought introductions to the Count and Countess were of two distinct types, those who were genuinely interested in the visitors and, in particular, with the Count's record, and those who merely wished to gratify their egotism by basking in a little reflected glory. Returned soldiers