

The Collapse of the Russian Empire

Told by ex-
Major-General B. S. Merlin

What should prove to be one of the most interesting series of talks yet broadcast in New Zealand will be commenced at 2YA on January 2, when Mr. B. S. Merlin, ex-Major-General in the Russian Imperial Forces, will relate the first of his experiences during the collapse of the Russian Empire and the dissolution of the army.



FLEEING disguised as a bugler from

the seat of war waged by one of Russia's noblest divisions of horse which he had commanded; recognised by a Soviet; captured; thrown into a dingy prison; brought before a military tribunal on which were sitting as his judges employees from a steel factory; long harangues with an unsympathetic president and final acquittal and escape—these are but flashes of the poignant and thrilling story that Major-General B. S. Merlin will relate during a series of six talks from 2YA.

Now Mr. B. S. Merlin, statistical clerk and interpreter in the Post and Telegraph Department, the former major-general belongs to one of the oldest and proudest families of Russia's landed aristocracy. But with the coming of Sovietism has gone all the glory and power of the old regime. They are memories only—but glorious memories, and though far greater than territorial boundaries separate him from his beloved Russia, the General is still at heart a Russian—a Russian of a Russia that has gone.

Once the ruler of a beautiful palace standing in 400 acres of parks and gardens and surrounded by an estate of four and a half thousand acres, Mr. Merlin and his wife now occupy a comfortable little flat in Oriental Bay. It is just above the tram terminus and from its veranda one looks out over the city, the shipping and the harbour. It is a beautiful spot, quiet and restful, and here the General has chosen to make his home and to preserve what is possible of the world that was once his.

It was in the early evening that the writer met for the first time one who was so distinguished, so interesting and so friendly. He told me briefly of his career and in more detail the chain of events that had brought him from the head of one of Russia's proudest cavalry divisions and one of the finest country seats, to the New Zealand Public Service and a flat in Oriental Bay—but there was not one word of remorse or criticism. My host not even expressed a wish that things should be otherwise, yet when, as I was leaving, we stood on his porch and, looking over the twinkling lights of the city, conversed

briefly on the beauties of Wellington by night I became conscious of a feeling of regret that the tide of change should work so drastically and ruthlessly.

Major-General Merlin was educated at the Corps of Pages of his Imperial Majesty the Tsar, and eventually became a page of her Majesty the Tsarina. At the age of 20 he received a lieutenancy in the Dragoon Guards attached to the Court.

THIS was the commencement of a distinguished military career which took him to the Russo-Japanese War, to the Russian legation at Tokio, to the intelligence service for South-Eastern Europe (of which he was in charge) to the command of a crack brigade selected to go to France (which, however, did not go), and ultimately as a major-general to the head of a cavalry division.

"We were fighting on the South-Eastern Front when the revolution broke out," Mr. Merlin told me. "My division were not revolutionaries but they were tired of war—they wanted to go home and get away from it all. A handful of Bolsheviks came by train—we could have annihilated them, but it was no use. The seeds of discontent had been spread, and I realised that I must flee. My wife had gone to Odessa, taking with her a few of the family treasures, and I endeavoured to reach her. After wandering about the country, now in hiding, now pursued, always like a hunted animal, I assumed the disguise of a bugler and attempted to get away by train. I was recognised, arrested, thrown into prison and finally brought before a military court.

"The trial was long and difficult. It seemed that there was but little hope of my ever escaping from the clutches of the Soviet. They were charging me with being a spy for, of course, when apprehended I was not wearing the uniform of my rank. But I was at length acquitted and allowed to join my wife. We made our way to (Concluded on page 5.)



—S. P. Andrew photo.
Major-General B. S. Merlin,
Whose series of talks on his miraculous escape from Soviet Russia, commences on January 2.