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The fledgling by Charles Bernard Nordhoff

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CHARLES BERNARD NORDHOFF

THE FLEDGLING

Trieste

By

CHARLES BERNARD NORDHOFF



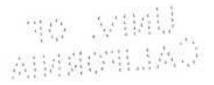
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I

A WATCHER OF THE SKIES

January 22, 1917

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WE were put on active duty at the front about the first of the year; in fact, I spent New Year's night in a dugout within pistol-shot of the Germans. It was quite a celebration, as the French Government had provided champagne, cakes, and oranges for all, and every one was feeling in a cheery mood. When dinner was over, each of us chipped in his day's ration of army wine (about a pint), and with a little brandy, some oranges, sugar, and a packet of spices I had been commissioned to get, we brewed a magnificent bowl of hot punch, or mulled wine. First "The Day of Victory" was toasted, then, "France"; then, with typical French consideration,

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"The United States." After that, each man's family at home received a health; so you may be interested to know that your health and happiness for 1917 were drunk in a first-class abri by a crowd of first-class fellows, as all French soldiers are.

The next day was a typical one, so I will sketch it for you, to give an idea of how we live and what we do. When the party broke up it was late, so we turned in at once, in a deep strong dugout, which is safe against anything short of a direct hit by a very heavy shell. Once or twice, as 1 dropped off to sleep, I thought I heard furtive scamperings and gnawings, but all was quiet until just before daybreak, when we were awakened by a terrifying scream from a small and inoffensive soldier who does clerical work in the office of the médecin chef. The poor fellow has a horror of rats, and usually sleeps with head and toes tightly bundled up. I flashed on my elec-