

A WAR-SCATTERED FAMILY

Anonymous.

The story here presented concerns a family of which only a few members survive. The writer is well familiar not only with the individual characters, but with the scene of concentration as well. There is no plot, no yarn is being spun - a few moments, scattered over the span of several years, are simply related in accordance with ^factual happenings. Many might tell the tale, some, no doubt, better than this attempt has done; but the details are known ^{to} a very few people. One who has not actually been ⁱⁿ contact with ^{some of the events here portrayed} ~~the members of~~ would surely lack adequate discrimination, and might easily fall victim to host of excitements. Nor would he be willing to write a full account, even if the complete details were revealed - for the story takes us through the time of the World War, and from the point of view of those who found themselves, circumstantially, on the wrong side of the fence.

I

Christmas Eve, 1913 - in a typical "Middletown" of central Bohemia - within the walls of a mediaeval homestead. The family of a self-made merchant, having expressed the customary thanks and praise of the season, prepared for a joyous evening. For, as is well known, Christmas Eve is ~~EMEM~~ truly the outstanding holiday of the year in that part of Europe.

Around a candle-lighted, candy-laden spruce tree, the family group eagerly gathered for the festive occasion. Games, contests, and tests of superstitious omens, all exciting and ^{well} enjoyed, ~~by all,~~ were to occupy several hours. Grandmother, quite in accordance with custom, directed the procedure. With father, mother, grandmother, two daughters, and three sons, there were two or sometimes three groups engaged in a given activity. Eventually, the entire family circle concentrated on interpretation of omens.

animal was now expected to rush forward and grab one of the offerings - ah, and its owner will be the first to marry the following year. This ^{is} fine if everything works out as anticipated, but, alas, our cat did not even approach the tree. The girls coaxed, pushed, begged - all in vain, Chicha was not interested. Owing to certain ^{the} mischievous plotting through the combined conspiracy of the three brothers who took turns in feeding ^{was parted royally} the spirited feline ^{on his favorite delicacies,} throughout the day, (finishing with a raw fish head and a saucer of cream shortly before the cat was called) ^{Of course,} ^{when he couldn't even finish his fish} ^{In consequence neither of} ^{two sisters} ^{married in 1914.} What a pity! ^{such} ^{two} lovely potential brides, ^{and} ^{now} they must wait another full year, ^{it seemed,} ^{Christams,} after all, is not all joy. Nobody could tamper with old shoes, ^{so the boys} ^{They could rely} ^{on the signs of the shoes,} which were ^{which were} ^{tumbled by the} ^{will indicate,} ^{was sure to be true.} The shoes were thrown, in turn, over the ^{lace & thrown over the} ^{he will} ^{heel} ^{leave;} ^{he'll} ^{towards} the door - ^{and you just stay home.} Both of ^{the} elder brothers cast "out". A few sighs - not ^{of} relief, ^{but} rather inspired by the realization that ^{one of the boys was to study abroad;} ^{but for the other one} there were no plans. ^{Anyway - a silly superstition, and look, the little} ^{one will remain.} Much affection and commotion followed, ^{kissing, and such,} ^{possibly enjoyed by the disburseers,} ^{but hardly by the disappointed recipient.} ^{a shriek, and a scuffle broke the spell:} The Christmas tree; ^{much to} everybody's amazement, had caught fire. A sturdy arm hurled the blazing spruce out the window into a snow bank - candy and all. - ^{but not before} ^{Grandmother} ^{mué:} "This is surely a serious sign; it implies a calamity. I see much trouble ahead, indeed a world catastrophe, war!" The episode, however, was soon forgotten, for there were many ^{more} ^{pleasant} matters compelling our attention. As the night progressed, little thought was given to grandma's apprehension: WAR! Silly superstitions, on with the fun.

II

Saint An's day, 1914. Another festive day in the little town. This time the occasion was a laboriously planned outing in the municipal park.

at the crack of dawn ³

Nominally sponsored by a select group, but in reality carried by the spirit of the entire populace, the day was projected to combine a majales with an excuse for good time by all. The morning started well with a clear sky and the town seemed to take on the garb of a state holiday as national flags were swung from windows, mansards, and roofs. By six o'clock, the municipal band considerably strengthened by volunteer talent, woke up the bourgeoisie in the square with sweet tunes of oldfashioned melodies. Heartily, the citizenry fell into the tempo and spirit of the invitations of the merry-makers, led by students - the rulers of the town for the day. Frolic, be merry, join in the fun - who could resist? The stage was set, the scenery just about perfect; who could wish for a lovelier late July day? Of course, we shall all join in - out in the square in the morning, out to the park in the afternoon. At 9.30, there is to be a concert, at 10.30 a pageant, at 11.30 another concert - and then, oh joy, the parade starts at 1 P.M. Certainly, this is going to be a full day - be sure that you miss nothing. Well before nine, the band, having more or less rounded the town, assembled before the Hotel Noble. Not so much by affection, as by reason of throat comforts - knowing that the bill was fotted by others, they wanted to be in trim. And having each duly partaken in the renown Pilsen nectar, they responded to the call of the leader to render a few classics, well rehersed in advance: Dvořák, Fibich, Smetana, etc. The square was filled with milling crowds, the students ~~took care to~~ ushered the elite to reserved seats, and the eyes of all centered upon the review stand ~~from which~~ the mayor was soon to be heard - just a brief talk ~~on~~ on the history of the town, now well over eight hundred years old - then the concert. With a cordon of police before him, ~~members~~ of the council, selectmen, and ~~other~~ dignitaries behind, the mayor appeared. He quickly climbed the flower-clad stand, only to stumble over a series of well planted fire crackers, but undismayed by the startling racket, unrolled his notes. The band stuck the national anthem. Amid the tense moments filled by the solemn tunes, a brisk figure was observed making strides towards the strand. Who can it be - such a sacrilege - why, this is scanda-

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lines

lous. With the closing corona of the hymn, the intruder had reached the stand, ^{and} the mayor leaned down toward ~~him~~. Silence ensued, no one even seemed to move. ~~The conversation at the stand seemed endless - what as it~~ ^{what is going on?} ~~be?~~ Look, a poster is being put up on the bill board at the corner of the court house, yes, and another on the otherside of the square - what is going on? "Citizens", boomed the mayor's voice, "The festivities are cancelled. War has been declared, mobilization orders are being issued. I implore you to disband quietly. Please retire to your homes." The bill boards were besieged - no doubt, war, mobilization. The news quickly spread - more concern, perhaps, being given to the ~~mundane~~ ^{mundane} marred plans for the day than to the consequences of the public notice: "We, by the grace of God, the apostolic ..." etc., etc., "do hereby proclaim a general mobilization ...".

Once more, the family of the merchant gathered, ~~again in the quaint dining room~~ ^{again in the quaint dining room}. Grandmother had little to say - had she not predicted? Father was quite concerned. The eldest son was scheduled to report at the garrison in a nearby city by noon on Monday. Nothing could change that, irrespective of the nature of the cause, motifs, ^{re} rationalization, nationalistic feelings - the word of the Kaiser had to be obeyed. The second son, recently returned from abroad, had planned to leave in a few days to pursue studies in England. He was prepared, ~~he~~ family willing, to depart at once and try to cross borders. ~~As a result~~ ^{As a result} The consent gained, he lost no time in planning his scheme. ~~minimum~~ ^{minimum} luggage, not much in cash (and, of course, no traveler's checks or a letter of credit) - ~~and with assurance of additional funds as soon as he reaches England,~~ ^{and with assurance of additional funds as soon as he reaches England,} he managed to catch the late afternoon ^{6:00} express westward bound. The preparations of the eldest were even briefer - for him the state would provide, and there was time till the morning. The sisters gave a sigh - just as well that the cat failed ~~them~~ last Christmas, the war will not last a month, and then there will be so much more reason to be happy.

Christmas Eve, 1914. Little, very little to be juyous over. Grand-
 mother was buried but a few days before. The eldest son had not been heard
 from since August ~~4th~~, and ^{in the meantime} since that time, "the enemy" had made several
 deep advances. Fortresses, originally though impregnable, fell like frail
 shacks, numbers of the missing mounted daily, and the anticipated "speedy
 end" of the bloody horror seemed nowhere in sight. There was no incentive
 to arrange a festive dinner while host of men were suffering out in the
 open, and ~~one of our own family perhaps~~ ^{a member of the}. The other, we knew, had rea-
 ched a neutral land, after narrow escapes at borders, and managed, eventu-
 ally, to reach his final destination. However, it became impossible to fut-
 nish additional funds, ~~there being~~ ^{prohibitive financial} for a state of war ~~made~~ transactions
~~impossible~~. His plans had to be changed, school given up - but at least he
 had work, and seemed cheereful.

^{The} dinner was simple, the games very few, and ~~the girls dismissed with~~
^{were dismissed} omens altogether. With mother's suggestion we gathered several baskets of
 food to take to the ~~HOWITSMORE~~ camp of prisoners of war, situated some
 miles outside the town. Father knew the commander so that an entry was
 certain - otherwise our intentions should have been in vain. The site of
 shabby barracks, ~~WHICH~~ crowded with tiers of bunks, was not a pleasantry. To
 the inmates - Russians - our Cristmas eve meant nothing. However, the pros-
 spect of some decent food - little as it was for the crowd, brought a cheer.
 In return, an improvised balalajka M orchestra tendered entertainment, and
 we purchased quantities of finger rings made out of horse hair and embel-
 lished with bits of glass. Father centered his attention on the latest
 arrivals. He found a kin of the famous Tolstoy who, subsequently, became a
 frequent guest at our home - that is to say whenever he managed to find an
 excuse to come in town. It was through him, shortly after Christmas, that
 we learned ^{of} the whereabouts of ~~my~~ ^{the} eldest brother - imprisoned in the
 Koban district. And somewhat later, with an official announcement of his
 entry in the list of the missing, a word came, again through the camp,
 that he had joined the Bohemian Legion. About that time, an opportunity

presented itself to despatch money to the other brother through a neutral country. His acknowledgement was considerably delayed and the letter, severely censored, required days of painful treatment to penetrate the black ink blotches. The effort was crowned with success - at least the gist of the message was revealed, and much useful information gained. At Easter a card came from the brother in Russia. On the surface it seemed most innocent, taking of health, weather, and recreation, and including a reference to skip. Now skip was a game much favored in our family, consisting of word scrambling upon a prescribed system of skipping certain ^{syllables} ~~letters~~ and transposing ~~syllables~~ letters. The family, each member supplied with a transcript, ~~MEMMEMMEMMEM~~ concentrated upon the task of discifering ~~MEMMEMMEMMEM~~ the card. The initial attempts failed to tally - the words themselves seemed to give no sense. Then it was relized that perhaps the alphabetic order had been altered - ah, let's try the azbuka. How simple, why didn't we think of it at once, of course, the Russian alphabet would help to confuse a suspecting censor. The card told of the activities of the Legion - of which rumors had already reached the land - and it also contained a prediction that the war should soon be over and the boys be home by Christmas. Other similarly disguised messages followed, but with the halt of the Russian advance, an interruption ensued.

The brother in England was forced to leave the country lest he be interned in a camp. Through the interest of certain friend who appreciated the difference between an Austrian subject and a true Bohemian, he managed to secure help for passage to the United States. Thereupon, he was successful in establishing contacts with the other brother in Russia. Mail from America, although equally censored, was more regular, and, of course, the skip was resorted to with great success. Eventually, a ~~MEMMEMMEMMEM~~ ^{triangular system} of communication was established, the mail practically circumventing the northern hemesphere in the process. This proved useful in the work of the mafia to which the family readily rendered service.

Thus, when Cristmas came in 1915, ~~MEMMEMMEMMEM~~ ^{somewhat} a cheerful dinner

was in order, and again we visited the camp of Russian prisoners.

IV

As 1916 progressed, the ~~MMB~~ ~~of the~~ Central Powers had strengthened their positions, and, seemingly victorious on all sides, despite the added fronts in the Alps, and in the Southern Carpathians, additional advances were being gained. Internally, a ruthless iron hand held the suspected element at bay through censorship, arrest, and martial law. The majority of the Bohemian leaders, unless they were fortunate enough to escape into Switzerland, were either under close scrutiny, or else in prison. Newspapers came out with blank pages, ^{columns. they had to go over to} glorifying the deeds of ~~MMB~~ "our" armies, and belittling ^{of the Allies} the efforts of the enemy." It was well known that whole regiments composed of anti-Austro-German ^{men} feelings had marched across the line ^{of} to surrender to the "enemy", and immediately joined the Legions ^{then} well established both in Russia and France. The ~~MMB~~ Mafia had regular reports on the activities of the several organizations abroad, ^{there} ~~which, MMB~~ under the leadership of Masaryk and Beneš, and with the support of Russia and France, were laying the foundation for the ultimate liberation of the western Slavs. They inspired the suffering nation with new hopes, and the Mafia worked with a greater vigor than ever. The trustworthy few, fearing betrayal, had to restrict their numbers to a minimum, hence each member was heavily taxed with assignments. State wires had to be tapped and constantly guided and ~~MMB~~ headquarters frequently shifted. Message had to be smuggled out under most difficult circumstances. School-age youngsters were especially useful in this regard. A pretense was always found to maintain them at strategic points, and as "border runners", they proved their trust ^{to} with satisfaction. It was in this connection that the youngest son of the merchant's family gained the confidence of leaders and was entrusted with special assignments. Eventually, however, he was trapped. Although no proof could be mustered against him, he, together with others, was promptly court-martialed, and only his age saved him from the bullet or gallows. Imprisoned in a filthy dungeon, he spent his Christmas of 1916 not so much concerned with his own fate, but with the

consequence thereby imposed upon the family, who were forced to suppress their services to "THE CAUSE". With the ascent of ~~KING~~ ^{a new} Kaiser Charles I, an amnesty was proclaimed. The youngsters held for treason, were included, and promptly "released" - ~~rather~~ ^{that is} assigned to a special regiment and hustled to the front without even being allowed to see their families. They ~~were~~ ^{had}, of course, previously gone through the routine of military training which became compulsory in school early in 1915, so that the rifle and nap-sack were no novelties to them. Nevertheless, it was somewhat of a shock to be rushed into the front lines without knowing just how to behave. The introduction of the youngest son of the merchant to the "christening by fire" inspired him with but one thought: Surrender at the first opportunity. But the matter was not easy of realization, for the members of the company were summarily and individually marked as political suspects. This was indeed a distinction, ~~for~~ ^{as} it immediately implied that persons so stamped were assigned the "finest" of duties. The officers were not of their own nationality, and even if they themselves may have had a heart, they feared consequences from above unless they applied the utmost pressure. Frequent changes of positions were the rule, and with the Russian revolution, the select outfit was switched to another front. There was no mail from home, nor was it possible to write in. The only hope was that a wounded comrade might be able to communicate with one's family when removed to the hinterland. Eventually, then, the skip was resorted to again, but the process was strictly unilateral and the messages very few indeed. Chances of surrendering grew fainter as well-nigh permanent fronts were established and no-man's land was filled with impenetrable obstacles. Those who tried and failed were ~~blasted~~ in full view upon the barbed wire just before the trenches. To inflict a wound upon oneself meant a garrison, if not the noose - in short, the outlook was bleak. Our youngest, however, found a promising opportunity quite unexpectedly. Replacing a fallen buddy on a night patrol, he saw a chance to get lost - and then, come what will. Accordingly, he capitalized the situation. First he made certain that his hand grenades were in ample number to end all

in case of a fiasco - for he preferred this to being ~~thrown~~ ^{struck} over the wires. Not knowing the nature of the terrain and the positions of the flanks, he concluded that a ~~MMMMMM~~ bee-line forward might lead to success. Departing from the squad under the pretense of ailing, he rushed through a deserted trench, climbed a hill, and surveyed the situation. Darkness helped in a way, but distinctly handicapped orientation. The front was quiet, the forest seemed deadly ~~M~~ silent; it was difficult to decide which way to turn, ~~MM~~ Straight forward seemed the best. Rifle in hands, hand grenades, ready for discharge hanging from the belt, unconcerned with directions, our intended deserter progressed with caution. Presently, he recognized sounds, but he could not comprehend the language. It might be his patrol, then his attempt would have to be shelved. On the other hand, if it be the "enemy", - gretat Finding adequate protection in a thicket, he waited. The voices came nearer he pricked his ear - a foreign tongue, no doubt, this was not his patrol. He affixed a bit of bandage to the end of his bayonette, quickly closed the caps of the hand grenades, and moved forward to ~~MM~~ meet the group. They in turn became aware of his presence. A brief, tense moment - and the two sides met. The uniforms, the language, ~~MMMMMMMMMMMM~~ ^{and} proved their respective identities. At last, then, the youngest one seemed to be at his goal. He proceeded to surrender by sticking the bayonette into the ground and began to remove the hand grenades. The enemy group, however, were not in agreement with such action. A mutually intelligible tongue was soon struck and it was revealed that both sides had the same intention. War, after all, is equally unpleasant and dangerous on either side of the line. ~~MMMMMM~~ The enemy group, 32 strong, was now surrendering. Outnumbered, our youngest had no choice, especially not when he was assured that the front was well over a mile ahead, and anyway, the thirty-two rifles sealed the argument. Reluctantly, he led the way, first reaching the hill ~~MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM~~ which originally confused him, realizing the serious mistake in estimating directions. No wonder everything had seemed so quiet. However, this was no time for bemoaning the lost chance - what will the commander say? A bargain was

agreed upon - and a mutual pledge was given to tell an acceptable story of capture. And, somehow, it worked, for the original patrol of which our youngest was a member, never came back. Nine men lost - thirty-two prisoners taken. Not so bad, thought the commanding officer. Indeed, the brave act deserves recognition. Within a week, while the thirty-two prisoners were probably wishing that they had ~~accepted~~ ^{heeded} the advise and warning of the ~~the~~ hero-captor, an iron cross was pinned on the brave youngster.

V

Saint Anⁿ day, 1918, back in our "Middletown". Four years have gone, and the war still on. Although it was plainly evident that the strengthened armies of the Allies, encouraged by the Yanks, would eventually turned the tide, the internal situation was most distressing. The Mafia was reduced to a very few members, ~~whose chief concern was~~ the strength of the iron hand was felt more keenly than ever. Naturally, there was no celebration of the holiday - the town was quiet. People did not go out to the ~~inns, public gathering were not permitted,~~ ^{inns, public gathering were not permitted,} ~~for there was nothing~~ ^{lined} Long files of women and children had gathered before bakeries to wait, paitently, for hours, to buy a meager allotment of what was called "bread". By noon the shops closed, not because of the hour, but by reason of exhausted supplies, and no amount of tears would help. The gendarms quickly disperced the disappointed crowd, and the square was deserted.

The family of the merchant took to the forest for the afternoon, ~~the~~ ^{The} girls had packed sundry morsals for a pic nic, took their crochet work along, and ~~while~~ the parents carried letter and cards from their scattered sons to ~~se~~ read again. ~~over them once more.~~ It was a beatiful day; there were very few people in the forest, and everything was so calm - conducive to forgetting, for a spell at any rate, the miseries of the time. In the late afternoon a spot was selected for ~~the~~ ^{new} meal, a deserted hunter's shack, ~~being deemed the best.~~ The frail construction, uncar^ried for in years, perhaps only occasionally used ~~by~~ ^{as} a temporary sh^ulter in rain, ~~had~~ offered at least a few benches and a table. Here the contents of baskets were spread and the family, well tuned for a meal by the advanced hour, heartily began its repast. "Pssst --- Psst - Psst,

Mary, this is Bill, Bill Jonas - don't you remember, your neighbor's son. I am in the shack - is it safe to come out? Your little brother is here, too? Is it safe?" Hurridly, the surroundings were reconnoitered and found ~~MMMMMM~~ safe. Bill appeared, then another boy - a stranger: "Your son", said Bill, "is down the cellar, ill. We have deserted, the three of us ~~MM~~ ~~MM~~ reached this place last night, Sonny is ill, we have gone through hell, over a thousand miles, mostly on foot, many detours, avoiding cities, begging for food, - say, may I have a piece of bread? Sonny is asleep, down the cellar. You girls watch, and we'll go down." Hurridly, Bill grabbed some food, stuck several pieces into his pockets, and while the two sisters took their posts, the parents and the two boys went down the cellar. There, on the damp floor, with a ~~MM~~ thin coat under him and a rag covering, was Sonny - asleep - or so it seemed. The light was poor, and the stairway, detached by the boys as a measure of safety, had been considerably damaged in the hurried operation. Examination showed that Sonny was suffering from fever and in a delirium. The rags were ~~MMMMMM~~ replaced by fresh clothing and all the food transferred below. The girls occasionally reported ~~MM~~ quiet outside, while a plan was made for action after dark. First a doctor was summoned to the house, equiped with first ~~MM~~ aid necessities. A hay wagon was sent out towards the forest, the boys carried sonny out, and then the three, well covered by straw, were transported into the house of the merchants family. Here the neighbors were waiting to ~~MMMM~~ greet their only child. The stranger, whose home was over hundred miles away, was furnished with clothes and funds, and refusing hospitality, quietly departed to complete his journey. Sonny was in a bad state of health. The fever was partially checked by the physician, but it was then revealed that his main suffering was caused by lice embeded under his skin. Without proper hospital facilities, little could be done. ~~Therightwasdark~~ Disguised in his sister's clothes, sonny was transferred to the municipal hospital. The chief surgeon knew - realized the grave circumstances, disregarded the element of his personal danger, and went to work. By five in the morning,

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Sonny was back home, while his younger sister remained to occupy a hospital room with sundry bandages - just coming out of ether. The greatest problem was to cover up the presence of Sonny, and to banish suspicion of outsiders. A place was improvised in the attic, and just as everything seemed to be going well, with Sonny recovering strength, a tip came from friends that the house was to be raided within a short time. The only hope of refuge was offered by the ~~passage~~ underground passage (of mediaeval origin) which could be entered from the cellar. The doctor was against the suggestion - proposed by Sonny himself, who had often explored the intriguing network of the subterranean halls and chambers. However, time was short, and finally, it was agreed to take a chance - since the alternative meant at least a garrison prison, and no regard for health condition. Equiped with a first aid kit, ~~and~~ ample food for several days, candles, matches (even cigarettes), Sonny made his retreat and the entrance into the passage was carefully blocked. The tip proved to be correct, for in the late afternoon, several gendarmes arrived, accompanied by local police. While the police helped materially to confuse the gendarmes, the family managed to faint complete surprise - nothing suspicious was found, although father did have a hard time to explain how he obtained the Italian automatic found by one of the snoopers. Eventually, the explanation that it was bought at the prisoners camp - and the fact that it was not loaded, induced leniency. After all, the gendarmes understood the situation - they too had a human streak in them, and their commander felt that his report ~~was quite aware of the general state of the crumbling empire~~ would satisfy the authorities. But Sonny did not dare to come out at once. At night he would come to bed in the house, retreat early in the morning, and with Bill as his companion, devised a method of communication from a safe place with the most vital quarters of the two adjacent houses - the kitchens. Time went on and the subterranean life became quite a chore. The boys craved some relaxation, and in September, they thought that their safety was well assured. Not satisfied with the gardens of the two houses, and knowing all the details of the underground complex of passages, they decided to ~~then~~ venture out into

the open. The chief attraction was the dance given by a group of their buddies now on leave - and that was too good to miss. Their liberty was indeed brief, for a government inspector had to be present ^{at} ~~MM~~ the dance, and the two army deserters, not being forewarned, were readily spotted. Promptly, they were placed in the local jail. And equally promptly, with the signal help of the keeper, they escaped. Back under the houses, they sent an S.O.S. to the kitchens, startling a maid who, confused, made a telephone call to summon the parents, little realizing, that wires were under surveillance. Our heroes, then, found themselves back in jail - this time behind the strong bars of the court house, with the city jail keeper as a neighbor. The following morning they were being transported to the nearby garrison. However, only Sonny reached the final destination, for Bill found a chance to jump out of the window of the train and succeeded in making his escape, ~~MINIMUM~~ Sonny was returned back to the front, properly labeled as to his past record. This time, he found himself on the Italian line - a sight not totally strange to him. There was very little doing - except whole sale desertion and self-inflicted wounds. Indeed, a revolution was in progress, and by the middle of October, no one seemed serious about war. It was just as well to stay put - and so Sonny realized. His main concern was to get back home,; there, he felt, will be need for all hands. The front was cracking in several spots. By the end of October, Sonny, amid a motley group of soldiers, fought his way back from the Italian front through hostile hinterland towards the Bohemian border. On the twenty-seventh, the group arrived in the capital, and the following day, with independent Czechoslovakia publically proclaimed (exactly ten days after the Philadelphia manifesto), Sonny was home. This time, however, he did not have to resort to celars. The town needed patrolling, and men with military equipment were indeed few. He helped to organize a unit, mustered several veterans, helped to scour the woods for deserters, and within a few days joined a company to go to Slovakia to occupy the eastern portion of the newly born republic. The war was over - the ~~war~~

revolution was on.

VI

Christmas, 1918. In "Middletown" many a family was preparing for a real celebration of the season with the whole group reunited ^{for the first time in} ~~after~~ years. American relief work, functioning so swiftly, had provided ~~ample~~ ^{ample} food - the tyranny of practically three centuries ~~had been broken~~ had been broken - new life began. Communication with outside world were more or less restored, and many of the missing had been accounted for. ~~The legation~~ ^{President Masaryk had returned, the} legionnaires began to arrive from France and Italy, and the Russian division were soon to follow. Indeed, there was cause for joy.

The family of the merchant - for the third time without the sons - gave thanks for knowing of their activities and experiences in full detail. The eldest had just announced his removal from central Siberia towards Vladivostok, and hoped to reach home by July of 1919. ~~The second had sent He was planning to~~ ~~be sent to Europe with the relief~~ ~~in a complete diary~~ ~~and his correspondence with the eldest.~~ ~~Sonny had just been commissioned and decorated for bravery.~~ ~~in a complete diary of his experiences as well his correspondence with the eldest.~~ He was to be sent to Europe with a relief party, first to the Balkans, and then come home - for Christmas at the latest. Sonny had just been decorated for bravery and commissioned, attaining the same rank as his father had originally held. He also wrote that the following Christmas was sure to see him at home. The family had much to be thankful for, and to rejoice. The girls even resorted to omens - the cat performing quite nobly, completely devouring both pieces of the cake. They then threw apple peel over their shoulders and interpreted from its position the initials of the respective grooms. Finally, they went to the garden to shake lilac bushes and to listen to the bark of a dog to find out from which direction the y will come. All seemed to work out to perfection - if only grandma was there to see it all.

VII

Late in 1919

~~SONNY~~ Sonny ~~was~~ was discharged from service; the eldest came home shortly afterwards; the third brother ^{arrived for} ~~surprised~~ the family at Thanks-

giving ~~time~~. After six years, the family planned a Christmas with all immediate members present. The old games were fully resorted to once more, and, of course, omens were not forgotten. The girls, realizing that the obliging cat, ^{was not always dependable,} ~~no longer ~~was~~ alive,~~ dispensed with the cake test - were they not completely fooled last year? "Silly superstitions", remarked ~~dad~~ dad; "and yet", he added, "we shall never forget grandmother's prediction in 1913"