

THE RIGORS OF WRITING

Erich Maria Remarque, famous author of "All Quiet on the Western Front" and "The Road Back," has not found the profession of letters an easy one. He recently told an interviewer in Germany:

"The public often believes that a book is written at one stroke in a kind of ecstasy, but I have to make extraordinary efforts to finish what I have begun. Sometimes I have sat at my desk from 9 in the morning through the entire day without being able to write a single line."

All of this is more than ordinarily interesting to the reading public, chiefly because of the odd misconception that commonly exists concerning the writing of books.

Most people, as Herr Remarque says, believe that a book comes into being with a rush. There is glib talk of "getting an inspiration," as if the writer sat, moon-struck, until a divine afflatus filled his being and set him frantically to work writing down the words that welled up from within. Similarly, on a lower plane, people talk of "getting an idea for a story"—as if, once the outline of a plot were conceived, all the rest were simple.

As a matter of fact, the job of writing—if one is trying to create anything with any pretensions to dignity—is one of the most arduous, soul-killing jobs a man can tackle. Each page has to be dredged up laboriously, to the tune of much sweating and self-castigation. The man who produces a book, if it is above the "hammock literature" grade, does so only by dint of hard work and mental suffering.

For that reason it must be peculiarly discouraging to be an author. For the book that is brought into existence with so much trouble generally gets very cavalier treatment from the public. Reviewers have an insufferably airy way of dismissing it with two paragraphs; and the reader can never be trusted not to desert it after five minutes' trial in favor of something more exciting.

Still, things are probably all for the best. Even as it is, too many books get published every year. If it were not for the weeding-out pro-

cess that the difficulty of writing imposes on the ranks of the would-be authors the number would be simply overwhelming.

And the man who really has something to write which is worth writing never gets discouraged. He plugs along in spite of doubt, boredom and discouragement; and sometimes, as in the case of Herr Remarque, he has the satisfaction of knowing that his book has worked mightily on the minds of people all over the world.

Fast Thinking In the Air

The speed with which an aviator has to think sometimes is amply illustrated by the most recent misadventure of Major James H. Doolittle, who is one of America's most talented flyers.

Major Doolittle was speeding along at a 235-mile-an-hour clip over East St. Louis, Ill., the other day, traveling a bare 100 feet from the ground, when suddenly the fabric began to tear loose from the wings of his plane.

In a moment he had nosed his ship up to an altitude of 300 feet. Then, because the construction of its fuselage made it hard for him to jump out, he rolled it over on its back and dropped out upside down, letting his parachute get him down safely while the ship went on and crashed.

It all happened in a very few seconds. Major Doolittle is alive today because he can think with lightning speed—and act as fast as he thinks.

Stick To the Job—How?

In the current issue of The Magazine of Wall Street, an influential New York financier was quoted as making the following remark:

"Pronounced improvement in business in this country, and the world over, will come if everybody will stick at work on his own job."

In a country which gives to its bankers the breathless awe that bankers get in America, this may pass for a very weighty saying. Nevertheless, it may cause a little perplexity, if the nation at large tries to adopt it. There are approximately 6,000,000 Americans today who have no jobs to stick to. Just how are they going to follow this advice?