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Intimate Glimpse Of Erich Remarque
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Intimate Glimpse Of Erich Remarque

(James V. Bryson, in the Milwaukee Journal)

»It is beautiful! Indeed I can say no more.« The speaker was Erich Remarque, the 32-year-old author of »All Quiet on the Western Front.« We were seated at lunch in the fashionable Kaiserhof Hotel in Munster.

Half an hour before Remarque and his charming wife, his manager, Herr Otto Klements, and one or two film executives had sat in a theater in the little town of Munster looking at the film which Carl Laemmle had created out of Remarque's book. Remarque had arrived at the theatre driving his own car. He had come from few knew where. When we parted, later in the day he set off again for the quiet spot where he has buried himself away from notoriety.

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It was 10 A. M. when I first saw Remarque. I had flown from London to Berlin and from the German capital to Munster, the little town in Westphalia. I admit to intense surprise when I saw him. He is 32, admitted, but he looks ten years younger and is Paul Baumer in the flesh. We shook hands quietly and walked into the theater and took our seats in an atmosphere charged with electricity.

It was Remarque's first glimpse at the wonder picture which has grown out of his book. We might have been turned to stone for all that passed as the film flickered through its tale of glory, war and death.

As when it finished Remarque got up and walked out. There were tears in his eyes. He could not speak.

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Remarque told me through his interpreter that the boys of »All Quiet« were his war comrades, that the old schoolmaster called him and his classmates to war even as Kantorek does in the film and book. Remarque answered the first call and at the age of only 16... he had the worst of war. He was terribly wounded in the side.

The story of the mother's illness when Paul Baumer returned home was that of Mrs. Remarque, whose illness and eventual death were only slightly suggested in the film. That is one reason why Remarque is so sad. Another is that he saw the bitterness of life so early... The day he wanted to join up his father clapped him heartily on the back and bade him go... His mother's tears, as she pleaded with him, nearly kept him back... for he was only 16. Many of the incidents in the film happened almost exactly in real life. But with the changes

even Remarque found no fault. The picture as a whole pleased him tremendously, far too much to talk about with its tide of terrible memories.

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Certainly he has a lot to be proud of and good reason to be shy. His book has sold better than any work outside the Bible. More than 3,500,000 copies have been sold throughout the world, 400,000 of which have been bought in England.

It is just sixteen years since he started on the great adventure of war. He was only 16 then. He is now at a halfway mark.

After meeting this extraordinary man I do await something far greater. As to the man himself, he is sad. He is shy and as timid as a gazelle, almost too timid to shake hands.