



DEAR JOE:

Here are some ideas about life-after-the-army by a man who knows a lot about it from way back, and who is especially concerned with problems that face ex-service people who are interested in writing.

ERICH MARIA REMARQUE, ex-front line fighter of World War I and author of the best-selling *Arch of Triumph* (Appleton-Century, \$3), understands "that lost feeling" of ex-GIs of World War II.

"All soldiers go through it after they get out," Remarque says. "The first wonderful, free feeling that follows discharge is over. Now they suddenly realize they are on their own again. In the army, everyone, from private to general, has someone over them who gives the orders and carries the responsibility. That prop is gone when they get out. It is natural to experience a letdown."

He experienced it after 1918; a whole generation experienced it. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Remarque's best-seller of 16 years ago, he gave the viewpoint of the young soldier swept up by the war—it may help us to understand the viewpoint of the young ex-GI:

"All the older men are linked up with their previous life. They have wives, children, occupations, and interests, they have a background which is so strong that the war cannot obliterate it. We young men of 20, however, have only our parents, and some, perhaps, a girl—that is not much, however, for at our age the influence of parents is at its weakest and girls have not yet got a hold over us. Besides this there was little else—some enthusiasm, a few hobbies, and our school. Beyond this our life did not extend. And of this nothing remains."

To help the returning soldier to reorient himself in the civilian world, Remarque prescribes new interests, new friends; and sympathy and forbearance on the part of his family. To writers just out of uniform who find they cannot write because of war- or world-weariness, he offers this advice:

"Keep a diary. You don't have to put down more than that you had lunch with so-and-so, and even the fact that you don't feel like doing anything. Keep making these entries for several weeks. The mere transference of what's inside you to the paper outside you will help. Soon you will begin to make longer entries; you will be writing again. I see you smile at this. Part of the cure is in the belief this will help."

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BLUE-EYED, broad-shouldered; relaxed in carpet slippers and a mixture of tweeds and flannels; refreshed by an occasional scotch-and-soda, Remarque talked of soldiers, present and past; of books and writing, and of himself.

"A writer can't jump steps," he said. "If with the first book you jump steps, you have to go back to the second and third steps. Development has nothing to do with success."

(*All Quiet*, his first book, jumped several steps. It sold over a million copies in the U. S. A. alone—with unauthorized editions the figure is said to be closer to a million and a half. Now he has another success on his hands. *Arch of Triumph* is the February Book-of-the-Month Club selection, was a *Collier's* serial, and was sold to the movies. Printings to date total over 700,000 copies.)

"I think it is easier for a writer to start with a moderately successful book," he went on. "Yes, easier. Better, I wouldn't say. Success is good. Every writer wants it; or why does he write? But a writer shouldn't cheapen himself to get success."

The success of *Arch of Triumph*, his fifth book, took him by surprise, he said, but he is already at work on another book.

Speaking of one of his failures (*Flotsam*, which is said to have sold

under 40,000 copies), he recalled that "Dorothy Parker panned it something awful in PM."

"Most people," he said, "expected me to be a mature writer who would stay on the level of his first book. It's like an actor who had a big success with his first part. It would be inhuman to expect him to keep it up."

"With this book (*Arch of Triumph*), I tried to forget I wrote any books before. I have lined up two more books." He smiled and added, "Anti-success books."

Arch of Triumph is laid in Paris on the eve of World War II. Its hero is a German refugee who, Remarque says, he met there.

"Everyone said, 'Don't write about refugees any more,'" he went on. "The problem is not refugees, but human beings in a situation where everything is destroyed, with no right to live anywhere. A human being who can go on living under such conditions is more than a refugee. I want to show what a human being is doing in exceptional cases—denied life, he goes on living."

"I am not a brilliant writer. I try to get the human problem out of it. That's never dated. I just want to describe one human being. Statistics are ghastly, but you don't see it. Show them how one of them died, and it will stay in their heads."

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REMARQUE speaks English fluently, with only an occasional Teutonic construction. He writes in German.

"English, compared with German, is shorter," he says. "I lose

Photo by Morris Engel



Erich Maria Remarque photographed recently in his New York apartment.

something in translation, but sometimes I am gaining in briefness and clarity.

"Perhaps every writer should be a newspaperman first—it's a good way to lose too much respect and awe of your own words."

He admires Hemingway, Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Faulkner and Wolfe. Wolfe, he said, appealed to German readers "because of a Faustian quality of always seeking something and never finding."

Speaking of war books, he said, "The level now is excellent. But a good war book can't be just reportage. Just to hate war is not enough. Everyone hates war."

"I didn't write *All Quiet* as an anti-war book. The theme was thousands and thousands of young people between 18 and 22 who should have started to enjoy life, but who were suddenly confronted with the end of life. The aim of war is not to get out alive, but to get killed. The ones who escaped alive know only half. The others cannot talk about it any more."

"Incidentally, the first publisher in Germany who read *All Quiet* turned it down," Remarque went on. "He told me people wouldn't want to read any book about war—this was in 1928, when war was the biggest business in Germany."

Anti-Nazi from the start, and disliked by the Nazis for his anti-war sentiments, Remarque has been a wanderer since 1929, living in Switzerland, France, Italy and the U. S. A. Now, at 48, he expects his final U. S. citizenship papers this year.

A year ago the OSS asked Remarque for suggestions on the re-education of Germany. He did not feel at liberty to disclose the nature of the report he made, but the subject led to questions many have asked, "What went wrong in Germany after 1918? How was it possible for the Nazis to grow?"

"The greatest mistake of the Social Democrats," he replied, "was to take over before the collapse. Afterward they were blamed for everything. They should have waited a few more weeks and let the generals sign the armistice—it was the generals who asked for it. When the soldiers began to drift back from the fronts, it was easy to tell them that they had not been beaten in the field. They knew where they had been. It was easy for them to swallow the lie of a stab in the back."

"Now they know they were beaten."

Thus went the talk one night last week in Remarque's suite at the Ambassador Hotel. Antique furniture throngs the three rooms whose walls are hung with original Cezannes, Renoirs, Van Goghs, Daumiers and a Utrillo. Beside a record-player stood a massive array of records. An overflow of books from packed shelves perched crazily on tables, chairs and writing desk. On the writing desk lay the thickening white pile of sheets of his new novel.—CHARLES NORMAN