

Remarque – A Glimpse of the Man

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Remarque.

A Glimpse of the Man.

(From a Correspondent.)

The other day a well-dressed young man, with fair hair, blue eyes, and sunburnt complexion went into a bookseller's shop and asked to see the newest novels. Of course he was shown »Im Westen nichts Neues« (»All Quiet on the Western Front«) by Erich Maria Remarque, and was told that half a million copies of this amazing successful war-book had been sold in three months. »That is no proof of its artistic merit,« he said. The bookseller continued his eulogy of the book, but was cut short with »I wrote it« from the young man.

Remarque is at present in Davos, and someone who has met and talked with him there describes him as somewhat melancholy in tone. How can he be anything but serious when every day letters come thanking him for his book, letters from men whose terrible wounds are still unhealed, from the shell-shocked, gas-poisoned, and blinded? »When I came back my mother had died,« he said, »and what is a family without the mother? I became editor of a sporting paper to take the edge off my sorrows.« Asked if he had ever written anything before he replied:

»Only trifles not worth mentioning. I was unknown and found life hard. I had nothing in common with the manifestations of modern culture. I felt I was different and alone. One day I started writing. I had the material and it only wanted putting in order. But for a long time I left what I had written lying in a drawer and began other things. The book seemed to me too personal.

»I believe that it is an isolated success. The success took me by surprise, and left me cold. Far from giving me pleasure, it made me feel unexpressibly sad and helpless. Suddenly I, the unknown, became an object of interest and curiosity. It all depressed me, and I had to escape from Berlin and come here to Davos.«

Remarque's flight from publicity does not mean that he is writing another book. He is chiefly occupied in answering letters. »I fell it is my duty to those comrades who suffered like myself. I will answer all those letters before I do anything else.

»To write another book after such an astounding success will be a difficult task. Perhaps I shall never write anything more. Why should I add yet another to the vast army who write from vanity, necessity, or because it is their vocation?«

Remarque has refused endless offers from publishers. He knows nothing of politics, except, as he said with a smile, that Stresemann is Foreign Minister. He has never read either *Barbusse* or *Unruh*. He is a native of Osnabrück, in Westphalia, and an orthodox Catholic.