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and heartbreaking road of "rejection slips." That called for iron courage and determination.

"Many well-known authors," said Sir Neville, "have followed this road. Michael Arlen wrote 100 stories before he had his first contribution accepted. And his experience is by no means uncommon."

Hard Work Without Frills

Young writers, added Sir Neville, should not overlook or despise correspondence schools or courses in journalism and short-story writing. These offer useful signposts to the budding writer, and sometimes show him a short-cut to the top.

I spoke my piece.

"Supposing, Sir Neville, I, as an aspiring writer, walked into Fleet Street, what chance would I have of landing a job? And is it really the romantic place we read of?"

He answered my last question first. "About as romantic as Lombard Street. Solid, hard work, without any frills. As for your chances of landing a job there, that would depend on one or two things—your own personality and the nature of the thing you had to sell. If it was a specialised line that attracted an editor's eye, then, of course, you might establish

an entree. Or, if your personality is of the type to fit some specialised job, such as interviewing political and social lions, then again your chance would be good. Outside that, your chances of breaking into Fleet Street single-handed would be pretty slim."

"England, I would say, is the best literary shop to-day," he added. "If you've got something worthwhile to sell—the market is ready and waiting. America would not be so easy. They have their own technique of writing over there that makes it difficult for an outsider to break in. An American would have a far better chance of crashing the English market."

Dearth of New Writers

Commenting on the thousands of manuscripts that pour yearly into his own publishing firm, Sir Neville said that only about three in one thousand were found acceptable. He also remarked on the dearth of new writers and new ideas during this present war.

"Not a single new author of any note has appeared over the past four years. There must be a reason for this somewhere. The same applies to other fields. Take music; unlike the last war, that produced memorable marching songs that are still being sung to-day. Only one song has appeared out of this war—and that at the beginning: 'Hang Out

Your Washing on the Siegfried Line.' And even that fell far short of the 1914-18 songs."

"Perhaps," I said, "people are too occupied with their own little dramas and tragedies to have any urge left for the creative instinct."

"Maybe that is the answer. The last war didn't even touch many of the people. This is an all-in effort."

Sir Neville also remarked on the failure of authors to-day to create a central character in their work who would achieve permanence. Sherlock Holmes, for example. Had he a present-day prototype?

"This is a significant fact," he added. "Previous to 1925, when the *Strand* magazine came out with a short story of Conan Doyle's, the circulation would invariably take a jump of 50,000. No writer since then has been able to lift the circulation by more than 10,000."

So much for writing and authors. Oh, except a parting word for New Zealand!

"I wish we could get some good New Zealand writers. You have Ngaio Marsh, of course. We think a lot of her in England. But we can do with more."

So I hope writers of my own sex will get busy with paper and pencils. Fame may be waiting for them just round the corner.

—P.M.

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