

## LITERARY DISCIPLINE

By MIGNON G. EBERHART

THE difficulty about writing a piece on how to write lies in the fact that so far as I know there are no new rules for writing. I have pondered and procrastinated in writing this in the hope of discovering something new, something that has not been said many times, something that would give a new facet, even a very small one, for viewing the craft. But try as I have tried, the whole thing simmers down to the same rules. That is, if you can call them rules when no matter how slavishly and faithfully they are followed they still do not always sum up to the desired total.

There are not many of them. The main one, of course, is to write. No amount of planning and thinking can take the place of one honest hour at the typewriter. I don't mean that planning and thinking aren't necessary, for of course they are. But the writing itself is the thing. And there's nothing to keep your planning and arranging process from going on coincidentally with your writing. In fact, once you have a chapter or so written you'll find that your projected plot steadies itself, becomes firmer and more concrete and thus, as a rule, more reasonable. When your characters emerge, you'll find that they have a very good effect upon your plot; they seem to show it up in true light and if there are weak spots you are more likely to see that weakness after you have written some of your story than before. This is particularly true of mysteries, for mystery plots are by their very nature difficult and likely to be treacherous. Motives in mysteries have to be scrutinized and questioned and tested and *written* in many cases before you discover whether they are actually as sound as they seemed when you first considered them.

Writing, of course, is a habit. Like any other habit you'll find it a help once you've established it. When you have habituated yourself to staying at your desk from four to eight hours a day, you no longer have the troublesome reluctance to work to combat within