NOT long ago I saw a picture in a comic magazine. It represented a disturbed writer looking up from his desk to scold the cat. The caption (addressed to the cat) read as follows: "What are you doing, stamping through the house?"

That picture presents the ancient reputation of the writers, for from the very beginning they have been dubbed the irritable tribe, theirs the cranky, touchy, and altogether difficult profession. They do their work in solitary confinement, and often are unable to think of anything else even when they are not working. And so they are apt to seem lonely souls, irritable as a porcupine.

Of course this picture is overdrawn, a caricature. But there is enough truth in it to make people wonder what happens in a house where there is not only one writer—but two! And why, if there is already one person writing in that house, another should wish to do so. At least, that is what the editor of The Sooner Magazine has asked me to discuss.

At first, one might suppose that it was a mere trick of self-defense on the part of one or the other. One might try to explain it on the proverbial principle that Misery Loves Company. One might contend that the only way to put up with a writer is to become a writer oneself. But like all plausible theories, this one has a catch in it. For the fact that both of the Campbells have always wished to write, and have been working towards it independently from the start. And so this theory fails to the ground. Facts kill it.

Facts also dispose pretty effectively of another theory—namely, that writing as a joint affair is the only way for a man and his wife to see anything of each other, especially when both have other work than writing to attend to. People might suppose that we took up writing as golf-widows take up golf—so as to see something of each other now and then.

But the truth is, we both wanted to write, both began to write, and both found ourselves writing without any expressed plans. And considering the satisfaction of the work, it seems likely we shall go on writing for some time. Everyone admits that the woman who knows nothing of business, the man who takes no interest in his home, are both missing a great deal of common experience which they might share. But when two people practice the same art, they have a bond which arises from a mutual understanding of each other's problems and triumphs. And this, I should say, is the major satisfaction of having two writers in one house.

For, after all, there is no talk like shop talk. Golfers talk golf. Business men talk business. Horsemen talk horses. Mothers talk children. We all love to talk of the thing we are interested in, and to talk to others who know what we mean. And that is one of the chief blessings of having two writers in one house. Especially when they are man and wife.

Everyone has seen professional writers, living alone, distrustful, carefully avoiding all reference to their work in the presence of other writers, never really letting themselves go in argument or criticism or praise, men who lead a life about as cheerful and sociable as that of the wandering Jew. No wonder people call them irritable. They are. It would do them good to talk shop with someone who is neither a collaborator nor a rival.

For that describes the two of us. I think, Isabel Campbell and Stanley Vestal have never collaborated, and probably could not do so. The materials which stimulate the imagination of one would not stir the other; and our techniques are widely different, as anyone who reads what we write will agree. But for that very reason we find shop talk very profitable, because each one brings something which is fresh and novel to the other. And so we have plenty of discussion, debate, and argument about technical matters of writing—discussions which to me, at least, are extremely diverting and useful. And we have such a good time at them, that we never notice whether the cat is stamping through the house or not.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Reviews of Dobe Walls by Stanley Vestal and Jack Sprat by Isabel Campbell, as appearing in newspapers and magazines, will appear in The Sooner Magazine for November. Jack Sprat in particular has received unstinted praise for its brilliance and finish.