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matter was perfectly simple. A cold-bomb, whose outer surface acted as a surface at absolute zero, that is, the absolute limit of low temperature, would be at once the most spectacular and most useful form in which the hypothetical material could be used in a military way. The steam-plume rising from the center of the ice-cake was a theoretic necessity to dispose of the heat that would enter the bomb, to form a thermal equation. Then, alternately, I put myself in the position of "Teddy Gerrod," who was fighting the would-be Dictator of the Earth, and the would-be Dictator himself. Gerrod destroyed the cold-bomb with high explosive. The Dictator had to evolve a bomb that could not be so destroyed. That was the next step. He evolved the bomb. Back to Gerrod's viewpoint. He would not be content to counter the Dictator's efforts, but would try to attack the Dictator himself. To keep from killing off my hero at the outset, I had the nature of the Dictator's weapons made manifest on a scape-goat. Forewarned, when Gerrod risked his (to the author) precious life, he had means of combating the Dictator's jets of liquid hydrogen. The result was a pleasant scene in which the aeroplane with my hero aboard darted unscathed through sheets of flaming gas, burning in mid-air.

All of this sounds like wildest melodrama, but is scientifically correct and humanly even probable. I can assure you that if some gentle reader finds himself supplied with the weapons at the Dictator's disposal, he will be strongly tempted to emulate the Dictator. In such event, however, I promise to revive "Teddy Gerrod" and put his massive brain at the problem again.

As for advice to young writers. I am no more than a "young writer" myself. I have been writing commercially for only four years, since I was eighteen, and have been a free-lance for only two. And as far as imaginative fiction is concerned, I know of no advice I can give. The same broad principles apply as in any other form of fiction. In the first place you simply must know what you are talking about, and in the second place you must have your people human. You cannot have your hero an exception to all human instincts governing conduct. In evolving a character you must proceed from common characteristics to individual qualities, unless you are a genius. If you weave your stories around a character you know, that is another matter. He will conform to common characteristics without your bothering.

There is a third necessity for consistently

saleable fiction. It must be dramatic. If you ask me what drama is, I confess my complete ignorance. There are thirty-six dramatic situations, and as many million without drama. Why those thirty-six are dramatic, I do not know. But in the last analysis anything that is dramatic has a chance of selling, and as far as I know nothing that is not dramatic has a chance of selling. Being a commercial writer myself, all the advice I can give is, "Know your subject and your people, and be dramatic. I don't know what drama is, or how to get it, or how to know it when you have it, but be dramatic!"

238. Edgar Rice Burroughs

The Editor has asked me to write something about the genesis, development and writing of "The Golden Locket," a short Tarzan story which appeared recently in *The Red Book*. I doubt if I can say anything that will apply any more particularly to "The Golden Locket" than to any of my other stories.

I presume that each man has his own methods. I have tried two. At first I merely carried in mind a very broad and general plot and then let one situation suggest the next. I did not know what my characters were going to do or where the plot was leading in the next paragraph. As I was writing merely to entertain I sought to put action or the suggestion of future action into each paragraph. I found this a very interesting way to write stories and enjoyed it thoroughly. Then I tried plotting my stories. I worked out a very elaborate chart covering the principal situations and action in each chapter. This chart I found rather difficult to follow, and the writing of the story became tedious labor by comparison with my former method, and so I went back to the old plan which I follow in practically all my stories. This would not be possible where a story depended for its principal interest upon an intricate plot, but in work of the kind that I do it is action that counts for most, the plot merely being a simple clothes-horse upon which to hang the action.

If I were to be asked to advise a young writer, the first thing that I should tell him would be not to take himself or his work seriously. Nature has given each of us a physique, a physiognomy and a character that differ in one way or another from those of every other created creature, and nature has also given each of us a method of expressing himself which differs from the methods by which all other men express themselves.

This method of expression is our style. It is affected naturally by our environment, our association and our reading, but I believe that it cannot be materially altered either for better or for worse. If you take yourself and your work too seriously you will devote too much effort to mastering a style which you believe will insure your success. Forget style while you are writing. Write in the way that interests you most, tell the stories that you are interested in, and if you cannot succeed in this way it is because nature never intended you for a writer.

239. Marda Mackendrick

Personalities—And a Suggestion

The germinal idea for "Heart of Fire" (The Metropolitan Magazine for July, 1919) came to me in a dream. The same thing has happened many times. I dream the first scene of a plot—or sometimes the middle or end of it—see it, and, in part, feel it very vividly. then click! off it goes, and I wake up! No proper way for a well behaved dream to treat you, but better than nothing, for all that.

This time I was particularly pleased with the man and his methods and was teased by the question: He would go on being a little different—now, just how? And so, the rest of the story gradually took shape.

Except for a brief note, however, I did nothing with it then. But one day last winter, "Kay" and "Betty" suddenly presented themselves to me and insisted upon being noticed. I was out walking and they came along too. My first vivid impression returned. I liked them a lot, and the next morning began to type.

They were nice! Sometimes characters persist in remaining colorless and stupid, and I have to wait un... they come out of the fog—if they are ever going to. It is a tiresome way. But sometimes, as in this case, they are immediately real to me, and tremendously interesting. Then the story writes itself. I don't mean by that that I sit down and reel it off without a forward glance, because I don't at all. First, there must be a long walk or ride, preferably horseback, though a street car will do if it goes far enough, when the framework as a whole is planned. Then, more of the same, day by day, writing each scene almost word for word in my head one afternoon and typing it the following morning.

I find that I "dream" truest when I am outdoors alone. It is not tedious then to compose and recompose until a sentence or a speech comes to suit you.

Often, of course, I get hopelessly stuck and am compelled to change to another bit of work or drop it all and play awhile with some real people. A good dose of flesh pots and frivolity is excellent for an attack of stale imagination.

As to the problems of this story, the chief one was to make "Betty" good enough for "Kay." (I find heroines refractory.) But she proved rather tractable after all. Then there was the difficulty of keeping up the suspense to the last, but that worked out finally by just putting myself in her place and thinking how I'd feel under like circumstances, and, for the rest—technical manipulation. But I enjoyed doing this story so thoroughly that it was never really troublesome.

I have tried to write ever since I was a child, even poetry, when I was a youngster (for which Heaven forgive me!), and I had certain haunts—one of them was the top platform of the windmill—where the fire of "inspiration" seemed to visit me most thrillingly. The first things I ever really finished were some short stories which were published in my college magazine, the Vassar Miscellany. Later I was made one of the editors and had some experience in judging the work of others, and in proofreading.

After I finished college I married and my writing, for some time, was only sporadic. I had plenty of encouragement but was lazy and too busy, besides, having a good time. Then, a few years ago, during one of these fits of would-be creative energy I was "dared" to write a story for Snappy Stories, and did it. The result was a check and a request for more. But the episode I had written up happened to be true, at least in outline, and unfortunately I knew no others of the kind, so my career in that line stopped as abruptly as it had begun.

The taste for "selling," however, had its effect and I wrote some other longer stories, still playing at it, though, until a year ago, when I began to work in earnest. Again I had luck selling, and, better yet, received personal letters from editors. Some of them were highly unflattering and even peevish, but at least they proved that a dent had been made in the india rubber fortress of editor-dom—naturally, it's much more inspiring to be abused than not to be noticed at all!

I want to write happy stories (surely you need not necessarily be drab and gloomy to be artistic—I won't believe it!) the kind of stories that make you feel that you have been with some delightful, real people, and