

Fiction Versus Facts

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A FEW letters have come to the Editor's desk from some readers who wish to know what prompts us to so frequently preface our stories in our introductory remarks with the statement that this or that scientific plot is not impossible, but quite probable.

These readers seem to have the idea that we try to impress our friends with the fact that whatever is printed in *Amazing Stories* is not necessarily pure fiction, but could or can be fact.

That impression is quite correct. We DO wish to do so, and have tried to do so ever since we started *Amazing Stories*. As a matter of fact, our editorial policy is built upon this structure and will be so continued indefinitely.

The reason is quite simple. The human mind, not only of today, but of ten thousand years ago also is and was so constituted that being merged into the present it can see neither the past nor the future clearly. If only five hundred years ago (or little more than ten generations), which is not a long time as human progress goes, anyone had come along with a story wherein radio telephone, airplanes, electricity, painless surgery, the phonograph, and a few other modern marvels were (Inscribed, he would probably have been promptly flung into a dungeon.

All these things sounded preposterous and the height of nonsense even as little as one hundred years ago, and, lo and behold! within two generations we take these marvels and miracles as everyday occurrences, and do not get in the least excited when we read of recent reports that it will be possible, within a year or less, to see as well as hear your sweetheart a thousand miles away, without intervening wires or connections of any sort.

So when we do read one of these to us "impossible" tales, in *Amazing Stories*, we may be almost certain that the "impossibility" will have become a fact perhaps before another generation — if not much sooner. It is most unwise in this age to declare anything impossible, because you may never be sure but that even while you are talking it has already become a reality. Many things in the past which were declared impossible, are of everyday occurrence now.

There are few stories published in this magazine that can be called outright impossible. As a matter of fact, in selecting our stories we always consider their possibility. We reject stories often on the ground that; in our opinion, the plot or action is not in keeping with science as we know it today. For instance, when we see a plot wherein the hero is turned into a tree, later on into a stone, and then again back to himself, we do not consider this science, but, rather, a fairy tale, and such stories have no place in Amazing Stories.

Of course once in a great while an author may take some liberties, as happened, for instance, in the conclusion of "A Trip to the Center of the Earth," printed in this Issue.

Jules Verne brought back his heroes in a most improbable manner. But this one defect does not detract from the story as a whole, throughout which good science is maintained. It is only when the entire plot becomes frankly impossible, or far too improbable, that we draw the line.

And it should never be forgotten that the educational value of the scientific type of story is tremendous.

Mr. G. Peyton Wertenbaker, author of "The Man from the Atom," says this on the same subject:

"Amazing Stories should appeal, however, to quite a different public (referring to the sex- type of literature). Scientific fiction is a branch of literature which requires more intelligence and even more [esthetic] sense than is possessed by the sex-type reading public. It is designed to reach those qualities of the mind which are aroused only by things vast, things cataclysmic, and things infinitely strange. It is designed to reach that portion of the imagination which grasps with its eager, feeble talons after the unknown. It should be an influence greater than the influence of any literature I know upon the restless ambition of man for further conquests, further understandings. Literature of the past and the present has made the mystery of man and his world more clear to us, and for that reason it has been less beautiful, for beauty lies only in the things that are mysterious. Beauty is a groping of the emotions towards realization of things which may be unknown only to the intellect.

"Scientific fiction goes out into the remote vistas of the universe, where there is still mystery and so still beauty. For that reason scientific fiction seems to me to be the true literature of the future.

"The danger that may lie before Amazing Stories is that of becoming too scientific and not sufficiently literary. It is yet too early to be sure, but not too early for a warning to be issued amicably and frankly.

"It is hard to make an actual measure, of course, for the determination of the correct amount of science, but the aesthetic instinct can judge. I can only point out as a model the works of Mr. H. G. Wells, who hits instinctively recognized, in his stories, the correct proportions of fiction, fact, and science. This has been possible only because Mr. Wells is a literary artist above everything, rather than

predomin- antly a scientist. If he were a scientist, his taste and sense would permit him only to write books of scientific research. Since he is an artist, he has given us the first truly beautiful work in this new field of literature.”

These opinions, we believe, state the case clearly. If we may voice our own opinion we should say that the ideal proportion of a scientifiction story should be seventy-five per cent literature interwoven with twenty-five per cent science.