

he made up his mind to write as if he were talking. His style has all the charm of the most natural and racy conversation, while in its loftier flights it reaches the level of the best English prose. Except for a first reading, to supply omissions and correct the punctuation, he never attempts to revise his work.

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For years before he himself thought of writing, Frank Bullen was a Kipling worshipper, and knew by heart the earlier Indian stories.

Mr. Bullen and  
Mr. Kipling.

As the material for the *Cruise of the Cachalot* began to take shape in his mind, it occurred to him that Mr. Kipling would treat it much more satisfactorily than he could, so he wrote to offer him the material. Mr. Kipling declined it, but advised him to push on, and several letters passed between them. There was a cherished hope in Mr. Bullen's mind that the great novelist might be persuaded to write an introduction for him. Mr. Kipling said No, but in the kindest way. "When a man can make a steamer move by saying things to it, and at it, and round it, and about it, then you will find that a book can be helped by power outside its own merits." This was before the *Cachalot* had been shown to its eventual publishers, and the experienced author advised the beginner to have it typewritten, and he also offered to look over it. More he could not do, for "some rather interesting experiences have taught me that the best way of making a man hate me for life is to meddle in any way with his work. . . . If the book is good, it will go, and if it is not, nothing will make it stir." In another communication Mr. Kipling gave a yet more conclusive reason against writing an introduction, "All the men who want to stick a knife into me would stick it into you as soon as they saw my name prefacing your book. Bitter experience has taught me that that kind of thing doesn't pay. If a book stands by itself, it will stand by itself; but if you use another chap's name to help it to a start, you will get all the whacks that the other chap would have got if he had written the book, in addition to a few whacks on your own merits."

Mr. A. J. Dawson, whose photograph we herewith present, has written a volume of stories, which is reviewed elsewhere in the present

The "African  
Nights Entertain-  
ment."

number of *THE BOOKMAN*. To that review we refer those of our readers who are curious as to the merits of the book, with the simple reservation that we say here merely that the *African Nights Entertainment* combines in a very unique and original way the fearful and the bizarre. In the choice of his title Mr. Dawson was at once very happy and yet very daring. A book of inferior merit would be crushed into utter helplessness by the sheer weight of such a name, because that name naturally invites something of a comparison with the vast store of tales which were brought from the East and given to Europe for the first time between the years 1704 and 1717 through the somewhat emasculated translation of Antoine Galland. The *New Arabian Nights* of Robert Louis Stevenson was, of course, a very admirable bit of literary invention. But to the general reader, we take it, the stories appealed rather through his curiosity than through his sense of horror.

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A great deal can always be said in disparagement of the literary taste and the general reading of the present time. It may be pointed out with perfect justice that we are not getting many masterpieces nowadays; that there are no *Vanity Fairs* nor *Pickwicks* nor *Cousine Bettés* nor *Monte Cristos*, and no Thackerays nor Dickenses nor Balzacs nor Dumases to write them; that if the great book of the old school was at times a little long-winded, if its conversations were too long and its heroics too stilted, it was at the same time vastly superior in solidity and strength. But there is certainly one department of fiction in which we have progressed. Novel readers have been so sated with the grim and tragic that they are growing just a little bit *blasé*, and a romance of particular horror is needed to give them a real thrill. The tales that caused the readers of the first half of the nineteenth century to fumble about tremblingly in cupboards and wardrobes before putting out the light

seem now ever so tame. The haunted chambers of Mr. G. P. R. James's enchanted castles no longer produce the shudders of old. Even the stories of Edgar Allan Poe are now admired, first of all, as literary productions. They are too palpably feats of the imagination. The horrors which they describe belong to strange lands and an unnatural atmosphere. The personages which troop through them inhabit a strange, weird country—the country of *Udahume*, where

The skies they were ashen and sober,  
The leaves they were crisped and sear,  
The leaves they were withering and sear.  
(It was night in the lonesome October  
Of my most immemorial year),  
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,  
In the misty, mid-region of Weir,  
It was down by the dark tarn of Auber,  
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

There is no story which seems to furnish the average newspaper editorial writer with finer opportunities for inept and misplaced metaphor than Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It is a book which is far from being ignored by the casual novel reader even in these days, when one is obliged to struggle strenuously even to seem to keep up with the books that are new and popular. Only a few months ago it was printed in a mutilated form in one of the most enterprising of our New York newspapers. By the novel readers of sixty years ago it was passed down as something to freeze the blood. Yet, somehow, it provokes only the mildest of thrills, and judged by the standards of to-day, it is a wofully dreary book. The central thought is wonderful. As an idea pure and simple, it takes rank with the great ideas of all literature. In its way, it is an epic of horror. Condense it to two hundred words as the theme, a romance and its possibilities are infinite. Only this immense seed thought, this vast conception, are in Mrs. Shelley's story submerged, smothered under the mass of platitude, of false rhetoric, of endless dialogue, of absurd claptrap. One very naturally likes to speculate as to what this theme might have been had it been handled by a Stevenson, a Kipling or a Guy de Maupassant. Above all, by

a Maupassant. What grandeur there would have been! What cynicism, what horror, what gloom!

What distinguishes the horror story of to-day from the horror story of the past, what gives to it the supreme, and final touch, is that closeness with which it is linked with reality and which baffles the reader who would say just where the commonplace and the probable ends and the impossible and supernatural begins. You are walking along Broadway or the Tottenham Court Road or the Boulevard des Italiens; you enter a café, a public house or a pastry cook's; you order a cocktail or a pint of twopenny bitter or a tart; you meet people whom you might very well meet, and presto! before you are aware of anything unusual taking place, you are walking stealthily through the streets of Bagdad, and experiencing the adventures of Aladdin of the Lamp or Ali Baba. Everything is quite tangible. The houses are of respectable and substantial brick. The china may be cracked, but it came through the clerk of the crockery store and not through the Djinn of the ring. In a word, when the astounding adventure has been played out the reader and the hero walk out together and sniff the damp asphalt and find a supercilious policeman on the next corner. Up to a certain point it all might have been.

Take, as a modern instance, Robert Louis Stevenson's story of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Mr. Utterson, Doctor Lanyon, Sir Danvers Carew and the normal Doctor Henry Jekyll—none of them is anything out of the ordinary. In fact, they are, one and all, rather commonplace characters. Soho is an every-day neighbourhood, and by suppressing two dozen pages one might have one of the most sedate and quiet of narratives. The background is London—London of to-day, vast, complex, big with mystery and strange crime, but the crime which ultimately finds its way into the police court and the newspapers. Jekyll is outwardly the most respectable of men—stiff-necked and punctilious, an observer