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Editor and Advisory Board

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SCIENCE BULLETIN

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DISILLUSIONMENT !

EDITORIAL

Who has not felt his very flesh writhe and shrink on reading Hugo's fearful story of Gilliatt's fight with the octopus? The art of the great Frenchman is here superb. He compels the reader to identify himself with his hero. Gilliatt's struggles and emotions are his also. The monster projects itself upon him—its tentacles entwine him, their horrible sucking vacuum cups pull at his flesh; he strains, heaves, grasps at these accursed circling gelatinous bands; they seem to yield, but never actually; they crush, excoriate, scarify—his flesh seems to melt—he is disintegrating—it is death in life!

But, pshaw! why all the emotion? "God made the octopus," said Hugo. "Yes," says the scientist, "but He didn't make him a man-eater!" Horrible he is to see, without doubt. Fierce is his owl-like beak, staring are his almost human eyes, terrible are his stringy, elastic tentacles with their rows of vacuum cups. But monstrous as he is in appearance, his actual danger to man consists only in the terror that his appearance inspires. He is probably as much afraid of man as man is of him. Fishes and other denizens of the sea fall grist to his horrible mill—but not man! Disillusionment number one!

In Appleton's Fourth Reader of forty years back is a story that has thrilled its thousands. Who has not fled hand in hand with that solitary skater as he raced silently down the moonlit river with the "bloody-jawed," slaver-flecked pack at his heels? Their hot breaths fairly blow upon him, he feels himself eviscerated, vanishing from the sight of men; he dodges suddenly and his fierce pursuers go sliding on their haunches—for the moment helpless. Then the

baying of his hounds saves him—and our blood pressure is allowed to fall! But it should not have arisen in the first place! Wolves do not hunt in packs. The largest pack seen is six or seven and these commonly consist of a family—a mother and her cubs. Moreover, wolves, gray or otherwise, rarely attack man. No longer may we thrill with propriety on contemplating the spectacle of the solitary hunter anxiously squatting over the flare of his waning campfire—his roving glance ever seeking the gradually narrowing circle of blazing wolf eyes. "No," says the scientist, "most of the wolf stories must go! A wolf may follow a man but largely out of curiosity." Disillusionment number two!

Yet another story that plumbs one's very depths of emotion. The day is calm, the bay like glass, the ship barely heaving from the long, slow swells. The sailors disport themselves in the lazy sea! Suddenly a cry is heard from the deck! The horrible word, "Shark!" rings out wildly over the waters. Three hundred yards out, a venturesome swimmer turns with blanched face and strokes powerfully towards the ship; a hundred yards back of him a great black fin cuts the water—a man-eater is in pursuit. The race is terrific—the shark is gaining on his victim, horror grips us! Then the boom of a light cannon rends the awful stillness and the monster turns belly-up—the rows of white saw-like teeth showing in his wide, evil mouth as he floats! Whew! That surely was a close one!

But, here again, the scientist speaks and assures the doubtful swimmer that he has nothing to fear from sharks. True, a barracuda may occasionally take off a leg or a hand—but no shark would think of being so ill-behaved. Time and again great fifteen-footers have come up and stared into Beebe's face as he walked about on the sea floor, but not one showed more than a casual interest in him. They don't seem to bother man, thinks Beebe. Disillusionment number three!

So it goes, as the scientist cleaves his way. Hoop snakes and joint snakes do not exist, snakes do not swallow their young to protect them, bats are not blind, loons are not