

The Face Behind the Mask.

A ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

The plague raged in the city of London. The destroying angel had gone forth, and kindled with his fiery breath the awful pestilence, until all London became one mighty lazar-house. Thousands were swept away daily, grass grew in the streets, and the living were scarce able to bury the dead. Business of all kinds was at an end, except that of the coffin-makers and drivers of the pest-carts. Whole streets were shut up, and almost every other house in the city bore the fatal red cross, and the ominous inscription: "Lord, have mercy on us." Few people, save the watchmen, armed with halberds, keeping guard over the stricken and those who ventured there shrank from each other and passed rapidly on with averted faces. Many even fell dead on the sidewalks, and lay with their ghastly, discolored faces upturned to the mocking sunlight, until the dead-carts came rattling along, and the drivers hoisted the body with their pitchforks on the top of their dreadful load. A few other vehicles besides these dead-carts appeared in the city now; and they, too, were loaded with the dead, and the cry of the drivers echoed dismally through the deserted streets: "Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead!" All who could do so had long ago fled from the devoted city, and London lay under the burning heat of the June sun, stricken for its sins by the hand of God. The pest-houses were full, so were the plague-pits, where the dead were buried in cartfuls, and no one knew who rose up in health in the morning but that they might be lying back and dead in a few hours. The very churches were forsaken; their pastors fled or lying in the plague-pits, and the great cathedral of St. Paul into a vast plague hospital. Cries and lamentations echoed from one end of the city to the other and Death and Charity reigned over London together.

Yet in the midst of all this, many scenes of wild orgies and debauchery still went on within its gates—as, in our own day, when the cholera ravaged Paris, the inhabitants of that famous city made a carnival, so now, in London, there were many who, feeling that they had but a few days to live at the most, resolved to defy death and indulge in the revelry while they yet existed. "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die," was their motto; and if in the midst of the frantic dance or debauched revel one of them dropped dead, the others only shrilled with laughter, hurled the livid body out to the street, and the demoniac mirth grew twice as fast and furious as before. Robbers and cut-purses paraded the streets at noon-day, entered boldly closed and deserted houses, and bore off with impunity whatever they pleased. Highwaysmen infested Hounslow Heath, and all the roads leading from the city, levying a toll on all who passed and plundering fearlessly the dying citizens. In fact, farmed London town, in the year of grace 1665, would have given one a good idea of pandemonium broken loose.

It was drawing to the close of an almost tropical June day that the crowd who had thronged the precincts of St. Paul's since early morning began to disperse. The sun, that had throbbled the livelong day like a great heart of fire in a sea of brass, was sinking from sight in clouds of crimson purple and gold, yet Paul's Walk was crowded. There were court gallants in ruffles and plumes; ballad-singers chanting the not over delicate ditties of the Earl of Rochester; usurers exchanging gold for bonds worth three times what they gave for them; quick doctors reading in seditious tones the bills of mortality of the preceding day, and selling plague-waters and anti-pestilential abominations, whose merit they boldly extolled; ladies, too, richly dressed, and many of them with diamonds and jewels always made St. Paul's a favorite haunt, and even to this day patronize its precincts, and flourish in the regions of Paternoster Row and Ave Maria Lane; court pageants in rich liveries, pet and pick-pockets with a keen eye to business; all clasped and jostled together, raising a din to which the plain of Shinar, with its confusion of tongues and Babylonian workmen, were as nothing.

Moving serenely through this discordant sea of his fellow-creatures came a young man booted and spurred, whose rich doublet of cherry colored velvet, edged and spangled with gold and jaunty hat set slightly on one side of his head, with its long black plume and diamond clasp, proclaimed him to be somebody. A profusion of snowy shirt frills rushed impetuously out of his gilet; a black velvet cloak, lined with amber satin, fell picturesquely from his shoulders; an sword with a jeweled hilt clanked on the pavement as he walked. One hand was covered with a gauntlet of canary colored kid, perturbed to a degree that would shame any belle of to-day, the other, which rested lightly on his sword hilt, flashed with a splendid opal splendor. He was a handsome fellow, too, with fair waving hair (for he had the good taste to discard the ugly wig then in vogue), dark, bright, handsome eyes, a thick blonde mustache, a tall and remarkably graceful figure.

wherein an expression of countenance wherein a good nature and a fiery impetuosity had a hard struggle for mastery. That he was a courtier of rank was apparent from his rich attire and rather aristocratic bearing, and a crowd of hangers-on followed him as he went, loudly demanding a share of his money. A group of trim-bred girls, singing the songs of the day, called boldly to him as he passed; and one of them, more free and easy than the rest, danced up to him, striking her tambour and shouting rather than singing the chorus of the then popular ditty:

"What care I for pest or plague?
We can die but once, God wot,
Kiss me, darling—stay with me;
Love me—love me, leave me not!"

The darling in question turned his bright blue eyes on that dashing street singer with a cool glance of recognition.

"Very sorry, Nell," he said, in a nonchalant tone, "but I'm afraid I can't. How long have you been here, may I ask?"

"A full hour by St. Paul's; and where has Sir Norman Kingsley been, may I ask? I thought you were dead of the plague!"

"Not exactly. Have you seen—ah! there he is. The very man I want."

With which Sir Norman Kingsley dropped a gold piece into the girl's extended palm, and pushed on through the crowd up Paul's Walk.

A tall, dark figure was leaning moodily at the ground, and taking no notice of the busy scene around him until Sir Norman laid his upturned and jeweled hand lightly on his shoulder.

"Good morning, Ormiston. I had an idea I would find you here, and—but what's the matter with you, man? Have you got the plague, or have your mysterious illness flitted about you? Or what other annoyance has happened to make you look as you do, or old King Lear, send aid by his tender daughters to take care of himself?"

The individual addressed lifted his handsome face, settled now into a look of gloomy discontent. He slightly raised his hat when he saw who his questioner was.

"Ah, it's you, Sir Norman! I had given up all notion of your coming, and was about to quit this confounded what has detained you?"

"I was on duty at Whitehall. Are we not in time to keep our appointment?"

"Oh, certainly, La Masque is at home to visitors at all hours, day and night. I believe in my soul she doesn't know what sleep means."

"And you are still as much in love with her as ever, I dare swear. I have no doubt, now, of what you were thinking when I came up. Nothing else could ever have made you look so dimly woe-begone as you did, when Providence sent me to your relief."

"I was thinking of her," said the young man moodily, and with a darkening brow.

Sir Norman favored him with a half-smiled, half-contemptuous stare for a moment, then stopped at a huckster's stall to purchase some cigarettes; lit one, and after smoking for a few minutes, pleasantly remarked, as if the fact had just struck him:

"Ormiston, you're a fool!"

"I know it," said Ormiston, sentimentally.

"The idea," said Sir Norman, knocking the ashes daintily off the end of his cigarette with the tip of his little finger; "the idea of falling in love with a woman whose face you have never seen! I can understand a man's going to any absurd extreme when he falls in love in proper Christian fashion, with a proper Christian face; but to go stark, staring mad, as you have done, my dear fellow, about a black loo mask, why—I consider that a little too much of a good thing! Come, let us go."

Nodding easily to his numerous acquaintances as he went, Sir Norman Kingsley sauntered leisurely down Paul's Walk, and out through the great door of the cathedral, followed by his melancholy friend. Pausing for a moment to gaze at the gorgeous sunset with a look of languid admiration, Sir Norman passed his arm through that of his friend, and they walked on at rather a rapid pace in the direction of Old London Bridge. There were few people abroad, except the watchmen walking slowly up and down before the plague-stricken houses; but in every street they passed through they noticed huge piles of wood and coal heaped down the centre. Smoking zealously they had walked on for a season in silence, when Ormiston ceased puffing for a moment to inquire:

"What are all these for? This is a strange time, I should imagine, for bonfires."

"They're not bonfires," said Sir Norman; "at least they are not intended for that; and if your head was not fuller of that masked witch of the centre, you could not have helped knowing. The Lord Mayor of London has been inspired suddenly with a notion that if several thousand fires are kindled at once in the street, the pestilence will be driven out; so, when St. Paul's tolls the hour of midnight, all these piles are to be fired. It will be a glorious illumination, no doubt; but as to its stopping the progress of the plague,

I am afraid that it is altogether too good to be true."

"Why should you doubt it? The plague cannot last forever."

No. But Lilly, the astrologer, who predicted its coming, also foretold that it would last for many months yet; and since no prophesy has come true, I see no reason why the other should not."

"Except one thing, that there would be nobody left alive to take it. All London will be lying in the plague-pits by that time."

"A pleasant prospect; but a true one, I have no doubt. And as I have no ambition to be buried headlong into one of those horrible holes, I shall leave town altogether in a few days. And, Ormiston, I would strongly recommend you to follow my example."

"Not I," said Ormiston, in a tone of gloomy resolution. "While La Masque stays, so will I."

"And perhaps die of the plague in a week."

"So be it. I don't fear the plague half so much as I do the thought of losing her."

Again Sir Norman started.

"Oh, I see! It's a hopeless case. Faith, I begin to feel curious to see this enchantress, who has managed so effectively to turn your brain. When did you see her last?"

"Yesterday," said Ormiston, with a deep sigh. "And if she were made of granite she could not be harder to me than she is."

"So she doesn't care about you, then?"

"Not she. She has a little Blenheim lapdog that she loves a thousand times more than she ever will me."

"Then what an idiot you are to keep haunting her like her shadow! Why don't you be a man, and tear out from your heart such a goddess?"

"Ah! that's easily said; but if you were in my place, you'd act exactly as I do."

"I don't believe it. It's not in me to go mad about anything with a masked face and a marble heart. If I loved any woman—which, thank Fortune! at the present time I do not—and she had the bad taste not to return it, I should take my hat and make her a bow, and go directly and make love to somebody else made of flesh and blood instead of cast iron! You know the old song, Ormiston:

"If she be not fair to me,
What care I how fair she be!"

"Kingsley, you know nothing about it!" said Ormiston impatiently. "So stop talking nonsense. If you are cold-blooded, I am not, and—I love her."

Sir Norman slightly shrugged his shoulders, and flung his smoked-out weed into a heap of firewood.

"Are we near her house?" he asked.

"Yonder is the bridge."

"And yonder is the house," replied Ormiston, pointing to a large, ancient building—ancient, at least, for those times—with three stories, each projecting over the other. "See! while the houses on either side are marked as pest-stricken, hers alone bears no cross. So it is, I suppose, clinging to life as stricken with death; and those who, like me, are desperate, even death shuns."

"Why, my dear Ormiston, you surely are not so far gone as that? Upon my honor, I had no idea you were in such a state of mental wretchedness, and I wish to heaven I was in yonder dead-cart, with the rest of them—and she too, if she never intends to love me!"

Ormiston spoke with such fierce earnestness that there was no doubting his sincerity; and Sir Norman became profoundly shocked—so much so, that he did not speak again until they were almost at the door. Then he opened his lips to ask, in a subdued tone:

"She has predicted the future for you—what did she foretell?"

"Nothing good; no fear of there being anything in store for such an unlucky dog as I am."

"Where did she learn this wonderful black art of hers?"

"In the east, I believe. She has been there and all over the world, and now she visits England for the first time."

"She has chosen a sprightly season for her visit. Is he not afraid of the plague, I wonder?"

"No; she fears nothing," said Ormiston, as he looked loudly at the door. "I begin to believe she is made of adamant instead of what other women are made of."

"Which is a rib, I believe," observed Sir Norman, thoughtfully. "I don't dare say for their being of such a crooked and cantankerous nature. They're a wonderful race, women are; and for what inscrutable reason it has pleased Providence to create them, even I cannot say. The opening of the door brought to a sudden end this little touch of moralizing, and a wrinkled old porter thrust out a very withered and unlovely face.

"La Masque at home?" inquired Ormiston, stepping in, without ceremony.

The old man nodded and pointed upstairs, and with a "This way, Kingsley," Ormiston sprang lightly up, three steps at a time. Sir Norman followed in the same style by Sir Norman.

"You seem pretty well acquainted with the latitude and longitude of this place," observed that young gentleman, as they passed into a room at the head of the stairs.

"I ought to be. I've been here often enough," said Ormiston. "This is the common waiting room for all who wish to consult La Masque. That old bag of bones who let us in has gone to announce us."

Sir Norman took a seat and glanced curiously round the apartment. It was a common place, apartment enough, with a floor of polished black oak, slippery as ice and shining like glass; a few old Flemish paintings on the walls; a large round table in the center of the floor, on which lay a pair of old musical instruments called virginals. Two large, curtainless windows, with minute diamond-shaped panes, set in leaden casements, admitted the golden and crimson light,

"For the reception-room of a sorceress," remarked Sir Norman, with an air of disappointed criticism. "There is nothing very wonderful about all this. How it she spies fortunes, anyway? As Lilly does, by maps and charts; or as these old Mercury to show us to the presence of your goddess."

The door opened, and the "old bag of bones," as Ormiston irreverently styled his lady-love's ancient domestic, made a sign for them to follow him. Leading the way down along a corridor, he flung open a pair of shining folding doors at the end, and ushered them into the majestic presence of the sorceress and her magic plumed hair.

Both gentlemen stopped forward to contemplate the scene of action. As he slowly did so, a look of deep pleasure settled on his face, as he had supposed.

In some ways it was very like the room they had left, being low, large and square, and having floors, walls and ceilings paneled with black oak. But it had no windows, a large bronze lamp, suspended from the center of the ceiling, shed a flickering, ghostly light. There were no paintings—so grim carvings of skulls, skeletons and serpents pleasantly wreathed the room—neither were there seats nor tables, nothing but a huge ebony caldron at the upper end of the apartment, over which a grinning skeleton on wires played his mad game of hide-and-seek with a scythe in one hand, and a scythe in the other, kept the curtains of the window. Opposite this cheerful-looking guardian, was a tall figure in black, standing motionless, as if, too, was carved in ebony. It was a female figure, tall and slender, but as her features were so completely hidden by a black velvet mask, in one hand, exquisitely small and white, she held a gold chain, and with the other she toyed with a tame viper, that had twined itself round her waist. This was doubtless La Masque, and becoming conscious of that fact, Sir Norman made her a low and courteous bow. She returned it by a slight bend of the head, and turning toward his companion, spoke:

"You here again, Mr. Ormiston! To what am I indebted for the honor of two visits in two days?"

His voice, Sir Norman thought, was the sweetest he had ever heard, musical as a chime of silver bells, soft as the tones of an aeolian harp, through which the worst wind whistled. "Madam, I have a matter of business to consult you with," said Ormiston, with a flushing cheek and slightly tremulous voice; "but I have merely come with my friend, Sir Norman Kingsley, who wishes to know what the future has in store for him."

Thus invoked, Sir Norman Kingsley stepped forward with another low bow to the masked lady.

"Yes, madam, I have long heard that those fair fingers can withdraw from the future, and I have come to see what Dame Destiny is going to do for me."

"Sir Norman Kingsley is welcome," said the sweet voice. "As he but one condition; for if he speaks, the scene he beholds will vanish. Come forward."

Sir Norman compressed his lips as closely as if they were forever mechanically sealed, and stepped forward accordingly. Leaning over the edge of the ebony caldron, he found that it contained nothing but water, for he labored under a vague and unpleasant idea that, like the witch of Endor, he might be haunted by the dead. La Masque opened her golden casket and took from it a portion of red powder; with which it was filled. Casting it into the caldron, she murmured in a low voice, "I dare say, Sir Norman, you are a Coptic, or some other unknown tongue, and slowly there arose a dense cloud of dark red smoke, that nearly filled the room. Had Sir Norman ever read the story of Aladdin, he would probably have thought of it then; but the young courtier did not greatly affect literature of any kind, and thought of nothing now but of seeing something when the smoke cleared away. It was rather long doing so, and when it did, he saw nothing at first but his own handsome, half-serious, half-incredulous face; but gradually a picture, distinct and clear, formed itself at the bottom, and Sir Norman gazed with bewildered eyes. He saw a large room filled with a sparkling crowd, many of them ladies, splendidly arrayed and sparkling in jewels, and foremost among them stood one whose beauty surpassed anything he had ever before dreamed of. She had the robes of a queen, purple and ermine—diamonds blazed on the beautiful neck, arms and fingers, and a tiara of the same brilliant crown—held a scepter. What seemed to be a throne was behind her, but something which surprised Sir Norman most of all was to find himself standing beside her, the cynosure of all eyes. While he yet gazed in mingled astonishment and incredulity, the scene faded away and another took its place. This time a dim-gloomed, damp and dismal; walls and floor and ceiling covered with green and hideous slime. A small lamp stood on the floor, and by its feeble, watery gleam, he saw himself

again standing, pale and dejected, near the wall. But he was not alone; the same glittering vision in purple and diamonds stood before him, and suddenly he drew his sword and plunged it up to the hilt in her heart! The beautiful vision fell like a stone at his feet, and the sword was drawn out reeking with her life blood. This was a little too much for the real Sir Norman, and with an expression of indignant consternation he sprang upright. Instantly it all faded away, and the reflection of his own excited face looked up at him from the caldron.

"I told you not to speak," said La Masque, quietly; "but you must look on still another scene."

Again she threw a portion of the contents of the caldron into the caldron, and "spoke aloud the words of power." Another cloud of smoke arose and filled the room, and when it cleared away Sir Norman beheld a third and less startling sight. The scene and place he could not discover, but it seemed to him like night in a storm. Two men were lying on the ground and bound fast together. It appeared to him, as he looked it faded away, and once more his own face seemed to mock him in the clear water.

"No," said Sir Norman, promptly. "It was Ormiston and myself. Which one, madam?"

"Dead!" exclaimed Sir Norman, with a perceptible start. "Which one, madam?"

"If you cannot tell that, neither can I. If there is anything further you wish to see, I am quite willing to show it to you."

"I'm obliged to you," said Sir Norman, stepping back; "but no more at present, madam, that I'm some day to murder a lady, especially one so beautiful as she I just now saw."

"I have said nothing—all you've seen will come to pass, and whether your destiny be good or evil, I have nothing to do with it, except," said the sweet voice, earnestly, "that if La Masque could strew Sir Norman Kingsley's pathway with roses, she would most assuredly do so."

"Madam, you are too kind," said the young gentleman, laying his hand on his heart, while Ormiston scowled darkly—"more especially as I have the misfortune to be a perfect stranger to you."

"Not so, Sir Norman. I have known you this many a day; and before long we shall be better acquainted. Permit me to wish you good evening!"

At this gentle hint both gentlemen bowed themselves out, and soon found themselves in the street, with very different expressions of countenance. Sir Norman looked considerably pleased and decidedly puzzled, and Ormiston looked savagely and uncompromisingly jealous. The animated skeleton who had admitted them closed the door after them; and the two friends stood in the twilight on London Bridge.

CHAPTER II.

"Well, said Ormiston, drawing a long breath, 'what do you think of that?'

"Think? Don't ask me yet," said Sir Norman, looking rather bewildered. "I'm in such a state of mystification that I don't rightly know whether I'm standing on my head or feet. For one thing, I have come to the conclusion that your masked lady-love must be enchantingly beautiful."

"Have I not told you that a thousand times? O thou of little faith! But why have you come to such a conclusion?"

"Because no woman with such a figure, such a voice and such hands could be otherwise."

"I knew you would own it some day. Do you wonder now that I love her?"

"Oh, as to loving her," said Sir Norman, coolly, "that's quite another thing. I could no more love her for her hands, voice and shape than I could a figure in wood or wax; but I admire her vastly, and think her extremely clever. I will never forget that face in the caldron. It was the most exquisitely beautiful I ever saw."

"In love with the shadow of a face! Why, you are a thousandfold more absurd than I am."

"No," said Sir Norman thoughtfully. "I don't know that I'm in love with it; but if ever I see a living face like it, I certainly shall be. How did La Masque do it, I wonder?"

"You had better ask her," said Ormiston, bitterly. "She seems to have taken an unusual interest in you at first sight. She would strew your path with roses, forsooth! Nothing earthly, I believe, could make her say anything half so tender to me."

Sir Norman laughed and stroked his moustache complacently.

"All a matter of taste, my dear fellow; and these women are noted for their pertness in this line. I begin to admire La Masque more and more, and I think you had better give up the chase, and let me take your place. I don't believe you have the ghost of a chance, Ormiston."

"I don't believe it myself," said Ormiston, with a desperate face; "but until the plague carries me off I cannot give her up, and the sooner that happens the better. Ha! what a chance!"

THE FALL FAIRS.

PENINSULAR FAIR, Chatham, Oct. 9, 10, and 11.
Moraviantown, Oct. 17 to 19.
Orford, Highgate, Oct. 12 and 13.
Howard, Ridgeway, Oct. 3 to 5.
Aldborough, Rodney, Oct. 10 and 11.
Leamington, October 3 to 5.
Moravian Indian Fair—At Moraviantown, October 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th.

Neither cheese, cabbage, fish nor baked beans should ever be put into the refrigerator. They all leave an odor of which it is difficult to rid the refrigerator, and they also flavor the food.

What is

CASTORIA

Castoria is for Infants and Children. Castoria is a harmless substitute for Castor Oil, Paregoric, Drops and Soothing Syrups. It contains neither Opium, Morphine nor other Narcotic substance. It is Pleasant. Its guarantee is thirty years' use by Millions of Mothers. Castoria destroys Worms and allays Feverishness. Castoria cures Diarrhoea and Wind Colic. Castoria relieves Teething Troubles, cures Constipation and Flatulency. Castoria assimilates the Food, regulates the Stomach and Bowels of Infants and Children, giving healthy and natural sleep. Castoria is the Children's Panacea—The Mother's Friend.

Castoria.

"Castoria is an excellent medicine for children. Mothers have repeatedly told me of its good effect upon their children."

Dr. C. C. Osmond, Lowell, Mass.

Castoria.

"Castoria is so well adapted to children that I recommend it as superior to any prescription known to me."

H. A. ASHES, M.D., Brooklyn, N. Y.

THE FAC-SIMILE SIGNATURE OF

Chas. H. Fletcher.

APPEARS ON EVERY WRAPPER.

One of the nicest things for breakfast this hot weather is a rasher of

Bow Park BACON

Made for the best trade in Canada by Canadians from Canadian bred animals, raised and specially fed at the Bow Park Farm.

Easy to cook. Require very little fire.

USE YOUR ROUGH WOOD

When Heating Your House with a FAMOUS MAGNET WOOD FURNACE. Extra large firing door. Heavy corrugated fire-box that cannot crack. Sectional fire grates that will not burn out. Fire travels 3 times the length of furnace. Direct and indirect draft. Cemented cup joints that will not leak smoke.

No Lean Stock is found where a

Famous Evaporator is Used.

THE HANDIEST BOILER ON THE MARKET. Has sheet steel body that cannot warp. Removable galvanized iron pan. Heavy cast iron grates and linings, preventing their burning out. Does the quickest work at the least cost. Can also be used for boiling soap.

ESTIMATES AND PAMPHLETS FREE from our local agent or our nearest house.

THE McCLARY MFG. CO.

LONDON, TORONTO, MONTREAL, WINNIPEG AND VANCOUVER.

H. Macaulay, Local Agent, Chatham

Use Paints That Stay On!

Many paints used for Floor Painting are utterly unfitted for the purpose! They show every impression and are shabby looking in a week! Use

RAMSAY'S PAINTS

which are made for the purpose of being walked on: They give a hard, dry surface with a glossy finish and are always smooth and easily cleaned. They will not scale, crack nor blister. A painted floor is much more cleanly and healthy than a carpeted one, and vastly more economical. They are mixed ready for use and easily applied.

Established 1842 Paint Makers.

A. RAMSAY & SON Montreal.