

one's interest is impassioned, and even idlers are pre-occupied.

The young dandy was so much absorbed in his anxious quest that he did not observe his own success; he did not hear, he did not see the ironical exclamations of admiration, the genuine appreciation, the biting gibes, the soft invitations of some of the masks. Though he was so handsome as to rank among those exceptional persons who come to an opera ball in search of an adventure, and who expect it as confidently as men looked for a lucky *coup* at roulette in Frascati's day, he seemed quite philosophically sure of his evening; he must be the hero of one of those mysteries with three actors which constitute an opera ball, and are known only to those who play a part in them; for, to young wives who come merely to say, "I have seen it," to country people, to inexperienced youths, and to foreigners, the opera house must on those nights be the palace of fatigue and dulness. To these, that black swarm, slow and serried—coming, going, winding, turning, returning, mounting, descending, comparable only to ants on a pile of wood—is no more intelligible than the Bourse to a Breton peasant who has never heard of the *Grand livre*.

With a few rare exceptions, men wear no masks in Paris; a man in a domino is thought ridiculous. In this the spirit of the nation betrays itself. Men who want to hide their good fortune can enjoy the opera ball without going there; and masks who are absolutely compelled to go in come out again at once. One of the most amusing scenes is the crush at the doors produced as soon as the dancing begins, by the rush of persons getting away and struggling with those who are pushing in. So the men who wear masks are either jealous husbands who come to watch their wives, or husbands on the loose who do not wish to be watched by them—two situations equally ridiculous.

Now, our young man was followed, though he knew it not, by a man in a mask, dogging his steps, short and stout, with a rolling gait, like a barrel. To every one familiar with