

MASKS

MASKS have played an important although occult part in the world's history. Whether the Man in the Iron Mask was really the twin brother of Louis XIV., or the Duke of Monmouth, or the fraudulent Minister of a petty Italian Prince, has not yet been decided; and the antiquarians, says the London Daily Telegraph, have not entirely made up their minds whether the man in the mask who beheaded Charles I. was the common hangman, Gregory Brandon, or Hugh Peters, or Oliver himself. Everybody knows that the executioner of Thistlewood and his deluded associates was the ordinary Jack Ketch; but it has not yet been discovered who was the masked individual in a sailor's dress who decapitated the culprits after they had been cut down. Even the origin of masks is wrapped in the mists of antiquity. Some archæologists hold that these disguisements were worn at the festival of Bacchus to conceal the effects of too frequent libations of the juice of the grape on the countenances of the votaries of the convivial Dionysus; while others assert that the invention of the mask was due to Thespis, and that it subsequently became one of the indispensable "properties" of the ancient Greek theatre. At all events, the classification of masks is a thing of very remote origin. There were masks for old and young—maidens, matrons, and old women, shopkeepers, physicians and slaves—each comprising a number of categories and subcategories; but, among these ingenious devices for veiling the human face more or less divine, no mention is made of the mask purely and simply idiotic. It may be urged that imbecility is sufficiently indicated by the floured visage of Pierrot, and by the glaring white veneer, with the scarlet half-moons on the cheeks, the elongated mouth and the cockscomb of Mr. Clown; but it need scarcely be said that a good deal of mother-wit frequently underlies the seeming silliness of professional buffoons and jesters. The mask we mean is that of the unadulterated Tom Fool—the pure white curd of ass's milk, the almost Scriptural fool, whose chief needs here below are stocks for his feet and stripes for his back.

Such a mask, in a moral if not in a physical sense, was certainly assumed by an absurd hobbledehoy of sixteen, who was charged at Ramsgate recently with annoying a servant-girl. The evidence went to prove that the prisoner, while masked, broke into the room of the prosecutrix. It is not, however, stated what particular form was taken by the hobbledehoy's facial disguise. There are masks and masks. One of the crotchets of prison discipline was to compel prisoners undergoing separate confinement to wear caps, the peaks

of which were provided with a pair of holes to see through, and which, when drawn down, while the gaol-birds were in chapel or taking their exercise in the prison yard, served effectually as masks, and prevented them from recognizing each other, facially at least. Then there was the famous mask donned by James Bloomfield Rush when he burst into Stanfield Hall with the intent of slaughtering the Jermy family. That mask was, technically speaking, a wig, since it consisted of thick curls almost covering the forehead and joining a beard and mustachios, and the disguise had been purchased by the assassin at a costumier's warehouse near the Strand. The Ramsgate hobbledehoy may have veiled his head with a hairy screen of the Rush pattern, or, rashly anticipating the festivities of the 5th of November, he may have sped on his adventurous and outrageous errand in a paste-board mask, modelled to represent either the reversed features of Mr. Punch or the more baneful lineaments of Guy Fawkes. Or, perchance, impelled either by motives of economy or by a squalid ambition to emulate part of the equipment of a nocturnal burglar, the foolish youth at Ramsgate may have been content to wear only a strip of black crape or calico on the upper part of his face. At all events, there he was in the servant-girl's room, unexpected, uninvited, unwelcome. The girl, who appears to have exhibited considerable presence of mind under the circumstance, prevailed upon her objectionable guest to take himself off; but she promptly gave information as to his misconduct, and he was duly given into custody and brought up before the local bench on a charge of assault. The magistrates, being loth to send this raw lad to prison, were content to fine him forty shillings and costs, with the alternative of one month's imprisonment, and he was furthermore bound over in the sum of ten pounds to keep the peace for six months. The blundering excuse offered by this young scapegrace for his mischievous folly was that he had been reading "sensational stories." Without going nearly so far as the secretary of a great moralizing society, who has lately delivered himself of the astonishing utterance that nine-tenths of the fiction of the day are distinctly evil in their tendency, it may be said, without exaggeration, that the amount of sensational literature in circulation has attained such dimensions as to be in the highest degree dangerous to the moral health of the community, and especially of the rising generation. The genuine penny dreadful is not without plenty of masks. They are to the cheap sensational novelist and his readers as favorite accessories as the "copiosa quantitas d'Amoretti," or winged Cupids, whom the Italian Cardinal instructed Giulio

Romano to paint on the ceiling of his Eminence's dining-room. When Claude Duval dances a coranto on Hounslow Heath with the lady whom he has forced to alight from her coach, but whom, for the sake of her good looks and her nimbly tripping feet, he refrained from despoiling of her jewels, the notable highwayman always wears a mask in addition to a richly-laced suit of clothes, a plumed hat, jack-boots and a silver-hilted rapier. As a matter of fact, the French scoundrel Duval, who was a cashiered footman of the Duchess of Portsmouth, and a squalid, ignoble, drunken, profligate varlet to boot, never danced any corantos with any ladies out of St. Giles, and would have been forgotten long years ago had not that great perverter of the juvenile mind, Mr. Harrison Ainsworth, introduced some sorry doggerel about Claude Duval in Newgate into his powerful but eminently mischievous romance of "Jack Sheppard." It was the same with Dick Turpin—a coarse, common, dissolute footpad and horse-thief, who ultimately turned housebreaker, and whose most chivalrous exploit was the thrusting of a poor old woman on to live coals in the grate in order to force her to confess where her small hoard of ready money was hidden. Yet this brutal malefactor becomes in Mr. Ainsworth's "Rookwood" quite a picturesque hero, and in the fiction of two generations since there were few more popular episodes than that of Dick Turpin's ride upon Black Bess from London to York. The catiff never had a horse called Black Bess; he never rode from London to York without drawing rein; and his adventures, as falsely narrated by the novelist, have done a world of harm in stimulating morbid sentiment and diseased fancy among growing lads.

In denouncing the evils which are most undoubtedly caused by sensational stories dealing principally with crime and criminals, it is but fair to remember and to recognize that the infection of sensationalism originated not in the lower but in the upper ranks of the community. In the eighteenth century, the masses both in town and country were to a prodigious extent wholly illiterate, while, for the few who were able to read, the cheap literature mainly consisted in chap-books telling of signs, wonders and portents, monstrosities, plagues, earthquakes and shipwrecks. There was nothing very sensational in the old ballads about Robin Hood and Little John, or Johnny Armstrong, or the Miller of Durham. "Chevy Chase" was a patriotic and stirring, but not an unhealthily sensational ditty; "The Heir of Lynn," "The Children in the Wood" and "George Barnwell," afterwards dramatized into a most doleful tragedy, were not actively demoralizing; in fact, the City shopkeepers used to send their apprentices to the