

Masks.

BY E. A. BRAYLEY HODGETTS.



THE word "mask" means a different thing to different people. The student of history and biography has a conception of a mask totally different from that of the frequenter of the *bals masqués* of the Paris Opera, or little Tommy when he is home for his holidays and devotes his intellect to frightening the cook. Nevertheless, all masks have something in common: they are all counterfeit presentments of faces. But while the historian is interested only in the masks of historical personages, the schoolboy takes a wider and more catholic view. This article will interest primarily the schoolboy. If he can succeed in frightening his sisters and the household generally, he will be happy. With a view to a promotion of his happiness, we intend to furnish the schoolboy with a few models which, if he can successfully imitate them, will prove most efficacious.

Being oldsters, and therefore, of course, prigs, we cannot, however, content ourselves with a bare description of the masks here illustrated, nor resist the temptation to offer "information" and convey "knowledge," for which all properly constituted schoolboys will hate us. Thus we very much fear that we shall please nobody.

To begin with, there is the prosy scientific theory of the "origin" of masks, which nobody knows, consequently it is quite safe to write yards on this subject. Some people have thought that the object of the mask was, not to frighten the cook, but to illustrate the Buddhist theory of "Metempsychosis," which is a fine word.

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Others, again, maintain that the savages whom we know to-day, and consider to have been arrested in their evolution, are really the descendants of the naughty boys of the human family—that they have degenerated and lost the arts and knowledges which they formerly possessed. Thus the curious customs of savages would be perversions of former very excellent practices, and the heathen mythologies of those uncivilized races, which, strange to say, all possess a strong family likeness, would be idolatrous and vile corruptions of an ancient and beautiful religion common to the entire human race.

Still, none of these views will quite explain the origin of masks, yet masks are found pretty nearly all over the world.

Here, for instance, is a splendid one (No. 1). It is the mask used by the devil dancers of Ceylon, and is to be particularly recommended in the case of very pious old maiden aunts. This mask is supposed to be the portrait of a devil, named Calloo-Coomare; he is a Ceylon devil, and ought to be a very exciting person to meet on a quiet, dull Sunday afternoon. It is painful to have to record that the Cingalese, instead of "abjuring the devil



1.—MASK USED BY THE DEVIL DANCERS OF CEYLON.

and all his works," as they ought, actually worship Calloo-Coomare. If anybody is ill, the priests of the devil, wearing his mask, which is made of wood, painted in various colours, and has a tusk sticking out of each side of the horribly grinning mouth—the devil always grins—two discs at each side, and three cobra capellas on the top, come and perform the devil's own dance. An altar, decorated with garlands, is erected, and the sacrifice, usually a cock, is offered on it,

together with rice and all the proper ingredients. Here is a specimen of the prayers of the devil-priests:—

“The Black Devil, who dwells under the rocks and stones of the Black Sea—the Cingalese seem rather hazy in their geography)—looks upon the world, sees the infants, and causes them to be sick. Thou, Fanah Devil—who acceptest offering at the place where three ways meet, thou causest the people to be sick,” etc.

This is a very long prayer, and full of vituperation; the devil is called a *furious devil* and a *bloodthirsty devil*, and is described as playing in a pool of blood. Thus it will be seen that playing pool is an invention of the devil's. This devil is also told that it plays in the laundry, a most valuable hint this for the schoolboy. It is very bad to be ill in England, with

eyes roll and the mouth open and shut. It is the mask of a medicine man. We should recommend that this mask should be used with discretion. The effects might otherwise be disastrous.

It would be very suitable for the Lord Mayor's ball.

A very creditable work of art is the mask marked No. 3. It comes from New Britain, and shows that the natives of that interesting island must have very strongly developed æsthetic taste. It is made of wood, carved and painted in various brilliant colours, and elegantly trimmed with fibres and feathers. In some respects it would give the *matinée* hat points, although it is, of course, far less hideous. As a table-ornament it would make the reputation of any family. An intelligent boy who could succeed in producing an exact reproduction of this work of art would deserve a sound thrashing for not devoting his abilities to a better purpose.

We understand that the War Office is looking out for a new head-dress for the Army. Something light, elegant, and imposing is wanted. Here is the very thing (No. 4); the mere sight of it would frighten any ordinary human enemy. Although this specimen is made of



2.—MASK USED BY NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS.



3.—DANCING MASK FROM NEW BRITAIN.

doctors and nasty medicines, but what fun it must be in Ceylon!

The next mask (No. 2), which comes from North America, is a very helpful one, especially if properly coloured. It is cut out of solid wood and painted light blue, black and white. The lower lip is of canvas and movable by strings, so also are the eyes. This is a most fascinating mask. The wearer can make the



4.—DANCING MASK FROM NEW BRITAIN.



5.—MASK FROM NEW GUINEA.

wood, we see no reason why it should not be made of straw. There is a very fine red plume in the centre. Of course, the mask beneath has not quite the facial expression of the average Tommy Atkins, but that is a detail. This also comes from New Britain, and must have adorned the head of a New British Grenadier, if there is such a thing.

If the War Office should adopt our suggestion, we would recommend the Home Office to attire policemen in the garb of the Duk-duk, as shown at No. 5. The Duk-duk is not a quack doctor, as his name would seem to imply, but the stern guardian of law and order. He is only known by the initiated to be a human being—the unfortunate “general public” look upon him as a sort of demi-god. We could point to similar curious phenomena even in this country. Mr. Wilfrid Powell, in his “Wanderings in a Wild Country,” sententiously observes: “It is curious how widely distributed is this Duk-duk system.” It is found in New Britain, New Guinea, New

Ireland, and also in a good many older countries. The Duk-duk travels through the bush, visiting each village and setting everything right, resembling in this respect a newspaper correspondent. If anybody is accused of injuring another the Duk-duk demands restitution, and if this is not rendered the Duk-duk burns down the offender's house and generally executes judgment. Women and children may not gaze on the Duk-duk, or they will die. The schoolboy is told this in all fairness, to prevent accidents. Nor may the secrets of the Duk-duk be discussed outside the Taboo ground, where he is supposed to live. If an uninitiated person trespasses on the Taboo grounds of the Duk-duk, he is incontinently



7.—MASK FROM THE TORRES STRAITS.



6.—MASK FROM NEW GUINEA.

eaten up by the Duk-duk. Are there not Duk-duks everywhere?

Savages wear masks very much as we do—at dances, only there is a slight difference between the dances. We are able to give illustrations of a batch of masks from New Guinea and neighbouring islands, used exclusively for what must be called savage *bals masqués*. They are certainly highly commendable from the schoolboy point of view (Nos. 6—18).

No. 6, for instance, looks like a gigantic tea-cosy, or the enormous grenadier shakoos of the eighteenth century, which are still worn in Germany and Russia by certain guard regiments. This mask is made of whitened bark cloth on a basket frame of cane; the features are coloured red and black and outlined with white. The mouth is open. A boy of twelve with a mask like this



8.—MASK FROM TORRES STRAITS.



9.—MASK FROM TAMAI ISLAND.



10.—MASK FROM SAIBAI ISLAND.

would create quite a sensation coming unexpectedly downstairs.

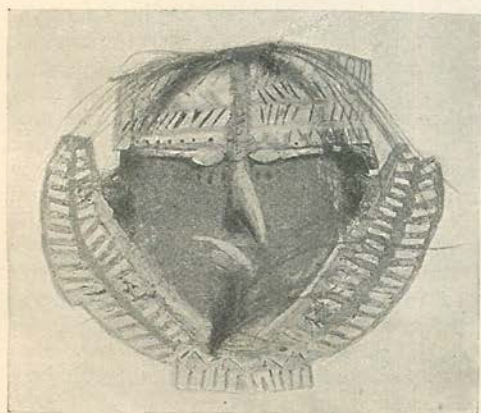
In No. 7 the eyebrows are of red wool, very neat; the mask is cut out of solid wood and decorated with strings—would suit old lady. No. 8 is not unlike No. 7; it is evidently intended to represent some musical deity. No. 9 is evidently the mask of a local clown; it is made of wood and painted white and red. There is an air of refinement about No. 10, although it is hardly good form to carry one's walking-stick thrust through the nose; the eyes, also, are too close together for high ideality. Nevertheless, the general design is artistic. The treatment of the hair in particular is excellent. The hair is human hair. This mask is also of wood, the eyes being of mother-of-pearl.

No. 11 must be the pantaloons to the clown

of No. 9; it has a weary, tired, weather-beaten look, and is made of sheet-iron. It is supposed to be an imitation of tortoiseshell, but we feel sure that any average boy could produce a better mask than this out of a discarded biscuit-box. Tortoiseshell being rare, the



12.—MASK OF TORTOISESHELL FROM DARNLEY ISLAND.



11.—MASK OF SHEET-IRON FROM MABUIAGE ISLAND.

natives substitute whatever material they can pick up from wrecks and in other ways. No. 12 is a sort of pre-Raphaelite attempt in real tortoiseshell. It is distinctly depressing, and has a mediæval air. Not so No. 13. This is a very perfect piece of work, and has a baboon look about it. It is made of bark-cloth, or tapa, stretched on



13.—MASK FROM SOUTH-EAST NEW GUINEA.

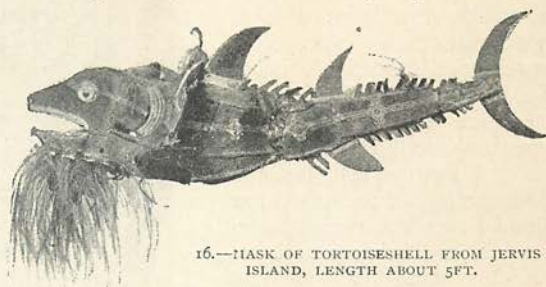
a frame of cane. This mask is appropriately coloured black and red, and has ribs of fibre. A very pretty design is No. 14. This is expensive, and made of tortoiseshell. The eyes are too close together for our notions of beauty; but the mouth is full of expression, and the ears suggest the friend of the Old Kent Road coster. A Shakespearean forehead gives a false air of intellectuality to this mask. This must be by way of satire. In No. 15 we have another elaborate



14.—MASK OF TORTOISESHELL FROM MOUNT ERNEST.



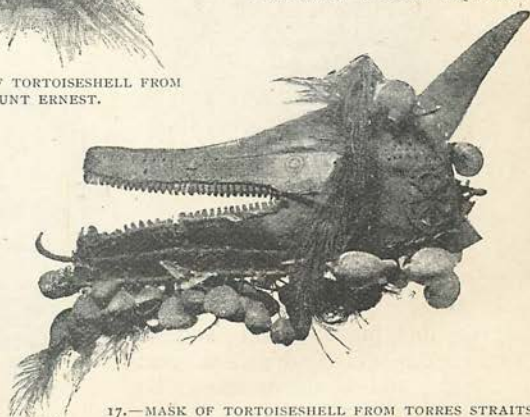
15.—MASK OF TORTOISESHELL FROM TORRES STRAITS.



16.—MASK OF TORTOISESHELL FROM JERVIS ISLAND, LENGTH ABOUT 5 FT.

work of art. It is also made of tortoiseshell, but is decorated with mother-of-pearl, cassowary feathers, and seed shells. It looks like a nightmare, and is distinctly impressionist in

execution. We now come to a series of pantomime heads. No. 16, for instance, is supposed to represent a fish. The rude, untutored savage has engraved a pattern on it, inlaid it with white enamel, Aspinall's for preference, and decorated it with cassowary feathers. It is made of tortoiseshell, and is 5 ft. long. This mask is guaranteed to frighten anybody, from fathers downwards, at fifty paces. The same may be said of No. 17. This is also of tortoiseshell, and is supposed to represent a crocodile's head. It is decorated with cassowary feathers and nuts. It is all nuts to the schoolboy. The horn at the top looks



17.—MASK OF TORTOISESHELL FROM TORRES STRAITS.

formidable, but is harmless. No. 18 is very elaborate. There is a poetic dreaminess about it which is most beautiful. The eyes are distinctly good, but why there should be

a double row of eyebrows is a mystery. Pigeons, cassowary feathers, shells, mother-of-pearl, etc., are the ingredients used in making this latest style of mask, which is supposed to represent a crocodile's head. We see that the fashions in masks are numerous. In olden times they used to be invariably made of tortoiseshell, but the modern rage for cheapness has reached even the savages, who now use old boxes and kerosene-tins, and find them just as effective. This is a valuable hint, for the schoolboy cannot always get tortoiseshell.

A very elaborate head-dress is No. 19. It consists of a double-faced mask of blackened wood wearing a hat, and with ornaments in the hair.



19.—MASK FROM NEW CALEDONIA.

From the bottom hangs a fringe of black fibre. To the superficial observer this mask would suggest reminiscences of Noah's Ark and Aunt Sally, and would appear to be the head-dress of a local book-maker, 'bus-driver, negro-minstrel, or bishop. It is really a Mumbo Jumbo mask, and comes from West Africa. This mask will be found very useful in punitive expeditions against sisters,



18.—MASK FROM YAMA.

as we shall presently see. Throughout a considerable portion of Western Africa the feminine part of the community stand in dread of a semi-human demon called Mumbo Jumbo. He usually makes his appearance at night, when the natives are enjoying the West African equivalent for a county ball. His approach is heralded by a cry, and he joins the party uninvited, armed with a rod, and followed by attendants carrying sticks. While the people dance round him, probably mistaking him for Jack-in-the-Green or a May-pole, he suddenly walks up to one of the women and touches her with his rod. She is instantly seized by the attendants, dragged to a post, tied to it, and there receives a

sound thrashing under circumstances of great indignity. This would make a novel and exciting figure in a children's cotillion. The Mumbo Jumbo visitation is always a put-up job. The men are all in the secret, and know who Mumbo Jumbo is. The woman selected has been bad-tempered, had a fit of the tantrums, and so the husband arranges for a Mumbo Jumbo entertainment. Savages have some very excellent institutions, but we fear that the introduction of this custom into an English family circle among brothers and sisters might lead to unpleasant consequences for the brothers. Still, the schoolboy could recommend his school-fellows to try it on their sisters, and watch the result. There is nothing very remarkable about the masks shown under No. 20. Lowther Arcade can produce far better



20.—JAPANESE MASKS.



21.—MASK FROM NEW CALEDONIA.

coarse stuff or cloth woven across slender stems of wood, and stiffened by a piece of brown bast inside. From the lower part depends a cord net-work, with long black fowl feathers attached, which covers the body. The hair and whiskers are made of coarse frizzled human hair, and the beard of plaited round cords of the same. This mask comes from New Caledonia, and with the addition of a hump it would do very well for Punch. There is this advantage about it, that the wearer for the time he has it on is "taboo," and can hit anybody he likes without being hit in return. There is considerable doubt, however, in our mind whether similar privileges would be extended to the wearer of such a mask in this tyrannical country.

No. 22, though not very large, we may, nevertheless, be excused if we baptize this as an Elephantine



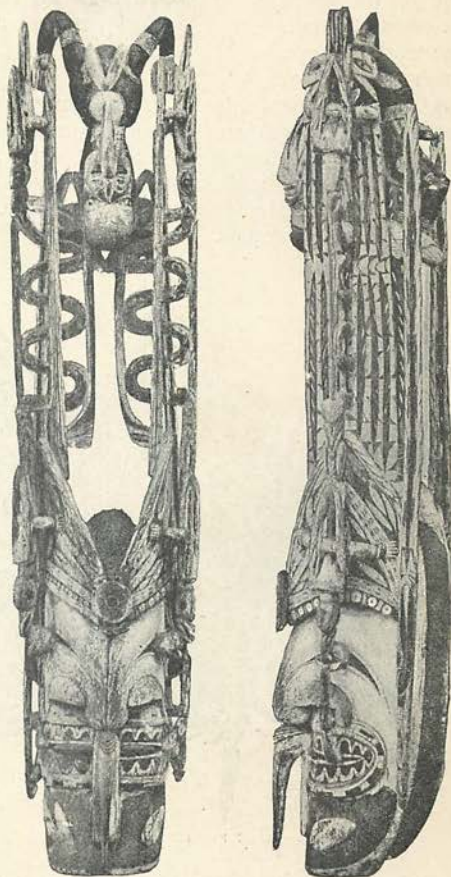
22.—MASK FROM NORTH NEW GUINEA.

specimens. They come from over-rated Japan, and are worn by the actors of that artistic country. They are made of wood and painted to taste. They might serve to soothe the loneliness of grandmamma, and for that purpose are possibly hideous enough.

But No. 21 represents a really ingenious piece of ugliness. Not unlike a Polish Jew in appearance and style, it is made of black painted wood attached to a cylindrical frame made of

work. Carved in wood, and painted in black, red, yellow, and white, it is very fetching, *vide* the "beady" eyes. We must also note that, for some reason best known to the maker, the ear is placed directly under the left eye. The mouth requires no comment! The place of birth is somewhere in Northern New Guinea.

No. 23 is what we are tempted to call a high-falutin' mask. At all events, it measures



23.—MASK FROM NEW IRELAND.

from "head to foot" something over five feet. We have two views of it: the first is a full-face, the second a profile. The mask proper consists of coloured wood; the beak of a bird points downwards from directly under, and in a perpendicular line with, the nose. But perhaps the most striking part is the superstructure, which is nearly twice as high as the face itself. A *mélange* of carved birds and snakes, of multicoloured feathers and bones, supports a native lady, caught half way round a somersault, and tied there for ever. That is, no doubt, the New Ireland

natives' method of solving the momentous "Woman Question."

The two masks depicted at No. 24 are not made of oranges, as their general shape and appearance suggest, but are carved out of solid wood. The teeth are gilt, which makes them

look like an advertisement for an American dentist. Their eyes are painted a quiet red and yellow, and the face is white, with a few black and gold adornments. They are worn by Javanese actors—during the pantomime season, no doubt.



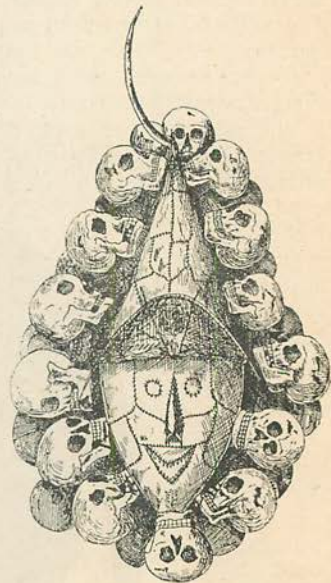
24.—MASKS FROM JAVA.

with human skulls, all of which have belonged to the enemies of the wearer, and been struck off their owners' shoulders by him. We should therefore not advise anyone to attempt to reproduce this mask unless, indeed, he use a biscuit-tin as a substitute for the tortoiseshell, and hang it round with the skulls of the cats he has slain. This particular mask was found in the Straits by Mr. C. E. Brockett, who formed part of an expedition sent out to find the survivors of the ship *Charles Eaton*, lost in the Straits in 1834. The mask was



25.—MASK FROM NEW IRELAND.

At No. 25 we have given a specimen, not for imitation, of a really beautiful mask, which also comes from New Ireland. The savage who executed this work of art must indeed have felt proud of himself, and probably his friends put out his eyes to prevent him from making another. It is constructed of wood, cane, fibre, and shells, and is painted black and red. The wings are red, white, and black. The whiskers are of red fibre. But the grand feature of this masterpiece is a magnificent nautilus-shell which crowns the whole. It must have been found rather heavy. Fancy dancing



26.—MASK FROM SKULL ISLAND.

appropriately picked up in Skull Island, and it was discovered that the skulls on it were mostly those of Europeans, probably of the very people whom the expedition was in search of.