



ICHAEL MONAHAN has said in one of his essays that until Balzac arrived there was little, if any, adequate treatment of women in fiction. Women had not yet

come largely into artistic existence, only Ladies and Courtesans. In "Love In a Mask"

("L'Amour Masqué").*

LOVE IN A MASK the recently discovered

Balzac story, now translated into English, we find the author of the *Comédie Humaine* antedating by at least a generation woman's revolt against the intolerable conditions of tyranny in marriage. The story was presented by Balzac in manuscript to the Duchesse de Dino; and for more than half a century it reposed, luxuriously bound, in her library. Then her son, the present Duc de Dino, gave the treasure to Lucien Aubanel, a man of letters, who, in turn, brought it to the attention of the publisher, M. Guillemin. The story appeared in print for the first time in March, 1911. "Love In a Mask," says Mary Adams Stearns, in the *Chicago Evening Post*, "stands in relation to Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* as a sixteenth-century lyric would to a great epic."

Elinor de Roselis, the heroine of Balzac's story, is a beautiful and passionate woman, born in Martinique and married by her parents at the age of sixteen to the richest settler on the island. M. de Roselis possesses all those vices which, according to Balzac, "invariably spring from isolation and unlimited power"; and when he dies suddenly in the midst of a debauch, leaving Elinor independent and rich at the age of twenty-five, she has conceived an over-

whelming repugnance for that bond which, she has found, "weighs heavily on the weak, upholds the strong and sanctions injustice." But the maternal instinct is strong within her. All through her wretched married life she has longed in vain for children; and she now determines to become a mother, but never again a wife.

In Paris, at the Opera Ball, on the eve of Mardi Gras, Elinor meets Léon de Préval, a gallant young cavalry officer, who, despite her mask, falls madly in love with her charming personality, and proves ready to commit any folly for her sake, no matter how incomprehensible it appears. Elinor succeeds, then, in accomplishing her heart's desire. She becomes a mother; but the father of her child has never even seen her face. He is simply and mysteriously informed of the birth of a daughter. He feels himself indissolubly a husband and father, yet he knows nothing of wife and child, but the mere fact of their existence.

Then Léon begins to experience some invisible shaping influence at work in his life. He is promoted unaccountably to the position of aide-de-camp, and ordered into Spain for active service. There he distinguishes himself, but he is found missing after a terrific battle. Elinor, meanwhile, has been living quietly and happily with her child. The shock of Léon's disappearance, however, forces her to realize that a man, in spite of all her precautions, has yet the power to disturb her tranquility. Léon returns, seriously wounded; and after further mystifications and misunderstandings, Elinor reveals her identity and they are married.

"The idea that Balzac, half a century ago, wrought out in all its startling audacity," says the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, "has evidently been fermenting

* LOVE IN A MASK, OR IMPRUDENCE AND HAPPINESS. By Honoré de Balzac. Translated by Alice M. Ivimy. Rand, McNally & Company.

in the brains of the modern novelist." The climax of Robert Hichens's "The Fruitful Vine" is here cited, and Elinor Glyn's vulgar novel, "Three Weeks." But, as the Springfield *Republican* points out, altho the theme of "Three Weeks" may bear some resemblance to Balzac's story, such a comparison only enforces the contrast between Mrs. Glyn's "evil suggestion" and the ab-

solute purity in thought and treatment of "Love In a Mask." Balzac, the master of passion painters, the depicter of chaotic emotions to whom all arts, crafts, philosophies and natures are but tools, here, as one reviewer sums up the case, unbends his black intensity as if on a calm summer day and gives us something which, compared to his other works, is almost idyllic.

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