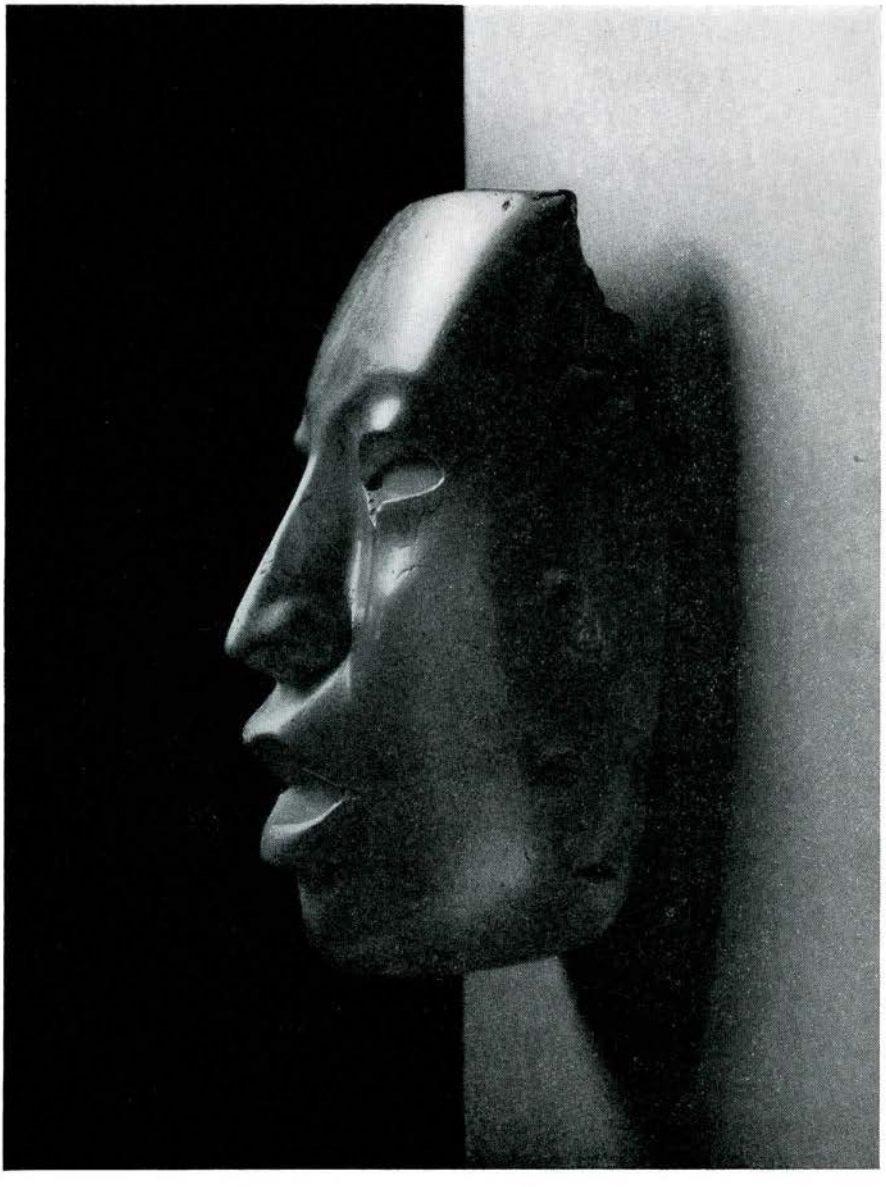

Stone mask, Toltec culture, Mexico.

FOREWORD

This issue of the Bulletin is an illustrated synopsis of the University Museum's special Hallowe'en exhibit, Mask Parade—a bizarre collection of false faces.

The majority of the masks in the special exhibit were made by ancient or primitive craftsmen as the paraphernalia of masked ceremonies. But false faces or face-coverings of one sort or another have been made by men of the past and present for many special or utilitarian purposes, as for example to preserve the likeness of living features on the mummy cases of Egyptian kings, to protect combatants from gas attacks in World War I, or to shield the face and eyes from sun, snow glare or industrial hazards. Similarly the dramatic masks of the ancient Greek and Chinese theatres, devised to represent stylized characters, are a specialized type of false face only in general related to the very numerous examples of the ceremonial mask. Because of this diversity of use it is difficult to define any basic function of the mask or to limit a mask exhibit to a group of functionally related objects.

The Eskimo Shaman carves his wooden masks to represent the spirit beings who appear to him in a vision and with his assistants performs a masked dance demonstrating the supernatural powers conferred upon him by these spirits. His audience is deeply religious and firmly convinced of the reality of the spirits and their power. In a similar religious atmosphere the dancers of the Iroquois False Face Society perform their curative rites, the Singalese of Ceylon exorcise their demons, the masked Melanesians appear as spirits before individuals at times of life crises and the Pueblo Indians impersonate their ancestral spirits. Among primitive people throughout most of the world the mask plays a specific part in sacred or supernatural ceremonies, representing gods, spirits or souls of the dead and often illustrating a widespread belief in the spiritual relation between men and animals.

In sharp contrast are the riotous Harlequins of the *commedia dell' arte* and the fun-provoking revelers of the modern carnival and Hallowe'en. By primitive standards such frivolous performances must appear sacrilegious to an extreme. And yet there is good reason to believe that our festive masks survive from ancient rituals no less

awe-inspiring than those of our contemporary primitives. Pagan rites survived the Church in Europe and the devil became a favorite figure of the mediæval carnival.

The anthropologist, observing a primitive masked performance, is inspired by the apparent intensity of the religious feeling but does not overlook the obvious pleasure of performers and audience who find escape from the sometimes burdensome world of reality in mystery and drama. The appeal of the mysterious and dramatic undoubtedly accounts for our own pleasure in the masquerade.

That the practice of mask-making is nearly universal can be seen from such an exhibit as this. The antiquity of the practice was demonstrated when painted figures of masked performers were found in Stone Age caves of France. Is there a basic motive underlying man's almost universal preoccupation with false faces? Surely part of the appeal to the observer of a mask collection is conjecture as to this motive.

F. G. R.

The design on the cover is from an Alaskan Eskimo mask; it was drawn by Miss Marie Strobel. The photographs are by Reuben Goldberg.

The vignette on the title page is a Basonge mask.