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The Phantom of the Opera

BY GASTON LEROUX

CHAPTER XVII.—(Con'd.)

M. de Chagny patted the round shapes and kept on saying:

"Barrels! Barrels! . . What a lot of barrels!"

Indeed, there was quite a number of them. Symmetrically arranged in two rows, one on either side of us. They were small barrels and I thought that Erik must have selected them of that size to facilitate their carriage to the house on the lake.

We examined them successively to see if one of them had not a funnel, showing that it had been tapped at some time or another. But all the barrels were hermetically sealed.

Then, after half lifting one to make sure it was full, we went on our knees and, with the blade of a small knife which I carried, I prepared to stave in the bung-hole.

At that moment, I seemed to hear, coming from very far, a sort of monotonous chant which I knew well, from often hearing it in the streets of Paris:

"Barrels . . . Barrels . . . Any barrels to sell? . . ."

My hand desisted from its work. M. de Chagny had also heard. He said:

"That's funny! It sounds as if the barrel were singing!"

The song was renewed, farther away:

"Barrels! . . . Barrels! . . . Any barrels to sell? . . ."

"Oh, I swear," said the viscount, "that the tune dies away in the barrel! . . ."

We stood up and went to look behind the barrel.

But we heard nothing there and were driven to accuse the bad condition of our senses. And we returned to the bung-hole. M. de Chagny put his two hands together underneath it and, with a last effort, I burst the bung.

"What's this?" cried the viscount. "This isn't water!"

The viscount put his two full hands close to my lantern. . . . I stooped to look . . . and at once threw away the lantern with such violence that it broke and went out, leaving us in utter darkness.

What I had seen in M. de Chagny's hands . . . was gunpowder!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SCORPION OR THE GRASSHOPPER: WHICH?

(The Persian's Narrative Continued.)

The discovery flung us into a state of alarm that made us forget all our past and present sufferings. We now knew all that the monster meant to convey when he said to Christine Daae:

"Yes or no! If your answer is no, everybody will be dead and buried!"

The monster had given her until eleven o'clock in the evening. He had chosen his time well. There would be many people, many "members of the human race," up there, in the resplendent theatre. What finer retinue could be expected for his funeral? He would go down to the tomb escorted by the whitest shoulders in the world, decked with the richest jewels.

We were all to be blown up in the middle of the performance . . . if Christine Daae said no!

Ah, what was the time? . . . For, after all, eleven o'clock to-morrow evening might be now, might be this very moment! Who could tell us the time? We seemed to have been imprisoned in that hell for days and days . . . for years . . . since the beginning of the world. Perhaps we should be blown up then and there! Ah, a sound! A crack!

"Did you hear that? . . . There, in the corner . . good heavens! . . Like a sound of machinery! . . Again! . . Oh, for a light! . . . Perhaps it's the machinery that is to blow everything up! . . . I tell you, a cracking sound: are you deaf?"

M. de Chagny and I began to yell like madmen. Fear spurred us on. We rushed up the treads of the staircase, stumbling as we went, anything to escape the dark, to return to the mortal light of the room of mirrors!

M. de Chagny broke the glass of his watch and felt the two hands. . . . Judging from the space between the hands, he thought it might be just eleven o'clock!

But perhaps it was not the eleven o'clock of which we stood in dread. Perhaps we had still twelve hours before us!

Suddenly, I exclaimed: "Hush!"

I seemed to hear footsteps in the next room. Some one tapped against the wall. Christine Daae's voice said:

"Raoul! Raoul!"

We were now all talking at once, on either side of the wall. Christine sobbed; she was not sure that she would find M. de Chagny alive. The monster had been terrible, it seemed, had done nothing but rave, waiting for her to give him the "yes" which she refused. And yet she had promised him that "yes," if he would take her to the torture-chamber. But he had obstinately declined, and had uttered hideous threats against all the members of the human race! At last, after hours and hours of that hell, he had that moment gone out, leaving her alone to reflect for the last time.

"Hours and hours? What is the time now? What is the time, Christine?"

"It is eleven o'clock! Eleven o'clock, all but five minutes!"

"But which eleven o'clock?"

"The eleven o'clock that is to decide life or death! . . He told me so just before he went. . . He is terrible. . . . He is quite mad; he tore off his mask and his yellow eyes shot flames! . . . He did nothing but laugh! . . . He said, 'I give you five minutes to spare your blushes! Here,' he said, taking a key from the little bag of life and death, 'here is the little key. . . And he again laughed like a drunken demon and left me. Oh, his last words were, 'The grasshopper! Be careful of the grasshopper! A grasshopper does not turn: it hops! It hops! And it hops jolly high!' "

The five minutes had nearly elapsed and the scorpion and the grasshopper were scratching at my brain. Nevertheless, I had sufficient lucidity left to understand that, if the grasshopper were turned, it would hop . . . and with it many members of the human race! There was no doubt but that the grasshopper controller an electric current intended to blow up the powder-magazine!

M. de Chagny, who seemed to have recovered all his moral force from hearing Christine's voice, explained to her, in a few hurried words, the situation in which we and all the Opera were. He told her to turn the scorpion at once.

"Here he comes!" cried Christine. "I hear him! Here he is!"

We heard his steps approaching the Louis-Philippe room. He came up to Christine, but did not speak. Then I raised my voice:

"Erik! It is I! Do you know me?"

With extraordinary calmness, he at once replied:

"So you are not dead in there? Well, then, see that you keep quiet."

I tried to speak, but he said coldly:

"Not a word, daroga, or I shall blow everything up." And he added, "The honor rests with mademoiselle. . . . Mademoiselle has not touched the scorpion"—how deliberately he spoke! —"mademoiselle has not touched the grasshopper"—with that composure—"but it is not too late to do the right thing. There, I open the caskets without a key, for I am a trap-door lover and I open and shut what I please and as I please. I open the little ebony caskets: mademoiselle, look at the little dears inside. Aren't they pretty? If you turn the grasshopper, mademoiselle, we shall all be blown up. There is enough gunpowder under our feet to blow up a whole quarter of Paris. If you turn the scorpion, mademoiselle, all that powder will be soaked and drowned. Mademoiselle, to celebrate our wedding, you shall make a very handsome present to a few hundred Parisians who are at this moment applauding a poor masterpiece of Meyerbeer's . . . you shall make them a present of their lives . . . For, with your own fair hands, you shall turn the scorpion. . . And merrily, merrily, we will be married!"

A pause; and then:

"If, in two minutes, mademoiselle, you have not turned the scorpion, I shall turn the grasshopper . . . and the grasshopper, I tell you, hops jolly high!"

The terrible silence began anew. The Vicomte de Chagny, realizing that there was nothing left to do but pray, went down on his knees and prayed. At last, we heard Erik's voice:

"The two minutes are past . . . . Good-bye, mademoiselle. . Hop, grasshopper! . . ."

"Erik," cried Christine, "do you swear to me, monster, do you swear to me that the scorpion is the one to turn? . . ."

"Yes, to hop at our wedding."

"Ah, you see! You said, to hop!"

"At our wedding, ingenious child! . . . . The scorpion opens the ball. . . . But that will do! . . You won't have the scorpion? Then I turn the grasshopper!"

"Erik!"

I was crying out in concert with Christine. M. de Chagny was still on his knes, praying.

"Erik! I have turned the scorpion!"

Oh, the second through which we passed!

Waiting! Waiting to find ourselves in fragments, amid the roar and the ruins!

Feeling something crack beneath our feet, hearing an appalling hiss through the open-door, a hiss like the first sound of a rocket!

It came softly at first, then very loud. But it was not the hiss of fire. It was more like the hiss of water. And now it became a gurgling sound: Guggle! Guggle!"

We rushed to the trap-door. All our thirst, which vanished when the terror came, now returned with the lapping of the water.

The water rose in the cellar, above the barrels, the powder-barrels—"Barrels! . . . Any barrels to sell?" and we went down to it with parched throats. It rose to our chins, to our mouths. And we drank. We stood on the floor of the cellar and drank. And we went up the stairs again in the dark, step by step, went up with the water.

The water came out of the cellar with us and spread over the floor of the room. If this went on, the whole house on the lake would be swamped. The floor of the torture-chamber had itself became a regular little lake, in which our feet splashed. Surely there was water enough now. Erik must turn off the tap!

"Erik! Erik! That is water enough for the gunpowder! Turn off the tap! Turn off the scorpion!"

But Erik did not reply. We heard nothing but the water rising: it was half-way to our waists!

"Christine!" cried M. de Chagny. "Christine! The water is up to our knees!"

But Christine did not reply. . . . . We heard nothing but the water rising.

No one, no one in the next room, no one to turn the tap, no one to turn the scorpion!

We were all alone, in the dark, with the dark water that seized us and clasped us and froze us!

"Erik! Erik!"

"Christine! Christine!"

By this time we had lost our foothold and were spinning round in the water, carried away by an irresistible whirl, for the water turned with us, and dashed us against the dark mirror, which thrust us back again; and our throats, raised above the whirlpool, roared aloud.

Were we to die here, drowned in the torture-chamber? I had never seen that. Erik, at the time of the rosy hours at Mazenderan, had never shown me that, through the little visible window.

"Erik! Erik!" I cried. I saved your life! Remember! . . . You were sentenced to death! But for me, you would be dead now."

We whirled around in the water like so much wreckage. But, suddenly, my straying hands seized the trunk of the iron tree! I called M. de Chagny, and we both clung to the branch of the iron tree.

And the water rose still higher.

"Oh! Oh! Can you remember? How much space is there between the branch of the tree and the dome-shaped ceiling? Do try to remember! . . . After all, the water may stop, it must find its level! . . . There, I think it is stopping! . . . No, no, oh, horrible! . . . Swim! Swim for your life!"

Our arms became entangled in the effort of swimming; we choked; we fought in the dark water; already we could hardly breathe the dark air above the dark water, the air which escaped, which we could hear escaping through some vent-hole or other.

"Oh, let us turn and turn and turn until we find the air hole and then glue our mouths to it!"

But I lost my strength; I tried to lay hold of the walls! Oh, how those glass walls slipped from under my groping fingers! . . . . We whirled round again! . . . We began to sink! . . . One last effort! . . . A last cry: "Erik! . . . Christine! . . ."

"Guggle, guggle, guggle!" in our ears. "Guggle! Guggle!" At the bottom of the dark water, our ears went, "Guggle! Guggle!"

And, before losing consciousness entirely, I seemed to hear, between two guggles:

"Barrels! Barrels! Any barrels to sell?"

(To be continued.)

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I know a bright world of snowy hills
at Boonton,
A blue and white dazzling light on
everything one sees,
The ice-covered branches of the hemlocks sparkle
Bending low and tinkling in the
sharp thin breeze,
And iridescent crystals fall and
crackle on the snow-crusst
With the winter sun drawing cold
blue shadows from the trees.
—Sara Teasdale, in "Flame and Shadow."

Minard's Liniment for dandruff.

Big Playground.

Jasper National Park in northern Alberta, with an area of 4,400 square miles, is one of the largest "playgrounds" in the world. A part of this reserve to the north of the central section is still unexplored, but the park is being rapidly opened up by the construction of trails and highways.

Unpleasant.

"How did you make out at school this week?" inquired the father at the dinner table.

"Had we not better discuss something else?" replied James. "I have been taught lately that dinner talk should always be pleasant."

Puss at Play

When a cat is frightened or angry it ruffles up the hair of its body and tail in order that it may appear more dangerous The cat does this by a chemical discharged by its adrenal glands.

Who's Who in Music.

Handel—1759-1865.

George Frederick Handel, in Saxony
born,
When a boy loved his music more
than his game;
But his youthful ambition was treated
with scorn,
And his music his father threw into
the flame,
In secret he played in the garret alone
Such beautiful music as never was
known.
'Till a good German Duke heard this
marvellous creature,
And forced the stern father to give
him a teacher.
Of his work, the "Harmonious Blacksmith" we note,
And one single month "The Messiah"
he wrote,
While he steadily rose to great honor
and fame,
And the works of his genius immortal
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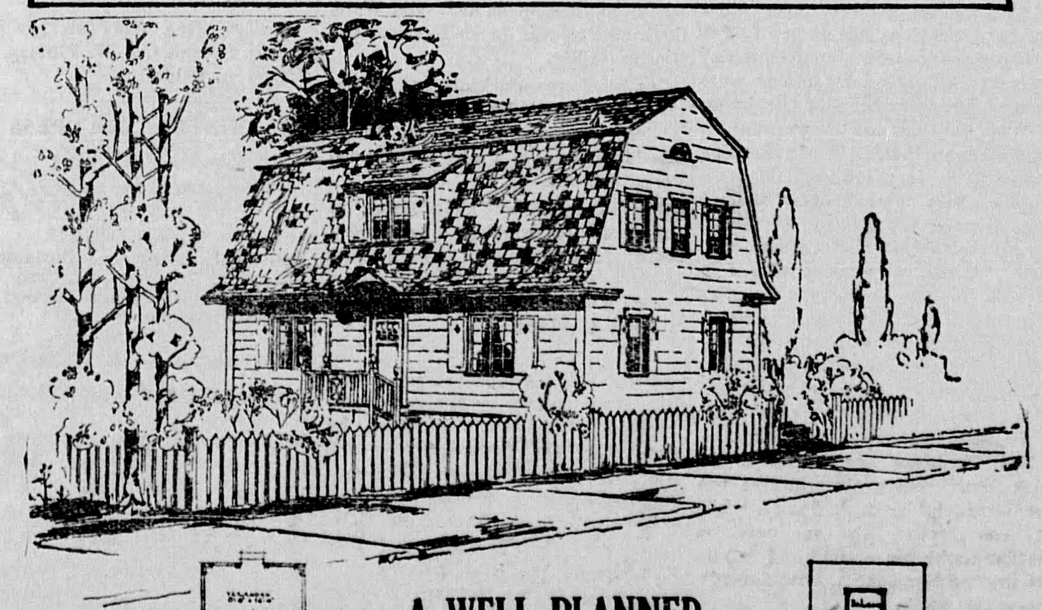
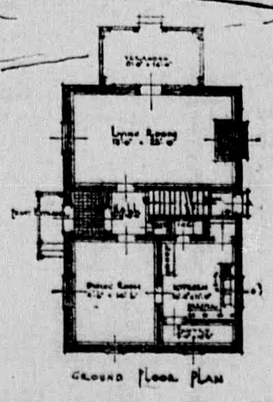
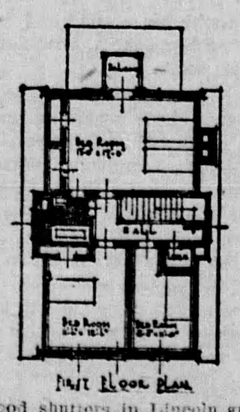




A WELL PLANNED COLONIAL HOUSE

By
Gratton D. Thompson
Architect



The illustrations show a compact and, at the same time, thoughtfully planned house,—the living room and dining room well lighted and with floor and wall space quite sufficient for furniture and pictures for rooms of such sizes. Kitchen with its service entrances to the dining room and basement and side entrances well arranged —a very important factor. The bedrooms each entered directly from the hall and provided with cupboard accommodation. The direct connection between the main bed room and bath room as well as from the hall should be noted.

No waste hall space—just floor area sufficient for service to the various rooms. The vestibule is tiled with 6" Dutch tile and the bathroom dado and floors of same material in delft blue and white. Birch floors are laid throughout, those in the ground floor rooms being stained walnut color. Walls of rooms and halls throughout are finished in sand stucco for water color finish, the plastering being applied direct to composition board plaster base, instead of the ordinary wood lath.

The mantels, doors and trim, of simple Colonial design, are of pine for paint finish. Heating is with hot water, the radiators being placed under the windows, and plumbing with all standard fixtures, built in. Storage for house use, as well as a properly fitted up laundry, is provided in the basement, together with coal storage and boiler room.

The exterior shows a homelike, yet dignified design—the entrance sufficiently marked with a hooded doorway, the door itself being partly glazed and with simple paneling.

The walls—finished with clap-boarding over composition board — have been painted a deep cream, and the wood shutters in Lincoln green. The windows throughout are casement, the sash being sub-divided into small lights—giving a proper scale to the general design Roofing material is slate surface multi-colored shingles, giving a very pleasing help to the general scheme.

This house could be built on a lot with fifty feet frontage, with a depth of not less than one hundred and ten feet; more ground than this, of course, would add very much to the possibilities for a well planned garden, with tennis court, flower and truck gardens and drying area and garage yard.

Readers desiring further information regarding the plans and specifications of this house should communicate with the architect direct. Address Mr. Gratton D. Thompson, 65 McGill College Avenue, Montreal, Que. Copyright 1926, MacLean Building Reports, Limited.

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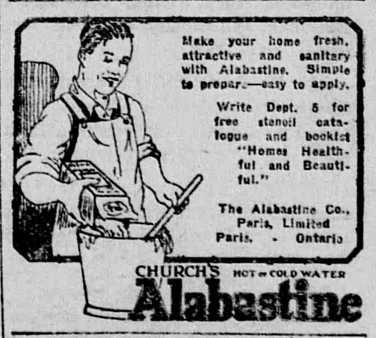

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