

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

by GASTON LEROUX
Author of The Mystery of The Yellow Room Etc.



PROLOGUE.

In Which the Author of This Singular Work Informs the Reader How He Acquired the Certainty That the Opera Ghost Really Existed.

The Opera ghost really existed. He was not, as was long believed, a creature of the imagination of the artists, the superstition of the managers, or a product of the absurd and impressionable brains of the young ladies of the ballet, their mothers, the box-keepers, the cloak-room attendants or the concierge. Yes, he existed in flesh and blood, although he assumed the complete appearance of a real phantom; that is to say, of a spectral shade.

When I began to ransack the archives of the National Academy of Music I was at once struck by the surprising coincidences between the phenomena ascribed to the "ghost" and the most extraordinary and fantastic tragedy that ever excited the Parisian upper classes; and I soon conceived the idea that this tragedy might reasonably be explained by the phenomena in question. The events do not date more than thirty years back; and it would not be difficult to find at the present day, in the foyer of the balcony of the Opera, a man whose word could absolutely rely, who would remember as though they happened yesterday the mysterious and dramatic conditions that attended the kidnapping of Christine Daae, the disappearance of the Vicomte de Chagny and the death of his elder brother, Count Philippe, whose body was found on the bank of the lake that exists in the lower cellars of the Opera on the Rue-Scribe side. But none of those witnesses had until that day thought that there was any reason for connecting the more or less legendary figure of the Opera ghost with that terrible story.

The truth was slow to enter my mind, puzzled by an inquiry that at every moment was complicated by events which, at first sight, might be looked upon as superhuman; and more than once I was within an ace of abandoning a task in which I was exhausting myself in the hopeless pursuit of a vain image. At last, I received the proof that my presentiments had not deceived me, and I was rewarded for all my efforts on the day when I acquired the certainty that the Opera ghost was more than a mere shade.

On that day, I had spent long hours over The Memoirs of a Manager, the light and frivolous work of the too-skeptical Fronvolourin, who, during his term at the Opera, understood nothing of the mysterious behavior of the ghost and who was making all of the inquiries that he could at the very moment when he became the victim of the curious financial operation that went on inside the "magic envelope."

I had just left the library in despair, when I met the delightful acting-manager of our National Academy, who stood chatting on a landing with a lively well-groomed little old man, to whom he introduced me gaily. The acting-manager knew about my investigations and how eagerly and unsuccessfully I had been trying to discover the whereabouts of the examining magistrate in the case, M. Faure. Nobody knew what had become of him, alive or dead; and here he was back from Canada, where he had spent fifteen years, and the first thing he had done, on his return to Paris, was to come to the secretarial offices at the Opera and ask for a free seat. The little old man was M. Faure himself.

We spent a good part of the evening together and he told me the whole Chagny case as he had understood it at the time. He was bound to conclude in favor of the madness of the viscount and the accidental death of the elder brother, for lack of evidence to the contrary; but he was nevertheless persuaded that a terrible tragedy had taken place between the two brothers in connection with Christine Daae. He could not tell me what became of Christine or the viscount. When I mentioned the ghost, he only laughed. He, too, had been told of the curious manifestations that seemed to point to the existence of an abnormal being, residing in one of the most mysterious corners of the Opera, and he knew the story of the envelope; but he had never seen anything in it worthy of his attention as magistrate in charge of the Chagny case, and it was as much as he had done to listen to the evidence of a witness who appeared of his own accord and declared that he had often met the ghost. This witness was none other than the man whom all Paris called the "Persian" and who was well-known to every subscriber to the Opera. The magistrate took him for a visionary.

I was immensely interested by this story of the Persian. I wanted, if there were still time, to find this valuable and eccentric witness. My luck began to improve and I discovered him in his little flat in the Rue de Rivoli, where he had lived ever since and where he died five months after my visit. I was at first inclined to be suspicious; but when the Persian had told me, with child-like candor, all that he knew about the ghost and had handed me the proofs of the ghost's existence—including the strange correspondence of Christine Daae—to do as I pleased with, I was no longer able to doubt. No, the ghost was not a myth!

Chagny case, who were friends of the Chagny family, to whom I showed all my documents and set forth all my inferences. In this connection, I should like to print a few lines which I received from General D—:

Sir: I can not urge you too strongly to publish the results of your inquiry. I remember perfectly that, a few weeks before the disappearance of that great singer, Christine Daae, and the tragedy which threw the whole of the Faubourg Saint-Germain into mourning, there was a great deal of talk, in the foyer of the ballet, on the subject of the "ghost;" and I believe that it only ceased to be discussed in consequence of the later affair that excited us all so greatly. But, if it is possible—as, after hearing you, I believe—to explain the tragedy through the ghost, then I beg you, sir, to talk to us about the ghost again. Mysterious though the ghost may at first appear, he will always be more easily explained than the dismal story in which malevolent people have tried to picture two brothers killing each other who had worshipped each other all their lives.

Believe me, etc. Lastly, with my bundle of papers in hand, I once more went over the ghost's vast domain, the huge building which he had made his kingdom. All that my eyes saw, all that my mind perceived, corroborated the Persian's documents precisely; and a wonderful discovery crowned my labors in a very definite fashion. It will be remembered that, later, when digging in the substructure of the Opera, before burying the phonographic records of the artist's voice, the workmen laid bare a corpse. Well, I was at once able to prove that this corpse was that of the Opera ghost. I made the acting-manager put this proof to the test with his own hand; and it is now a matter of supreme indifference to me if the papers pretend that the body was that of a victim of the Commune.

The wretches who were massacred, under the Commune, in the cellars of the Opera, were not buried on this side; I will tell where their skeletons can be found in a spot not very far from that immense crypt which was stocked during the siege with all sorts of provisions. I came upon this track just when I was looking for the remains of the Opera ghost, which should never have been discovered but for the unheard-of chance described above. But we will return to the corpse and what ought to be done with it. For the present, I must conclude this very necessary introduction by thanking M. Mifroid (who was the commissary of police called in for the first investigations after the disappearance of Christine Daae), M. Remy, the late secretary, M. Mezier, the late acting-manager, M. Gabriel, the late chorus-master, and more particularly Mme. la Baronne de Castelot-Barbezac, who was once the "little Meg" of the story (and who is not ashamed of it), the most charming star of our admirable corps de ballet, the eldest daughter of the worthy Mme. Girly, now deceased, who had charge of the ghost's private box. All these were grateful to me for the interest and thanks to them, I shall be able to produce those hours of sheer love and terror, in their smallest details, before the reader's eyes.

And I should be ungrateful indeed if I omitted, while standing on the threshold of this dreadful and veracious story, to thank the present management of the Opera, which has so kindly assisted me in all my inquiries, and M. Messenger in particular, together with M. Gablon, the acting-manager, and that most amiable of men, the architect entrusted with the preservation of the building, who did not hesitate to lend me the works of Charles Garnier, although he was almost sure that I would never return them to him. Lastly, I must pay a public tribute to the generosity of my friend and former collaborator, M. J. Le Croze, who allowed me to dip into his splendid theatrical library and to borrow the rarest editions of books by which he set great store.

GASTON LEROUX.

CHAPTER I.

Is It the Ghost?

It was the evening on which MM. Debienne and Poligny, the managers of the Opera, were giving a last gala performance to mark their retirement. Suddenly the dressing-room of La Sorrell, one of the principal dancers, was invaded by half-a-dozen young ladies of the ballet, who had come up from the stage after "dancing" Polyucte. They rushed in amid great confusion, others to cries of terror. Sorrell, who wished to be alone for a moment to "run through" the speech which she was to make to the resigning managers, looked around angrily at the mad and tumultuous crowd. It was little Jammes—the girl with the tip-tipped nose, the forget-me-not eyes, the rosy cheeks and the lily-white neck and shoulders—who gave the explanation in a trembling voice: "It's the ghost!" And she locked the door.

Sorrell's dressing room was fitted up with official, commonplace elegance. A pier-glass, a sofa, a dressing-table and a cupboard or two provided the necessary furniture. On the walls hung a few engravings, relics of the mother, who had known the glories of the old Opera in the Rue Le Pelletier; portraits of Vestris, Gardel, Dupon, Eligotini. But the room seemed a palace to the brats of the corps de ballet, who were lodged in common dressing-rooms where they spent their time singing, quarreling, smacking the dressers and hair-dressers and buying one another glasses of casis, beer, or even rum, until the call-boy's bell rang.

Sorrell was very superstitious. She shuddered when she heard little Jammes speak of the ghost, called her a "silly little fool!" and then, as she and the other girls were mixed up in the

general, and the Opera ghost in particular, at once asked for details:

"Have you seen him?" "As plainly as I see you now!" said little Jammes, whose legs were giving way beneath her, and she dropped with a moan into a chair.

Thereupon little Giry—the girl with eyes black as sloes, hair black as ink, a swarthy complexion and a poor little skin stretched over poor little bones—little Giry added: "If that's the ghost, he's very ugly!"

"Oh, yes!" cried the chorus of ballet-girls.

And they all began to talk together. The ghost had appeared to them in the shape of a gentleman in dress-clothes, who had suddenly stood before them in the passage, without their knowing where he came from. He seemed to have come straight through the wall. "Pooh!" said one of them, who had more or less kept her head. "You see the ghost everywhere!"

And it was true. For several months, there had been nothing discussed at the Opera but this ghost in dress-clothes who stalked about the building, from the top of the dome to a shadow, who spoke to nobody, to whom nobody dare speak and who vanished as soon as he was seen, no one knowing how or where. As became a real ghost, he made no noise in walking. People began by laughing and making fun of this specter dressed like a man of fashion or an undertaker; but the ghost legend soon swelled to enormous proportions among the corps de ballet. All the girls pretended to have met this supernatural being more or less often. And those who laughed the loudest were not the most at ease. When he did not show himself, he betrayed his presence or his passing by accident, comic or serious, for which the general superstition held him responsible. Had any one met with a fall, or suffered a practical joke, or lost a powder-puff, it was at once the fault of the ghost, of the Opera ghost.

After all, who had seen him? You meet so many men in dress-clothes at the Opera who are not ghosts. But this dress-suit had a peculiarity of its own. It covered a skeleton. At least, so the ballet-girls said. And, of course, it had a death's head.

Was all this serious? The truth is that the idea of the skeleton came from the description of the ghost given by Joseph Bouquet, the chief scene-shifter, who had really seen the ghost. He had run up against the ghost on the little staircase, by the footlights, which leads to "the cellars." He had seen him for a second—for the ghost had fled—and to any one who cared to listen to him he said: "He is extraordinarily thin and his dress-coat hangs on a skeleton frame. His eyes are so deep that you can hardly see the fixed pupils. You just see two big black holes, as in a dead man's skull. His skin, which is stretched across his bones like a drum-head, is not white, but a nasty yellow. His nose is so little worth talking about that you can't see it side-faced; and the absence of that nose is a horrible thing to look at. All the hair he has is three or four long dark locks on his forehead and behind his ears."

This chief scene-shifter was a serious, sober, steady man, very slow at imagining things. His words were received with interest and amazement; and soon there were other people to say that they too had met a man in dress-clothes with a death's head on his shoulders. Sensible men who had wind of the story began by saying that Joseph Bouquet had been the victim of a joke played by one of his assistants. And then, one after the other, there came a series of incidents so curious and so inexplicable that the very shrewdest people began to feel uneasy.

For instance, a fireman is a brave fellow! He fears nothing, least of all fire! Well, the fireman in question, who had gone to make a round of inspection in the cellars and who, it seems, had ventured a little farther than usual, suddenly reappeared on the stage, pale, scared, trembling, with his eyes starting out of his head, practically fainted in the arms of the proud mother of little Jammes. (I have the anecdote, which is quite authentic, from M. Pedro Galliard himself, the late manager of the Opera.) And why? Because he had seen coming toward him, at the level of his head, but without a body attached to it, a head of fire! And, as I said, a fireman is not afraid of fire.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW.)

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Durham's New Administration

Special to The News.

Durham, May 1.—At a meeting of the board of aldermen, it is expected that the winding-up of this city's business, preparatory to turning it over for the incoming democratic administration will take place tonight. The date of the new administration taking over the city government has been definitely announced. The first struggle that it will have will be over the city attorneyship. At present City Attorney Chambers, who is captain of the Durham Light Infantry, is on the Mexican border and will be there several weeks. The election will take place during his absence. He is a candidate for re-election but has opposition. Everybody is considerably interested in this matter because the prosecution of the blind tigers has become such a burdensome matter in sporadic cases like the last two weeks have brought out.

In this connection, there has been organized to help in the prosecutions of these cases, a law and order league with George W. Watts president and James H. Southgate, secretary. This was made necessary by a well-defined private effort to create an unfavorable public sentiment as would discountenance the work of the detectives in breaking up the lawless traffic in whiskey here. When this was seen, a body of men who believe actually in prohibition, got together in the municipal building and organized. They will be about the courts during the May term and see that the juries are not filled with booze sympathizers and that the solicitor have the advantage of all facts and moral support possible.

The league has in it such men as Julian S. Carr, Sr., George W. Watts, B. N. Duke, W. A. Erwin, J. E. Staggs, Dr. W. P. Few, James H. Southgate and other men who have prominence all over the country.

There has been a great falling off of the jug trade the past two weeks and it was all caused by the agitation of the matter in the courts.

Melo Teer, a white man, was severely hurt Saturday night by a negro thief, whose flight from the James H. Farley store while some one was calling "stop thief," resulted in a head-on collision.

The funeral services over the remains of Mrs. J. C. Moore, the mother of Dr. R. A. Moore, of this city, were held yesterday afternoon in Orange chapel, Orange county. Mrs. Moore died Saturday afternoon on West Chapel Hill street, Durham, at the home of Dr. Moore.

Mrs. N. J. King died yesterday morning at 12:45 after a short illness with pneumonia. Mrs. King, who lived with her daughter, Mrs. E. R. Tingen, was a native of Fayetteville, but had lived here 15 years. She was the sister of Mr. B. R. Hargrove, of Cumberland, and also of Mrs. L. R. Breece, wife of Capt. Breece, of that place.

The first of a series of lectures at Trinity College will be given this evening at Craven Memorial Hall, Editor Clarence Poe, of Raleigh, making the address.

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Portly Mr. Taft Has Slim Chance

New York, April 29.—Wilbur F. Wakeman, manager of the American Protective Tariff League, made a desperate effort to get control of the republican machine in New York county in the interest of Vice-President James S. Sherman, today.

The fight raged until late this evening, and will probably be continued, although at a late hour tonight it was apparent that President Taft's supporters were in complete control of the situation and would carry out their original program of electing Samuel S. Roemer president of the committee to fill a vacancy caused by the resignation of Lloyd C. Griscom. It developed that the reasons for Griscom's retirement being guarded so carefully was that Wakeman and Sherman began several months ago to obtain control of the local organization. The great interests represented by Wakeman in the tariff league are preparing to fight Taft because of his position on Canadian reciprocity, and Wakeman has stated publicly that Taft "cannot be re-elected, if he should be nominated in 1912, because of his position on reciprocity."

The Wakeman candidate is J. Van Vechten Oloot, one of the supporters of Speaker Cannon in the last congress and one of the foremost champions of the "stand pat" program of the tariff league.

WOULD NOT SWAP TITLE

FOR GRANDFATHER'S MONEY

New York, April 29.—The real motive that has actuated Maurice Burke Roche, son of Mrs. Fanny Burke Roche, to resist the stipulation in the will of his grandfather, Frank Work, the eccentric millionaire, that he relinquish the name of Burke Roche and adopt that of Work, became apparent today.

Maurice Burke Roche has put his heart upon becoming a British peer. As the elder son of James Burke Roche, the divorced husband of Mrs. Fanny Burke Roche, he will fall heir some day to the title of Baron Fermoy. The honor is a brother of James Burke Roche and lives in England, in the sunset of life.

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