

THE NIGHTINGALE



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The Nightingale

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BEING A STORY FOR CHILDREN AND A PARABLE FOR MEN AND WOMEN.

In China, you must know, the Emperor is a Chinaman, and all whom he has about him are Chinamen too. It happened a good many years ago, but that's just why it's worth while to hear the story before it's forgotten! The Emperor's Palace was the most splendid in the World; it was made entirely of porcelain, very costly, but so delicate and brittle that one had to take care how one touched it. In the Garden were to be seen the most wonderful flowers, and to the costliest of them silver bells were tied, which sounded, so that nobody should pass by without noticing the flowers. Yes, every thing in the Emperor's Garden was admirably arranged. And it extended so far, that the Gardener himself did not know where the end was. If a man went on and on, he came into a glorious forest with high trees and deep lakes. The wood extended straight down to the sea, which was blue and deep; great vessels could sail beneath the branches of the trees, and in the trees lived a Nightingale, which sang so splendidly that even the poor Fisherman, who had many other things to do, stopped still and listened, when he had gone out at night to throw out his nets, and heard the Nightingale. "How beautiful that is!" he said; but he was obliged to attend to his property and thus forgot the bird. But when in the next night, the bird sang again and the Fisherman heard it, he exclaimed again, "How beautiful that is!"

From all the countries of the World, Travellers came to the City of the Emperor and admired it, and the Palace and the Garden, but when they heard the song of the Nightingale, they said: "That is the best of all!" And the Travellers told of it when they came home; and the learned men wrote many books about the Town, the Palace, and the Garden. But they did not forget the Nightingale; that was placed highest of all; and those who were Poets wrote most magnificent poems about the Nightingale in the wood, by the deep lake. The books went through all the World; and a few of them once came to the Emperor. He sat in his golden chair, and read, and read; every moment he nodded his head, for it pleased him to peruse the masterly descriptions of the City, the Palace, and the Garden. "But the Nightingale is the best of all!" it stood written there. "What's that? exclaimed the Emperor." "I do not know the Nightingale at all! Is there such a bird in my Garden? I've never heard of that: to learn such a thing for the first time from books!" And hereupon he called his Cavalier. This Cavalier was so grand that if any one lower in rank than himself dared to speak to him, or to ask him any question, he answered nothing but P! and that meant nothing.



“There is said to be a wonderful bird here called a Nightingale!” said the Emperor. “They say it’s the best thing in all my great Empire. Why have I never heard any thing about it?” “I have never heard him named,” replied the Cavalier. “He has never been introduced at Court.” “I command that he shall appear this evening, and sing before me,” said the Emperor. “All the world knows what I possess, and I do not know it myself!” “I have never heard him mentioned,” said the Cavalier. “I will seek for him. I will find him.” But where was he to be found? The Cavalier ran up and down all the staircases, through halls and passages, but no one among all those whom he met had heard talk of the Nightingale. And the Cavalier ran back to the Emperor, and said that it must be a fable invented by the writers of books. “Your Imperial Majesty cannot believe how much is written that is fiction, and something that they call the black art.” “But the book in which I read this,” said the Emperor, “was sent to me by the High and Mighty Emperor of Japan, and therefore it cannot be a falsehood. I will hear the Nightingale! It must be here this evening! It has my imperial favour! and if it does not come, all the Court shall be trampled upon after the Court has supped!” “Tsing-pe,” said the Cavalier; and again he ran up and down all the staircases, and through all the halls and corridors; and half the Court ran with him, for the Courtiers did not like being trampled upon.

Then there was a great inquiry after the wonderful Nightingale, which all the World knew, excepting the people at Court. At last they met with a poor

little Girl in the kitchen, who said, "The Nightingale? I know it well; yes, it can sing gloriously. Every evening I get leave to carry my poor sick mother the scraps from the table. She lives down by the strand, and when I get back and am tired, and rest in the wood, then I hear the Nightingale sing! And then the water comes into my eyes, and it is just as if my mother kissed me." "Little Kitchen-Girl," said the Cavalier, "I will get you a place in the kitchen, with permission to see the Emperor dine, if you will lead us to the Nightingale, for it is announced for this evening."

So they all went out into the wood where the Nightingale was accustomed to sing; half the Court went forth. When they were in the midst of their journey a cow began to low. "Oh!" cried the court pages, "now we have it! That shows a wonderful power in so small a creature! I have certainly heard it before." "No; those are cows lowing," said the little Kitchen-Girl. "We are a long way from the place yet." Now the frogs began to quack in the marsh. "Glorious!" said the Chinese Court Preacher. "Now I hear it: it sounds just like little church bells." "No; those are frogs," said the little Kitchen-Maid. "But now I think we shall soon hear it." And then the Nightingale began to sing.



“That is it!” exclaimed the little Girl. “Listen, listen! and yonder it sits,” and she pointed to a little gray bird up in the boughs. “Is it possible?” cried the Cavalier. “I should never have thought it looked like that. How simple it looks! It must certainly have lost its colour at seeing such grand people around.”

“Little Nightingale!” called the little Kitchen-Girl, quite loudly, “our gracious Emperor wishes you to sing before him.” “With the greatest pleasure!” replied the Nightingale, and began to sing most delightfully. “It sounds just like glass bells!” said the Cavalier. “And look at the little throat, how it’s working! It’s wonderful that we should never have heard it before. That bird will be a great success at Court.” “Shall I sing once more before the Emperor?” asked the Nightingale, for it thought the Emperor was present. “My excellent little Nightingale,” said the Cavalier, “I have great pleasure in inviting you to a Court festival this evening, when you shall charm his Imperial Majesty with your beautiful singing.” “My song sounds best in the green wood!” replied the Nightingale; still it came willingly when it heard what the Emperor wished.

The Palace was festively adorned. The walls and the flooring, which were of porcelain, gleamed in the rays of thousands of golden lamps. The most glorious flowers, which could ring clearly, had been placed in the passages. There was a running to and fro, and a through draught, and all the bells rang so loudly that one could not hear one’s self speak. In the midst of the great hall, where the Emperor sat, a golden perch had been placed, on which the Nightingale was to sit. The whole Court was there, and the little Cook-Maid had got leave to stand behind the door, as she had now received the title of a real Court cook. All were in full dress, and all

looked at the little gray bird, to which the Emperor nodded.

And the Nightingale sang so gloriously that the tears came into the Emperor's eyes. The tears ran down over his cheeks, and then the Nightingale sang still more sweetly; that went straight to the heart. The Emperor was so much pleased that he said the Nightingale should have his golden slipper to wear round its neck. But the Nightingale declined this with thanks, saying it had already received a sufficient reward. "I have seen tears in the Emperor's eyes; that is the real treasure to me! An Emperor's tears have a peculiar power. I am rewarded enough." And then it sang again with a sweet, glorious voice.

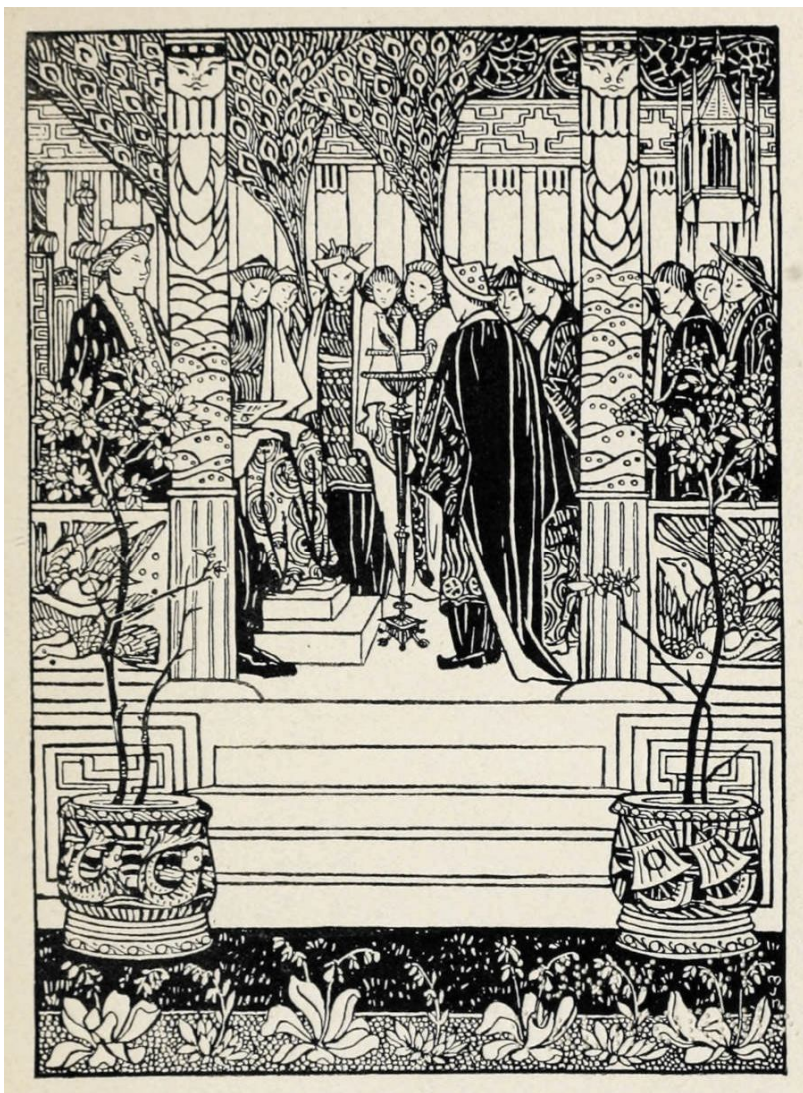
"That's the most amiable coquetry I ever saw!" said the Ladies who stood round about, and then they took water in their mouths to gurgle when any one spoke to them. They thought they should be nightingales too. And the lackeys and chambermaids reported that they were satisfied too; and that was saying a good deal, for they are the most difficult to please. In short the Nightingale achieved a real success. It was now to remain at Court, to have its own cage, with liberty to go out twice every day and once at night. Twelve servants were appointed when the Nightingale went out, each of whom had a silken string fastened to the bird's leg, and which they held very tight. There was really no pleasure in an excursion of that kind. The whole City spoke of the wonderful bird, and when two people met, one said nothing but **Nightin**, and the other said **gale**; and

then they sighed, and understood one another. Eleven pedlar's children were named after the bird, but not one of them could sing a note.

One day the Emperor received a large parcel, on which was written "The Nightingale." "There we have a new book about this celebrated bird," said the Emperor. But it was not a book, but a little work of art, contained in a box; an artificial nightingale, which was to be like a natural one, but was brilliantly ornamented with diamonds, rubies, and sapphires. So soon as the artificial bird was wound up, he could sing one of the pieces that he really sang, and then his tail moved up and down, and shone with silver and gold. Round his neck hung a little ribbon, and on that was written, **The Emperor of Japan's nightingale is poor, compared to that of the Emperor of China.** "That is capital!" said they all, and he who had brought the artificial bird, immediately received the title, Imperial Head-Nightingale-Bringer. "Now they must sing together; what a duet that will be!" And so they had to sing together; but it did not go very well, for the real Nightingale sang in its own way, and the artificial bird sang waltzes. "That's not his fault," said the Playmaster, "he's quite perfect, and very much in my style." Now the artificial bird was to sing alone. He had just as much success as the real one, and then it was much handsomer to look at; it shone like bracelets and breastpins. Three-and-thirty times over did it sing the same piece, and yet it was not tired. The people would gladly have heard it again, but the Emperor said that the living Nightingale ought to

sing something now. But where was it? No one had noticed that it had flown away out of the open window, back to the green wood.

“But what is that!” said the Emperor. And all the courtiers abused the Nightingale, and declared that it was a very ungrateful creature. “We have the best bird after all,” said they, and so the artificial bird had to sing again, and that was the thirty-fourth time that they listened to the same piece. For all that they did not know it quite by heart, for it was so very difficult, and the Playmaster praised the bird particularly; yes, he declared that it was better than a Nightingale, not only with regard to its plumage, and the many beautiful diamonds, but inside as well. “For you see, ladies and gentlemen, and above all, your Imperial Majesty, with a real Nightingale one can never calculate what is coming, but in this artificial bird every thing is settled. One can explain it; one can open it and make people understand where the waltzes come from, how they go, and how one follows upon another.”



“Those are quite our own ideas,” they all said, and the speaker received permission to show the bird to the people on the next Sunday. The people were to hear it sing too, the Emperor commanded, and they did hear it, and were as much pleased as if they had

all got tipsy upon tea, for that's quite the Chinese fashion; and they all said "Oh!" and held up their forefingers and nodded. But the poor Fisherman, who had heard the real Nightingale, said, "It sounds pretty enough and the melodies resemble each other, but there's something wanting, and I know not what!" The real Nightingale was banished from the country and Empire. The artificial bird had its place on a silken cushion, close to the Emperor's bed; all the presents it had received, gold and precious stones, were ranged about; in title it had advanced to be the High Imperial After-Dinner-Singer, and in rank to number one on the left hand; for the Emperor considered that side the most important on which the heart is placed, and even in an Emperor the heart is on the left side; and the Playmaster wrote a work of five-and-twenty volumes about the artificial bird; it was very learned and very long, full of the most difficult Chinese words; but yet all the people declared that they had read it, and understood it, for fear of being considered stupid, and having their bodies trampled on. So a whole year went by. The Emperor, the Court, and all the other Chinese knew every little twitter in the artificial bird's song, by heart. But just for that reason it pleased them best; they could sing it with themselves, and they did so. The street-boys sang "Tsi-tsi-tsi-glug-glug," and the Emperor himself sung it too. Yes, that was certainly famous!

But one evening, when the artificial bird was singing its best, and when the Emperor lay in bed listening to it, something inside the bird said

“Whiz!” Something cracked. “Whirr!” All the wheels ran around, and then the music stopped. The Emperor immediately sprang out of bed, and caused his Body Physician to be called; but what could he do? Then they sent for a Watchmaker, and after a good deal of talking and investigation, the bird was put into something like order; but the Watchmaker said that the bird must be carefully treated, for the barrels were worn, and it would be impossible to put new ones in, in such a manner that the music would go. There was a great lamentation; only once in a year was it permitted to let the bird sing, and that was almost too much. But then the Playmaster made a little speech, full of heavy words, and said this was just as good as before, and so of course it was as good as before.

Now five years had gone by, and a real grief came upon the whole Nation. The Chinese really were fond of their Emperor, and now he was ill, and could not, it was said, live much longer. Already a new Emperor had been chosen, and the people stood out in the street and asked the Cavalier how their old Emperor did. P! said he, and shook his head.

Cold and pale lay the Emperor in his great gorgeous bed; the whole Court thought him dead, and each one ran to pay homage to the new ruler. The Chamberlains ran out to talk it over, and the Ladies’ Maids had a great coffee-party. All about, in all the halls and passages, cloth had been laid down, so that no footstep could be heard, and therefore it was quiet there, quite quiet. But the Emperor was not dead yet; stiff and pale he lay on the gorgeous bed

with the long velvet curtains and the heavy gold tassels; high up, a window stood open, and the moon shone in upon the Emperor and the artificial bird.

The poor Emperor could scarcely breathe; it was just as if something lay upon his chest; he opened his eyes, and then he saw that it was Death, who sat upon his chest, and had put on his golden crown, and held in one hand the Emperor's sword and in the other his beautiful banner. And all around, from among the folds of the splendid velvet curtains, strange heads peered forth; a few very ugly, the rest quite lovely and mild. These were all the Emperor's bad and good deeds, that stood before him now that Death sat upon his heart. "Do you remember this?" whispered one to the other. "Do you remember that?" and then they told him so much that the perspiration ran from his forehead. "I did not know that!" said the Emperor. "Music! music! the great Chinese drum!" he cried, "so that I need not hear all they say!" and they continued speaking, and Death nodded like a Chinaman to all they said. "Music! music!" cried the Emperor. "You little precious golden bird, sing, sing! I have given you gold and costly presents; I have even hung my golden slipper around your neck; sing, now, sing!" But the bird stood still; no one was there to wind him up, and he could not sing without that; but Death continued to stare at the Emperor with his great hollow eyes, and it was quiet, fearfully quiet!



Then there sounded from the window, suddenly, the most lovely song. It was the little live Nightingale, that sat outside on a spray. It had heard of the Emperor's sad plight and had come to sing to him of comfort and hope. And as it sung the spectres grew paler and paler; the blood ran quicker and more quickly through the Emperor's weak limbs, and even Death listened, and said, "Go on, little Nightingale,

go on!" "But will you give me that splendid golden sword? Will you give me that rich banner? Will you give me the Emperor's crown?" And Death gave up each of these treasures for a song. And the Nightingale sang on and on; and it sung of the quiet Churchyard where the white roses grow, where the elder-blossom smells sweet, and where the fresh grass is moistened by the tears of survivors. Then Death felt a longing to see his Garden, and floated out at the window in the form of a cold white mist.

"Thanks, thanks!" said the Emperor. "You heavenly little bird! I know you well! I banished you from my Country and Empire, and yet you have charmed away the evil faces from my couch, and banished Death from my heart! How can I reward you?"

"You have rewarded me," replied the Nightingale. "I have drawn tears from your eyes, when I sang the first time; I shall never forget that. These are the jewels that rejoice a singer's heart; but now sleep and grow fresh and strong again; I will sing you something." And it sang, and the Emperor fell into a sweet slumber. Ah! how mild and refreshing that sleep was. The sun shone upon him through the windows, when he awoke refreshed and restored; not one of his servants had yet returned, for they all thought he was dead; only the Nightingale still sat beside him and sang.

"You must always stay with me," said the Emperor. "You shall sing as you please; and I'll break the artificial bird into a thousand pieces." "Not so," replied the Nightingale. "It did well so long as it

could; keep it as you have done till now. I cannot build my nest in the Palace to dwell in it, but let me come when I feel the wish; then I will sit in the evening on the spray yonder by the window, and sing you something so that you may be glad and thoughtful at once. And I will sing of those who are happy, and of those who suffer. I will sing of good and of evil that remains hidden round about you. The little singing-bird flies far around, to the poor Fisherman, to the Peasant's roof, to every one who dwells far away from you and from your Court. I love your heart more than your crown, and yet the crown has an air of sanctity about it; I come, I shall sing to you; but one thing you must promise me." "Every thing!" said the Emperor; and he stood there in his imperial robes, which he had put on himself, and pressed the sword which was heavy with gold to his heart.

"One thing I beg of you; tell no one that you have a little bird that tells you everything. Then it will go all the better." And the Nightingale flew away. The servants came in to look to their dead Emperor—and—yes, there they stood, and the Emperor said, "Good-morning."