

**THE CHINESE NIGHTINGALE***An Old Legend of China*

MANY CENTURIES ago a great and good emperor lived in China. This emperor had the most beautiful palace in the world—at least, so the people who lived in China thought. All about the palace was a beautiful garden. At the edge of the garden was a deep, dark forest, and in this forest there lived and sang a nightingale.

When the emperor heard about the nightingale, he told his servants to go to the woods, and ask the nightingale to come and sing at the palace.

"Dear nightingale," said the chamberlain that night, "the emperor has sent me to find you. He wishes you to come to the palace and sing for him there."

"Why should I go to the palace to sing?" asked the nightingale. "I am happier here in my beautiful woods."

"You will make the emperor very happy if you do go," answered the Chamberlain.

So the brown bird went back with him to the palace. As they passed through the garden, they could hear all the tiny bells ringing from their hiding places on the stems of the flowers where the emperor had tied them.

"Here, dear emperor, is the nightingale," said the chamberlain, with a low bow as he came to the emperor's throne.

Then the nightingale sang. So charmed was the emperor and so charmed were all the great lords and ladies, that it seemed that they could never hear enough.

"I am glad that you have liked my song," the nightingale said. "But now

I must go back to my home in the deep, green woods."

"Oh, do not go!" said the emperor, and one of the lords caught the nightingale and put her into a cage.

"Now," said the emperor, "you shall be the court singer."

The nightingale was very unhappy.

"Why did they shut me up in a cage?" she said. "Every one knows that I cannot sing in a cage."

One day, when the door of the cage was opened in order to put food into the cage, the nightingale slipped out and flew through the open window into the woods.

The emperor was very sorry when he learned that his little court singer had disappeared. He was not satisfied until one of his lords made a little toy bird and brought it to him. This toy bird could sing only when it was wound up, and even then its voice was very loud and shrill. But one day the spring in the toy bird broke and it could sing no more.

Then the emperor fell sick. Nothing that was done could cure him. The lords and ladies feared that he would never be well again. Everyone talked about the emperor and his illness. At last the birds in the forest heard of it.

"I must go back and sing for our emperor," said the nightingale to the other birds.

"He will shut you up again," they said.

"That will not matter if I can only make him happy," said the little bird.

Back she flew, straight through the open window into the emperor's room. There she sat on the bedpost and began

to sing. What sweet music came from her tiny throat!

The emperor heard the music, but thought he must be dreaming. "If only I might hear my nightingale again," he said.

"Here I am, dear emperor," said the nightingale, and she sang again.

"Oh, dear nightingale, you have made me better already," said the emperor. From that day he was sick no longer. He never put the nightingale in a cage or shut her up again. Each night, just before he went to sleep, he would open his window. Then the little bird would fly in and sit and sing for him.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What is a nightingale? (A bird known as a thrush noted for its sweet song which it sings at night.)

2. What is a legend? (See the dictionary.)

3. From what country does this legend come?

4. Do you know that this legend has given inspiration for a music composition? (This old Chinese legend has been told in music by a great modern composer named Stravinsky. The music may be heard in Stravinsky's ballet—see the dictionary—and his opera called *The Nightingale*.)

5. Tell about the emperor's palace.

6. Who caught the nightingale?

7. What was done with her?

8. Why was the nightingale unhappy?

9. Would you be happy if you were shut in a cage?

10. What did the nightingale succeed in doing?

11. What happened to the emperor?

12. Why did he want to hear the nightingale again.

13. What did the nightingale do?

14. How did the emperor treat the nightingale then?

15. What lesson do you learn from this story?

16. Will birds of the forest come to your window and sing? (Yes, if fed and treated kindly.)

17. Did you like this story? Why?

18. Can you name a bird of the Phil-

ippines which belongs to the thrush family, the family to which the nightingale belong? (The *maya*)

19. Is the *maya* of the Philippines noted for its



*Then the nightingale sang.*

song?

20. Do you know the names of any other song birds of the Philippines?

21. Do you think birds should be protected? Why?

22. Do you like to hear the sweet song of a bird?

23. Do you know any other bird legends?

24. If you know any other bird legend, perhaps you would like to write it for publication in THE YOUNG CITIZEN. Why not try?

25. Do you know any other Chinese legends?