

# A Christmas Nightingale.

(Continued.)

When it was over the neighbors gathered about Elise, asking questions. "Who was the boy? Where had he come from? What was he doing with him? Was there any money? No? Ah, well, he would be a burden upon the town. They supposed he would be sent to the almshouse, that was where the poor had to go, and indeed they should be thankful that there was such a place. No doubt he was strong enough to do some work. He could make himself useful in return for his keep."

Giovanni heard them talking, half dazed. What would become of him? He turned to look back as they neared the presbytery; he heard the sound of heavy shoes on the cobblestones of the street, and the shrill voices of children at play came up from the gardens below the ramparts. A yellow, wintry sun was shining overhead; the red-brown tiles of the roof of the church contrasted with the clear blue of the sky, and high up on the wall, ceaselessly watching, was that great eye—

Je vois tout, et partout.

"We will keep him here for a day or two, Elise," the cure said, and the old woman grumbled a little under her breath, but she was really kind-hearted, and her grumbling was only the sort of protest she felt due to her own dignity; in reality she was glad that the child was to remain.

He was put to bed again that night beside the fire, and he had dropped to sleep, but presently he heard voices and his own name spoken. The Mayor had come in to call on the cure, and feeling the great importance of his office, he was talking of paupers and foundlings that were a burden to the town. "Now this vagabond," he said, "Monsieur le curé, you must not let him be a care to you; you are too kind-hearted, and you must not undertake the support of a child like this; neither must Elise be burdened. No; the thing to be done will be to send him to the almshouse; there they will feed him and work him hard, and he will take his place as any of the other paupers; and lucky he is to find a spot to lay his head."

"I suppose you are right, Mayor," the cure answered with a sigh, "and yet I am loth to turn him away. The poor child seems so gentle and so grateful for any little thing that is done for him."

"Ah, yes, that's all very well, but his place is at the almshouse, and there he should go before another day passes. A glass of wine? Thank you, Monsieur le curé; yes, I will take a little glass to drink your health. Good luck to you, and don't keep the child another day; let him go where he belongs. Good-night."

The benignant, warm-hearted cure accompanied him to the door and stood watching his retreating figure as he went clumping heavily through the garden and so out into the now almost deserted road.

Giovanni lay very still. He had heard, he had heard it all, but he would not go to the almshouse; no, no, he would not. He fell asleep, and the cure went to bed, leaving the door of his room ajar. The night wore on and the fire died down; there were only a few embers on the hearth, and gradually they were extinguished. The clock struck twelve. It was cold and it was very dark. Giovanni remembered the words of the Mayor, he had understood the acquiescence of the cure. He put one foot slowly to the ground, then the other; he felt for his clothes on the chair near the lounge; stealthily he crept towards the little hallway and there he slipped on his trousers and his blouse. His cap was hanging on a nail by the door. He turned the key slowly in the lock; it creaked a little and he waited fearfully, hardly daring to breathe, then he opened the door, just a little, a little more, till there was room for his body to pass through. Everything was in shadow. He closed the door softly behind him, and pressing closely to the bushes that bordered the walk leading to the gate, he came to it, and went out into the street. It was very quiet; the only sound he heard was of the water trickling into the fountain. He saw the church wall dimly outlined. He remembered the fresco, and he trembled. "It's wrong, he wondered. Oh, no, it could not be wrong. God saw, God knew; He would protect him, and, keeping well in the shadow, he passed down the road, crossed to a narrow alleyway that led he knew not where, but following on he found himself at the top of a long flight of stone steps leading down between steep terraced gardens. Down, down, fifty, a hundred and fifty—would they never end—two hundred and one, two hundred and ten—yes, here he was at the end, at last, down on a road that led away—away—but he would follow it.

When the sun rose, coming up there behind the mountains whose crests were white with snow, Giovanni was three miles away from R—. He dared not stop, though he was very tired. There were orchards all about, trees with bare branches, high hedges beside the road that stretched away interminably; and presently he heard voices; occasionally a cart would pass along the road on the way to the market town. Giovanni crept through a hole in the hedge and lay down close to the bushes, fearing to be discovered, but no one stirred. There was a tree with his own apple. The child kept on and on; he was getting hungry. He felt in his pocket; there were six great coins. He saved a sob

and wiped his eyes on the sleeve of his blouse, remembering how his grandfather had given them to him, one each day last week, because he had sung so well, and they were to have a treat at a cake shop some day when they stopped in a town. But now, alas! there were no cakes to be thought of, no treats; only, perhaps, when he got far enough away he would dare to stop at a bakery and buy a loaf of bread.

The dawn was coming; slowly the sky turned from darkness, and soft grey tints were shading into yellow and pink light that painted the snowy tips of the distant mountains and just as the sun showed its great red disc above the horizon, Giovanni found himself entering the narrow, ill-paved street of a little village. Everything was very still, almost all the shutters were closed, but sometimes there were sounds of life; a cock crowed, and there were pigeons wheeling about the church tower, and occasionally one swooped down towards the ground and strutted along the cobblestones of the street. The smell of newly baked bread greeted the child's nostrils, as a low door swung heavily back on its hinges, and the baker came out and took down the shutters which had been withdrawn from the oven and were piled on the long, low counter ready for early distribution. Giovanni hesitated a moment, then ventured inside the door, and laying one of his treasured coins on the counter, asked for a penny's worth of bread. The baker, too busy to pay much heed to the child, cut one of the loaves in half and handed it to him across the counter, then threw the penny carelessly into the till. As the boy turned to go, a door at the back of the shop opened and a girl came in from the yard. She was a healthy, bright-faced young woman with red cheeks and laughing black eyes; she had black hair and she wore a coarse blue stuff dress, the skirt of which was turned back, showing her short brown petticoat, and wooden shoes that clattered on the tiles of the floor as she walked. She carried a pail of milk, warm and foaming, and when she saw the child she said good-naturedly, "Good-morning, little one, won't you let me give you a bowl of milk?"

"Thank you, mademoiselle," Giovanni answered, and gratefully took the bowl which she handed him, greedily drinking its contents. "But you are hungry," the girl said. "Yes, mademoiselle, and the milk is very good. Thank you again," and as the girl turned to her morning work Giovanni hurried out of the shop, fearful that someone might stop and question him. He got away from the village as quickly as possible, and continued on his journey, which was to lead him he knew not whither. Sometimes he sat down to rest in an out-of-the-way corner, eating a little of the bread, but he dared not finish it; he must make it last as long as possible. Once, creeping close to a hedge, he fell asleep, and when he awoke he was stiff and cold. It was getting late in the afternoon, and snow was beginning to fall in tiny flakes. Still he pressed forward; he must find some sheltered corner where he could sleep for the night, and it was dark and the lamps were lighted when he came to the village of X—. And it was Christmas Eve.

There was a steep, narrow path leading up between the walls of tall houses, whose lower story gave on to the street, but whose garret opened into the upper road. Giovanni kept close to the wall and began to climb up—up—feeling his way along. He was getting very tired, and he thought he must soon lie down, and when he came upon a depression in the wall and felt that there was a doorway in which was to be found partial shelter from the snow and the cold, he sank down and, curling himself up, soon fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER II.

Le Père and la Mère Jammonaye rose early on the morning of the 24th of December. Père Jammonaye opened the shutters, and looking out saw the sun rising over the far eastern mountains; then he went into the kitchen and made a fire, where Mère Jammonaye soon followed him. She put the kettle on to boil, and then the pair walked out of the door that led from the top of the house into the little garden, which, walled in from the road, was on a sort of terrace on a level with the roofs of the houses below.

"Our little domain does not look very flourishing this morning, maman," Père Jammonaye said, smiling kindly at the old woman. "But what can one expect in winter, papa," she answered. "Everything looks dead at this time of year, but we know that the plants are not really dead, and it won't be very long before the snowdrops are coming up and the crocuses cover the ground."

"Yes, yes, and there's no little domain as beautiful as ours; we were fortunate indeed to find the little place in which to spend our declining years. Now that the children were gone, gone long ago, and they two were alone and had been for many a year, but neither of them ever forgot, though each one tried for the other's sake to be brave and cheerful."

They walked through the little garden where the box borders were almost the only green things to be seen; the beds that in summer time were the old man's pride, with the lettuce and parsley and various vegetables; the rose bushes and wondrous dahlias, the two apple trees and the espaliered pears and the vine-covered arbor—all were brown and bare. Coming to the dark red gate in the wall Père Jammonaye unlocked it, and the two old people passed on to the flight of steps, which soon brought them to the church, through whose open doors people were passing to early Mass. When they had reverently said their prayers before the altar, they lighted candles for their children, who were never forgotten, and then returned to the house, where the kettle was singing merrily in the kitchen over the charcoal fire, and there Mère Jammonaye made the coffee and proceeded to straighten up the apartment, so that it could be left for the day for they were to make their yearly pilgrimage to Belfort, something they had never yet neglected during all the years they had inhabited the little domain.

The two hottes were filled with great yellow pears the Père Jammonaye carefully selected from the beams in the store-room. He had hung them there to ripen in the autumn, a string fastened to the stem of each, leaving every separate one depending from its own particular nail. The two old people were very proud as they watched their trees; first the buds, then the blossoms, and then soft green baby leaves unfolded the tiny fruit formed and grew large bending down the branches with its weight, so that they had to be propped up at last with great forked sticks that Père Jammonaye went out and cut in the woods for the purpose. It had been a wonderful year for the fruit, for the pears and apples, as well as for the currants and raspberries, and the great purple gooseberries. The hôte that he now strapped to his wife's shoulders the old man had only partially filled for her to carry a heavy burden, and he had put some late chrysanthemums on top of the pears, and two brand new wreaths of metal and beadwork which were to be hung on the crosses over there in the churchyard, not far from which was the land to which they always fondly referred as the great domain.

In the market square at Belfort they disposed of the fruit at a good price, and they exchanged greetings with old friends whom they saw but seldom in these days. Every one had a kind word for them in their childish old age. When they quitted the market-place they went to pray in the churchyard, and hung the wreaths on the crosses that marked the graves of the children, strewn the mounds with gay colored flowers. Then, coming back through the town, they called at the house of a friend, who insisted upon their stopping for déjeuner, and the day wore on and it was late before they found themselves back in the streets of X—, so that they went into the house through the lower door and climbed the long flight of stairs to their own apartment.

L'Abbe Gregoire had not been many months at X—, but in those few months he had succeeded in endearing himself to everyone. Old men and women, the middle aged and young children, all had come to trust and to love him; he was their spiritual father, and he was also their true and sympathetic friend. He had given up everything to follow the Voice that had called him, and he had never allowed himself to look back, never permitted himself to indulge in vain regrets. It had taken him some time to become accustomed to the ways of the little parish, and he had felt lonely in the beginning, but devoting himself to his people and their various needs, he had found his reward and happiness in constant occupation. Shortly before his arrival in the village, the wife of the proprietor who had bought and restored the wonderful medieval castle at the top of the hill, whose walled garden overlooked the churchyard, had presented an organ to the parish, a beautiful instrument, which had been the greatest joy to L'Abbe Gregoire, for he was a lover of music, and whenever he had a spare half hour he was in the habit of crossing the little bridge that led from his own door in the upper story of one of those tall houses to the road just opposite the great door of the church. Once inside, he would seat himself before the instrument and let his hands wander over the keys, and music such as the old church had never heard before would fill the building with a great volume of glorious melody.

L'Abbe Gregoire also taught the children to sing, doing his best to them; training and encouraging them as well as he could; but here he found a difficulty, for not one of them had any idea of music; there was no

sign of a voice among them all. The hymn that he had composed for the Christmas festival, he knew what it might be like if only he could get it properly sung; he could hear it as he closed his eyes and threw back his head, playing the accompaniment softly and trying to fancy the words sung as he would have had them, if only there were someone who could understand. He was ashamed. He had felt almost impatient when the poor children had lifted up their voices and proudly—yes, proudly—had fairly murdered the hymn that he knew was in itself a gem among Christmas songs. But he shrugged his shoulders, saying to himself, "If one can't have what one likes, one must like what one has," and he thanked the children and smiled upon them in a way that made them quite happy and content.

When Père and Mère Jammonaye came to their own rooms that Christmas Eve they put away the baskets, and directly the old woman busied herself in the kitchen preparing the dinner to which they would bring good appetites after their long and tiresome day. The good soupe aux choux sent up a steam that filled the little kitchen with the odor of cooking vegetables, and Mère Jammonaye drew the round black oak table near the fire, placing on it the bowls and plates, and the caraffe that Père Jammonaye filled with red wine from the cask in the cellar; and the old woman brought one of the flat, round loaves from a shelf in the cupboard, putting it on the bread board and laying a knife beside it with which they cut great slices as they were required. When the meal was finished, the old woman went about washing the dishes and putting things in place, and gathered up the crumbs left from the loaf, and opening the window, scattered them outside for the birds.

The old man sat by the fire smoking his pipe; occasionally they spoke a few words, but both were preoccupied, and though neither of them said so in words, each knew that the other was thinking of the long ago, when they were both young, and the children had played about their feet or nestled their heads contentedly against their shoulders. "It is time to be looking up," the old man said at last, as he rose from his chair and, knocking the ashes from his pipe, laid it on the shelf above the stove. He put on his cap, threw his old cape across his shoulders, and went out of the door, walking the length of the little domain. It would have been quite dark by now, but happily the snow, having whitened the ground, had ceased falling and the stars were coming out, while the crescent moon was to be seen shining brightly overhead. Père Jammonaye went through the garden, past the beehives which were to him such a source of pride, between the box hedges, and under the bare overhanging branches of the fruit trees, and, coming to the garden door, he opened it, intending to look up and down the long flight of steps to see if anyone were passing. As he lifted the latch, something that was leaning against the door fell back with it, and when he stooped down to see what it was, his eyes rested on the form of a sleeping child.

"Hello, hello, what's this?" The old man put his hand on the head of the child, who did not open his eyes but only moved impatiently and drew himself together. Père Jammonaye shook him by the shoulder; still the child did not move; he felt very cold, he wore no overcoat, and it seemed to the old man that he must be half frozen. Stooping, he lifted him in his arms, and closing the door behind him with his foot, he carried him back to the house.

Mère Jammonaye, who when her husband was no longer in the room had allowed herself to give way to the fit of crying which she had managed to restrain while the old man was still in the house, wiped her eyes and looked up as the door opened and he came into the kitchen carrying the child in his arms.

"Here, maman, le bon Dieu," he said, "has sent us a Christmas present," he said.

"What is it? What have you got?" The old woman got up hastily. "Full the armchair up to the fire," the old man continued; "it's not every night in the year that one can find a child at one's very door; this is evidently a gift sent by le bon Dieu to comfort us in our old age."

He put the child down in the great chair, and presently he began to move; he opened his eyes. "Where am I?" he asked. "Here you are, at home, at home with Papa and Maman Jammonaye; where else should you be?" The old man said.

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## TO LOVERS OF ST. ANTHONY of Padua.

Dear Reader.—Be patient with me for telling you again how much I need your help. How can I help it or what else can I do? For without that help this Mission must cease to exist, and the poor Catholics already here remain without a Church.

I am still obliged to say Mass and give Benediction in a Mean Upper-Room.

Yet such as it is, this is the sole outpost of Catholicism in a division of the county of Norfolk measuring 35 by 20 miles.

And to add to my many anxieties, I have no Diocesan Grant. No Endowment (except Hope).

We must have outside help for the present, or haul down the flag. The generosity of the Catholic Public has enabled us to secure a valuable site for Church and Presbytery. We have money in hand towards the cost of building, but the Bishop will not allow us to go into debt.

I am most grateful to those who have helped us and trust they will continue their charity.

To those who have not helped I would say—For the sake of the Cause give something, if only a "little." It is easier and more pleasant to give than to beg. Speed the glad hour when I need no longer plead for a permanent Home for the Blessed Sacrament.

Address—**Father Gray, Catholic Mission, Fakenham, Norfolk, England.**

P.S.—I will gratefully and promptly acknowledge the smallest donation and send with my acknowledgments a beautiful picture of the Sacred Heart and St. Anthony.

## Letter from Our New Bishop.

Dear Father Gray.—You have duly accounted for the aims which you have received, and you have placed them securely in the names of Diocesan Trustees. Your efforts have gone far towards providing what is necessary for the establishment of a permanent Mission at Fakenham. I authorize you to continue to solicit alms for this object until, in my judgment, it has been fully attained.

Yours faithfully in Christ,  
† F. W. KEATING,  
Bishop of Northampton.

man laughed, and Mère Jammonaye bent over the child and stroked his hand.

He sat up and looked about, dazed by the light and the voices and the strange room in which he found himself.

"Where am I? I don't understand."

"Here, maman, get him some soup, that's what the child wants."

It took only a few minutes; the soup kettle on the back of the stove was always ready. Mère Jammonaye brought soup and bread and the child ate it greedily.

"But who are you?" he asked at last.

"We are your good friends, Papa and Maman Jammonaye, and we think, it being Christmas Eve, le bon Dieu has brought you to us as a Christmas gift; only we do not quite understand where he brought you from."

The child drew back suddenly, looking frightened.

"What is the matter, little one?" the old man asked. "There's nothing to be afraid of; you are among friends."

"But the almshouse—is this the almshouse? That is where they said they would send me."

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"No, no, this is not the almshouse, this is the house of Papa and Maman Jammonaye, and perhaps le bon Dieu has chosen to send you here instead."

It took some time for the whole story to come out. Giovanni was afraid at first; he knew that he had run away from the cure, and he could not be sure that he would not be sent back again, but Maman Jammonaye, who understood children, and whose motherly heart had never ceased to yearn for those she had lost, gradually succeeded in reassuring him. She and Papa Jammonaye heard and understood the story and they promised the boy that, whatever else happened, he should not be sent to the almshouse.

Bye and bye a bed was made up for him in the little room opening from their own. How often had the old people looked at that little empty bed, sighing that there was no child to sleep in it, and then glanced up at the old-fashioned photographs in their own room, each with its wreath of flowers made from the hair of a dead child. To-night long, they knelt looking up at the crucifix which hung under that bright colored print of the Mother of God, and gave thanks for the gift that had been left at their door, the gift that was to prove the joy and so-lace of their old age.

For almost the first time in her life Maman Jammonaye did not go to the midnight Mass. To be sure, the child was sleeping, but there was a chance that he might wake, and if he should, and he were to find himself alone in the strange house, he would be alarmed. So Maman Jammonaye decided to stay and watch beside him while the old man went up.

The boy lay quietly back among the soft pillows, drawing himself up like a dormouse under the plump duvet and sleeping as if he enjoyed every breath; Mère Jammonaye listened, smiling to herself at the thought of the child who had come to stay. She was tired herself, but she preferred to sit up waiting till the old man came back; and she nodded by the fire, her head drooping forward. She must have fallen asleep, for she started up suddenly with a start, the clock pointed to ten minutes after one, and the noise that woke her—

(Continued on page 7.)

## WAS WEAK AND THIN

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It is a pleasant. If I were you. The pathway. The shining m. The dream won. From honest w. And you must read. And shun the. —Youth's Cor.

A TRAMP CA. SAVED A FA. FCF

Spunk was haunted the ga. basements of a. York city. She and not a bit hi. tame and good. neighborhood ch. fun with her. boy named Har. picked up Spunk as she was, at arms into his n. have a play wit. time he fed her, about her. Sp. herself, though, to be turned out. They knelt look. it was cold weat. Spunk sneaked sl. chen range out of sleep.

Harry got sleep and went upstairs all the other sev. family when their and not one of the tramp cat behind. It was a gas rang. gas jets belonging burning.

The lighted jet. low that when. came and the gas. duced the light wa. ed, although the g. to flow, filling the. poisonous fumes. gas mounted the st. through the rest of the family—father, dren—were still fast of anything but th. they were in.

But Spunk, cat