

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

A Dramatic Reading

by
Victor Hugo



Wetmore Declamation Bureau

**Box 2695
Sioux City, IA 51106**

**www.wetmoredeclamation.com
Email: speeches@wetmoredeclamation.com**

CAUTION: Wetmore Declamation Bureau material is protected by United States copyright law and conventions. None of our material may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means-electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other-without prior permission. No trademark, copyright or other notice may be removed or changed. All rights reserved. Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS
A Dramatic Reading

Victor Hugo

From the book "Les Miserables."

One evening in the beginning of October, 1815, the Bishop of D--- had remained in his bedroom until a late hour. At eight o'clock, feeling that supper was ready, and that his sister might be waiting, he closed his book, rose from the table and walked into the dining-room.

There was a loud rap at the door. "Come in," said the Bishop. A man entered and stopped; the firelight fell on him; a sinister apparition.

"My name is Jean Valjean. I am a galley-slave, and have spent nineteen years in the bagne. I was liberated four days ago, and today I have marched twelve leagues. On coming into the town I went to the inn, but was sent away in consequence of my yellow passport. I went to another inn, and the landlord said to me, 'Be off!' I went to the prison and the jailer would not take me in. I got into a dog's kennel, but the dog bit me and drove me off. I went in the fields to sleep in the starlight, but there were no stars. I thought it would rain and, as there was no God to prevent it from raining, I came back to town to sleep in a doorway. A good woman pointed to your house and said, 'Go and knock there.' I have money, one hundred francs, which I have earned by nineteen years' toil. I will pay. I am tired and hungry; will you let me stay?"

"Madame Magloire, you will lay another plate, knife and fork."

"Wait a minute; that will not do. Did you not hear me say that I was a galley-slave, a convict, and had just come from the bagne? Here is my passport, which turns me out wherever I go: 'Jean Valjean, a liberated convict, has remained nineteen years at the galleys,--five years for robbing with housebreaking, fourteen years for trying to escape four times. The man is very dangerous.' All the world has turned me out; will you give me some food and--have you a stable?"

"Madame Magloire, you will put clean sheets on the bed in the alcove. Sit down and warm yourself, sir. We shall sup directly, and your bed will be got ready while we are supping."

"Is it true? You will not turn me out--a convict?--You call me, 'Sir'! I believed you would turn me out, hence told you at once who I am. I shall have supper; a bed with sheets like anybody else! For nineteen years I have not slept in a bed. What is your name, Mr. Landlord?"

"I am a priest living in this house."

"A priest! What a worthy priest!"

Madame Magloire came in bringing a silver spoon and fork, which she placed on the table.

"Madame Magloire lay them as near as you can to the fire. The night breeze is sharp on the Alps, and you must be cold, sir."

Each time he said "sir" in his gentle, grave voice the man's face was illumined. "Sir" to a convict is the glass of water to the shipwrecked sailor. Ignominy thirsts for respect.

Monseigneur's bedroom two silver candlesticks, which she lighted and placed on the table.

"Monsieur le Cure, you receive me as a friend and light your candles for me, and yet I have not hidden from you whence I come."

"You need not have told me who you are. This is not my house but the house of Christ. This door does not ask a man whether he has a name, but if he has sorrow. You are suffering, you are hungering and thirsting, and so be welcome. And do not thank me nor say that I am receiving you in my house, for no one is at home here excepting the man who is in need of an asylum. I tell you who are a passer-by, that you are

more at home than I am myself. Why do I want to know your name? Besides, before you told it to me, you had one which I knew."

"Is that true? You know my name?"

"Yes, you are my brother---You have suffered greatly?"

"Oh, the red jacket, the cannon ball on your foot, a plank to sleep on, heat, cold, the sweat of men, the blows, the double chain for nothing, a dungeon for a word, even when you are ill in bed--and the chain-gang! The very dogs are happier. Nineteen years! And now I am forty-six--and the yellow passport!"

"Yes, you have come from a place of sorrow. If you leave that mournful place with thoughts of hatred and anger against your fellow man, you are worthy of pity; if you leave it with thoughts of kindness, gentleness and peace, you are worth more than any of us."

Meanwhile Madame Magloire had served the supper. The Bishop during the whole evening did not utter a word which could remind this man of what he was. He supped with Jean Valjean with the same air and in the same way as if he had been M. Gedeon Le Provost or the parish curate. Was not this really charity?"

The rooms were so arranged that in order to reach the alcove was it necessary to pass through the Bishop's bedroom. At the moment the convict went through this room Madame Magloire was putting away the plate in the cupboard over the bishop's bed head.

"I trust you will pass a good night," said the Bishop.

"Thank you, Monsieur l'Abbe." He suddenly turned, "What! you really lodge me so close to you as that? Who tells you that I have not committed a murder?"

"That concerns God."

The Bishop stretched out his hand and blessed the man, who did not bow his head, and returned to his bedroom.

As two o'clock peeled from the cathedral bell Jean Valjean awoke. One thought held his mind, the six silver forks and spoons and the great ladle which alone was worth two hundred francs, or double what he had earned in nineteen years.

When three o'clock struck it seemed to say, "To work!" He noiselessly opened his knapsack, took a bar in his right hand, walked toward the door of the adjoining room and pushed it boldly. A badly-oiled hinge suddenly uttered a hoarse prolonged cry in the darkness. Jean Valjean started, shuddering and dismayed. A few minutes passed; nothing had stirred. He heard from the end of the room the calm and regular breathing of the sleeping Bishop. Suddenly he stopped, for he was close to the bed. At this moment a cloud was rent asunder and a moonbeam suddenly illumined the Bishop's pale face. The sleeper seemed to be surrounded by a glory. There was almost a divinity in this unconsciously august man. Jean Valjean was standing in the shadow with the crowbar in his hand, motionless and terrified. He had never seen anything like this before, and such confidence horrified him. It seemed as though he was hesitating between two abysses--the one that saves and the one that destroys. He was ready to dash out the Bishop's brain or kiss his hand.

A moonbeam rendered dimly visible the crucifix over the mantel-piece; it seemed to open its arms for both, with a blessing for one and a pardon for the other. All at once Jean Valjean went straight to the cupboard, seized the plate basket, hurried across the room, opened the window, put the silver in his pocket, threw away the basket, leaped into the garden, bounded over the wall like a tiger, and fled.

The next morning at service Monseigneur was walking outside when Madame Magloire came running toward him in a state of great alarm.

"Monseigneur, the man is gone--the plate is stolen."

"Was that plate ours?" Madame Magloire was speechless.

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS---Page 3.

“Madame Magloire, I had wrongfully held back this silver, which belonged to the poor. Who was this person? Evidently a poor man.”

As he spoke there was a knock at the door.

“Come in” said the Bishop.

The door opened and a strange and violent group appeared on the threshold. Three men were holding a fourth by the collar--the fourth was Jean Valjean.

Monseigneur had advanced as rapidly as his great age permitted.

“Ah, there you are; I am glad to see you. Why, I gave you the candlesticks, too, which are also silver. Why did you not take them away with the rest of the plate?”

Jean Valjean looked at the Bishop with an expression no human language could describe.

“Monseigneur, then what this man told us was true. We met him and, as he looked as if he were running away, we arrested him. He had this plate.”

“And he told you that it was given to him by an old priest at whose home he had passed the night? I see it all. And you brought him back here; that was a mistake.”

The gendarmes loosed their hold of Jean Valjean, who tottered back.

“My friend, before you go, take your candlesticks.”

Jean Valjean was trembling in all his limbs; he took the candlesticks mechanically and with wondering looks.

“Now, go in peace. By-the-by, when you return, my friend, it is unnecessary to pass through the garden for you can always enter, day and night, by the front door, which is only latched.”

Then, turning to the gendarmes, he said, “Gentlemen, you can retire.”

Jean Valjean looked as if he were on the point of fainting. The Bishop walked up to him:

“Never forget to employ this money in becoming an honest man. Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. I have bought your soul of you. I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and give it to God.”