

The Swan's Nest

Hans Christian Andersen

Between the Baltic and the North Sea there lies an old Swan's Nest, and it is called Denmark. In it have been born, and will be born hereafter, Swans whose names shall never die.

In the olden days, a flock of Swans from that nest flew over the Alps to the green plains of Milan, for it was wonderful to live there. These Swans were called Lombards.

Another flock, with brilliant shining plumage and clear, truthful eyes, alighted at Byzantium, nestled around the throne of the Emperor, and spread out their broad white wings like shields to protect him. Then Swans were known as Varangians.

From the coasts of France arose a cry of terror-terror at the bloody Swans who, with fire in their wings, flew down from the North! And the people prayed, "God save us from the wild Northmen!"

On the fresh turf of an English meadow, near the open shore, with the triple crown on his kingly head, his golden scepter stretching out over the land, stood another royal Swan.

And on the far shores of Pomerania the heathens bent the knee, for thither too, with drawn swords and under the standard of the cross, had flown the Danish Swans.

"But all that was in the ancient days!" you say.

But in times nearer our own have mighty Swans also been seen flying from the Nest. A flash of lightning cleft the air-lightning that blazed over every country in the world-for a Swan had flapped his great wings and scattered the twilight mist. Then the starry heavens became more visible and seemed nearer to the earth. That Swan's name was Tycho Brahe.

"Yes, that was years ago," you may say. "But what about now, in our own generation?"

Well, in our own generation we have seen Swans soaring together in glorious flight.

We saw one gently sweep his wings over the golden chords of the harp, and sweet music thrilled through the lands of the North. Then the wild mountains of Norway lifted their crests higher in the blazing sunlight of ancient times; the pine and the birch rustled their leaves; the Gods of the North, the heroic men and noble women of Scandinavian history, came to life again against the background of deep dark forests.

We saw a Swan strike his wing against the hard marble mountain till it broke in pieces, and new shapes of beauty which had been shut up in the stone stepped forward in the bright sunny day. Then the nations of the world raised their heads in wonder to gaze at the glorious statuary.

A third Swan we have seen spinning threads of thoughts that spread from land to land around the earth, so that words fly with lightning speed throughout the world.

Yes, our Lord protects the old Swan's Nest between the Baltic and the North Sea. Let mighty birds speed through the air to tear it to pieces. It shall never be! We have seen even the unplumed young ones circle the edge of the Nest to fight with their beaks and their claws, their young breasts bleeding.

Centuries will pass, and the Swans will still fly forth from the Nest, and they shall be seen and heard in every part of the world. Long will it be before the time comes when in spirit and truth men say, "That was the last Swan! The last song from the Swan's Nest!"