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CONSIDER THE SWAN

By Cornelius Weygandt

Fifty years and more ago a boy used to ride in from ten miles out in the country to Ithaca to take books out of the library here. It was on Saturday afternoons he made that journey, on the back of an old Dobbin tired out most week-ends by the heavy work of the farm. It was historical novels and books of old legends the boy took out, for he heard the horns of Elfland calling, and echoes of old romance dinned in his ears as he read of "tourneys and great challenges of knights." His home was a highland farm nearly two thousand feet above tidewater, and bobolink-haunted in May, but rare air and bird music were not half so enchanting to him as the stories of G. P. R. James and the legend of Lohengrin, knight of the swan.

His precious book of wonders spread open on the broad back of the farm-horse rapt the boy out of the workaday world. He could give himself up wholly to the ecstacies the book enkindled in him. The old horse was headed homeward, and knew, of course, the way home. The boy never urged the loved beast out of a walk. The slower Dobbin's pace, the longer the enchantment of reading lasted. That boy found his way out from the farm through Cornell, that boy, grown man, I was proud to have as my colleague at Pennsylvania for half my lifetime. I hope that he and other men whose lifework is shared by both universities will be passports to your toleration of what I have to say to you now.

I was asked to speak on some phase of the American scene, so dear to all of us, the ground out of which we are digged, the ground that will hold all of us in the end. One part of that American scene, one that has concerned me since boyhood, and one so far as I know that has not been exploited, is the swan, the swan as we see the bird on the water and in the sky, the swan as we see it as a motive in interior decoration on a score of articles, the swan as our poets and essayists have presented it.

I asked my colleague, the boy of those expeditions into Ithaca of a half century ago, had he ever seen whistling swans on Cayuga's waters? He said:

of this talk is due to the swan's habit of hissing, almost the only sound the bird is capable of making. There is ground, though, for this general belief in its unamiable temperament, if not for such stories as have been told of its seizing a child offering it tidbits and holding that child under water until the unfortunate was drowned.

When, after years of watching, I did see a bunch of swans on a mudflat above Fairmount Dam on the Schuylkill, they turned out to be those from our Philadelphia Zoological Garden on the loose, mute swans, not whistling swans. So, too, was the one I saw, another year, with the mallard ducks at Peter's Island in the Schuylkill, a mute swan, a stray I was told from a swannery on some Main Line estate. Mute swans though scarce today, were not rare about Philadelphia sixty years ago, and I know of one estate whose mistress at seventy is proud to have the same strain of birds that she knew as a child. All along the Old York Road, originally the stage coach route from Philadelphia to New York, there were in my youth ponds with swans, though today I know of no single bird on any of the few estates that retain any pretense of being manorial.

There are no rhymes about swans in Mother Goose, no parallels to "goosie gander," or the like, and the Bible mentions the swan only to declare it one "ye shall have in abomination among the fowls." That adjuration, in "Leviticus," may have had its influence on restricting the rearing of mute swans in America, the semi-domesticated swans of Europe. It may also have hindered attempts to domesticate whistling swans. Nuttall does speak of seeing two tame swans near St. Louis, but whether they were whistling swans is not clear from the context. He tells us categorically that "it is to the Trumpeter that the bulk of the Swan-skins imported by the Hudson Bay Company belong."

Babies of my generation of Americans were tucked away in cradles and cribs under coverlets of swansdown. If they were not, their parents were recreant to the code under which babies of prosperous folks kicked and waxed fat. There was swansdown facing, too, on the caps of such youngsters and for the jackets they donned in winter for out-of-doors. That vogue of swansdown had much to do with the thinning down almost to extinction the great hosts of both our American swans. There is still doubt whether the Trumpeter can be saved, but the passing of the law in 1913 forbidding all shooting of swans has brought back the whistling swans. The flock that frequents in winter the head of Chesapeake Bay is alone estimated at three thousand, and it is believed there are ten times as many more wintering along the coast on down to Currituck.

There is now enough interest in swans for their flight northward in spring to be chronicled as news. Correspondents in Harrisburg send in reports of their passage up the Susquehanna to the metropolitan newspapers, and their further progress north is noted from Williamsport and Niagara Falls. There are few days in late winter but automobile loads of people come to the grounds

of the Veterans' Hospital at Perryville to see this great flock at the Head of Chesapeake. Those lucky enough to see migrating swans in the air over sections of the country they traverse daily never fail to expatiate upon their seeing of the birds. They become a first topic of conversation.

These newspaper accounts of the migration northward of our whistling swan are more often interesting than accurate. Take, for instance, this item under date of March 22, 1938, in the *Philadelphia Evening Ledger:*

"Springtime was in the blood of nearly 1500 whistling swans which alighted on the Susquehanna River today near Washington Borough.

"Ornithologists at Franklin and Marshall College described the flock as the largest to be seen in the vicinity since 1922.

"The swans—all white except for an occasional coal black bird—the ornithologists said, have halted on their springtime journey to the North to mate. The birds will pair up in the next few days and seek a nest for two for the Summer."

Though a black swan is found in Australia, one doubts such instances of melanism as are here recorded. Perhaps stray geese or cormorants joined the swans in their northern flight and were mistaken for black swans.

In the *New York Herald Tribune* of March 14, 1942, I find an account of swans partially wrecking an airplane at a height of eight thousand feet. The account appears in a paper read by Allen L. Morse, chief of the aircraft development section of the Civil Aeronautic Administration of Washington, at a meeting of the Society of Automotive Engineers held in the Hotel New Yorker on March 13th. In the words of the reporter:

"Mr. Morse quoted a pilot's report of an encounter with five swans. It read:

"'Climbing at 8,000 feet. Air speed 150 m.p.h. Hit flock of swans. One swan penetrated leading edge, left wing. Second swan almost tore off left vertical stabilizer. Rudders jammed. Third swan struck and dented engine cowl. Later two swans went through propeller. Portion of swan taken from wing after landing, weighed eleven and a half pounds.'"

I have never seen swans in migration. One day, as our train slid into Queen Lane Station, Amos Peaselee Brown caught sight of me at a car window and made gesticulations indicating that I should raise the window and look up. By the time I could comply the swans that he later told me had been circling about overhead, seemingly confused, had picked up their course again, and had disappeared. Another morning Clarence Child said to me, on his arrival at college: "You should have been with me this morning at Merion Station. Seven big white swans went over in a line. They looked just like those I have seen on Currituck."

Even today, when the whistling swan is plentier than it has been at any time in my lifetime, there are more people, I take it, who know the semi-domesticated mute swan than our own species. Until comparatively recently, until heavy taxes and the great increase of the cost of living broke up most

of our large country estates, mute swans were kept at enough places for you to see one bunch, at least, of them, in any round by automobile of a hundred miles of suburbia. Two generations earlier, in days just after the Civil War, these mute swans were still plentier.

I cannot but deplore the passing of such estates. Many were near enough to the cities to be places for all sorts and conditions of people to go sightseeing. The farm is much more to me personally than the great country estate, but the great country estate had, too, a place in American life. The farm is in my blood. My mother was born on a hill farm thirty-five miles out from Philadelphia, a Chester County farm. All my infancy was nourished by stories of Milford Mills, its Sheldon pears, its dominiques, its merino sheep, its yield of hay and oats and corn. So strong is my feeling for the farm that I am in half revolt against the suburban life I have lived for most of my days. However, in my young days, I had neighbors who maintained large estates, in which I could not but be deeply interested. On such places there were great stables, extended outbuildings, henneries and aviaries, generous planting of exotic as well as of native trees, box gardens, orangeries, cool greenhouses for camellias and daphnes, belvideres and summer houses, fountains and ponds. It was on such places the European mute swan was kept in a state as near domestication as this essentially wild bird could attain to. The swan was never so widely kept as was the peacock, which had its place on the farms of a hundred years ago as well as on the manors of that time.

It was on such old estates, where monied merchants and traders and manufacturers liked to live in a state not far removed from that of landed gentry abroad that you would come on swans sailing stately over walled waters lined round with weeping willows. At times the birds would break bounds and wander about the countryside. The last such bird I have met I came upon, militantly aggressive, in the middle of the Bethlehem Pike above Ambler. It was holding up all traffic. I had to get out of the car and hoosh it out of the way before we could proceed on our journey.

I have never met swan on the table, but the one man I know who has so met it, in a cygnet of our whistling swan, not in the cygnet of the European mute swan, fairly snorted with contempt when I asked him if it was as good as canvasback duck. That swan was, however, considered a great dainty, is told us by Thomas Nuttall in his *Ornithology of the United States* (1840), who, although he "confounded the American bird with the Hooper of Europe," has told us most, of all the old ornithologists, of what the swan meant to America of yesterday: "The aborigines of the interior make much use of the down of the Swan as a matter of decoration, in which taste they have also been very successfully followed by civilized nations." He waxes lyric, in the early Victorian fashion, over the bird: "Its pure, spotless, and splendid attire; its stately attitude; the ease and elegance with which, like a bark, it sits and moves majestically on the water, as if proud and conscious of its beauty; aiding its pompous progress by gently raising its snow-white wings to catch the sportive

breeze, wherein it wantons with luxurious ease, queen of its native element,—in short, all conspires to shroud the Swan, however mute, with its long acknowledged and classic perfection. And as if aware of its high and ancient pretensions, it still, as in former ages, frequents the now neglected streams of the Menander and the Strymon; with an air of affected languor it is yet seen silently sailing by the groves of Paphos, though no longer cherished by its beauteous queen."

Though not a household book like Audubon, Nuttall was well known in hundreds of American homes. It is hardly too much to say that, supplementing the picture of Audubon and the preachment of the fable of the ugly duckling, Nuttall's description gave to America its notion of the swan. In the day in which it was published Americans, according to John Krider's *Sporting Anecdotes* (1853), might have seen "acres of swans," American whistling swans, on the Chesapeake, but folks then, like all too many of us today, preferred to take a written record as the source of their information rather than take the trouble to learn of things with their own eyes.

Joel Barber tells us in *Wild Fowl Decoys* (1934) that "Swan decoys are among the rarest on the coast, found only along the shores of the Chesapeake; Back Bay, Virginia; and Currituck Sound. When Swan shooting was prohibited in 1913, many of these men [professional hunters] knocked off the long heads and converted their swans into geese." He pictures but two swan decoys in his book, one by Samuel T. Barnes of Havre de Grace, Maryland, carved out about 1890; and the other from the Eastern Shore below Kent Island, of an unknown carver but apparently of about the same period, circa 1890.

As we drove up to the house of Mr. Joseph Coudon, Ellerslie, at the head of Chesapeake Bay, a swan decoy, life-size, greeted us at the side of the steps to the porch. It was from such swan decoys that Mr. Coudon developed his carving of swans in the round, life size and mounted on great panels, eight feet long and three feet high. One such was in the White Horse Tavern, nearby his home, but the prize one was over the mantelpiece of his home, Ellerslie. This is of the swan in flight and against such background painted in as you see it against in the neighborhood, a background of sky above bay water. This carving gives you a sense of the bird's power of flight, hardiness, warm well-being such as only one with the heart and hand of an artist could convey. The coloring of bird and background, like the carving of the bird, is masterwork.

A toy swan of the decoy sort was given me by Mr. Coudon, whose first toy, given him when he was but a small tot by his father, was a miniature of the familiar blue-bill duck. This toy duck he showed us when we called, sharply pitted by toothmarks, proving that it had been as often a plaything for puppies as for small boys. This toy swan is seven inches long of body and three inches broad. Its head rises three inches above its two-inch high body, to a total height of five inches. Its head is three inches long. Like the typical

decoy, it has no feet. The toy has verisimilitude in shape, its head is turned at a characteristic angle, and there is something at once clean cut and graceful about it.

Dr. Herbert H. Beck has invited me more than once to go on his swan trip down Chesapeake Bay on the steamer he charters every February, but that trip always occurs in the period of mid-year examinations, and, as I give few examinations save orals, I am busy all day long all the two weeks of mid-years. I can never get off for the swan trip, on which the party has never failed, in twenty years, I think it is, to see swans. That trip, with students at Franklin and Marshall of Professor Beck, and with bird-loving friends of his, is the most picturesque feature of American college life known to me.

You find swans figured on much English china made for the American market from 1790 to 1860. Three pieces of soft paste I have, a teapot, a bowl and a cup plate, bear effigies of swans, the first in the round, the second and third in the flat. Did the potters who modelled a swan on the lid of the teapot feel that its presence there would make that teapot irresistible to the American buyer? One certainly finds few such birds surviving. The long neck of the swan, though, may have made such contraptions as this lid fragile and caused the discarding of many utensils because of breakage. That neck extends up in a round above the back of the swan and is attached to its bosom just at the chin. Nor have I seen swans used as handles to teapots, as well they might, or as handles to sugar bowls, as one, in instances, sees used the heads of birds and beasts, eagles or lions. The teapot is brown line china with conventionalized tulip-pomegranates in yellow and orange on its sides and chains whose links are leaves, leaves in green and blue and yellow. The swan on the lid, all white save for its black bill, is about an inch long, a half inch broad and an inch and a half high.

The bowl, come on in Chambersburg in Pennsylvania, and unbought on discovery because of the high price put on it, was bought later, by long distance dickering in letters, at a reasonable price. All the way home from Chambersburg by car, I was regretting I had not bought it, despite its exorbitant figure, for it was the first time I had seen a swan in brown line china, whether Wedgwood, or Mayer, or Herculaneum, or by another of the several Staffordshire potters who vied with each in the making of this ware so dear to America. It was a wild day I ran on the bowl, with a storm driving the rain in torrential dashes against the windshield, a cold northeaster, but the colors of the bowl, white and yellow and green and brown, and the swan, outlined in brown between orange-plumed rushes in green, at the bowl's bottom, clearly imprinted on my mind's eye, warmed me all the way home.

But though I regretted not buying the bowl, I allowed two weeks to elapse before I wrote the antique dealer about it, naming my price. He allowed another two weeks to pass, to make me fear I should lose a find and raise my bid. Then he wrote, capitulating, and sent it to me at my price. I had never been enamored of the bowl for its beauty. It was desirable to me because I

was a collector of brown line china, and a lover of birds in design as well as in feathers and flesh. I had regretted its purchase in after years had I paid too much for it. All that I lost in not buying it at sight was the joy of carrying it home, not the least of the joys of collecting. I do not minimize that joy, but it is not so lasting an emotion as is the satisfaction that remains with one at having made a good trade. The bloods that mingle in me, Pennsylvania Dutch, Scotch-Irish, Welsh Quaker and New England Yankee, will not be denied their characteristics.

I cannot recall where I procured the cup plate in soft paste, with a swan with raised wings transfer-printed on it in grey. Its waved and scored edge is daubed with a narrow and irregular border in blue. The bird is thin-necked and snake-headed, of less heavy proportions but of attitude identical with salt cellars in clouded glass gotten out by the Gillinders in Philadelphia in the eighteen-seventies, about the close of our ultra-appreciation in America of Victorian English things. There are the usual rushes and sward along the water on which the swan swims. Though the print reveals it as unequivocally a swan, it is labelled "Swan" in upper left centre. The cup plate is admirably moulded and glazed and transfer-printed. There is nothing more than artisanry about it, but it served, we may be sure, to delight a nursery. It has certainly been patted and treasured, and who shall say it has not helped to salve the sore heart of some unhappy child.

They must have been happy children, indeed, who lived with the two Woods plates in a blue identical with that known as "historical blue" when it carries scenes of a church in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, or of the landing of Lafayette, or of a steamboat above Fairmount Dam, or of Gilpin's Mills on the Brandywine. These plates came, too, from the Cumberland Valley in Pennsylvania. Two generations of children in a Scotch-Irish family had seen them brought out at Christmas and for very special company. They show two young ladies and a youth and two children in a boat on an estuary opening on wide waters, all five humans deeply centered on five swans, two old birds and three cygnets, which they are feeding.

The white swan sitting on its nest on the top of the inkwell for quill pens, raises wings, pink-banded, as if to ward off foes. A gold band encircles, low down, its oval base two inches wide and two inches and a half long. The edge of the nest is green, of some sort of clay rubble, separating the china receptacle that holds the ink from the brave bird above it. The swan's head reaches to the height of three inches above the base of the inkwell. The material of the inkwell is a hard paste or porcelain.

The two tin trays, Chippendale-shaped, bear each two swans and a peacock. They are very decorative, their dominant colors black and dark green and gold with daubs of bronze at top and bottom that cast a kind of glow over all. The background is black. Around the edges runs a yellow line. The two swans in gold among green rushes at upper left have their backs to the bronzed peacock with light blue head that struts away from them. Two

golden eggs in a nest of green and yellow show that the swan has just begun to lay her complement of seven to nine. The peacock is symbolic of many things, things seemingly contradictory. The peacock is the symbol of pride, but it is the symbol, too, of "The Resurrection." The swan is a symbol of love, and, at the same time, a symbol of all that is lordly and majestical in life. The humblest man has moments lordly and majestical, if only at great crises in life. He would rejoice when his heart was low, in two such trays as these on the upper shelf of the corner cabinet in his dining room, to bring back moments of pride. These trays are late tollware, outlined by a stencil, and touched up by hand. They represent their sort of tollware at its very best. You can call them, without apology, beautiful.

It is difficult to find any particular significance in the swans decorating a pair of brass candle-snuffers. A cock on such a device would not be inappropriate, for the cock is a symbol of fire and potent to ward off the fire of lightning when swung aloft as the crowning glory of a weathervane. One fancifully inclined might say, I suppose, that the swan is a symbol of water, which quenches fire as do the candle-snuffers. I suspect, however, that these two swans are just decorative, without any direct association with the device they adorn.

These two swans are etched in on either arm of the snuffer, the one resting on its thumb piece and the other on its finger piece. They are European swans with curved necks and full bosoms. They give individuality and life and the appeal of curiosity to what would be without them just a pair of brass snuffers. Whatever one conjectures as to the reason of their presence, one is driven to wonder, in the end, if they are not scribed here because of some tradition no longer understood. Had he who made the snuffers, handwork every bit of them, a book of designs like that I have for the decoration of patch box lids on Kentucky rifles and for the insets in brass and German silver on their stocks?

I have two swans in green glass, mantelpiece ornaments or paper weights, I am not sure which. They are, I think, of English origin. I have swans, roughly done, on what seems like child's fracturwork, from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. I have four buttermoulds, with swans cut *intaglio* upon them, to leave raised images of swans on the top of the butter. I have seen swans on samplers, on the prints of papier-mâché trays, on powder horns, on the enamelled glass called Stiegel, in cut-outs, in lacy valentines, in sheets of gummed birds for decorative purposes, in tinsel work laid under glass, and in needlepoint.

It was the mute swan, familiar from the ponds of public gardens or great estates, or from pictures in children's books, or from objects of household art brought from Europe, that was taken as the model of representations of swans in American decoration. Even if our whistling swan was known in "The States," it was not known close at hand, but floating off shore on wintry waters or in the air. Its more angular shape, its head, neck and body ap-

proaching Z shape rather than the S of the mute swan, could not appeal as did the rounded curves of the Old World bird. These rounded curves, too, had become familiar through their absorption by folk art, and nothing is harder to change than what has become established in folk art.

So it is that when a swan is used as the decoration on a button made in America it is a mute swan. As it is with the button, so it is with the swan used as a decoration on the patch-box of a Kentucky rifle or as an inset on stock or barrel. In Edward Ricksecker's book of designs for the decoration of such rifles there is only one swan depicted, as there is only one goose, among the many doves and quail, but that one swan is unmistakably the Old World swan. The bird rests amid heavy leafage, presumably aquatic, with raised wings, as if it were a mother swan repelling an approach to her nest.

Two little items of Swanana, if so I may call them, came my way the day before St. Patrick's Day of 1942. Both were fashioned of glass, not moulded, but pulled into rough shape at the end of a blowpipe perhaps. The larger one, its two inches of height mostly long-extended neck, has its wings raised threateningly, as we so often see tame swans raising them. This fellow is of clear glass, with black bill, and froglike black eyes set in relief against little rounds of white far back on its head. The other, of about two-thirds the size of the swan of clear glass, is of green glass. It is wingless and eyeless, with a red bill. Its base shows that it has been broken off the end of a blowpipe. Neither is of any importance save to show how universal is the appeal of the swan. The dewdabs are intended as favors, at this function or for that game. That they should be priced at fifty cents and thirty-five cents is hard to account for.

After the salt cellar the ship's barometer is the most familiar contraption made in the form of a swan. The common form of this barometer has a curved tube that suggests at a far distance, but still suggests, the neck of the swan. And though the water-chamber of the barometer is upright and parallel to the curved tube, that water-chamber suggests, in shape, the body of the swan. Some ingenious glass blower back along must have seen the resemblance of the traditional shape of the ship's barometer to the swan and developed a more exact swan's shape for a glass on which he was working. Such a glass forewarns us of storm on bitter days of January.

They are making a flower holder in the shape of a swan nowadays in a glass factory at Bridgeton in New Jersey. Ten years ago they were making a similar holder in concrete in Reading in Pennsylvania. I still have one, painted white, I bought from a peddler in the main street of Ephrata.

Though the Japanese make little use of any swan in their decoration, *Cygnus musicus*, the swan whose canorous cries are fabled into a death song, is a visitor to Japan. The Japanese, however, made toy swans yesterday for export to America. One rests before me on my table as I write. A cylindrical glass case, rounded at the top, is fitted into a wooden base. The glass is two inches and a half high and two inches in diameter. The base is half an inch

high and two inches and a half in diameter. Two birds in white, one a little more than a half inch in height and length, the other a little less, navigate about a white-sanded round that presumably represents water. A tuft of greenery with flowering and fruiting bushes in white and yellow and red makes an island in the pond. The birds seem to be celluloid and the floral material paper. The whole little set-up suggests a miniature of the trifles in blown glass one used to pick up at country fairs in the days of my youth.

That "swan" is still a name to conjure with, that the swan is still a symbol of whiteness and purity, is proven by its use in advertizing, advertizing which, curiously, still preserves in its counters an appeal to what of folkways survives in us as we are today in America. It may be, of course, that the general approval of Pavlowa's swan dance, reawakened latent popular interest in swans. Certain it is that using "swan" in the name of a new soap put upon the market, and in placing a representation of a swan at the head of a page announcing a "white sale" shows that advertizers who know their business believe that the public will respond to talk about swans and to pictures of swans.

Out in Indiana they make a cake flour, very white and very light, that they call swansdown cake flour. A swan in white, with black bill and beautifully curved neck, ornaments the front of the package, and on the back is a little fellow of even more conventional curves against a background of blue. Three recipes for cake bearing the "swansdown" name find place among nine offered, one for "swansdown white cake," another for "swansdown sponge cake," and the third for "swansdown angel food." And a great New York store, wishing to attract attention to its sale of white goods, can think of no better device to bring in buyers than a great swan at the top of a full page advertizement.

The swan was so much on the mind of folks in the mid-nineteenth century that its swelling curves of white feathers and its lordly bearing were imitated in boats and sleighs. They made pleasure boats in the shape of swans with paddle wheels driven by manpower, and boats for the shooting of wild fowl in the same form. Joel Barber in *Wild Fowl Decoys* (1934) reproduces a boat of the latter sort represented in *American Game Bird Shooting* (1882). In these same eighties you found swans to ride in in merry-go-rounds and roller coasters.

It was in sleighs, though, the effigies of swans were most general. The swelling front of the sleigh fashioned to turn aside the clouts of snow and ice thrown up by the feet of the horses suggested swan curves, so it was almost inevitable that the runners following those curves should be swan-headed as they were extended beyond the dashboard. Finials these runners needed and no finials could be more aristocratic to the mid-Victorian mind than those that assumed the contours of the swan's neck and head.

At first sight of it, Leroy Smith pounced upon swans' heads on four of the six sleighs pictured on a reprint of "New York Flyers On The Snow" by

Currier and Ives. I had been sent this very reprint of sleigh racing in 1867 by T. Worth, but my casual scrutiny of it had not revealed the swans to me, though swans had been a matter of deep concern to me all this winter of 1941–1942. It is a gay lithograph, with reds and greens and bays of sleighs and beasts standing out boldly against the whites of snow and houses and the greys of trees and indeterminant distance. I should have noticed the swans, for I was now and then carried to school by neighbors in a sleigh with swan heads bent down before the dashboard.

Two of the six birds of "The Seven Rules of Wisdom" have necks so long and curved they may well be swans. This is a piece of Pennsylvania Dutch fractur in red and yellow with touches of black and green. It numbers thirty square blocks of designs and wording in its thirteen inches by eight. The swan-like birds are found on the lowest tier of blocks. The birds, occupying a little more than an inch square, are of red heads, yellow necks and bodies, with red wing coverts centered with black. They are situated in blocks two and four of the five blocks of the seventh tier of blocks. It is an incredibly brilliant piece of fractur. That two of its six birds should be swanlike when most birds in Pennsylvania Dutch decoration are peacocks and pelicans, doves and distelfinks, parrots and owls, but adds testimony that swans so appeal to the imagination of men that they force themselves in where conditions would seem to preclude their presence.

It would be tedious, as the old travellers say, to describe in detail all items of such sort, but I cannot forbear from writing of a scene in petitpoint that hangs in our hallway. It is a big piece of work, twenty-five inches tall by twenty-one inches wide, red and faded goldish in color, of a lady and gentleman by a pond side, presumably feeding two swans afloat upon the waters. Though it is labelled at the bottom "Elizabeth Dean's work Reading 1846" there is an almost Gallic air about it. Shall we write down that accent of French romance to Huguenot blood in this countryside of Levans, Pardees and Bertolettes, or to a French influence in some young ladies seminary attended by Elizabeth? Above the birds and their feeders is this legend from Psalm 44: 11:

> By this I know that thou favourest me
> Because mine enemy doth not triumph over me.

That is a heartening combination to find together, the King James Bible and courtliness, a combination more often found in America before the Civil War than the America of today has the gumption to realize.

There is no more forthright example of the consideration in which the swan is held in America than its wholesale dominance in all the decoration of Swannanoa in "The Blue Mountains" of Virginia. This great estate was built after 1900 by Major James H. Dooley, of Richmond, at a height of two thousand feet, at Rockfish Gap, twenty-eight miles west of Charlottesville. The white marble of the house was selected because it was of the color of the

swan. The swan on a great shield over the front door and the swans worked in on the columns of the house testify to the concern with the swan that led to the creation of the estate.

The name of the estate, Swannanoa, derives not from the bird, but from an Indian word that means a "wonderful view," which the ridge on which the house is situated affords on both sides. Skyline Drive comes close to the estate, and were that estate kept up to the condition of its heyday it would have become a veritable Mecca for motorists. The furniture that was once in the house was much of it either made in the shape of a swan, or swan-decorated. Most famous of it all were the great bed in the likeness of a swan and the bathing pool with swan motives about it.

Such a conception for a great estate, that all about it should be swan-dominated, swan-celebrant, swan-lordly, is more native to Victorian times than to the early nineteenth century in which it was laid out. Its creation reveals how deep-seated has been the belief in America, even in comparatively recent years, that the swan is the symbol of high and lovely things, of proud purity, of magnalities and splendours. The swan has fallen heir to the place the peacock held earlier as the kingliest of American birds. That is as it should be, for the swan afloat on a pond is of a beauty more potent than that of the peacock parading on the lawn. There is dignity in the swan, and grace; there is serenity, and repose; there is power and lordliness.

The swan has been much besung by poets America has honored, as so much in English literature has been honored in America before it was honored in Great Britain. There is now in America Dr. Oliver St. John Gogarty, who has taken out his first papers in the process of becoming an American citizen, and who has sought a place as a medical officer in the service of the United States. His volume, *An Offering of Swans*, was published in London in 1923. The poem that gives title to the slim volume came about in as odd a way as ever came title to any volume. Dr. Gogarty, throat, nose and ear man, and member of the Irish Senate, was in his physician's office in Dublin. It was late for office hours, between seven and eight o'clock in the evening. Said one of two men remaining in the office: "We're sorry, doctor, but you will have to come with us. We're members of the Irish Republican Army and we have orders to take you off."

They took him by car to an abandoned factory on the Liffey, the river that flows through Dublin. There one of the two made references too ominous not to be understood as intimations that the prisoner was to be shot. The other guard, as he walked past the doctor, said: "Doctor, I'll help you if I can." As he marched past the doctor again, he said: "I'm an old patient of yours." So, a sentence at a time as he marched to and fro, he told the doctor to jump through the window of the room they were in, not to stop to open it, but to carry out the sash before him. The guard's last words to the doctor were: "I might miss you if you jumped when it was me and not the other guard was in a position to fire."

Dr. Gogarty jumped out as directed, came down into the water, and thought for a moment he would drown, his feet held fast in the mud in the shallows. He struggled loose, however, swam the river, swearing as he swam that if he escaped he would make payment to the river in an offering of swans. He escaped. After it was safe for him to return from London to Dublin, after a couple of years, he brought with him a pair of swans, and, with William Butler Yeats presiding over the ceremonies, deposited them on the river. Says Dr. Gogarty in *An Offering of Swans*, in the verses called "To The Liffey With The Swans":

> Keep you these calm and lovely things,
> And float them on your clearest water;
> For one would not disgrace a King's
> Transformed beloved and buoyant daughter.
> And with her goes this sprightly swan,
> A bird of more than royal feather.

The poem of poems written by an Irish poet about swans is "The Wild Swans at Coole" that gives title to a volume of poems of Yeats published in 1918. I have a particular interest in that poem for in the summer of 1902, forty years ago nearly, I walked with Yeats in the woods of Coole, by Coole lake, and saw the "nine and fifty swans" of his count. It was an eerie place, grey water under grey skies, broken in the west by a wintry yellow that brought out startlingly the white of the great birds. The thought underlying the poem is of man's ageing and the seemingly perennial youth of the swans.

Part of our inheritance in America, down into that yesterday in which Greek was an integral part of our education, is the legend of the song of the swan just before he dies. Tennyson's "Dying Swan" is the most familiar form of that legend. It is the swan's stateliness that Keats stresses in his "Epistle to Charles Cowden Clarke." To James Thomson, of *The Seasons*, too, the swan is "the stately sailing swan." Spenser lauds the swan's whiteness in his "Prothalamion":

> So purely white they were,
> That even the gentle stream, the which them bare,
> Seemed foul to them.

Chaucer refers to the fabled jealousy of the bird and to his singing at death, in a famous line in "The Parlement of Foules":

> The jalous swan, ayens his death that singeth.

Irish folksong, that did so much to bring the verse of Yeats to the colors of Irish landscape, is full of references to the swan. It is most often to emphasize the whiteness of his beloved's breast that the poet refers to the bird, but there is an instancy in certain of the reference, say, in Dr. Hyde's *The Love Songs of Connacht*, that proves the swan was known to the old poets, known on water and in the sky.

So intimately are swans associated with Yeats that Masefield in *Some Memories* writes of the Irish poet's world:

> It is a twilit world of ancient forests,
> Dark under crescent moon and evening star,
> With waters, as of lake or a still sea,
> Where swans, who are bewitched princesses, glide.
> Where the white unicorn prints dainty hoof,
> And the white swans fly, crying mystery.

Irish literature is full of swans. The children of Lir are turned into swans in that old saga, one of "The Three Sorrows Of Storytelling," and a "silver swan" is apostrophized in "The Boreens of Kerry." Page after page in my copies of Lady Gregory's translations in *Gods and Fighting Men* and in *Cuchulain Of Muirthemne* is listed in the blank pages at the end of both volumes for its reference to "swans."

One of the earliest poems about the swan in English is that found in the *Exeter Book*, and, in the condition of Anglo-Saxon studies in my youth, attributed to Cynewulf. As Stopford Brooke pointed out long ago in *The History of Early English Literature* (1892) the riddle "The Swan," is very modern in feeling. His insistence on preserving the alliteration of the original straightjackets the poem, but none of the recent translators I know has preserved more of the spirit of the Old English. The poet of the riddle gives the swan a song, as the classical writers did, but he attributes the song to the bird's feathers rustled by the wind. It is in a saga of the English hero, Weland the Smith, that we meet the swan maidens, in the *Volundarkortha*, but the scene of their tragedy has been transferred to Scandinavia.

From Shakespeare to Sturge Moore the swan singing as he dies has inspired poets in Old World England. The bird itself in its proud beauty has appealed to Wordsworth, and to James Elroy Flecker, who admirably catches its slow progress in lines about Tyre. He dreams of ships that

> "sail like swans asleep
> Beyond the village that men still call Tyre."

An unexpected author in whom to find a reference to a swan is Walt Whitman. It is obviously the mute swan of the Old World he refers to in the "Song of Myself" in "the neck of the long-lived swan is curving and winding." There are such swans established today as breeding birds close by his native Huntingdon on Long Island. Perhaps they were already established there in the days of his youth a hundred years ago. Edna St. Vincent Millay, too, celebrates the swan as it flies over the deep canyons of a great city.

Though, no doubt, many of our American poets in infancy were tucked away in swansdown quilts and wore swansdown edging to their caps when taken out of doors, they seem to have written very little about swans. The earliest reference, just about 100 years ago, is that by James Gates Percival I have referred to. Percival was a good deal of a naturalist and I think there

is no chance that he took a snow-goose for our whistling swan. Of course, he might have chanced upon a tame swan.

Dr. William Carlos Williams, a graduate of our Medical School at Pennsylvania, has sung the swan in verses called "Peace On Earth." There is wild spring-like quality about these verses. Against their background, "The Swan is flying" excites you and prints itself on your memory. It may be that he is referring to the constellation called "The Swan," as well as to the bird with which we are so particularly concerned.

There is no doubt, however, that Robinson Jeffers is referring to our bird in flesh and feathers when he writes, "Love the Wild Swan":

> "Love your eyes that can see, your mind that can
> Hear the music, the thunder of the wings. Love the wild swan."

Which swan she is writing of is not made clear by Louise Bogan in her "Winter Swan," but it is a set of verses written with her eye on the object.

That a novelist of such popular appeal as Temple Bailey should call a novel of hers *The Trumpeter Swan* (1920) shows that she expects people to be taken with that title. I am told that they were taken with that title and that the book sold widely. That there are not more such titles is to be accounted for, of course, by the fact that for fifty years, say from 1870 to 1920, both our American swans, the trumpeter and the whistler, had been so greatly reduced in number by shooting that very few people knew either one of the birds. There is a reference to the swan "gliding" in "Home On The Range." Our American western ballads are full of references to birds, but it is the goose that hangs high in them, not the swan.

In a singing game current in New England, and parallel to one widespread in Old England, "The Twelve Days of Christmas," swans are the gift of the seventh day. The reference is to seven swans, that lucky number so treasured in folklore. "The seventh day of Christmas," the rhyme runs, "my true love sent to me Seven swans a-swimming." The whole twelve verses build up after the fashion of "The house that Jack built."

Robert Gibbings in *Sweet Thames Run Softly* (1941), a volume of out-of-door essays, takes away the character of swans, as, indeed, do most of those who write or talk about them. Day by day gossip about them, hearsay of swans, develops, as you question everybody you meet about them. I broached the subject to an Italian bootblack on the morning of January 28, 1942, at Thirtieth Street Station in Philadelphia. He had never seen swans in his native Calabria, or in the cranberry country of middle Jersey in which he had lived before coming to Philadelphia. The patron two seats away from me on the shoe-shine stand overheard our conversation and broke in: "If you want to see wild swans go down to Chestertown in the Eastern Shore of Maryland. They tell me they have them there all winter. I can't tell you, though, anything about their morals."

There are not so many places named after swans as you would expect.

The first so named that I have come across is Swannandael, on the west bank of Delaware Bay, a Swedish settlement of the seventeenth century that did not last long. There is Swan Bay on the estuary into which Wading River falls on its way southeast through the Jersey Pines, and Swan Point at the head of Barnegat Bay. There is Swan Island off the coast of Maine. The reason there are so few places along the Atlantic coast named for their association with swans is that few of our whistling swans migrate along the ocean front north of Delaware Bay. The Susquehanna Valley is their chosen highway to the arctic tundras.

There are more places named after swans in Minnesota and Wisconsin and Iowa than elsewhere in the States. These, it is likely, are named because of trumpeter swans that frequented their neighborhoods. The trumpeter was not rare in the Mississippi Valley in pioneer days. From which swan places named "swan this" and "swan that" in Ohio came is not easy to decide.

"The Swan" of Saint-Saens is still a familiar concert piece, and "The Swan of Tuonela" of Sibelius carries us far from the cities in which we hear it played by this or that great symphony orchestra. It is not to the shadow land of the programme notes that this tone poem of Sibelius takes me, but to far northern places, of bleak light and wind through browned rushes, and waters lapping with low sounds on the shore. The swan is, indeed, of all birds most closely associated with cold, and with arctic reaches where hard freezing comes early and lasts late. It is in March the swans leave the Chesapeake and are reported on their way north by Susquehanna and Niagara. It is in the dead of winter we see them by Perryville and Chestertown and Secretary.

My colleague, Dr. Frank G. Speck, tells me that the swan was not held in any particular regard by our Eastern Indians. They used white feathers in decoration, but it was a matter of indifference to them whether those feathers were of swan, snow-goose or heron. The swan had no place, either, on the totem poles of the Alaskan Indian. To the Easterners the great bird was known as "the white flyer." Always and everywhere that is what stands out as memorable in the swan, its whiteness, and whiteness is everywhere symbolical of what is beyond the usual, the ordinary, the prosaic. So it was, too, to the Indians, as some old traveller records, perhaps Heckewelder. He tells us that when the Indians of our eastern coast saw the white sails of the white strangers offshore, they said: "They have come, these strangers, on great white swans."

It was on a wintry day of early April a friend of mine saw a pair of swans, dropped down from a flock beating north, to a thoroughfare behind the sea islands off Jersey, battle a duck hawk to a standstill and then to a retreat. Who thinks there is anything weak about swans fails utterly to know the birds. Their soft buoyancy of flight, their immaculateness of white feather, their gentle progress over the water does not deny to them stout hearts, a stern will to live, warm and wild vitality, savage joy in combat and strength unrivalled in any creature of their size and weight. If their white hosts are associated

in any way with the angelic hosts so long a dream of men, let all remember there were angels held strong of arm to defeat the enemies of God. Nor did Zeus lose any of his power and majesty when in the guise of a swan he wooed Leda. In many religions swans have been powerful allies of the children of light.

The place of my first impressive seeing of whistling swans was Perry Point, Maryland. The time was February 27, 1938. Earlier in the month I had set out to see them, but I was turned back by a blizzard at Kennett Square. That was, indeed, one of the memorable days of my life, that February 27th on which I first saw the hosts of swans. As the Roman poet has it, that was a white day, *Alba dies.* There was, of course, a large element of dream-come-true in my joy at seeing them. When one has hungered, from youth up, for the sight of the great birds, in their white, buoyant in high air, and has missed seeing them again and again, the final seeing is all the more precious. All my friends had seen swans, some, and not those particularly bird-wise, over and over again. One friend saw a trio on a pond in Chester County, and still another quite a bunch on the lake at Ontelaunee Park near Reading. A former student took me south from York to see a group that were keeping a space in a pond free of ice, but the swans were gone by the fall of night when we arrived there. Another friend exults in reporting the bickering and preening of swans he saw on the Delaware through a telescope from a riverside house in Andalusia. Still another rouses my envy by describing a long line of the great birds he saw winging their way north through the Delaware Water Gap.

Friends of mine at Marietta saw swans by the hundred on the Susquehanna on March 22, 1938. They were driving their car by the river when they noticed what they thought were cakes on cakes of white ice floating on the water. As they neared the cakes of "white ice" they saw the "cakes" were swans. "The river was fairly alive with them," my informant said. "I had never before believed there were so many swans in the world. They were noisy and restless, constantly swimming about and now and then taking wing. I shall go out to look for them every spring now for so long as I shall live. I can't tell you how the seeing of those thousands of swans stirred me. It makes me kind of choke trying to tell you about them. They were so white. They were so wonderful in their whiteness. I just can't describe it. They took my breath away."

It was just before this I had seen the whole flock of Head of Chesapeake at Perry Point. There were no intimations of an occasion as we drove into the grounds of the Veterans Hospital and on to the walled parapet which is a vantage point from which to view the birds on their sand bars a third of a mile offshore. The thousands of them broke in on our vision all at once, crowded close together on the bars above the water line and gathering in about those bars, on which there were no more resting places available.

It was good to see them when a shaft of sunlight broke through the grey clouds spread over the dull waters, a great white drift of wild life kindled to an

intensity of candor inconceivable and unbelievable. It was good to see them leaving, the half of them, the sand bars, and floating off all headed toward where the Susquehanna pours into Chesapeake Bay. It was good to see them rise, in hundred after hundred, when a boat approached their resting places, and hover in their white loveliness against the dim blue of the Eastern Shore. It was good to hear, as we stood close down to the very edge of the waters, the clangor and clamor of their crying of those still about the sand bars, as they lifted up their long necks and flapped their wings and voiced their excess of well-being no grey day of intermittent snow flurries could cabin or confine.

It was our moment of closest sight of the swans when eight of them, flying in line, beat out from some inland slough where they had been feeding to join their dispersing comrades. Deliberately, slowly, undeviatingly, the eight winged bayward, great fluffs of white feathers, downy, soft-looking, yet sturdiness incarnate, a compound of power and outward gentleness, of wild strength and purity of color that made them the greatest wonder of out-of-doors that had ever come my way. The great number of swans offshore on bar and water and awing thrilled you through and through. The eight in air so close you could have tossed a pebble over their line smote you to the heart with their bridled force and utter beauty.

This sight of the swans in their thousands brought the north to me with an instance I had never known before, its tundras with water holes and stunted willows, its brief summer, its loneliness, its exhilarating air. Their whiteness lifted my heart. I travelled in vision to the far and silent places that are their journey's end, to white nights hard with cold moonlight. About them was a suggestion of peace at the world's end.

The whiteness of snow is now receding from all our northland, the whiteness of bloom is following in in the snow's wake. Everywhere the blossoms of plum and pear and cherry are like the breaking front of a great wave of warmth flowing in from the south. Whiteness has been from of old close to the business and bosoms of men. Generations of men have visualized as white the star that led the magi and the shepherds to the manger at Bethlehem. Edelweiss from the Alps would not be its noble self were it not for its whiteness. Children would not fall asleep so quickly were there not magic in the whiteness mothers stress as they recount how "the white, woolly sheep jump over the fence, the white woolly sheep jump over the fence."

White has fascinated the poets from Archilochus down. Burns saw the moon setting beyond "the white wave," and saw in it a menace that Time was setting for him. Hardy saw the sun go "white as though chidden of God." Whiteness is much with us, now as a portent and now as a wonder. Again it reveals itself as heartsease, or as wings to the weary spirit in a field of buckwheat in full sunlight between grey walls, or in drifts of dogwood bloom along a hemlocked hill.

There is, though, no white through all the scores of whites, so uplifting as the white of thousands of swans rising from grey waters, beating their way

past you against the dim blue of far hills, swans buoyant, strong beyond dream of strength, silent, irresistible in beauty, a visitation of wonder and delight that comes too seldom to us busy on the treadmill of the daily task. Who can grow old in spirit if he subjects himself at intervals to such a vision of the exuberance and majesty of nature? Who can be unhappy in a world that can give us such a pageant of loveliness? Who can lose faith in life when it can give us such a moment of exultation as is ours in the spectacle of the hosts of swans awing? Here is a symbol, surely, of our emergence from the insistent blackness of today into the promised whiteness of tomorrow.

Cornell University, April 19, 1942.