



Feats on the Fiord (Arthur Rackham Collection) With Illustrations Large Print: Masterpiece Collection Children's Classics

Harriet Martineau

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Every one who has looked at the map of Norway must have been struck with the singular character of its coast. On the map it looks so jagged; a strange mixture of land and sea. On the spot, however, this coast is very sublime. The long straggling promontories are mountainous, towering ridges of rock, springing up in precipices from the water; while the bays between them, instead of being rounded with shelving sandy shores, on which the sea tumbles its waves, as in bays of our coast, are, in fact, long narrow valleys, filled with sea, instead of being laid out in fields and meadows. The high rocky banks shelter these deep bays (called fiords) from almost every wind; so that their waters are usually as still as those of a lake. For days and weeks together, they reflect each separate tree-top of the pine-forests which clothe the mountain sides, the mirror being broken only by the leap of some sportive fish, or the oars of the boatman as he goes to inspect the sea-fowl from islet to islet of the fiord, or carries out his nets or his rod to catch the sea-trout, or char, or cod, or herrings, which abound, in their seasons, on the coast of Norway. It is difficult to say whether these fiords are the most beautiful in summer or in winter. In summer, they glitter with golden sunshine; and purple and green shadows from the mountain and forest lie on them; and these may be more lovely than the faint light of the winter noons of those latitudes, and the snowy pictures of frozen peaks which then show themselves on the surface: but before the day is half over, out come the stars—the glorious stars, which shine like nothing that we have ever seen. There the planets cast a faint shadow, as the young moon does with us; and these planets and the constellations of the sky, as they silently glide over from peak to peak of these rocky passes, are imaged on the waters so clearly that the fisherman, as he unmoors his boat for his evening task, feels as if he were about to shoot forth his vessel into another heaven, and to cleave his way among the stars. Still as everything is to the eye, sometimes for a hundred miles together along these deep sea-valleys, there is rarely silence. The ear is kept awake by a thousand voices. In the summer, there are cataracts leaping from ledge to ledge of the rocks; and there is the bleating of the kids that browse there, and the flap of the great eagle's wings, as it dashes abroad from its eyrie, and the cries of whole clouds of sea-birds which inhabit the islets; and all these sounds are mingled and multiplied by the strong echoes, till they become a din as loud as that of a city. Even at night, when the flocks are in the fold, and the birds at roost, and the echoes themselves seem to be asleep, there is occasionally a sweet music heard, too soft for even the listening ear to catch by day.

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