

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Tale of the Land of Cockaigne**



Now listen, and I'll tell you about a good country, which many a man would emigrate to if he knew where it lay and an opportune passage.

But the way there is far for the young and for the old, and they will find it too hot in winter and too cold in summer. This beautiful region is called Cockaigne, Cuccagna in Italian, and the houses there are roofed with pancakes, the doors and walls are of gingerbread, and the beams are of roast pork. What we buy for a ducat here costs only a penny there. Around every house is a fence which is woven of bratwursts and Bavarian sausages, some of them grilled in charcoal, some of them freshly boiled, according as each person likes to eat them. All the wells are full of malmsey and other sweet wines, Champagne as well, and they simply run into your mouth if you put it to the spouts. So whoever likes to drink such wines, let him make haste to enter Cockaigne. On the birches and willows there, breadrolls grow freshly baked, and under the trees flow streams of milk; the breadrolls fall into these and soak themselves for those who like to crumble them; women and children, serving-lads and maids, will really like that! Hey Maggie, Hey Steve! Don't you want to emigrate? Make your way to Breadroll-Stream, and mind you don't forget to take a big milk-spoon with you.



The fish in Cockaigne swim on top of the water, are ready fried or boiled as well, and swim very close to the strand; but if you're really too lazy and a real Cockaigner, you have only to call pst! pst! – and the fish come walking out onto the land and hop up into the hand of the good Cockaigner, saving him the need to stoop down.

You may well believe that the birds there fly around in the air ready roasted, geese and turkeys, pigeons and capons, larks and fieldfares, and if it's too much of an effort to stretch your hand out for them, they fly straight into your mouth. The suckling pigs are surpassingly good there every year; they run around ready roasted and every one of them carries a carving-knife in its back, so that anyone who likes may cut himself a fresh, juicy slice.



Cheeses grow in Cockaigne like stones, both large and small;¹ the stones themselves are all dove's crops with stuffing, or sometimes little meat vol-au-vents. In winter, when it rains, it rains pure honey in sweet drops, which you can lick and lap up to your heart's content; and when it snows, it snows icing sugar, and when it hails, it hails sugarcubes mixed with figs, raisins, and almonds.

In Cockaigne the horses lay no droppings but rather eggs, large, whole basketfuls of them, and in such heaps that a thousand can be bought for a penny. And money can be shaken from the trees like chestnuts. Everyone may shake the best coins down for himself and leave the ones of lesser value lying.

In this land there are also great forests, where the finest clothes grow in the bushes and on the trees: jackets, coats, tabards, trousers, and jerkins, of all colours, black, green, yellow (for the postilions), blue or red, and anyone who needs a new garment goes into the forest and knocks it down by throwing a stone or fires a bolt up at it. On the heaths grow beautiful dresses for ladies, of velvet, satin, gros de Naples, barège, madras, taffeta, nankeen and so on. The grass consists of ribbons of all colours, ombré as well. The juniper trees bear brooches and golden pins for chemisettes and mantelets, and their berries are not black but are real pearls. On the fir-trees, ladies' watches and chatelaines hang very artfully. On the shrubs, boots and shoes grow, also hats for ladies and gentlemen, rice-straw hats and marabouts and every kind of headdress decorated with birds of paradise, hummingbirds, diamond beetles, pearls, enamel, and gold-braid.

¹ There is an ancient folk belief that stones grow.

This noble land also has two large fairs and markets with handsome privileges. Anyone who has an old wife and does not like her any more, because she is no longer young enough for him nor pretty, can exchange her there for a young and beautiful one and receive earnest money into the bargain. The old and ugly (for a proverb says: when one grows old, one becomes ugly) enter a Bath of Youth, with which the land is blessed. It is extremely potent; the old women bathe in it for some three days, or four at the most, and they become pretty lasses of seventeen or eighteen years of age.

There is also much entertainment, and many kinds of it, in Cockaigne. Whoever has no luck at all in this country has it there in gambling and shooting for sport, as in patrician tournaments. Many a man in our land will shoot to the side and far from the mark all his born days, but there he hits the target, and even if he were by far the furthest away, he would still be the best. That land is also splendid for the sleepyheads and lie-a-beds whose laziness here brings them into poverty and then into bankruptcy so they have to go begging. Every hour of sleep there brings in a florin, and every yawn a double-thaler. If you lose at the gambling-table, your money will fall back into your pocket. The drinkers have the best wine for free, and there is a reward of three batz² for every swig and swill, for women as well as men. Whoever teases and lampoons people the best receives a florin each time. No one is allowed to do anything for free, and he who tells the biggest lie is always given a crown for it.



² One florin was often equivalent to 15 batz; one batz was 4 kreuzer; one kreuzer was 4 pfennig.

In our country, many a man lies nineteen to the dozen and has nothing to show for his efforts; there, however, lying is held to be the finest art, hence all kinds of procurators and medicasters, horse-traders, and the tradesmen of ***, who always entice their customers but never keep their word, lie their way into the land.

Whoever wants to be a scholar there must have studied his Grobian. There are also such students in our land, but they have little thanks and no honour from it. He must also be lazy and gluttonous as well as clownish, those are the three fine arts. I know someone who could become a professor any day.

If you like to work, do good and shun evil, everyone there will be ill-disposed towards you, and you will be banished from Cockaigne. But if you are doltish, utterly incapable, and yet are filled with foolish vanity, you will be looked upon there as a nobleman. If you can do nothing but sleep, eat, drink, dance and gamble, you will be made a Count. But the one whom the general electorate recognise as the laziest and least suited to do any good will become King over the entire land and have a large income.

Now you know the nature and character of Cockaigne. Whoever wants to stir his stumps and make a journey thither but does not know the way, let him ask a blind man; but a dumb one will serve just as well, for he is sure not to tell the wrong way.

But there is a mountain-high wall of creamed rice surrounding the country. Whoever wishes to get in or out must first eat his way through it athwart.

