

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Two Ball-Shaped Millers**



Once upon a time there was a miller who was naturally very strong and fat, but because he wished to be secure against cut and stab, against bolt and arrow, he put himself into an extraordinary outfit. In the first place, he had a doublet made for himself, which he lined with chalk and sand; and to bind it together, he had molten pitch poured in. On the back he made a lining of several baskets, and the front he plated with old rasps and iron potlids; and the doublet became heavier than the heaviest cuirass breastplate and backplate ever worn by a warlike knight.

Over this the miller pulled on three shirts, and under the doublet he donned a real suit of armour, then another suit of armour over the shirts, and over that he pulled on nine loden jackets, like the ones wool-weavers in Swabia manufacture to this day. Now when the miller had put on this monumental bulwark of clothes, keeping his legs safe with more than four pairs of old lederhosen, one of top of the other, he was such an imposing, ball-shaped fellow, that he was just as wide as he was high, as a real ball must be; and he could not go out or in a city gate without being squeezed through, and could barely shift or stir, so his friends had to walk with him, lead him, and escort him. Now as he went to St. Oswald's Fair every year, wishing to show himself to the people, so he drove up and down on a cart in his armour and with such a panoply of weapons as no one had ever seen. The cart was drawn by four strong oxen, and it was followed by all the peasants of his village with their wives and children, and they hid behind the miller's cart when an enemy appeared as behind a fortress or a screen.

He was armed with two spears and a crossbow, at his side hung a sword the length of a man, a two-handed one; and beside him lay a bow, along with a quiver.

Now when the ball-shaped miller came with his cart and his four oxen to a certain mountain, over which the road led, he waited for a few nephews with their wives and children, who helped to push the cart up the height, while six oxen pulled at the front as an extra team, and in this way they finally brought him to the top with moil and toil and the shedding of many drops of sweat. When going down again on the other side of the mountain, the wheels of the cart had to be trigged as much as possible so the ball-shaped miller would not roll down head over heels. Now when his kin had finally brought him to his destination, he was let down from the cart with ladders and levers, like a large, full barrel of wine; and then they gathered around him, but mostly behind him, like the Philistines behind their Goliath.

In addition to this, the round meal-sack was of great strength and fearlessness, and it was rumoured of him that he once, in a mock tournament, where one warrior carried an apple on the point of his sword, and another carried a pear, and a great commotion arose – he entered the middle of the press, striking out with the force of a hailstorm in the cereal crops, which brings great suffering to many a peasant. But then he encountered an enemy, a strong and powerful one, who struck such a blow to the miller's head that his metal helmet fell straight down to the ground, and everyone who saw this thought that the head had flown off the miller's trunk with it; however, the ball-shaped warrior, when his opponent was

raising his arm, had quickly drawn his head down out of the helmet and under his high hauberk, and now he gave his opponent a stroke that cut as deeply into his neck as the mower's scythe into grass. So all were afraid of this mighty man, to whom the heroic feats of warriors in tales seemed nothing more than jests.

Now there was another miller in the neighbourhood, who was just as big and strong, just as ball-shaped, and wore just such a well-lined and metal-plated doublet, and neither of them could stand the other, for neither of them would accept second place. And they had hated and warred against one another for ten years. At every parish fair they attended, they went to loggerheads, fighting with words and weapons; but neither of them could do any harm to the other, and they were two greatly feared champions. One of the millers had a son, the other a daughter, who loved one another as ardently as their fathers hated each other, and this made the conflict even more intense; until, in the end, good and judicious friends interposed and advised both millers to become good friends and let their children marry.

When the rumour of the alliance of the two millers rang out through the land, and of their even intending to bind their children in marriage, there arose great unrest and apprehension, for it was plain for everyone to see that the two ball-shaped millers would be like two millstones between which anyone who came too close would be rubbed out. And now whoever came too close to the one miller would find himself having to deal with both of them, and no Prince could overcome both doublets, for the millers resembled round castles and they could not be starved out by a siege,

having as they did many a peck of corn in their doublets on which they could subsist for a long time. Now, as the two invincible heroes were so manly that the Emperor himself would have had a great deal of trouble overcoming them, so it could not but delight one and all that they turned their great might against the enemies of the realm, craving no pay or reward at all, save only the honour of being able to fight and do battle. And their only complaint was this, that so many days passed on which they could not catch sight of an opponent, because their reputation had spread so far and wide that everyone was afraid of them.

Many valiant feats were accomplished by the two ball-shaped millers after they were united, and if these deeds and the adventures they underwent had been written down, a book would have been made twice as big as the Bible and the Chronicles of the World. They also performed more miraculous deeds than all the heroes whose tales are told in the ancient legends and lays. In the end, they took up residence far away at the world's end, and if they have not died, they will still be alive today.