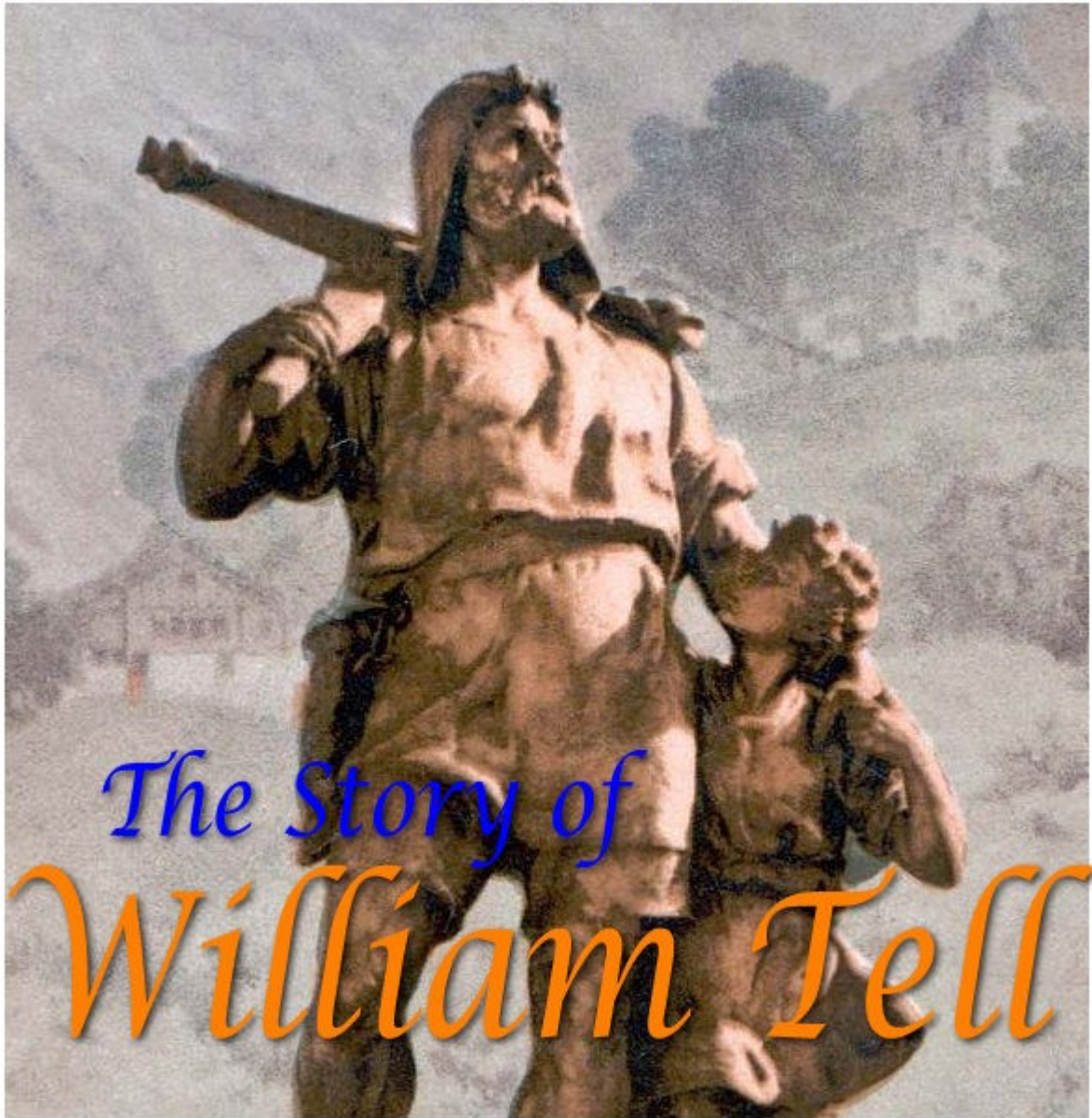


HomeschoolFreebieOfTheDay.com presents



The Story of
William Tell

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The Story of William Tell

The Country and People

Although it is one of the smallest European nations, Switzerland is one of the most remarkable. There are high mountain ranges, extensive lakes, valleys shut in by the mountains, and passes that can be defended by a few men from any invader. Born and reared among these wild surroundings, the Swiss have ever driven back powerful armies that came to capture or subdue their country.

At one time a large portion of Switzerland belonged to the Germans, although it is said by the historian that the Germans had only nominal authority over them. Switzerland then consisted of districts or cantons, which largely belonged to the dukes, counts and nobles. These possessions were inherited by the owners, and the people who lived upon them were regarded as little better than serfs, and the owners of these districts made free with the lives, the industry and goods of these people. In some cases cities had united for mutual protection against the oppression of the land-owners, and those who were thus united destroyed many castles from whence their owners were in the habit of oppressing the peaceful peasants and merchants.

Albert and Gessler

Thus it was in 1273 when Rodolphe of Hapsburg, one of the most powerful of the land-owners, was chosen for the Emperor of Germany. This gave him the means of still more oppressing the Swiss tenants. Rodolphe was, however, a humane master, and in no wise abused his power, but Albert, his son, succeeded him as Emperor in 1298, and was a man of very different character. He was a man of very different character. He was anxious to extend his own possessions, and undertook it in a most despotic way. He wished to unite certain free Swiss towns with their surrounding districts, called the Waldstätt or Forest-towns, with his inherited estates. He proposed at the same time that they renounce their connection with the German empire, and submit themselves to him as Duke of Austria. The people did not accept his proposals, and this began the first of the struggles for civil liberty in Switzerland.

Albert was very proud of his high rank, and when he learned of the refusal of the people to comply with his wishes, he was angry, and determined to subdue those whom he called only rude peasants. His first thought was to use the sword, but on second thought he determined to act more cautiously. He then sent a man named Gessler with small parties of Austrian soldiers. This act showed the poor peasants and their friends that Albert was determined to suppress them.

The Birth of William Tell

No sooner was Gessler firmly established than he became very disagreeable to the people, and in various ways began to oppress them. Altorf is a small town near the head of the lake of Lucerne, which is one of the most beautiful lakes in all Switzerland. Then it was there came to the protection of the oppressed people, just the same as it has often happened in other countries, a patriot and hero. This man was William Tell, about whom very little is definitely known, but history and tradition give his life the charm of poetry and romance.

The best accounts say William Tell was born in a secluded hamlet in the Canton of Uri, near the lake of Lucerne, about the year 1275, and, like his forefathers, was the proprietor of a cottage, a few small fields, a vineyard, and an orchard. When William was twenty years of age, his father is said to have died, leaving to him these possessions, and earnestly requesting him with his latest breath to work diligently and to die, should it be necessary, in his country's service. His father's dying request made a deep impression upon the young man, and after the burial of his father gave himself up to the labors of the field, and by his industry he is said to have been rewarded with bountiful harvests.

Beloved by the People

He rose at dawn of day, and left his work only when the darkness of night made it impossible for him to work longer. Nature had given him great powers of mind as well as beauty. He was a head taller than most of his companions, and loved to climb over the rugged rocks of his native mountains in pursuit of the chamois, and to steer his small boat across the lake in time of storm and danger. He could bear a very heavy load of wood upon his shoulders,—double, it is said, that of any ordinary man.

In the outdoor sports of the time in which he lived, he excelled all others. During the holidays, when the young archers were trying their skill according to the custom of the Swiss, Tell was obliged to be a looker-on so as to give the others a chance to win the prize. He was a great favorite with the people all around, and a most acceptable guest at every fireside. When he wished a wife to share his humble cottage, he won the heart and hand of Emma Furst, the fairest maiden in the whole district. He was happily married, and the couple lived together with much happiness. When a son was born they named him Walter, in honor of his grandfather, and they were all very happy together. Until the age of six, Walter was left to the care of the mother. Then the father began to take part in the education of his son. He carried him to the fields and pastures to instruct him in the work of nature, and spared no pains at home to teach him. There were other children, and each and all seemed to contribute some share to the happiness of the family.

Dwelling amid the rocky heights, not very far away, there lived another man, Arnold Anderhalden by name. They became warm friends, and so did their families. Arnold had a daughter, Claire by name, and Walter, the son of Tell, as he grew up learned to love her. Thus the two families had many ties in common to bind them together, while they lived in peace and happiness.

Gessler's Rule

No sooner had Gessler become settled than a cloud appeared over these and other peaceful homes. The soldiers were allowed many disagreeable liberties among the people. The tolls were raised, and for any trifling offense a peasant was punished by imprisonment and heavy fines, while the people were treated with insolence and contempt. One day Gessler was riding by a house built by Stauffacher in the village of Steinen, and he cried out, "What! Shall it be borne that these contemptible peasants should build such an edifice as this? If *they* are to be thus lodged, what are we to do?"

The wife of Stauffacher heard the insolent remarks of Gessler was upon this occasion and exclaimed, "How long shall we behold the oppressor triumphant, and the oppressed weep? How long shall the insolent stranger possess our lands, and bestow that our inheritance upon their heirs? What avails it that our mountains and valleys are inherited by men, if we, the mother of Helvetia, are to suckle the children of slavery, and see our daughters swelling the train of our oppressors?"



Gessler.



Tell.

There followed many indignities that were inflicted upon the peasants, who, as opportunity ordered, resented them in the way and manner peculiar to that age. In many cases the oppressors were punished when they little expected anything but submission to the rule of tyrants.

Tell viewed the unfortunate condition of affairs under the rule of Gessler, and he knew also that his iron rule would not long be endured by the peasants. He had his own ideas of the situation, and, without telling others what he was about, he kept thinking and planning some way in which to rid the country of the oppressive rule which Albert had forced upon them. He felt sure there would be some relief. Tell's friend, Arnold of Melchthal, too, was aroused and poured out his furious wrath, but Tell was silent.

Gessler's Cruelty

One evening William Tell and his wife sat in the front of their cottage, watching their son amusing himself amid the flocks, when the former grew more thoughtful and sad than usual. Presently Tell spoke and for the first time imparted to his wife some of his most secret designs. While the conversation was still proceeding, the parents saw their son rush towards them crying for help, and shouting the name of of old Melchthal. As he spoke Arnold's father appeared in view, led by Claire, and feeling his way along with a stick. Tell and his wife hastened forward, and discovered to their horror, that their friend was blind, his eyes having been put out with hot irons. Tell, burning with just indignation, called on the old man to explain midst of his friends and told the story of the cruel deed by which he had lost his eyes.

That very morning the father, son and granddaughter were in the field loading a couple of oxen with the produce for the market-town, when an Austrian soldier presented himself and ordered their owner to unyoke the oxen so he could drive them off. To this act of tyranny he told them insolently that such clodpoles might very well draw their own plows and carts. Arnold was furious at the soldier's insolent demands and language, and was only restrained by his father's earnest entreaties from sacrificing the robber on the spot. He did, however, aim a blow at him which broke two of his fingers. The enraged soldier retreated, and old Melchthal, who knew well the character of Gessler, immediately forced Arnold, much against his wishes, to go and conceal himself for some days in Mt. Rhigi. This mountain rises in a somewhat isolated position and is one of the most conspicuous hills of Switzerland. Scarcely had Arnold departed in this direction, when a detachment of guards from Altorf surrounded their humble home, and dragging old Melchthal before Gessler, he ordered him to give up his son. Furious at the refusal to do so, the tyrant commanded to have the old man's eyes put out, and this was done at once and in a most cruel manner. He then sent the object of his hatred forth blind to deplore his misfortune.

Walter Bore a Message to Arnold

Tell heard the story in silence and then inquired for Arnold's place of hiding. The father replied that it was a particular cavern of Mt. Rhigi, where the desert rocks were unknown to Gessler and his troops. He had promised to remain there until his father sent him permission to leave. Tell asked the oldman to grant this permission immediately; then, turning to his son, ordered him to go at once to Rhigi with a message for Arnold. Walter gladly obeyed, and providing himself with food, and receiving private instructions from his father, went on his journey as soon as the darkness would conceal his movements from the enemy.

Tell wrapped a wolf-skin coat about himself, seized his quiver full of sharp arrows, and taking his terrible bow, which few could bend, bade adieu to his wife for a few days, and left in an opposite direction from his son. It was quite dawn when Walter reached Mt. Rhigi, and a slight column of blue smoke directed him to the spot where Arnold was concealed. Arnold was startled at first, but when he saw that it was Walter, he listened eagerly to his dismal story, the conclusion of which made him so furious that he would gladly have rushed forth at once and attempted to kill Gessler, but Walter held him back. Instructed by his father, Walter informed him that Tell was preparing vengeance for the tyrant's crime, being at that moment with Werner Stauffacher, considering the best course to pursue. "Go," said my father, "and tell Arnold of this new villainy of the governor, and say that it is not rage which can give us just prudence. I leave for Schwytz to bid Werner arm his canton; let Melchthal go to Stantz, and prepare the young men of Underwold for the outbreak; having done this, let him meet me, with Furst and Werner in the field of Grutli."

Walter Captured

Arnold, only waiting long enough for a hasty lunch, sent Walter on his homeward journey, while he turned his footsteps toward Stantz, Walter started as soon as alone for Altorf, where unfortunately and unknown to himself he came into the presence of Gessler, to whom he said some hard things about the state of the country, being led to commit himself by the artful questions of the tyrant, who immediately ordered the lad confined with strict injunctions to his guards to seize whomsoever might claim him.



The Ducal Cap of Austria

Meanwhile there arose in the mind of Gessler doubts and fears, from what cause he knew not, that all was not right. He imagined that the people showed in their looks less submission to his authority, and the better to satisfy himself of what the real situation was, he ordered Berenger to erect at dawn of day in the market-place of Altorf, a pole on the point of which he was to place the ducal cap of Austria. He also gave orders that every one passing near or within sight of it should make obeisance, in proof of his homage and respect to the duke.

Soldiers under arms were directed to surround the place and compel the passers-by to bow with proper respect to the emblem of the governor of the three cantons. Gessler also determined that anyone who should disobey the order to pay the proper respect the emblem, or should by his bearing show a feeling of independence, should be accused of disaffection and be treated accordingly. This plan he thought would discover the people who were discontented, and at the same time furnish sufficient cause for their punishment should any be found. After paying his soldiers a considerable sum of money, they were placed around to see that his orders were obeyed. No one but a tyrant would ever attempt such an insolent humiliation of his subjects as this, and very few tyrants have ever gone thus far.

Tell's Plan Explained

During this time, Tell was carrying out his plan for the redemption of his country from Gessler's rule. When he reached the village of Steinen, he called a the house of Werner Stauffacher and when he was admitted, threw at his feet a heavy bundle of lances, arrows, cross-bows, and swords. "Werner Stauffacher," cried Tell, "the time is come for action;" and without a moment's delay, he informed his friend of all that had happened, dwelling minutely on every detail; and when he had at length finished, the cautious Werner could restrain his wrath no longer, but exclaimed, clasping the hero's hand. "Friend, let us begin; I am ready." After this interview, going in different directions, they carried around arms to their friends in the town and the neighboring villages. Many hours thus were passed, and when the whole were at last distributed, they both returned to Stauffacher's house, snatched some light refreshment, and then sped on their way to Grutli, with ten of their most tried friends.

Lake Lucerne was soon reached, and a boat was procured. Werner noticed that the water was agitated by a furious tempest, and he asked Tell if his skill would enable him to struggle against the storm. "Arnold awaits us," cried William, "and the fate of our country depends on this interview." With these words he leaped into the boat, Werner jumped in after him, and the rest followed. Tell cast loose the restless vessel, seized the tiller, and, hoisting sail, the little craft flew along the waves.

Presently, so it is said, the wind calmed down, and ere they reached the opposite side, had ceased altogether—a very singular thing in these mountain lakes. The boat was made fast, and the party hastened to the field Grutli, where at the mouth of the cavern of the same name, Arnold and Walter Furst awaited them, each with ten companions. Tell at once informed them of the situation, and gave a brief sketch of the state of the country under the Austrian rulers, and having satisfied his companions of the necessity for immediate and united action, it is said he then added: "We may have our plans frustrated by delay, but the time has come for action. I ask only a few days for preparation. Unterwalden and Schwytz are armed. Three hundred and fifty warriors are, I am assured, ready. I leave you to assign them a secluded valley as a place of rendezvous, which they may gain in small parties by different paths. I will return to Uri, and collect my contingent of a hundred men; Furst will aid me, and seek them in the Moderan and Urseren, even in the high hills whence flow the Aar, the Tessin, the Rhine, and the Rhone. I will remain in Altorf, and as soon as I receive tidings from Furst, will fire a huge pile of wood near my house. At this signal let all march to the rendezvous, and, when united pour down upon Altorf, where I will then strive to arouse the people."

After much deliberation the plan was accepted and the conspirators united by solemn vows to stand together and live or die in the defense of their common cause. Then one by one they stepped forward, and, raising their hand swore that they would die in defense of their freedom.

Tell Returns to Altorf

After this solemn oath, New Year's day was chosen for the outbreak, unless, in the meantime, a signal fire should arouse the people on some sudden emergency. Then the party separated, Tell and Furst going to Altorf. When Tell entered the town, the sun already shone brightly, and when he advanced to the public place, the first object to catch his eye was a handsome cap, embroidered with gold, stuck upon the end of a long pole, Soldiers walked around it in respectful silence, and the people of Altorf, as they passed, bowed their heads profoundly to the symbol of power.

Not a little surprised at what he saw and could not understand, Tell stood leaning on his cross-bow,

gazing with contempt on both the people and the soldiers. Berenger, captain of the guard, at length observed this man, who alone, amid the cringing people, carried his head erect. He went to him, and fiercely asked why he neglected to pay obedience to the orders of Gessler. Tell mildly replied that he was not aware of them, neither could he have thought that the possession of power could carry a man so far; though the cowardice of the people almost justified his conduct. This bold language somewhat surprised Berenger, who ordered Tell to be disarmed, and then, surrounded by guards, he was carried before the governor.

“Wherefore,” demanded the angry governor, “has thou disobeyed my orders, and failed in they respect to the Emperor? Why hast thou dared to pass before the sacred badge of they sovereign without the evidence of homage required of thee?”

“Verily,” answered Tell with mock humility, “how this happened I know not; it is an accident, and no mark of contempt' suffer me, therefore, in they clemency, to depart.”

Tell Shoots the Apple

Gessler was both surprised and irritated at this reply. He was assured there was something beneath the tranquil and bitter smile of the prisoner he could not understand. Suddenly he observed the resemblance between him and the boy Walter, whom he had met the day before, and immediately brought him forward. Gessler now asked the prisoner's name, which he no sooner heard than he knew him to be the archer so much respected throughout the whole canton; and he at once determined what punishment he would inflict upon him, and it was the most refined torture a tyrant's brain could imagine. As soon as Walter arrived, Gessler turned to Tell, and told him that he had heard of his extraordinary dexterity, and was accordingly determined to put it to the proof. “While beholding justice is done, the people of Altorf shall also admire thy skill. Thy son shall be placed a hundred yards distant, with an apple on his head. If thou hast the good fortune to bear away the apple in triumph with one of thy arrows, I pardon both, and restore thy liberty. If thou refuseth this trial, thy son shall die before thine eyes.”

Tell was horror-stricken and implored Gessler to spare him so cruel an experiment, though his son Walter encouraged his father to trust to his usual good fortune; and, finding him determined, our hero accepted the trial. He was immediately conducted into the public place, where the required distance was measured by Berenger, a double row of soldier shutting up three sides of the square. The people, awestricken and trembling, pressed behind Walter stood with his back to a linden tree, patiently awaiting the exciting moment. Gessler, some distance behind, watched every motion. His cross-bow and one bolt were handed to Tell; he tried the point, broke the weapon, and demanded his quiver. It was brought to him, and emptied at his feet. Tell stooped down, and taking a long time to choose one, managed to hide a second one in his girdle; the other he held in his hand, and proceeded to string his bow, while Berenger cleared away the remaining arrows.

After hesitating a long time, his whole soul was beaming in his face, his love for the boy rendered him almost powerless—he at length roused himself, deliberately drew the bow—aimed—shot—and the apple, struck to the core, was carried away by the arrow!

The market-place of Altorf was filled by loud cries of admiration. Walter flew to his father, who, overcome by the excess of his emotions, fell insensible to the ground, thus exposing the second arrow to view. Gessler stood over him, awaiting his recovery, which speedily taking place, Tell rose and turned away from the governor with horror, who, however, scarcely yet believing his senses, thus addressed him” “Incomparable archer, I will keep my promise; but,” added he, “tell me what need you

with that second arrow which you have, I see, secreted in your girdle? One was surely enough.”

Tell replied with some embarrassment, “that it was customary among the bowmen of Uri to have always one arrow in reserve.”

Gessler, Made Angry, Imprisons Tell

This explanation only made Gessler the more suspicious. “Nay, nay,” said he; “tell me thy real motive, and whatever it may have been, speak frankly and thy life is spared.”

“The second shaft,” replied Tell, “was to pierce thy heart, tyrant, if I had chanced to harm my son.”

At these words the terrified governor retired behind his guards, revoking his promise of pardon, ordering Tell further to be placed in irons, and to be reconducted to the fort. He was obeyed, and as slight murmurs arose among the people, double patrols of Austrian soldiers paraded the streets, and forced the citizens to retire to their homes. Walter, released, fled to join Arnold, according to a whispered word from his father.

Gessler could see that the people were much excited, and fearful that some plot was in progress, which his accidental shortness of provisions rendered still more unfortunate, determined to rid his citadel of the object which might induce an attack. He called Berenger and ordered him to prepare a large boat, in which thirty picked men could depart with him over the lake. He also ordered Tell placed in chains as soon as it was dark, adding, “I will myself take him where he may be punished for his offenses.”

That night Tell was placed in a bark which had been prepared, and Gessler and his soldiers entered the bark. He also had the bow and quiver carefully placed on board. He then ordered his soldiers to row as far as Brunnen, a distance of three leagues and a half, intending, it is said, to land on that point and place Tell in a dungeon not far away.

The evening was fine and the boat danced along the placid waters, and all seemed to be favorable to Gessler's plans. The first section was soon passed, while the prisoner lay chained in the boat. He gazed about wondering what his fate might be. Presently he beheld a light near his own home, which soon increased, and then a tremendous blaze arose that was visible all over Uri. Gessler also saw the flame, which was a signal to arouse the cantons, but he and the Austrians supposed it to be only the burning of some peasant's house, failing to attribute to the event the importance it deserved.

Tell Escapes

Suddenly the wind changed about and a storm began to rage; the waves dashed over the gunwale of the boat. The oarsmen worked bravely, but the pilot was unskillful, and the boat flew toward the rocky shore. The air was full of snow and clouds, and darkness spread over the water. The soldiers were horror-stricken and prayed for life, while Gessler was profuse in his offers of rewards if they would but save him.

One of the Austrians had heard that Tell was quite as good a boatman as bowman, and urged Gessler to give him the helm. He was so willing to do anything that gave promise of relief. He asked Tell if he could help them, and the shackled hero assured him that by the grace of God he could save them. He was immediately freed of his shackles and took his place at the helm. The boat, answering to his touch,

kept its course steadily through the waves. Tell pointed the boat in the direction he wanted to go, and guided by the dying light of the signal light, steered for the shore of Schwytz.

As the day broke in the eastern sky, Gessler observed the dangerous situation they were in and frowned in silence upon Tell. As the boat was driven inland Tell saw a table-rock and called upon the rowers to do their best until the precipice ahead was passed, as it was the most dangerous place in the lake. Gessler was now enraged, while Tell, regardless of his rage, turned the helm hard a-port, which brought the boat suddenly close to the rock, and seizing his faithful bow, sprang for the shore, at the same time turning the unguided craft back into the lake.

Gessler Shot

Thus having escaped from the clutches of the tyrant, he made for the heights, where he concealed himself by the way. Gessler and his soldiers barely escaped with their lives after Tell deserted the helm. At length a safe landing was effected. As soon as horses could be obtained they started out. As they moved along, Tell heard Gessler threaten death to himself and vengeance upon his family. At this point Tell emerged from his hiding, and seizing an opportune moment, sent an arrow from his bow through the heart of Gessler.

The death of Gessler brought joy to the oppressed peasants, and bound them more closely together than ever in a bond to resist the oppression of the Austrians. In 1315, Leopold, the second son of Albert, determined to punish Tell and his friends, and set out with a considerable army to do so. The Swiss posted themselves among the hills, and when the Austrian soldiers slowly ascended the hills, they were met by falling rocks and rolling stones that were let loose upon them. There was at the time a thick fog, and the advancing soldiers were thrown into confusion and completely routed with terrible slaughter.

Tradition says that in 1350 there was a terrible flood in that part of Switzerland, which destroyed the village of Burglen, the birthplace of Tell, and that our hero also lost his life. One of the Swiss chroniclers of the fourteenth century says that William Tell, the liberator of his country, died in 1354. This is all that is known of William Tell, but to him is given the credit of arousing the Swiss people to cut loose from the tyranny that had been thrust upon them, and there followed as a result a long struggle that finally united them in a free country.

Is It Only Tradition?

The story of William Tell is one of the most remarkable found either in history or fable. After reading the results of research to get at the truth, the writer is in doubt, but the story, or tradition, if you please, is so well told, and is so full of unselfish love of liberty, that we are not willing to give it up. The Tell story is first found in a ballad, the first nine stanzas of which were certainly written before 1474. Tell is called “the first Confederate,” and his feat is treated as the real and only reason why the Confederation was formed and the tyrants driven out of the land. It is probably to this ballad that Melchior Russ of Lucerne (who began his *Chronicle* in 1482) refers to when, in his account (from Justinger) of the evil deeds of the bailiffs in the Forest districts, he excuses himself from giving the story. He goes on to narrate how Tell, irritated by his treatment, stirred up his friends against the governor, who seized and bound him and was conveying him by boat to his castle on the lake of Lucerne, when a storm arose, and Tell, by reason of his great bodily strength, was, after being unbound, given the charge of the rudder on his promise to bring the boat safely to land. He steers it towards a shelf of rock, called in Russ' time Tell's Platte, springs on shore, shoots the bailiff dead with his cross-bow, and goes back to Uri, where he stirs up the great strife which ended the battle of Morgarten. In these two accounts, which form the basis of the Uri version of the origin of the Confederation, it is Tell and only Tell who is the actor and the leader. We first hear of the cruelties of Austrian bailiffs in the Forest districts in the *Bernese Chronicle* of Conrad Justinger (1420).



The Tell story and the “atrocities” story are first found combined in a MS. Known as the *White Book of Sarnen*. They are contained in a short chronicle written between 1467 and 1476, probably about 1470, and based on oral tradition. Many details are given of the oppressions of the bailiffs: We hear of Gessler, of the meeting of Stoupacher of Schwytz, Furst of Uri, and a man of Nidwalden at the Rutli,—in fact, the usual version of the legend. To give an instance of tyranny in Uri, the author tells us the story of the refusal of “der Thall” to do reverence to the hat placed on a pole, of his feat of skill, and of

his shooting of the bailiff, Gessler, from behind a bush in the “hollow way” near Kussnacht. Tell is represented as being one of those who swore at the Rutli to drive out the oppressors; but the narrative of his doings is merely one incident in the general movement which began quite independently of him. The chronology is very confused, but the events are placed after Rudolf's election to the empire in 1273. This is the only account in which Tell is called “der Thall,” which name he himself explains by saying, “If I were sharp (*witzig*) I should be called something else and not der Tall,” *i.e.* the simpleton or slow-witted man.

The only other known instances of the Uri version of the legend relating to the origin of the Confederation are the Latin hexameters of Glareanus (1515), in which Tell is compared to Brutus as “assertor patriae, vindex ultorque tyrannum,” and the *Urnerspiel* (composed in 1511-12), a play acted in Uri, in which Russ' version is followed, though the bailiff, who is unnamed, but announces that he has been sent by Albert of Austria, is slain in the “hollow way.” Tell is the chief of the Rutli leaguers, and it is his deed which is the immediate occasion of the rising against the oppressors, which is dated in 1296. Mutius (1540) is the latest writer, who, in his description, does no mention Tell and his act. The two stories are now firmly bound together; the version contained in the *White Book* is the accepted one, though small additions in names and dates are often made.

Another chronicler, Peter Etterlion, in 1507, tells in detail the story of the apple and governor's treachery. He also describes the storm upon the lake, but Tell shoots the governor in ambush as he passes to his castle. Others repeat it in various forms.

A Belgian scholar who made the research says there are four different views of the tradition. “First that which asserts the truth of the old Uri legend; the second admits the existence of Tell, the homage of the hat, the lake voyage, and the shooting of Gessler, but rejects the apple; the third admits the existence of a Swiss hero named Tell, but nothing more; and the fourth rejects the whole story.”

But even if the story is only a myth, or a tradition, it deserves a place in our literature, for there are few things written in the English language which boys and girls enjoy more than the story of William Tell.

Tell's Birthplace

Mark this holy chapel well!
The birthplace, this, of William Tell.
Here where stands God's altar dread,
Stood his parents' marriage-bed.

Here, first, an infant to her breast,
Him his loving mother prest;
And kissed the babe, and blessed the day,
And prayed as mothers use to pray:

“Vouchsafe him health, O God! And give
The child thy servant still to live!
But Go had destined to do more
Through him, than through an armed power.

God gave him reverence of laws,
Yet stirring blood in Freedom's cause—

A spirit to his rocks akin,
The eye of the hawk, and the fire therein!

To nature and to Holy Writ
Alone did God the boy commit.
Where flashed and roared the torrent aft
His sword found wings, and soared aloft!

The straining oar and chamois chase
Had formed his limbs to strength and grace!
On wave and wind the boy would toss,
Was great, nor knew how great he was!

He knew not that his chosen hand,
Made strong by God, his native land
Would rescue from the shameful yoke
Of Slavery,—the which he broke!

Coleridge

Song of the Origin of the Swiss Confederation

Somewhere about 1477 an unknown poet brought out a ballad upon the above subject. Four verses of this ballad bear upon the shooting of the apple. A translation appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* from which this is taken:

“Now listen well, dear sirs,
How the league at first arose,
Nor let yourselves be wearied;
How one from his own son
An apple from the head
Had with his hands to shoot.

“Th bailiff spake to William Tell:
'Now look thee that thy skill fail not,
And hear my speech with care;
Hit thou it not at the first shot,
Forsooth it bodes thee little good
And costeth thee thy life.'

“Then prayed he God both day and night
He might at first the apple hit;
It would provoke them much!
H had the luck by the power of God,
That he with all his art
So skillfully could shoot.

“Hardly had he done the first shot,
An arrow did he put in his quiver:
'Had I shot down my child.

I had it in my mind—
I tell thee for the honest truth—
I would have shot thee also.”

The Story of the Shot

As regards the simple story of the shot, apart altogether from its historical application, there can be no doubt now, after the investigations which have been made in all directions, that we have to do here with a wide-spread myth, belonging equally to many branches of the Germanic family, but preserved with special tenacity in the retired and conservative valley of Uri. The same legend occurs in various parts of northern and central Europe, in Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Holstein, on the Middle Rhine, and, with another motive, in the English ballad of William of Cloudesley. There is always a skillful archer who is punished by being made to shoot an object from a child's head, and who in almost every case reserves an arrow with which to slay the tyrant in case of failure. The names of the men and places and the local coloring, of course, vary in the different versions, but the structure of the story remains the same in all. The one which bears probably the greatest resemblance to that of William Tell is to be found in a Danish history, *Gesta Danorum*, written by Saxo, surnamed Grammaticus, in the twelfth century. Here the anecdote is told of one Toko, or Toki, and King Harald Bluetooth (936-986). Making due allowance for the great difference between the style of this work, which is in pompous Latin, and the rude and fresh dialect of the White Book of Sarnen, the resemblance is certainly very striking.

-The Atlantic Monthly.

After Tell's Death

After the death of Gessler, the people flew to arms. The Austrian soldiers were seized and sent out of the country, having first promised never to return. King Albert then came to the country for the purpose of subduing the rebels. On the way he was murdered by his nephew and a band of conspirators, whom he had thought his friends.

But the war went on. An invading army marched into Switzerland, and there were only 1300 Swiss to oppose them. But they were the bravest of heroes, and on a beautiful morning in 1315 they met on the invaders at Morgarten, utterly defeating them. There were many wonderful acts of bravery which only men filled with the spirit of freedom could perform. This victory gave freedom to Switzerland, the first blow for which was struck by William Tell, the hero of our story.

On the shore of Lake Lucerne, built upon the rock on which William Tell stood after springing from the boar and escaping from Gessler and his soldiers, there stands the chapel of William Tell.

This chapel, it is said, was built in 1383, thirty-one years after the hero's death, and in the presence of one hundred and fourteen persons who had known him while living. It is hard to believe that the story of Tell is all a myth, and somehow in spite of all the research, the story still lingers with us.

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