

THE STORY OF WILLIAM TELL

The people of Switzerland were not always free and happy as they are today. Many years ago a proud tyrant, whose name was Gessler, ruled over them, and made their lot a bitter one indeed.

One day a man called William Tell came riding into the village of Altdorf with his little son by his side. He came from the nearby town of Bürglen, and was reputed to be the best crossbowman and the best handler of a boat in the region.

This tyrant set up a tall pole in the public square, and put his own cap on the top of it; and then he gave orders that every man who came into the town should bow down before it. But there was one man, named William Tell, who would not do this. He stood up straight with folded arms, and laughed at the swinging cap. He would not bow down to Gessler himself.

When Gessler heard of this, he was very angry. He was afraid that other men would disobey, and that soon the whole country would rebel against him. He did not want this to happen! He wanted the townspeople to always show their respect to him! So he made up his mind to punish the bold man in front of all the townspeople to show that this disrespect would not be tolerated.

William Tell's home was among the mountains, and he was a famous hunter. No one in all the land could shoot with bow and arrow so well as he.

Gessler knew this, and so he thought of a cruel plan to make the hunter's own skill bring him to grief. If William Tell is such the great hunter in all the land, he should be able to prove his greatness under any circumstance. He ordered that William Tell's little boy should be made to stand up in the public square with an apple on his head; and then he bade Tell shoot the apple with one of his arrows.

Tell begged the tyrant not to have him make this test of his skill. What if the boy should move? What if the bowman's hand should tremble? What if the arrow should not carry true? "Will you make me kill my boy?" he said. "Say no more," said Gessler. "You must hit the apple with your one arrow. If you fail, my soldiers shall kill the boy before your eyes." Then, without another word, Tell fitted the arrow to his bow. He took aim, and let it fly. The boy stood firm and still. He was not afraid, for he had all faith in his father's skill. The arrow whistled through the air. It struck the apple fairly in the center, and carried it away.

As Tell was turning away from the place, an arrow which he had hidden under his coat dropped to the ground. "Fellow!" cried Gessler, "what mean you with this second arrow?" "Tyrant!" was Tell's proud answer, "this arrow was for your heart if I had hurt my child."

Gessler's face darkened with anger! Then he said, "Indeed? So long as you are at liberty I am at risk. I will spare your life, but you shall spend what is left of it in the prison across the lake. Guards, seize him!" The guards and Gessler tried to put him in prison on a deserted island, but William escaped while being transported. He killed the evil tyrant.

When the townspeople heard to this news, they knew that William had set their country free! Wilhelm Tell had indeed freed the people of Switzerland from their oppressor, and townspeople hailed him as a hero.

After the people had been freed, some of the townspeople wanted to make him king. William refused the offer. He never would want to live the lavish lifestyle of a king, so he returned to his peaceful cottage in the mountains.