

By MARY and CONRAD BUFF



THE APPLE
AND
THE ARROW

PROLOGUE

*Many many years past,
Over six hundred years ago
In the year twelve hundred and ninety,
Thirty-three men on a mountain meadow
Gathered together at midnight.*

*Peaceful men,
Herders of cattle,
Hunters of chamois,
Skilled with the crossbow.*

*From different cantons they came,
Some hailed from Uri,
Others from Schwyz,
Still others from Unterwalden.*

*And on that moonless night
Over six hundred years ago,
Thirty-three men talked long
Seeking an answer for freedom,
Seeking an answer for peace.*

*Thirty-three men on a mountain meadow
Many many years ago.*

A Promise

"MISSED it again. Go find the arrow, Rudi. It fell near that old rotten log over there. The one with the big hole in it."

Walter Tell laid his Swiss crossbow on the grass and sat down on a granite rock in the green Alpine pasture. He stared at the white circles he had carved on a big pine tree, the target at which he had shot all afternoon.

"Will I ever, ever hit the bull's-eye?" he asked himself. "Will I ever become a great bowman like Father when I grow up?"

Little Rudi, his brother, and Prinz, the herd dog, scrambled about in the pine forest searching for the lost arrow. As he waited for them to find it, Walter glanced up at the cold gray peaks of the Alps, white with autumn snow.

"Here it is. Prinz smelled it," shouted Rudi, holding up the arrow in his little brown hand and smiling happily. Prinz barked and wagged his tail. He always barked when he found an arrow. He seemed to know that his nose was keener than even Rudi's sharp blue eyes. "It was under the ferns by that rotten log," laughed Rudi, as he handed the arrow to his brother. "Try again, Walter, maybe this time you will hit it."

"There's the evening bell, Rudi. But I'll shoot once more. Then we must go home for the goats are getting restless and the wind is chilly." The goats, feeling the oncoming night, were already nibbling their way downward.

Standing with his legs apart, Walter placed an arrow in his crossbow and drew back the leather thong. Then sighting the target he suddenly unlatched the trigger. "Twang," sped the arrow. To his utter surprise, Walter saw it bury itself in the very center of the target.

"You hit it! You hit it!" shouted Rudi, jumping up and down in happiness. "If Father would only come now and see."

Walter eyed the quivering arrow. At last he had hit the bull's-eye. He felt proud and happy. Then, glancing at the Alpine peaks turning rosy in the sunset light, he walked to the tree and pulled the arrow from it, calling, "Come, Rudi, let's go home. It's growing colder. I wish Father *would* come. He's so late. When he left home this morning, he told Mother he would be back before sunset with a chamois or a fox or something."

Prinz and the goats were far ahead. By the time the boys saw their log hut at the edge of a pine forest, the sun had already set. Only a faint glow still lingered on the crests of the mountains.

Rudi and Walter stopped on their way downward to kneel for a moment before a humble cross, built beside the path. Their father had taught them to do this. Then they chased each other down the well-worn path. When they reached home, the goats had already huddled

into a pen made of three large boulders. Here they felt safe from prowling bears and wolves, for in those far-off days of the thirteenth century many wild animals roamed the Alpine mountains.

Rudi darted into the hut as Walter grabbed a wooden bucket which hung on a peg and went to milk the goats. After his task was completed, he latched the gate which enclosed the pen, and carried the foaming milk bucket into the cabin. This was but one room with a big table in the middle. A candle glowed on this oak table, polished from years of use.

"The goats gave lots of milk tonight, Mother," said Walter gaily, as Hedwig, his fair-haired mother, took the bucket of milk. "We waited for Father until after the vesper bell rang, but he did not come. And I hit the target, Mother, right in the middle, the very last time I shot. I did, really I did, Mother. Rudi will tell you."

"But why shouldn't you, the elder son of William Tell, hit the bull's-eye?" Hedwig laughed as she leaned down and kissed her boy. Walter knew that she was teasing, yet her words pleased him. Still smiling, she poured milk into two carved wooden bowls and cut thick slices from a huge loaf of rye bread. Walter and Rudi soaked the bread in milk and ate it hungrily. They felt content in their little warm hut. Their mother loved them. Besides, was not their father the best bowman in the land of Uri?

"Father *is* late," said Walter as he drank the last drop of warm milk in his bowl.

"Yes, he is," sighed Hedwig, looking at the window. "As I was weaving this afternoon on the loom, I often thought I heard his step on the trail. But only a rock slipped on the mountainside or a tree groaned in the wind that rises from the valley at nightfall. In these days no woman knows if her man will return home when the sun drops behind the mountains."

Walter saw his mother's anxious face and said soothingly, "Don't worry, Mother, Father will come soon. He *always* comes home, and with game too, doesn't he?"

"You are very young, my son," answered Hedwig, softly. "You do not know all that goes on now in the land of Uri. It is not as it was when I was a child."

Rudi was already asleep, his head resting on the table beside his empty bowl. Hedwig lifted him gently and carried him to bed. She slipped off his buckskin pants and removed his linen blouse. Then she laid him down on the grass-filled mattress and covered him with a homespun blanket of goat's hair. As she drew the curtain about his bed, she spoke to Walter, who was sitting on a bench munching on a tart mountain apple. "He is just a baby," she said gently. "He is always so tired at night when he comes home, yet each morning when he awakens he is as fresh as a spring crocus."

"He tried to hold the crossbow all by himself today," added Walter, smiling. "but he is not yet strong enough. Sometimes I hold it for him and let him shoot. When he presses the trigger and the arrow goes 'twang' he feels so big and so happy."

"Just wait, Son, someday he will be a good bowman too, like your father," said Hedwig, taking up her knitting.

All was quiet in the hut as Walter gnawed on the apple. He heard the wind whining among the pine trees. A goat bleated contentedly. Prinz barked, hoping someone would let him in, but he was not allowed in the hut. His job was to watch the goats all night long.

"Mother," Walter asked at last, "why are you so sad tonight? What did you mean when you said times were better when you were a child? You warned me not to tell Rudi about the time Father and Grandfather were gone all night and did not come home until the next day. I overheard them talking, you remember. What did they do on that mountain-

top all night, Mother? Won't you tell me? I am eleven years old now."

Hedwig Tell let her knitting fall in her lap as she looked at her son sadly. "Yes, you are eleven years old, Walter, and soon will be a man. It is too bad you overheard your father and grandfather talking together. When your father gets excited, he talks too loudly. Sometimes I fear they may even hear him in the village! You know now that some men were plotting together and your father and grandfather were with them on the mountain. Since you do know this already, I must tell you more. It may be beyond your years, but you must try hard to understand, Son. Listen carefully."

Hedwig was so solemn that Walter whispered, "Yes, Mother, I will try hard to understand you." His eyes were big with wonder. His heart beat fast and he was not a bit sleepy.

"Years ago," began Hedwig very quietly, "there was a king named Rudolph. He was ruler of Germany, Austria, and, of course, our canton of Uri. Also, our neighbor cantons of Schwyz and Underwalden. Each year he sent men to collect taxes from us, as rulers do. Otherwise he left us alone. Also, once a year he sent a nobleman to judge disputes among us: disputes over a cow, a goat, a boundary line or perhaps a forest. It seems there are always quarrels among people everywhere. As I said, a nobleman from Austria came yearly to judge us, and then returned to Austria again. But it is so different now."

"What do you mean, Mother, it is so different now? How is it different? Please tell me. I can understand. I am big."

Hedwig put her arms around him as she said, "The good king Rudolph died at last, as all men must. He was a good king as kings go. Then his son, Albrecht, became king. Albrecht was different from his father. He believed a king should rule with a hard hand, and that a king should hold a tight rein over his people. He did not want us to be as free as we had always been in the canton of Uri."

"Why, Mother?" asked Walter, wonder in his eyes.

"I will tell you, Son," continued Hedwig. "You know the big road, the Saint Gothard, that crawls up the Alps to the very top? That is the road to Italy."

"Yes," answered Walter, "I saw a pack train go through Altdorf one day, and the boys said the horses carried fine linens and such things from Lucerne and other cities. They said the men and horses were going to Italy."

"No doubt they were," replied his mother. "Everyone who travels over the Saint Gothard road must pay gold to Albrecht. The road goes right through Uri. And that is only one reason why the king wants our people to be tame. He gets much gold from the travelers over the road, big bags of gold. To be sure we are tame, Albrecht now sends bailiffs into the country and these bailiffs stay here all of the time. Some of them are low-born men like Gessler at Altdorf. He is not of noble blood, Walter, but a common man like ourselves. This Gessler is always about, prying into our affairs, we who have been free since there were mountains. Did you hear how Gessler put out the eyes of Arnold's old father when the bailiff could not find Arnold?"

"Yes, Grandfather told me about it," answered Walter, "I have hated Gessler ever since. He must be a coward to do that to an old man."

"Yes, he is a coward, Son," replied Hedwig. "He is building that great stone castle at Altdorf too, the castle of Zwing-Uri. Gessler makes the peasants work on the castle whether they wish to or not. Folks say that when the castle is finished, Gessler will live in it all of the time and watch us as a cat watches a mouse's hole, or the lion waits for the deer to graze before he springs. A part of the castle is a prison to put some independent mountain folk in when they even speak of freedom." Hedwig spoke so bitterly that Walter became fearful too. He

often glanced at the curtained window, wondering if someone were outside listening.

"It has grown worse with each year," continued his mother. "At last your father and grandfather, with Arnold and Stauffacher, decided the time had come to act. It was useless to protest any more. These four men talked to friends they trusted. Several weeks ago, thirty-three men, eleven from each of the three cantons, met on the Rootli. Do you know where the Rootli is, Son?"

"Yes, Mother, I do," answered Walter softly, glancing at the window again, for he heard Prinz bark. "We passed below it once when I was fishing with father on the lake. Father said it was an open meadow surrounded by a dense forest."

"That is the Rootli," replied his mother, "a wild and lonely place, so far away from Altdorf that no soldier of Gessler's would know of it. Your father said that the thirty-three men argued all through the night. Not one of them wanted to shed blood, but all wanted to drive out the bailiffs. Toward morning they swore on a sword to stand together, come what may."

"They plan to revolt on the New Year," she went on. "If the people of one canton are attacked, the folk of the other two cantons promise to come and help them. All will fight as one nation. All will die together, too, if it ever comes to that. We are a stubborn race," said Hedwig.

"On the New Year we will revolt then?" asked Walter wonderingly.

"Yes," said Hedwig, determination in her voice, "and that will be soon. The year 1291 will dawn soon. Gessler's stone prison will *never* be finished, my son." Hedwig trembled as she spoke and Walter trembled, too, for he had never seen his mother so disturbed. She was usually so quiet and happy.



"So *that* is why I must not speak of the meeting on the Rootli," whispered Walter. "I understand now."

"Yes, that is the reason, Son. Do not whisper a word to anyone, even to Rudi or Marie, the herd girl. For if it should leak out that we will revolt on New Year's Day, your own father, Walter, might be the first one to die. Promise, Son, to keep this secret locked in your heart. Say nothing to anyone."

"On my crossbow I promise," said Walter solemnly. His heart beat fast and he was very excited. "Mother, when the people revolt on New Year's Day, will knights come up into the mountains on horses and will cannons go off and make a lot of noise? Will there be fires too?"

"There will be fires on the mountaintops, Son, signal fires," replied his mother, "but I hope there won't be real war. War means starvation and death, not only to soldiers, but to women and children too. War *always* means that." She sighed and rose, taking Walter by the hand. "Come, Son, to bed. Tomorrow dawns only too soon. Sometimes I grow afraid when your father does not come home at nightfall. I imagine him killed by one of Gessler's knights or soldiers. Or perhaps blinded, as was Arnold's old father, so that he cannot see his way home to us. These are women's fears, I guess, just women's fears. Sleep well, Son, may you not dream of evil things."

Hedwig kissed Walter and drew the curtain close about the bed. The boy lay for a long time, thinking over what his mother had told him. He heard her wash the wooden bowls. The fire crackled and spit. The wind moaned among the fir trees. Although he was tired, Walter could not go to sleep at once. He tossed and turned. He heard the church bells at Burglen toll the half-hour. Suddenly Prinz barked. Walter heard something heavy fall on the ground outside the hut. The great door squeaked on its rusty hinges.

Walter sat up in bed as he heard his father's deep voice. "Home at

last, Hedwig. I did not bring in the dead chamois I shot, knowing you for a good housekeeper. It is a fine, fat chamois, with a thick hide, Wife, but dirty and bloody.”

Walter heard a bench squeak as his father sat upon it, and his mother laugh happily. Then came sounds of milk flowing into a bowl. Walter drew slowly aside the curtain just a little and peered out. In the candle-light he saw his father’s weary face and his great beard. He heard his mother say soothingly, “Rest, Husband, I see you are worn. Refresh yourself. The boys are sound asleep. Walter thinks he is a great bowman for he hit the bull’s-eye this afternoon. Rudi was so tired he fell asleep over his bowl of milk.”

After a few moments of silence Walter heard his father say, “What a long day it has been. I shot the chamois as he leaped over the rocks on the edge of a glacier. The beast fell over a cliff as he died. I slipped and slid over the rocks for a long time to find him. I met your father too, Hedwig, as I came down the mountain. We talked long together. Do you know, Hedwig,” he added, “the townsfolk say Gessler smells a rat. He notices that people carry their heads higher these days and so he is suspicious. How he would like to catch the leaders! He will try any new deviltry to find out who they are, too.”

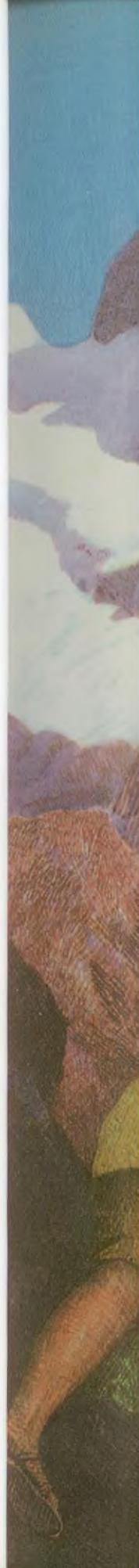
“You are much wrought-up, my husband,” replied Hedwig soothingly. “Eat and drink now, and after that we will talk.”

Walter lay down and listened to the wind moaning in the trees and the sound of the fire crackling on the hearth. Suddenly he heard his father speak again.

“Tomorrow morning, Hedwig, I must go to Altdorf.”

“ALTDORF! Oh no, not to Altdorf, Husband. You will walk right into some clever trap that Gessler has laid for you.” She spoke so shrilly that Walter sat up in bed.

He heard his father laugh and answer, “Trap, Wife, I’m too smart



for any trap Gessler could lay. I go to barter cheese for salt, perhaps, or to buy a new gown for the comeliest wife in all the mountains. I have a few skins to trade, too. Perhaps I may stop at the Baren Inn and drink with others there. I must go at dawn."

"But why do you go?" asked Hedwig, sorrowfully. "These are not reasons you have given me. They are not the *real* reasons. You jest with me."

Walter heard his father reply stubbornly, "I go because I *must* go, Hedwig. Your father says Gessler is looking for trouble. He is scheming. I must learn if any of our own men have betrayed us to him. If he knows about the revolt on the New Year."

"But, William, you know how quick your temper is, how sharp your tongue, how loud your voice especially when you get excited. Please don't go to Altdorf tomorrow," pleaded Hedwig.

"I will keep my tongue muzzled and my thoughts to myself, really I will, Hedwig. I will speak only with those I trust. Those I have known for years. A stone will be no more silent than I tomorrow," Walter heard his father promise.

"If I could only believe your words," sighed Hedwig. "You have never been as silent as a stone in all the years I have known you, Husband."

"I will be tomorrow, Wife. And if you still do not trust me, well then," and the mountaineer hesitated, "I will take Walter with me. A man does not take his elder son with him when he conspires, does he?"

Walter felt like jumping out of bed and rushing to his father, but he knew he must not. How wonderful it would be to go to Altdorf again! He would watch the blacksmith shoe a horse. He would play in the fountain with other village children. He might drink a glass of that sweet cider at the Baren Inn. Perhaps the bear would still be walking back and forth in his cage behind the inn and the old eagle drooping

on his perch. Altdorf was such a BIG place. Perhaps he might see a pack train march through the market place, going to Italy. He might even see a knight in shining armour riding a beautiful horse. *He might see Gessler, the tyrant, himself!*

“Well, if you *must* go,” the boy heard his mother say at last, “perhaps you should take Walter. He may keep you from getting angry and talking too much.” Then she added thoughtfully, “I told Walter tonight that he must not mention to anyone what he overheard when you and Father came home from the Rootli. He is only a child and you know how children forget and talk when they are full of a great secret. I do hope he remembers. It would be terrible if Gessler should hear of the revolt from a son of William Tell, wouldn’t it?”

“Do not fear, Wife, Walter is a likely lad and an honest one,” said William Tell. “I am sure he will hold his tongue. He is not like his old man, is he, Hedwig? A sieve full of holes?”

Walter heard his father laugh as he said this and his mother laugh, too. He turned over and lay close to Rudi for it was a cold night. He closed his eyes and just as he drifted off to sleep, he heard his mother murmur, “They sleep sweetly when they are young,” and that was all Walter remembered.



Faith

“WAKE up, Son, and dress quickly. We are going to Altdorf together.” William Tell’s deep voice awakened Walter. He jumped from bed as he remembered his father’s promise of the night before.

Soon father and son were tramping down the rough trail to Burglen. They passed through the tiny hamlet as William Tell nodded to right and left. Walter nodded too for he knew almost every child and dog of the village. Soon the two Tells were on the downward path again. The sun was just rising.

“When we get into Altdorf, Son,” said the father, “keep by me until I say you may play with the children. I will visit the tanner’s shop and trade for something for your mother. These skins on my back are worth something. She did not wish me to go to town today,



for she is fearful that I might talk too much or too loudly. You know the secret we must keep." Walter nodded. "We will keep it together, you and I," added Tell. He was in good spirits as he always was when he went to Altdorf.

Now they entered the ever-narrowing valley. It was fun to sing and shout and then listen to the sounds of their voices echo ever more faintly. Tell's strong dark legs moved along so fast that Walter could not sing much, he was so out of breath running. Then as the trail curved, Walter pointed to a cave in the hillside where lived a monk well-loved by the people of the land of Uri. He said, "Father, it must be lonely for Brother Klaus to live all by himself in that dark place and just pray all of the time."

"Perhaps it would be for you, Son," replied his father, "but Klaus seems happy. When any one of the mountain folk is ill or without bread, Klaus comes to comfort him. When a woman loses her husband or a mother her child, Klaus is there to pray with her. All men, Walter, do not like to do the same thing. Some like to hunt, others to fight, and still others to till the soil. Klaus is a man of God and I am sure he is happy even if he lives alone in that dark cave yonder."

Soon Walter saw the old roofs of Altdorf, and the stone towers of Zwing-Uri, Gessler's castle. Then Tell's happy mood changed. Walter heard him mutter, "That knave. As busy as a rat in a wheat rick. The towers grow higher each day. Soon Gessler will live there and spy upon all that we do. And put free men behind iron bars."

Walter said nothing. He was waiting eagerly to see the sign that hung from the roof of the Baren Inn. His father usually stopped at the inn. As they neared the place, Walter, to his surprise, saw his own grandfather, Walter Furst, standing before the inn as if he were really waiting for them. Walter loved his fun-making old grandfather, and ran to him, pulling on his cane.

“Well, well, bless my old eyes, what brings you two to Altdorf this cold day?” asked the older man. “It’s going to rain, too. Why are you not herding the goats, Walter, and you, William, hunting for deer or fox?”

Tell winked, and in a low voice answered, “Perhaps the same thing that brings you here, Furst,” which made Grandfather smile.

“Come in and let us drink together, then, and Walter too. He is growing up, that lad,” said Grandfather Furst, looking down at the boy.

As the three entered the low door of the old inn, Tell stooped, for he was a big man. Walter followed and ran to the hearth to warm his cold hands. The men sought a dark corner of the room where they might talk and not be overheard. Soon a maidservant brought three brown mugs of cider on a tray. Walter joined his father and grandfather and slowly sipped the delicious drink. He was sorry when he could see the bottom of the mug and there was no more cider. The grownups were talking about things he did not understand and he twisted and fidgeted on the hard bench, hoping his father would buy another mug of cider for him. But his father just glanced down at him and said, “You are restless, Walter. Why don’t you find the bear you are always talking about, and the eagle?” As he said this, he placed a forefinger over his mouth. Walter knew what he meant. He must keep the secret. Smiling, Walter ran through the room.

The bear was prancing up and down his cage in a never-ending trot, swinging his great head from side to side. He must hate that narrow cage, thought Walter. Village children were teasing the bear. They stuck branches of trees through the bars, hoping the wild animal might tear the branches with his wicked-looking claws, and thus frighten them. But the unhappy bear was used to children and paced his cage, thinking his own gloomy thoughts.

Then Walter watched a captured eagle in another cage. He was

perched on the dead branches of a tree. His eyes were shut and his tail feathers were falling out. He looked so sad and so old that Walter was sorry for him. For often, as he was herding in the mountains, the boy had watched great handsome eagles floating high in the heavens, carried ever upward by strong air currents. This old fellow must be dreaming of his mountaintops, thought Walter sadly.

The boy wandered around the building to the front door when suddenly he saw his father and grandfather step from the inn. His father looked very angry. Even his grandfather did not smile as Walter ran up to him.

"Come at once, Son. Let us go," was all that his father commanded. "Remember—quiet, and stay beside me."

"Yes," Walter answered, wondering at his father's change of mood. They passed through a narrow way between high houses and soon the village square or market place opened before them. Walter saw the familiar fountain in the center of the square but today two soldiers were beside it. One of them, an old fellow, was munching an apple. The other soldier was whittling on a stick with his dagger. They looked tired and bored. Then Walter noticed a long pole set in the ground beside the fountain. He had never seen that before. On the top of the pole fluttered a velvet hat with a feather in it, such a hat as Walter had often seen well-born people wear. He wondered why no children were playing in the fountain. No dogs lay in the dirt. No women came with water jars to draw water and to gossip together.

Suddenly a well-dressed villager passed by and nodded to the soldiers, doffing his cap and bending his knee to the hat on the pole. Walter felt his father's hand stiffen against his and heard him mutter, "Traitor." Nevertheless William Tell walked proudly on, looking neither to left or to right. Never did a man carry himself more nobly. His great bow hung from one massive shoulder. He walked with the dignity of a great



king. Past the fountain he strode, Walter clinging to him, past the soldiers, past the pole with the hat aloft, as if he did not see any one of them.

Suddenly Walter heard the younger soldier shout, "Stop, you! You dunce over there! Are you blind? See that hat on the pole, *you*. That's the hat of Austria, the ducal hat."

But father and son walked on unheeding. Soon the soldier munching the apple grabbed his spear and ran toward the mountaineer, yelling, "You knave, you blockhead. *Bow to that hat!* Or I'll run you through with this," and he lowered his great spear.

Only then did William Tell stop and eye the soldier fearlessly, as he shouted, "Hat, you dolt, what hat, I see no hat. I have business with the tanner." Tell's words made the soldiers very angry. One yelled, "Bend your knee to that hat, or we will crush your skull like a filbert, you and your filthy brat." The great mountaineer took one more step forward without replying, but the shouting of the soldiers had brought many townsfolk into the square. His way was blocked by soldiers with spears and by shouting people. Suddenly a guard blew on his bugle. Almost at once the market place was full of men, women, dogs, children. Other soldiers streamed in from narrow streets, to join the crowd, and Walter and his father were surrounded by a mob of people.

"Now for the last time, fool, bow before the ducal hat of Austria. Show you are a loyal subject of our governor, Gessler. Bow, you lout!" shouted a soldier.

The name of Gessler seemed to make Tell even more rebellious. He laughed in defiance, as Walter clung to him and shrank back from the lowered spears of the soldiers. "Go to the devil, you braggarts," he cried. "I am a man of peace. Why should I bow before a silly hat? A hat is not a lord. A hat is a thing of rags and feathers. It is nothing to bow down before."



The rugged mountaineer held his son's hand tightly and shouted these words so that all heard. The townsfolk milled around the soldiers in a dense crowd. Walter heard some of them curse the guards, call them "rats and knaves, dirt and dross."

Angry words flew like birds from people's mouths as they shouted at the soldiers. "Holy Mary," said one villager. "Poor wretch, he'll get it now," added another.

"Take your hands from me," commanded Tell as a guard seized him. "I have done no wrong. Take your hands from me, I say. I will not bow before that filthy hat. We've had enough of bowing and scraping in the land of Uri. Next thing you'll command us to bow before you, you bullies."

As they heard his insolent words, three angry soldiers grabbed the mountain man and pinned back his arms. "We dare you to insult the governor thus, you herder of goats."

A bugle sounded again, and the crowd scattered as mounted knights galloped into the market place. "Out of our way, you dumb brutes, out of our way," they commanded. Walter, almost in tears now, glanced up at them. And then he saw Gessler—the governor, Gessler. It could be no one else. The knight wore fine clothing, and rode a beautiful and spirited horse. But Walter thought he looked evil in spite of his grandeur.

"What goes on here?" demanded Gessler. The crowd was now deathly quiet. "Oh, so it is you, William Tell, the man of the mountains," jeered Gessler, seeing his soldiers hold the bowman by the arms. "In trouble again, I see. For what do my men now hold you so tightly, you herder of goats?"

The mountaineer did not reply. Then a soldier spoke. "He will not bow before the ducal hat, my Lord."

"Oh, so he is too fine to bow before the hat of Albrecht of Austria, is he? Tell, the windbag. Bow, I say, before your betters or we will run you through," warned Gessler.



Tell was silent. He did not move. He looked at Gessler and his eyes were like black coals, burning with hatred. Walter trembled but he held himself proudly like his father.

“So you have no tongue in that filthy mouth now. Who are your friends, Tell? There must be more like you in your mountains. Speak or you will be sorry.”

Now the great bowman was really angry. He bellowed like a mad bull. The people could hear every word he said. “I will not bend my knee before a hat. I will bow only to those more truly noble than I. Men of gentle birth. Wise men. The man of God and the good Lord himself. I am a man of peace. I will not bend my knee before a hat of rags and feathers. A hat is nothing to worship. A well-born man, a noble, is something else.”

How angry Gessler became at these words. He knew that Tell was jeering at his common birth. Tell was shouting his meanness to the whole village of Altdorf. Tell was insulting him.

“Oh, so you are too fine to bow before your betters,” snarled Gessler, white with fury. Then a sly look came into his face as he glanced sharply down at Walter, clinging to his father and hiding his face.

“Who is that brat that clings so cravenly to you, Tell?” asked Gessler.

“My son, Walter, my elder son,” replied Tell, looking at Walter and pressing his hand.

“Is that your only son, braggart?” asked Gessler.

“No, I have another son, Rudolph by name.”

“I see you have your crossbow with you, Tell. I have heard it said you are a good bowman, the best in the canton of Uri. Is that true?”

“I know not if it is true,” answered Tell, modestly, “for there are many good bowmen in Uri. But some folk have said so.”

A townsman shouted, “Tell is the best of us all.”

“Let us see then, how good a bowman you really are, lout. Take that