



## The Legend of William Tell

William Tell is famous for shooting an arrow through an apple on the top of a boy's head. But few people know why William shot the arrow. Here is the full story.

About eight hundred years ago, a proud tyrant\*, whose name was Gessler, was sent to rule over the people of Switzerland and he made them suffer very much.

One day 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. So he made up his mind to punish the bold man.

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 as well as he. Gessler knew this, and so he thought of a cruel plan to make the hunter's own skill punish him. He ordered that Tell's son Walter stand up in the public square with an apple on his head; and then he told Tell shoot the apple with one of his arrows.

Tell begged the tyrant not to make him test his skill by risking his son's life. What if the boy should move? What if the Tell's hand should tremble? What if the arrow should not fly straight?

"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 and then kill you. If you shoot the apple, you will both go free."

Then, without another word, Tell fitted the arrow to his bow. He took aim, and let it fly. Walter 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 exactly in the center, and carried it away. The people who saw it shouted with joy.

As Tell was turning away from the place, an arrow which he had hidden under his coat dropped to the ground.

"Tell!" cried Gessler, "why do you have this second arrow?"

"Tyrant!" was Tell's proud answer, "this arrow was for your heart if I had hurt my child."

Gessler was so angry that he had William Tell arrested. But William escaped. He knew that Switzerland would never be free until Gessler was gone. When Gessler came after him, William killed him with one of his arrows. This started a fight for freedom, which William and the people of Switzerland won. At last Switzerland was free.

In 1895, the Swiss put up a statue of William Tell and his son to honor him.

**\*tyrant:** a very cruel person; a bully

Baldwin, James. *Fifty Famous Stories Retold*. American Book Company, 1896.