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The legend of William Tell

At a time soon after the opening of the Gotthard Pass, when the Habsburg emperors of Vienna sought to control Uri and thus control trans-alpine trade, a new bailiff, Hermann Gessler, was despatched to Altdorf. The proud mountain folk of Uri had already

longed. He ordered him to shoot an apple off his son's head with his crossbow; if Tell were successful, he would save his life, but if he failed or refused, both he and his son would die.

The boy's hands were tied. Tell put one arrow in his shirt and an-

– unfamiliar with the lake – begged Gessler to release Tell so that he could steer them to safety. Gessler agreed, and Tell cannily manoeuvred the boat close to the shore, then leapt to freedom, landing on a flat rock (the Tellsplatte) and simultaneously pushing the boat back into the stormy waters. Determined to see his task through and use the second arrow, Tell hurried to Küsnacht. As Gessler and his party walked along on a dark lane called Hohle Gasse on their way to the castle, Tell leapt out, shot a bolt into the tyrant's heart and melted back into the woods to return to Uri. His comrades were inspired by Tell's act of bravery to throw off the yoke of Habsburg oppression in their homeland, and to remain forever free.



Rütiwiese on the Urnersee

joined with their Schwyzer and Nidwaldner neighbours at Rütli in pledging to resist the Austrians' cruel oppression, and when Gessler raised a pole in the central square of Altdorf and perched his hat on the top, commanding all who passed before it to bow in respect, it was the last straw. William Tell, a countryman from nearby Bürglen, either hadn't heard about Gessler's command or chose to ignore it; whichever, he walked past the hat without bowing. Gessler seized Tell, who was well known as a marksman, and set him a chal-

lenge. He ordered him to shoot an apple off his son's head with his crossbow, took aim, and shot the apple clean off his son's head. Gessler was impressed and infuriated – and then asked what the second arrow was for. Tell looked the tyrant in the eye and replied that if the first arrow had struck the child, the second would have been for Gessler. For such impertinence, Tell was arrested and sentenced to lifelong imprisonment in the dungeons of Gessler's castle at Küsnacht, northeast of Luzern. During the long boat journey a Föhnstorm arose on the lake, and the oarsmen

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