

# WILLIAM TELL:

THE

HERO OF SWITZERLAND.

A POEM.

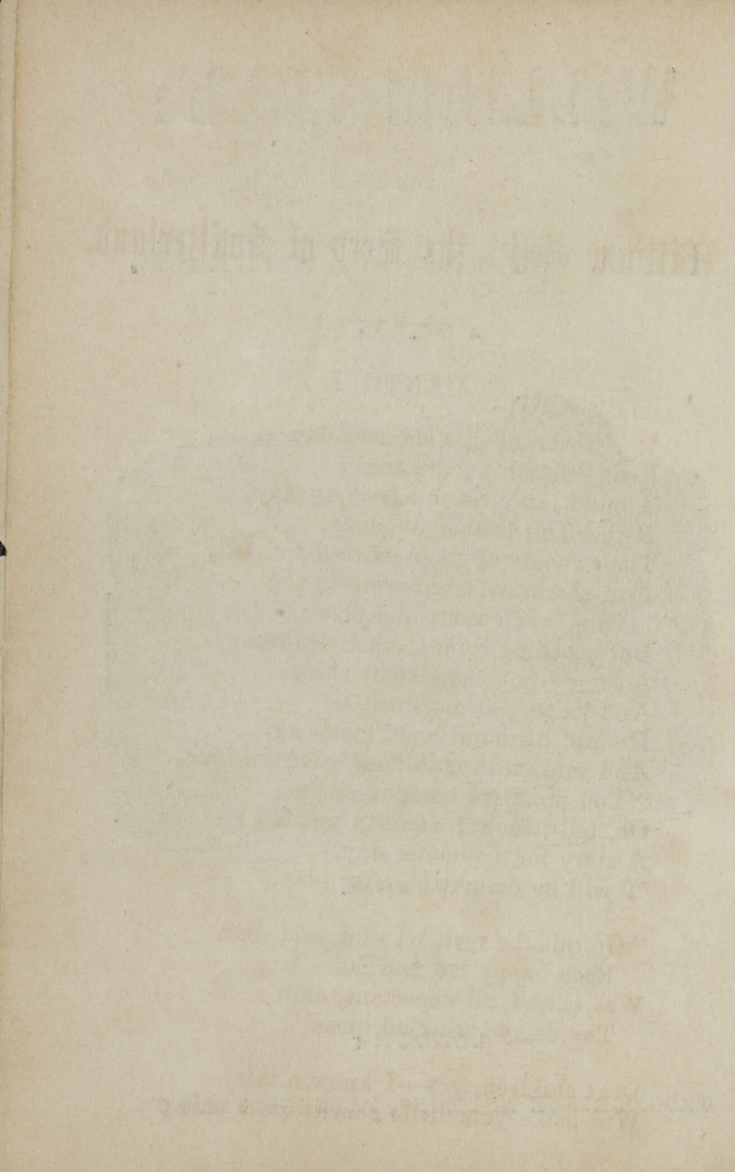


TELL'S CHAPEL.



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# William Tell: the Hero of Switzerland.

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## CANTO I.

It chanced upon a summer day  
I sat beneath a leafy tree ;  
Around ran girls and boys at play,  
Hither and thither joyously.  
Their shouts of gladness rose and fell,  
And pleasant task it were to tell  
Of all their sport and glee :  
But speeding from the active throng,  
A happy boy came swift along,  
And halting at my knee—  
He laid his hand upon my book,  
And said, with childhood's wistful look,  
“ You promised us another tale,  
Oh, tell it now ; you can not fail ;—  
A story for a summer day,  
’T will be delightful, after play.”

“ Go call the rest,” I said, and soon  
Each happy lad and lass  
Was seated, all expectant, on  
The daisy-sprinkled grass.

Dear children, yes—I know a tale,  
Will make your little cheeks grow pale ;

And from your eyes the tears shall flow,  
To hear of suffering and woe ;  
And then your hearts shall proudly burn  
Of noble deeds and thoughts to learn :  
How men maintained their native right,  
Against a haughty tyrant's might :  
How humble hearts may yet be free,  
And dare and do for liberty.

'Tis near six hundred years ago  
The Austrian emperor Rudolf died ;  
And left his pride, and pomp, and show,  
And all his empire far and wide  
To Albert—one of princely fame,  
Yet rests a blot upon his name :  
Rudolf had gained the people's love,  
But Albert cared no faith to prove ;  
His passion knew nor bound nor bar,  
He loved not gentle peace, but war.  
Had he been wise he would have known,  
The truly great leave war alone,  
And he perchance had 'scaped the strife  
When envious kinsmen took his life.  
For lust of power oft sorrow brings,  
And teaches while it humbles kings.

Now at that time in Switzerland,  
Where snow-capped mountains proudly stand,  
There dwelt a loyal-hearted race,  
Who tilled the fields, and led the chace.  
Their manners simple, wants but few,  
Their nature brave, their courage true.  
Far down in deeply-sheltered vales,  
Or on the slopes of rocky dales,  
Or high upon the mountains rude

Their rustic cots—their shelter stood,  
 And sweet affections round each hearth,  
 And freedom's virtues there had birth ;  
 True guardians of their native home,  
 Whatever foes or dangers come

But Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwald—  
 These three the Forest Cantons called,—  
 Did most for liberty aspire,  
 And glow with patriotic fire :  
 Each was to each a trusty friend,  
 In weal to serve, in woe defend.  
 No servile art was theirs to bring  
 False homage to a potent king :  
 For justice, mercy, truth—alone  
 Can knit a people to a throne.

With envy kaiser Albert saw  
 These people's land, and sturdy law ;  
 He longed to make their hills and plains  
 A portion of his own domains.  
 He tempted them with crafty speech,  
 But they of ancient treaties teach :  
 He sought to purchase them with gold,  
 They spurned his proffers brave and bold.  
 In anger, then, he sent a threat ;  
 But nobly they his envoy met,  
 And shewed the archives of their land,  
 And vowed the intruder to withstand.

More fiercely kindled Albert's wrath,  
 To meet such firmness in his path ;  
 Nor did he shrink from further wrong,  
 For they were weak and he was strong.  
 So sent he rulers in his name,

The Cantons' hardy pride to tame :  
 And Gessler came, and Beringar,  
 The joys of peace to mock and mar.

To Uri Gessler came as lord,  
 To spread his master Albert's sway ;  
 Nor spared he either fire or sword,  
 To force the people to obey.  
 Such sternness in his heart he brought,  
 'Twere sad to tell the woes he wrought :  
 He tortured men, and wives, and girls ;  
 He called them base-born peasant churls.  
 " I vow," he said, " their roofs shall smoke,  
 And on their necks I'll fix the yoke.  
 Shall they who tend but goats or kine  
 Against my searching law combine ?  
 Their vaunted pride shall end in shame ;  
 The dungeon shall their spirit tame."

The Unterwalders murmured then,  
 Through Schwyz a voice in every glen—  
 And Uri asks, with all her men,—  
 " How long shall we be slaves  
 Better than bend a servile knee,  
 Forget what freedom's pleasures be,  
 Or honest thought suppress, that we  
 Were sleeping in our graves !  
 Shall bondage fetter us who scale  
 The heights where eagles breast the gale  
 With proudly-beating wing ?  
 Nay ! we appeal to One on high,  
 In whose sight men all equal lie—  
 The peasant and the king :  
 Till hill and dale, and rock and plain,  
 Our land shall be our own again."



In lonesome places, hid from sight,  
They met, and counsel held at night.  
Yet in their half-despairing need  
No thought had they of bloody deed :  
For virtue waits and suffers long,  
Before it renders strife for wrong.  
The emperor they besought that he  
Would leave the Forest Cantons free ;  
And Gessler, whom they feared, recall,  
And no more bring them under thrall.  
Love must be won and not compelled ;  
Obedience is by love upheld :  
And faith that calms impatient fears,  
And hope that brightens under tears,  
May dwell beneath a peasant's vest,  
Truly as in a monarch's breast.

Upon the Unterwalden hills  
Stood Melchtal's free and happy dwelling ;  
His name was one that love instils ;  
Each tongue was of his virtues telling.  
All listened to his counsels sage,  
The ripened judgment of his age :  
Well could he soothe, restrain, advise ;  
For long experience made him wise.  
Wrong seemed less wrongful when he spoke,  
And passion less impetuous broke.  
He helped the weak their woes to bear,  
His bounty did the needy share ;  
His equals found his friendship true ;  
And well the tired wayfarer knew  
A welcome's hospitable proof  
Beneath the honoured Melchtal's roof.

He had a son—an ardent youth,  
With dauntless heart, and lip of truth.

And he was held in high report,  
For manly toil, and manly sport:  
Alike to labour or to lead,  
In pastime or in gallant deed.

In Unterwald Beringar's power  
Caused many timorous hearts to cower:  
He sent his guards with willing zeal  
To pillage through the land, and steal;  
And what they would they bore away,  
And bold was he who dared gainsay.  
One day young Melchtal in the field  
Heard the command, "Thy oxen yield?"



And turning round in hasty mood,  
Saw where Beringar's archer stood.

With ready speech and honest pride,  
 And flashing eye, the youth replied :  
 " What words are thine ? and who art thou,  
 Wilt loose the oxen from my plough ?"  
 The guard a scornful answer made,  
 And then to loose the beasts essayed.  
 " Is't come to this — that we must give  
 Our goods, to help marauders live ?"  
 Young Melchtal cried ; and seized the goad,  
 And such a stout resistance showed ;  
 The archer trembled for his life,  
 And fled to shun the sudden strife.  
 The youth sped homewards to relate  
 How he had turned the threatened fate ;  
 Rejoicing that he dared withstand  
 The power of strong aggression's hand.  
 " What hast thou done ?" his father said,  
 " Think'st thou the vengeance to evade ?  
 No hope for thee but instant flight,  
 Far from the fierce Beringar's might.  
 To Uri haste, — our friends will bear  
 Thee safely in concealment there."

Woe was the parting — son and sire —  
 The victims of oppression dire :  
 And as they spake the sad farewell  
 It sounded like a boding knell.  
 The youth had scarce departed when  
 The house was thronged by armèd men ;  
 They with rude hand and brutal word  
 Bore off old Melchtal to their lord :  
 Regardless of his many years,  
 And mocking at his servant's tears.  
 Then cried Beringar, " Where's thy son ?  
 Speak, traitor, if my wrath thou'dst shun !

My messenger he dared resist,  
As though the law were as he list.  
Is he the master here, or I?  
Know'st thou, old man, the penalty?"

Calm in reply old Melchtal said,  
"I know, dread lord: my son hath fled."  
"Fled!" cried Beringar, in a rage,  
"Old man, say whither? or thy age  
On which thou fondly may'st presume,  
Shall not protect thee from the doom."

Melchtal replied with fearless tongue,  
"Old, weak am I; my son is young:  
His life is better worth than mine,  
For him I glad myself resign.  
The secret shall my heart conceal,  
A treasure for our country's weal."

He paused and fixed his bright blue eye  
On the chief's face with dignity.  
The tyrant answered—"Be it so:  
Where hides thy son we yet shall know.  
But all thou hast is confiscate,  
The law awards it to the state.  
Judge if your boasted liberty  
Will aught avail in beggary.  
Ho! guards, there, bring the pointed steel;  
These traitors must be made to feel."  
The guards obeyed—Oh! dread surprise:  
They pierced the aged Melchtal's eyes;  
And closed them up in endless night,  
No more to see the blessed light.  
Now must he, blind and homeless, stray;  
Grope through the land his trembling way.

The cruel deed was done : but vain  
Such deeds true virtue to restrain :  
Though Melchtal now was blind and poor  
Yet found he friends and refuge sure ;  
And he was loved and solaced still,  
And honoured for his lofty will.  
And through the land this cruel wrong  
Resistance roused more stern and strong.  
Thus men who with fierce passion aim,  
Oft find their purpose end in shame.

But further must I now relate  
Of Gessler's power in Uri state.  
He to the town of Altorf went,  
Revolving on some dark intent ;  
Some new invention in his thought,  
With danger to the people fraught.  
Well might their spirit sink and fail ;  
For there he built a gloomy jail ;  
With stony dungeons, cold and drear,  
For such as talked of freedom near.  
None dared to sing their native songs—  
Recall the past—recount their wrongs—  
But they must lie in dungeons deep,  
And there in hopeless sorrow weep :  
Their only crime that they should dare  
To think, and then their thought declare.

Of somewhat, now, I come to speak—  
A ruler's strange, ignoble freak :  
For Gessler in the open space  
Of Altorf's ancient market-place,  
His archers bade a pole erect—  
Whereby to test the folk's respect.  
And on the top—with craft, mayhap,  
He hung the Austrian ducal cap :

A sign, as one might truly deem,  
 That Austria's power there reigned supreme.  
 And then proclaimed by beat of drum,  
 That all who near the pole should come—  
 Should bow, and humble reverence bear,  
 As though duke Albert's self stood there :  
 While near at hand the prison lay,  
 For such as dared to disobey.

The people heard ; but murmured more,  
 Firmer of purpose than before.  
 By reckless insult caution taught,  
 Among them went the whispered thought ;  
 For guards were set, the mien to trace  
 Of all who crossed the market-place,  
 With order every one to arrest  
 Who heeded not the lord's behest.—  
 But here, awhile, must intervene  
 A homely and a happier scene.

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## CANTO II.

The dawn is redly beaming  
 Far in the eastern sky ;  
 The rosy rays are gleaming  
 Across the snow-peaks high :  
 And streaks of light are twinkling  
 Adown the waterfall—  
 Hark ! how the bells are tinkling,  
 As loud the herdsmen call.  
 Up to their mountain meadows,  
 The early kine are going,  
 The vale yet sleeps in shadows,  
 While light above is glowing.

The hunter seeks the hill-top,  
The peasant drives his plough ;  
For brightly into Burglen  
The sun is shining now.

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We, children, such a song might sing,  
Could we behold an Alpine spring ;  
When winter yields to sun and showers,  
And leaves, and buds, and blooming flowers.  
But I my tale must now pursue ;  
And first another scene we view  
Of homely joys and rural life,  
Far from the town and all its strife.

Southward from Altorf lies Burglen,  
Deep hid the hills among,  
Shut in by soaring mountain heights,  
By lofty crags o'erhung.  
And here and there, on slopes of green,  
The quaint old houses may be seen ;  
Or perched upon some grassy knoll,  
Or turfy shelf, on cliff's high wall ;  
And some with signs of rural ease  
Stand snugly sheltered by the trees,  
That early blooming, hail the spring,  
And still their autumn fruitage bring.  
And leafy woods on every side  
The mountain's lower prospect hide ;  
And gladden with their tinted screen,  
What else would be a barren scene.  
Near by, with rapid stream and strong,  
A mountain river foams along,  
As though in haste its course to take,  
And mingle with the distant lake.  
Its noisy splash in summer's heat

With coolness seems the dale to greet  
In winter storms its hurrying roar  
Sounds hoarsely on the rocky shore ;  
The peasant hears the dismal sound,  
And tells of hapless travellers drowned

Burglen in olden time more rude,  
More hidden in its solitude,  
Was home and shelter to a few  
Of Uri's hardy peasants true.  
Rude health was theirs, which toil confers  
On simple-hearted villagers.  
And theirs the joys that every day  
The needful duties well repay.  
Some at the break of early morn  
Blew lusty music on the horn,  
When at the signal came the kine,  
With tinkling bells along their line ;  
Them did the wary herdsmen guide  
To pasture on the mountain side.  
And others drove the timid flocks  
To crop the grass among the rocks ;  
While hunters all the ground explore  
For prowling wolf and hungry boar ;  
Or watchful sudden arrows speed  
At eagle fierce or screaming glead.  
Each man could use his trusty bow,  
And each a varied art could show ;  
To shoot, or fish, or till the soil—  
Alike skilled for defence or toil.

And nooks there were that children knew,  
Where flowers in wild-blown sweetness grew ;  
And there beneath the forest-shade,  
Blithe groups of village children played,



Or pensive youths and maidens strayed,  
In life's sweet wayward pride.  
At times it seemed the sultry breeze  
Would linger 'mid the branching trees,  
And list while flower-roving bees  
Hummed in the summer tide ;  
Then forth would sweep, uncaring where,  
And flood with freshness all the air.

And near at hand the chapel stood,  
Whose bell inspired a reverent mood,  
Brought old and young, with heart subdued,  
Attendant on its chime :

There some had paid the marriage vow,  
With flowers enwreathed upon their brow,  
And loved as well and truly now,  
As in their gladsome prime.

And many on that sacred site  
Had borne the blest baptismal rite ;  
And oft within the ancient walls  
Had joined in holy festivals.  
And there around the building lay  
The graves of others—passed away ;  
Some even lost to rumour's tongue ;  
Some still lamented—old and young :  
A spot to heal or chasten thought,  
With deep and solemn teachings fraught.

When winter came with bleak attire,  
On each hearth blazed the winter fire,  
High heapèd with the ready store,  
That woodsmen from the forest bore.  
And when the hardy hunters came  
At night returned with welcome game—  
Perchance a deer, or birds of note,

Perchance a noble chamois goat,  
Glad cheer it was to see the glow,  
While all without was drift and snow ;  
And well it was that cheerful smiles  
Repaid the rigour of their toils.  
Then children crowded round to hear  
How flew the dogs, how fared the deer :  
How some on treach'rous ice had failed ;  
How bravely some the wolf assailed ;  
How some had sorely wounded been,  
Just as the glancing arrow keen,  
Them from his hungry jaws releast,  
And slew the gaunt and furious beast.  
Much marvelled they it should be so,  
And feared to touch their father's bow ,  
Yet pleased their mimic weapons bring  
And fly the arrows from the string.  
The parents note their children's play,  
And think upon the future day.  
And other while some ballad rhyme,  
Or legend of the olden time,  
Or stories of the saints would be  
The night's enlivening history.  
At times perchance some minstrel's lay  
Of lordly knight or lady gay ;  
Or else some pious pilgrim's prayer  
Who halted on his wandering there.

Dwelt with these peasants one whose name,  
Must now awhile our notice claim  
One long to be observed by fame,  
Or thought of as a spell :  
He lived in Burglen as the rest,  
And neighbours frankly him confest  
Among the brave the first and best :  
His name was WILLIAM TELL.

Beneath the roof where he was born  
Still saw he rise the golden morn,  
Still heard the pealing Alpine horn,  
    And lived devoid of care—  
And there his household treasures meet,  
A wife to make his labour sweet,  
Two boys his daily love to greet,  
    All these his pleasures share.  
Two mountain boys of active frames,  
Wilhelm and Walter were their names.

One day TELL laboured in the ground  
That formed his dwelling's frontward bound  
And sturdily his axe he plied  
Upon a tree-stem's knotty side.  
Yet paused he oft in thoughtful mood,  
As though with anxious doubts imbued.  
The merry boys were playing by,  
Watched by their mother's loving eye ;  
She notes at length TELL'S frequent pause,  
And instant seeks to learn the cause :  
" Dear husband ! thou wast ever glad ;  
Whence comes it now thou art so sad ?  
Oh ! tell me if some secret harm  
Hath worked thee to a strange alarm ?  
What thou endurest I can bear ;  
Whate'er thy grief, oh, let me share."

" Dear wife ! forbear thy boding fears,  
Though cause enough there be for tears.  
Come sit and listen while I say  
Of what befel but yesterday.  
Last night with toil o'erspent I came  
Thou know'st, and didst my tarrying blame.  
I went to see the ferryman,

Who lives upon the shore ;  
And of our country's wrongs we talked,  
And troubles yet in store ;  
For oft Kuoni rumour hears,  
As folk across the lake he steers.  
And there he told me of a deed,  
That made my flesh to creep :  
And he, the rugged ferryman,  
He could not choose but weep.  
Old Melchtal—he of Unterwald—  
Thou bearest him in mind,  
Is now a hapless fugitive ;  
Want-stricken, feeble, blind.  
The tyrant's minions pierced his eyes,  
And but for friendly aid,  
Melchtal the loved, the good, the wise,  
Must ply the beggar's trade.  
Well may'st thou shrink at such a sin,  
And done by human hand :  
God pardon them—for few there be  
Will pardon in our land !  
Sorrow and anger ruled by turns,  
As old Kuoni spoke ;  
And while we mourned, and chafed, and  
schemed,  
A sudden tempest broke.  
Fierce blew the blast, upheaved the lake,  
And while the waters toss,  
Cried from the farther shore a voice—  
'Haste, ferryman ! across.'  
Kuoni feared the angry storm ;  
Down to the boat I ran,  
And thanked be heaven who aided me,  
I saved the eager man.  
It was young Melchtal, forced to flee,

I led with hasty strides ;  
And now within our Uri bounds,  
He with thy father bides.  
I could not tell him of the wrong  
Upon his parent done ;  
But left him there, and wandered on  
Impatiently, alone.  
Like fire the blood coursed through my veins ;  
And when old Melchtal's plight  
Came o'er my mind—unconsciously,  
I clenched my hand to smite.  
I wandered on, nor whither saw,  
Such heat was in my brain ;  
Far up the rugged Rigisberg—  
The day began to wane :  
A driving blast came from the height,  
With blinding snow and sleet ;  
And there upon the dizzy ridge,  
I chanced a stranger meet.  
He, with a hunting-party gay,  
Went early on the chase ;  
But he had strayed, and now in vain,  
He sought the path to trace.  
Benumbed and shrinking from the gale,  
Had he been there alone,  
He would have died before the morn,  
And none his fate have known.  
Yet haughtily he spoke, and said,  
' Ho, peasant ! be my guide.'  
At such a time, a man, I thought,  
Might well abate his pride.  
' Guide me to Altorf,' next he said  
' Thy service I'll repay :'  
I knew him then, but nought replied,  
And turned and led the way.

'Twas Gessler, and at times I thought,  
 'Twere best to leave him there :  
 For like the lord of Unterwald,  
 His presence brings despair.  
 But yet I led—at length we came  
 In view of Altorf gate ;  
 And there the stranger questioned me  
 About my name and state.  
 ' Thy mien is bold,' he said, ' not such  
 As peasants ought to show :  
 What is thy name ? now answer me  
 Before I let thee go.'  
 ' Am I thy bondman ?' I replied—  
 ' Do I thy bidding wait ?  
 Lord Gessler, hear, my name is TELL :  
 A peasant's is my state.  
 But one of thousands, haughty lord,  
 All trusty men and strong ;  
 Who dare their ancient right uphold,  
 And dare resist the wrong.'  
 He started when I spoke his name,  
 And said, as then he turned,  
 ' Come, follow me, and thou shalt have  
 The pay thou well hast earned.'  
 Then answered I, ' my task is done,  
 I wait for no reward ;  
 At need bethink thee how one while,  
 A peasant served a lord.'  
 Whereat he chafed, and suddenly  
 Did to the archers call,  
 Who watched while pacing up and down  
 Upon the distant wall.  
 ' Ho ! hither guards : this fellow seize :'  
 My temper waxèd grim ;  
 My bow was in my hand, and yet

I did no harm to him,  
I left him standing in the path,  
And homeward took my way,  
And now good wife thou knowest why  
My thought is sad to-day."

She listened with attentive ear,  
In changeful mood of hope and fear.  
At last her tearful eye she raised,  
" Oh husband dear ! now heaven be praised  
That thou constrained to nobler good,  
The fierce temptation hast withstood.  
Thy wanderings for a time defer,  
Lest thou some vengeful risk incur ;  
And much the governor's wrath I dread,  
For what thou hast so bravely said."

" Fear not, dear wife, I shall be ware  
Of lurking foe or crafty snare ;  
But I must journey forth to-day,  
And counsel to our friends convey.  
Thy father says our leaguers wait  
But for the word to rouse the state.  
Wilhelm goes with me, for the lad  
E'er makes his honoured grandsire glad :  
To Altorf first—to learn if aught  
Hath promise to our party brought."

" Nay TELL ! go not ;" his wife replied,  
" Who knows what evil may betide ?  
In Altorf too what risk may be,  
Ye both may rue some treachery ?"  
" No risk no prize," TELL answering spoke,  
" And who, to break a country's yoke,  
Would not adventure to the deed."

Doth manly thought and purpose need:  
Repel thy fears thou may'st reflect,  
That Heaven can everywhere protect."

TELL reached his cross-bow from the wall,  
A weapon prized and true:  
His son tripped lightly by his side,  
And on their way they drew.  
With boding heart the mother saw  
Her first-born led away,  
And mounting to her chamber, there  
She meekly knelt to pray.  
Meantime the two with steady pace,  
Came near to Altorf's market-place.  
At each approach an archer guard  
With lance in hand kept watch and ward:  
And TELL unconscious of offence,  
Paid not the bidden reverence.  
"Hold!" cried the guard, "how, go ye by;  
Nor heed the signal lifted high?  
See, where it hangs! the law is now—  
That all who pass the cap shall bow."

"Bow to a cap!" said TELL, "who makes  
Such laws as even instinct breaks;  
And are we fallen so low to be  
A mocking jest for tyranny?"

"Ye waste but words in churlish pride:  
Salute the cap:" the guard replied.

"Nay," answered TELL, "shall it be told  
We sanctioned such an outrage bold?  
Think ye, sir archer, that our knees  
Are made to bend as tyrants please?"



We, nursed in freedom's rugged lap  
Cannot nor will salute the cap."

"Ho! guards, this way, this fellow dares  
To question of our chief's affairs ;  
I trow lord Gessler will him teach  
To hold another sort of speech."  
Round TELL and Wilhelm came the throng  
And marched away in circle strong,  
And brought them soon—the way was short—  
Where Gessler held his lordly court ;  
While angry threats and murmurs loud,  
Went through the people's following crowd.

The peasant stood before the lord,  
And bravely met his eye,  
As when he on the stormy hill  
Did timely aid supply.  
Young Wilhelm saw that glance of fire,  
And waited fearless as his sire ;  
And save the haughty ruler's ire—  
They boded nought of ill.  
Their homely garb looked plain beside  
The trappings gay of war and pride,  
That decked the ranks of those who bide  
The spacious hall to fill :  
For some within that vaulted room  
Wore velvet robe and nodding plume  
Nor did the glittering armour fail,  
The polished shield and coat of mail ;  
And gilded banners hanging high,  
Marked names of proudest chivalry.  
Above the rest lord Gessler sate,  
While round the door the archers wait.

When Gessler heard the prompt complaint  
 Touching his dignity's attain't,  
 He sudden asked, with frowning brow,  
 " Ho ! base-born peasant, who art thou ? "

TELL spoke, while proudly flushed his face,  
 " The base-born he, whose deeds are base.  
 Let him be such, who would enslave  
 A free-born people, true and brave. "

" What ! wilt thou bandy words with me ? "  
 Retorted Gessler scornfully ;  
 " Evading thus thy lord's appeal :  
 Thy name and errand now reveal. "

" My name thou know'st—when last we met,  
 Not hastily wilt thou forget.  
 My name is TELL—my errand's aim,  
 Is mine alone : not thine to claim. "

" Vaunt not," said Gessler, " but obey ;  
 And to the cap thy reverence pay. "

" To free-born men it is not given,  
 To bow the knee except to heaven.  
 Lord Gessler let this question cease,  
 And order now our prompt release. "

" And shall I thus the mandate break ?  
 Here more than honour is at stake.  
 The emperor's will ye now withstand,  
 From high to low throughout the land.  
 If thou would'st freely pass thy way  
 At once a subject's service pay. "

“ Lord Gessler,” answered TELL, “ can right  
Endure the wrongful ways of might ?  
What thou requirest is a snare,  
To make us Austrian bondage bear ;  
But come what may, I will not bow,  
Whate’er the emperor deem or thou.”

A movement went around the hall,  
At TELL’s undaunted speech ;  
And here and there one started up,  
Such daring to impeach.  
For many of his fame had heard,  
How he with ready hand  
Could send his arrow to the mark :  
None truer in the land.

“ So, as thou wilt,” was Gessler’s word,  
“ Wilt thou the penalty afford ?  
Hearken, bold peasant, on my breath  
Depends thy liberty or death.”

“ Death ? cruel lord, yes, well I know  
Thy heart to mercy’s teachings slow :  
But death for failing such behest !  
In this, forsooth, thou canst but jest.”

“ This shalt thou judge :” the lord replied,  
“ What youth is he stands at thy side ?”  
TELL heard the words with sudden start ;  
The wily question searched his heart.

The father looked down on his boy,  
A tear-drop dimmed his eye ;  
What pretext could he there employ  
To shape the apt reply ?

“ Let it content thee, lord,” he said,  
“ We love this gentle one ;  
And oft he dwells beneath our roof,  
He is—he is my son.”

Spake Gessler then, “ ’tis rumoured, TELL,  
Thou every bowman dost excel :  
Men say thy aim is sure and stark,  
And never fails the distant mark.  
Before us thou shalt send a shaft,  
And shew a sample of thy craft.  
Break up the court, for here the proof,  
Admits no strait inclosing roof.”

The courtly train then left the hall,  
The troop of archers past ;  
And guarded still by watchful eyes,  
TELL with his son went last.  
And soon two ranks stood face to face,  
Were ranged along the market-place,  
As Gessler, from a lofty seat,  
Ordered the preparations meet.  
TELL felt a proud and gladsome thrill  
To know his fate hung on his skill ;  
Ere long, he hoped, the trial o’er,  
To pass unquestioned as before.

But soon a new command he heard,  
That him to deepest anguish stirred :  
“ Now, TELL,” said Gessler, “ take thy bow,  
And straight to yonder station go.  
The boy a bow-shot distant led  
Shall stand,—an apple on his head  
Shall be thy mark—a noble test ;  
Prove well thy aim, and do thy best ;

For if the arrow go astray,  
Thy life shall instant forfeit pay."

TELL stood as one transformed to stone,  
Or horrid spell around him thrown.  
Oh, was it not some fearful dream,  
That dread reality did seem?  
Or was it but a mockery, meant  
To prove how steadfast his intent?

"Gessler," he said, "Oh, hear in ruth,  
No blame attends this gentle youth  
He has in nought offended thee,  
And well may prove thy clemency."

The lord rejoined, "he bears thy name—  
'Tis well: thou'lt need a stricter aim."

An archer slowly paced the ground;  
Dismayed the people crowded round,  
A shuddering horror o'er them fell,  
To mark the fierce suspense of TELL.  
And threats were muttered dark and deep;  
And mothers there were seen to weep.  
Young Wilhelm's danger made them sad,  
For all who saw him loved the lad,  
Who cheered by youthful courage good,  
Already in the distance stood.

Who goes to Altorf's market-place,  
Full six score steps may truly pace,  
Between two fountains in the space,  
Whose waters leap and play,  
And high their bubbling current throw,  
And splash and murmur as they flow:

Built to all after-time to show  
Where, on that fateful day—  
Two heroes stood—whose like is none :  
A hero father—hero son.

The cherished bow to TELL was brought,  
He next the offered arrows sought,  
And chose a shaft both straight and keen,  
And then—he hoped the act unseen—  
He stealthily a second drew,  
And hid beneath his vest from view  
But few could look upon his face,  
As slowly then he took his place ;  
So painful was the sight to see  
That matchless bowman's agony.

Then all his pent emotion broke,  
And to his hardy boy he spoke :  
“ My son, my son, Oh, woe the hour,  
That we became the sport of power !  
Oh, hadst thou with thy mother stayed,  
This bitter part thou hadst not played !  
Oh ! could she see thee standing there,  
What were her anguish—her despair !  
How can I aim oppressed with fears,  
Foreboding all her grief and tears ?”

Wilhelm replied in sweetest tone,  
To childhood that belongs alone ;  
“ No danger, father's in thy string,  
Thou hitt'st the bird upon the wing ;  
And far as arrow's flight may be  
Wilt strike an apple from the tree.  
Oh, fear not, father, for thy skill,  
The weapon can direct at will.”

TELL raised his cross-bow to the aim,  
It seemed his courage went and came ;  
Yet who will dare the parent blame,  
He still delayed to do.

He looked from eye to eye, and saw,  
Here, maledictions on the law ;  
There, dark resolves that inly gnaw,  
And down his weapon threw :

“ Lord Gessler,” cried he, “ take my life  
Let cease at once this goading strife :  
Do with me as thou wilt, but spare  
The boy to bless his mother’s care.”

The governor in haste replied,  
“ In vain the plea—thy suit’s denied.”

Among the crowd there stood a few  
Of worthy fame and courage true  
They joined in eloquent request,  
TELL might be spared the fearful test.  
But Gessler kept his stubborn mood  
Nor could his purpose be withstood.

Said TELL, “ I cannot harm my son ;  
For now he seems my dearest one.  
And year by year—from infancy,  
His life comes crowding back to me :  
The days of all his simple wiles,  
The days of all his mother’s smiles.—  
My heart revolts with very shame  
To think of such a murd’rous aim.”

“ Dear father, thou hast taught me well,  
To hold on hope, whate’er befel.  
My mother too, when danger near,  
Would say heaven’s trust preserves from fear.

Oh, fear not, father, that I shrink,  
 Thou shalt not see an eyelid wink.  
 Yon rock, whose summit breasts the sky,  
 Shall not more firmly stand than I."

"Boy, well hast thou reminded me  
 Of what befits myself and thee.  
 If I in thought a moment failed,  
 If for a space my spirit quailed,  
 I now can surer guidance ask,  
 I now can dare the fearful task.  
 Heaven help us, boy ! for such a deed,  
 Who would not truest courage need ?"

The father kissed his son, and then  
 Paced slowly to his place again ;  
 And paused once more at Gessler's seat  
 To crave remission of the feat :  
 "Recall," he said, "thy stern decree ;  
 Or work thy will alone on me.  
 Let children not thy wrath employ ;  
 I'll kneel to thee to save my boy."

With angry taunt the governor laught,  
 "Is life less worth than bowman's craft ?  
 Vex me no more : 'tis vain to ask ;  
 Away ! betake thee to thy task."

The fire that lights a freeman's soul,  
 In TELL's eye flashed as glowing coal,  
 And back he strode amain :  
 He seized his bow, and aiming true,  
 Loud twanged the string, the arrow flew,  
 The apple split in twain ;  
 And as the severed fragments fell,  
 The people cried—' Hurra ! for TELL.'



And who shall paint the father's joy,  
To note the safety of his boy?  
"Oh, bravely hast thou stood the test!"  
He said, and clasped him to his breast.

But Gessler ill could brook the skill  
That thus opposed his deadly will;  
The hidden arrow caught his eye,  
That TELL had taken covertly:  
"How now," he cried, "more rebels' craft:  
Wherefore and whence that other shaft?"  
Stept boldly forth, TELL made reply,  
"Learn, haughty lord, if so that I  
Had harmed my son—lord though thou be,  
This second shaft was meant for thee."

None stood there by that dared assuage  
The governor's vindictive rage;  
"I promised life," he cried to TELL;  
"And thou shalt live; but in a cell."  
And loud he spoke his stern commands—  
"Guards! seize the traitor: bind his hands.  
Him with our escort will we take  
To Kussnacht's tower beyond the lake."

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### CANTO III.

The boat was manned as Gessler bade,  
Along the lake her course was laid;  
But what a mingled freight she bore  
From Altorf to the farther shore!  
Triumphant power, and malice there,  
And servile thought, and weary care,

And doubt of retributive strife,  
And fears that dry the springs of life,  
Assembled were—a little plan  
Of man's accustomed art with man.

Lord Gessler sat, still fierce and grim,  
The landscape had no charms for him ;  
He heeded not the graceful play  
Of light and shade, where sunbeams lay.  
No charm he saw in clustering trees,  
That bowed their branches to the breeze ;  
Nor heard the lightly sounding splash,  
As wavelets on the margin dash.  
From time to time his glances fell  
Upon his hated victim TELL,  
Who sat with wrist in fetters rude ;  
His will constrained yet unsubdued.  
The iron could not curb his mind,  
His thought could rove still unconfined.  
Revisiting his household cares,  
His wife's, his boys' alarm he shares ;  
How will they watch and wait for him,  
Now sitting there with fettered limb !  
He prays heaven shield them yet from harm ;  
And while he thinks his heart grows warm,  
And seems to catch its wonted glow—  
But what a fate awaits him now !  
He, who could clime the topmost fell,  
Now doomed to pine in darksome cell ;  
He, who could face the wolf or boar,  
May scale the mountain peaks no more !  
Must light exchange for dismal gloom,  
And freedom for a living tomb.

But TELL still hoped in hour of need  
To save himself by valiant deed ;

Although oppressed by weighty care,  
Not his the weakness of despair.  
He all around the mountains knew,  
That showed their lofty summits blue ;  
Their changeful outline he could trace,  
Familiar as a brother's face.  
He knew where foaming torrents fell,  
And where reposed the verdant dell ;  
And while he viewed the rugged slopes,  
Came crowding back his youthful hopes.

Yet as he gazed, how changed the view,  
A shadow o'er the landscape grew.  
The hills put on a misty shroud,  
And downward crept the gathering cloud.  
Then came a whirl—a hollow breeze,  
That, wildly moaning, swept the trees ;  
Then all was mute—a solemn change—  
Yet seemed the stillness drear and strange,  
As though some direful presence there  
Lay circling on the darkening air ;  
And waited only for a doom,  
To blot the day with tempest's gloom.

Anon there rushed a ragged blast,  
That o'er the lake foam-lashing past ;  
As though a wind, grown tired of play,  
In sullen spite had run away.  
And thunder, muttering remote,  
Seemed like a far-off battle note  
At times a slanting sunny beam  
Flung down a fitful ghastly gleam.  
And still more fearful seemed the change :  
More ominous the portents strange.

But dark the sky and darker grew,  
The shrieking blast unceasing blew,  
And lightning flash and storm-cloud driven,  
Sped madly o'er the lurid heaven.  
And now the lake's deep waters hurled,  
In white and foaming billows curled ;  
And like a bird with broken wing,  
Or reeling like a drunken thing,  
There tossed the boat ; her crew all pale,  
Cowered in dismay beneath the gale.  
In vain cried Gessler, " Row, ye knaves :"  
They pointed to the surging waves,  
That in that wild appalling hour  
There mocked his presence and his power.  
No help was now in bows or spears ;  
And might despaired, rebuked by fears.

And howling still the tempest blew  
And high the raging waters flew ;  
So giddily the boat was toss'd,  
Her crew gave up themselves for lost.  
Now rising on a surging swell,  
Now into yawning deeps she fell ;  
And each man trembled for his life,  
So fierce the elemental strife,  
Save TELL, who sat with eye serene,  
And spirit calm, and lofty mien :  
A good man's thought all fear disarms,  
And comforts him amid alarms.

And still the thunderous storm-clouds flew,  
And still the howling tempest blew.  
At times it seemed with dreadful swoop,  
Down on the boiling lake to stoop ;  
With fury on the boat to bear—

anon it swept the upper air,  
Then came again that silence deep,  
As though the winds had gone to sleep ;  
Then gust on gust rushed wildly driven,  
From every quarter of the heaven,  
And hurtling from the mountain shore,  
Careered more fiercely than before.

The fury of the foaming lake,  
Might well the stoutest courage shake.  
In vain the crew their labours ply ;  
The tempest held the mastery :  
Now hither and now thither rocked,  
As though the storm their terror mocked.  
Dark threats, in vain, did Gessler urge,  
They nought availed against the surge.  
Upon their benches sat the crew,  
No effort could they more renew ;  
Their strength was gone, their hope all spent ;  
Nor whence they came, nor whither went  
Could see, for spray and shifting gloom ;  
And sullen waited for their doom.

While thus they powerless sat in dread,  
And fast their courage fell,  
An archer cried, " one hope is left ;  
Our only hope is TELL.  
Lord Gessler, hearken ! he is skilled,  
Beyond all reach of fear ;  
And well as he can use the bow,  
So wisely can he steer.  
Oh, let him now, from irons freed,  
But take the helm in hand ;  
warrant me, lord Gessler, soon  
He'll bring the boat to land."

The governor heard and thought awhile,  
What if the captive should refuse ?  
Or seek to render guile for guile ;  
Or death to loss of freedom choose ?  
Should he, the ruler in the land,  
Seek safety at a peasant's hand ?  
Or give to liberty again,  
The bravest of the mountain men ?  
Anon his hesitation past ;  
For unabated blew the blast.  
Not mercy made him cling to life,  
But further hope of vengeful strife.

So Gessler spoke, " If, as I hear,  
Thou, TELL, art skilled a boat to steer,  
Now at the rudder take thy stand,  
And bring us safely to the land.  
Thus traitorous speech shalt thou repay,  
And pardoned, freely pass thy way."

TELL's hands were loosed from fetters vile,  
He thus acceptance spake the while :  
" My life," he said, " is dear to me,  
As thine, lord Gessler, is to thee.  
My love a wife and children claim ;  
And somewhat for my country's fame.  
Judge ye, ere-long, as I perform,  
What skill may weather out the storm."

On this the hardy mountaineer,  
With helm in hand, began to steer  
And warily made for the shores,  
The while the crew resumed their oars.  
Within the mountain's sheltering height,  
He knew the gale of lesser might.

The boat obeyed the steersman true,  
And o'er the surges landward drew ;  
And guided by TELL'S vigorous arm,  
The crew forgot their late alarm.  
E'en Gessler owned the courage brave,  
That triumphed o'er the threatening wave.

But TELL, by shrewd perception taught,  
Revolved within a daring thought ;  
A purpose lurked within his eye,  
Which none there present may descry.  
Well might he dread, if he should land  
With Gessler and his servile band,  
The dungeon still would be his fate,  
And he long years a captive wait ;  
In dismal night or grisly day,  
Despairing linger life away.  
TELL'S bow and quiver at his feet,  
Were placed behind lord Gessler's seat :  
A trophy for the massive wall,  
In Kussnacht's spacious castle hall.

Upon the border of the lake  
Juts forth a rock, low, rugged, bare ;  
Where angry waters foaming break—  
The traveller still may see it there.  
A little chapel marks the place,  
Built in the olden time ;  
For well men loved in ancient days  
To hallow the sublime.  
Long may the little chapel stand,  
A noble record in the land.

Then TELL he so adroitly steered,  
That to the rock the vessel neared.

With prompt design he dared a deed,  
Where only daring can succeed ;  
And nearer come, he grasped his bow,  
His quiver seized—and stooping low,  
Upon the rock he leapt :



And with his foot the vessel spurned ;  
Her prow upon the impulse turned,  
And past the rock she swept—  
Again to struggle with the blast,  
That still blew furiously and fast.

As chafes a tiger in his cage,  
So Gessler stormed in baffled rage  
His passion's heat in curses broke,  
Stern maledictions loud he spoke,



On winds that mocked him as they blew,  
Upon his archers, boat, and crew.  
Vain all the efforts they could make,  
The vessel drifted o'er the lake.

TELL, panting with the sudden shock,  
Remained yet standing on the rock ;  
And in the first brief moments there,  
He prayed a thankful spirit's prayer.  
By signs he marked the sudden gale,  
Its fury spent, began to fail :  
Another work remains ere night—  
He turned and climbed the rocky height.

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#### CANTO IV.

The fury of the storm was past,  
Less fiercely blew the howling blast ;  
The waters tossed less wild and high ;  
The boat escaped the peril nigh.  
The crew at length could ply their oars,  
As Gessler pointed to the shores ;  
And rowing yet some miles away,  
They landed in a distant bay.  
Here Gessler no delay could brook,  
Himself at once to horse betook ;  
His captain too, and archer guide,  
Did straight for Kussnacht's castle ride.  
On foot the rest their journey take,  
Right glad to have escaped the lake.

But TELL, meanwhile, with ready might,  
Had gained the summit of the height ;  
And paused a space as though he sought,  
To strive with some contending thought

His trusty bow he closely scanned,  
To note if ready to his hand ;  
He wiped the moisture from the string,  
And tried the promptly rising spring :  
And thus with satisfaction knew,  
His cherished weapon still was true.  
He slung his quiver at his back,  
And hastened on the mountain track ;  
He knew all by-paths many a mile,  
Through hidden glen or steep defile ;  
Or traversing a turfy slope,  
Or o'er some rocky hillock's cope ;  
Or underneath the gloomy firs,  
Whose top the wind unceasing stirs.  
Some secret power seemed him to chase,  
So fast and constant was his pace ;  
He kept his eye bent on the ground,  
And neither paused or looked around.  
What were the purpose thus to need  
Such steady persevering speed ?

Perchance it was he homeward went,  
On sweet domestic joys intent.  
But far behind him Burglen lay ;  
His home was many miles away.  
In vain you watched his earnest face,  
No passing smile there left a trace ;  
For glad emotions seemed no room,  
Where all looked mingled doubt and gloom.  
Whate'er the recollections brought,  
They but impelled his sterner thought.

Yet once he paused—and standing still,  
Upon the shoulder of a hill,  
Beheld within his vision's ken,  
The heights that from his vision fell.

In mind he saw the pleasant scene,  
As though it at his feet had been :  
Partook of welcome household joys,  
And shared the pastimes of his boys.  
He heard their voices, loving strife ;  
And soothed his long-expectant wife.  
So far remote, in thought so near ;  
How peaceful there, how fervid here !  
The pause thus to affection lent,  
Once more he to his purpose bent ;  
And paced along his devious way,  
While waned the swiftly-passing day.

At length a rocky brow he reached,  
O'er which a hollow roadway stretched ;  
Where rooted broken crags among,  
Wild shrubs a tangled shadow flung,  
And from each narrow crevice hung  
Thin weeds and scanty grass :  
And TELL came on with hasty stride,  
Behind the crags he sought to hide,  
He knew that Gessler soon must ride  
Along that rugged pass :  
Of old it was the public way  
That from the lake to Kussnacht lay.

He climbed among the crags and sate  
As one resolved that lies in wait ;  
No wavering purpose had he now,  
He gazed towards the rising brow.  
While past, on various errand bent,  
Wayfarers on the journey went.  
One time some mounted trader wise  
In traffic's wiles or merchandise :  
Anon a daring hunter came

In eager quest of mountain game ;  
 Or couriers with impatient speed ;  
 Or beggars tottering in their need.  
 Herdsmen and husbandmen went past,  
 And mounted soldiers riding fast ;  
 And gaily came a marriage throng  
 With music and with bridal song.  
 And whiles with toiling penance bent  
 A pilgrim paced the steep ascent ;  
 Seeking perchance some distant shrine,  
 Some saintly relics deemed divine.  
 Each had a purpose in his breast—  
 Pride, love, devotion, trade or jest.

“ And mine,” said TELL, “ is true and brave ;  
 My purpose is the land to save.  
 I lived in peaceful thought with all,  
 Ere came this proud usurper’s thrall.  
 Why must the emperor’s grasping hand,  
 Oppress this once rejoicing land ;  
 And bring a happy race to shame,  
 Who own a birthright in their name ?”

“ Long have I proved thee, friendly bow,  
 With thee the prowling wolf laid low ;  
 But now a crowning shot I claim,  
 Ne’er hung so much upon thy aim.  
 Among the shafts shall two be known,  
 That whizzing from thy string have flown.  
 I shudder yet to think of one,  
 That threatened sore my darling son.  
 And this a fellow-shot shall be,  
 For country, home, and liberty.”

“ Make way, Lord Gessler comes, make way !”  
 Thus broke a sudden cry ;

And armed as for a coming fray,  
An archer speeded by :  
Erect he held the pointed lance,  
And looked around with threatening glance.

Then came a peasant woman there,  
Her look depressed by grief and care ;  
Her eyes with weary weeping red ;  
Two children by the hand she led :  
Not theirs the joy that childhood brings,  
Sorrow had checked its tender springs.

Ah ! truly had she cause to weep,  
And still for pity pray ;  
For in a dungeon dark and deep,  
Her husband lingering lay.  
Long months endured of sad suspense  
An honest tongue his sole offence.  
They whom his labour did sustain,  
Now left to misery and pain.

The archer passed, and in the rear,  
Was Gessler seen approaching near ;  
While to the captain at his side,  
He talked in all his wonted pride.  
He said, " Shall such a paltry land,  
Thus resolute against us stand ?  
By heaven ! I'll curb the people still ;  
And force them to the emperor's will.  
Nought care I for the rights they claim,  
With rebels but an idle name."

E'en as he spoke, the woman moved,  
And with her children knelt ;  
And with her piteous prayer essayed

Lord Gessler's heart to melt :  
 " Be merciful, dread lord," her plea,  
 " And give my husband back to me ;  
 My children pining cry for bread,  
 And bitter tears we long have shed."

" Whence this intrusion ?" Gessler cried ;  
 " Ho ! wretched woman, stand aside.  
 Must I be vexed by childish tears ;  
 Or list a woman's idle fears ?"

" Mercy, lord Gessler, we implore :  
 My husband unto us restore."

" Peace, woman ! once more stand aside ;  
 Lest I in anger o'er thee ride."  
 Regardless of the suppliant's need,  
 The governor spurred his restive steed—  
 When instant as a flash of light  
 An arrow whizzed in rapid flight ;  
 It clove Lord Gessler's broidered vest,  
 And deeply pierced his haughty breast ;  
 And shrinking with the deadly pain,  
 His hands forsook the bridle rein ;  
 Down from the horse's back he sank,  
 And fell upon the sloping bank :  
 Fast trickling from the sudden wound  
 His blood streamed redly o'er the ground.  
 In vain the captain stooping low,  
 Essayed to staunch the fatal flow.

Then strove that once proud lord to speak,  
 Though fading eye, and pallid cheek,  
 And failing breath, and accents weak,  
 His agony betrayed :

The captain kneeling at his side,  
 To calm his troubled temper tried,  
 All soothing offices supplied,  
 And lent him ready aid :  
 " May heaven have mercy !"—Gessler said,  
 " Such shot can TELL alone have sped."

" True !" cried a voice,—“ the shot was mine  
 Aimed now without command of thine.”  
 The listeners saw with sudden fear,  
 TELL's form above the rock appear—  
 " Gessler," he cried, " thy tyranny  
 Hath met its doom—the land is free !”

The tyrant's dead—the land is free !  
 On went the shout of liberty.  
 It woke the sleepers in Lucerne ;  
 It roused the busy streets of Berne.  
 It shook Mount Pilate's forests grim ;  
 It swelled the monks of Bernard's hymn.  
 And on it went—the land is free !  
 Around the distant Genfer See ;  
 And onwards still with gathering swen,  
 From Uri's hills to Appenzell.  
 Afar from Freiburg's towers it rung ;  
 It sped through Bale from tongue to tongue.  
 It all the Gotthard's echoes woke ;  
 And from the Jungfrau's top it spoke ;  
 It thundered 'mid the Schreckhorn's rocks ;  
 It pealed aloud from Zurich's clocks.  
 Where Constance overlooks her lake,  
 The far-resounding summons spake.  
 It mingled with Schaffhausen's roar ;  
 It leaped the Rhine from shore to shore ;  
 And dwellers on the rushing Rhone,  
 Sent back its spirit-stirring tone.

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Oh, may this ancient Alpine land,  
Be ever great as she is grand !  
Mont Blanc's white peaks for ever be  
The symbol of her liberty !

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## THE ENVOY.

The setting sun shone red when we  
Rose from our seats beneath the tree ;  
And as towards the house we walked,  
Among themselves the children talked ;  
And here and there a wish exprest,  
To know in simple phrase the rest.  
So I replied—" 'mid wild alarms,  
At once the Cantons rushed to arms.  
The land is free ! their battle shout ;  
They drove the Austrian tyrants out ;  
Retook each castle, tower, and town,  
And struck the proud usurpers down.  
Thus showing in their freedom's prime,  
An earnest of the coming time."

" Dear children !" then, said I, " attend  
Although my tale has found its end,  
Remember, there are tyrants still—  
With malice armed, and deadly skill ;  
And often they usurp our hearts,  
Pride, anger, envy—baser parts.  
Against them all must we contend,  
For fiercely they their post defend.  
Who trusteth God, and liveth well,  
More tyrants overcomes than TELL !"