

opened a path for that influx of scientific knowledge which has produced in after centuries the most enormous effects on the welfare of Europe, and made life possible for millions who would otherwise have been pent within the narrow bounds of Europe to devour each other in the struggle for life and bread!"

## CHAPTER III.

*DEFENSE OF FREEDOM IN ALPINE PASSES.*

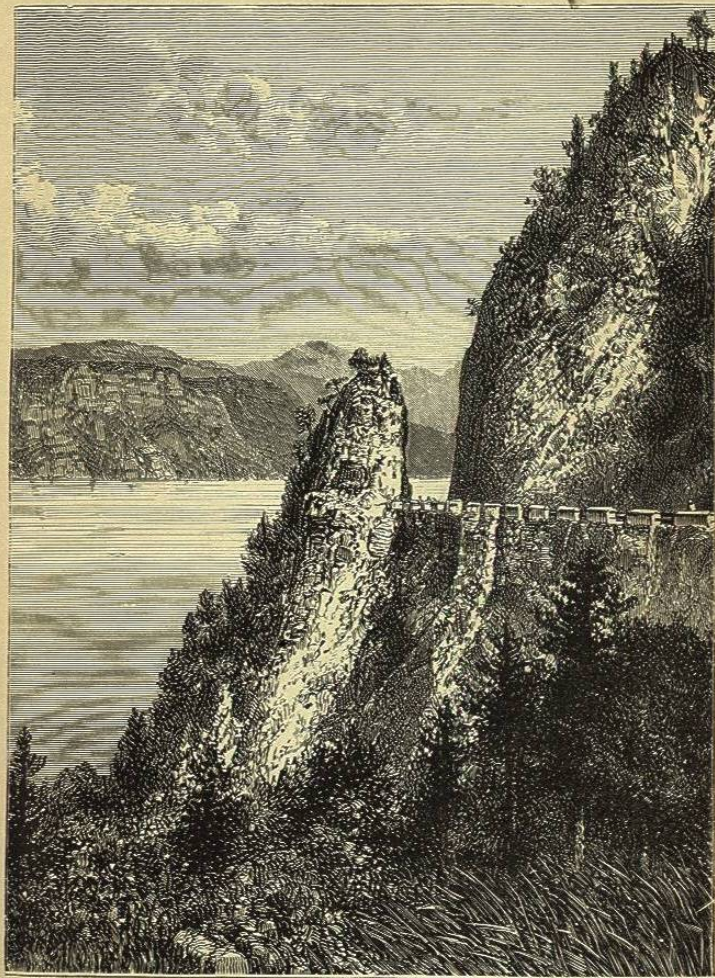
1. WHILE the great sovereigns of Europe were busy in fighting the Moslems in Palestine, they did not entirely neglect affairs at home. Some of them were very good rulers, protecting their subjects and maintaining good order, and others were tyrannical and imposed all sorts of taxes and heavy burdens upon the people. Up among the Alps, where the country is made up of rough, rocky mountains and narrow valleys, lived a people who were practically free. They lived in little communities, each one of which elected its own magistrate or governor, and made its own laws. The region was so poor and rough that the neighboring kings little cared to get possession of it, and the Alpine dwellers had a greater amount of freedom than any other people of Europe. The country was divided into little separate communities, one of which was called Schwytz, and this afterward gave the name to the whole country—Switzerland.

2. This country of the Swiss was really a part of the German empire, but the emperors had extended their rule over the lower parts of the country, leaving the forest cantons free. And a brave, courageous, and industrious people grew up there. No pauper-house among the Alps, for every able-bodied person worked, and no body tried to rob his neighbor of his honest earnings.

They were a strong athletic race, and the monarchs of the surrounding countries were glad to secure Swiss soldiers, for it was said that the Swiss never deserted. In 1298, while Wallace was struggling for freedom in Scotland, Albert of Austria, the second of the house of Hapsburg, resolved to get possession of the free forest cantons. He observed great secrecy in carrying out his designs, and it was not until a tax-gatherer or bailiff was permanently established in the country, supported by Austrian soldiers, that the people awakened to their danger. The story that follows is one that all true Swiss delight to believe, and, though it may not be true in regard to names and details, yet as a record of the main incidents of history it is substantially correct.

3. The first Austrian bailiff was Hermann Gessler, who built a strong fortress at Küssnacht, in Uri. At first he professed great love for the people, but when he became firmly established he threw off the mask, and showed himself to be a cruel, cowardly, mean-spirited tyrant. He was both vain and greedy, and he exacted both homage and tribute from the surrounding peasantry. Property was seized by the soldiers, and, should the owner venture to remonstrate, he was mercilessly beaten or killed on the spot. Complaints to the governor were followed by fresh outrages, until no one, even in the most secluded valleys, considered himself safe. Here tyranny as usual overstepped the bounds of safety. The free spirit, born of toil and privations in the mountain-fastnesses, would not long endure the outrages to which the people were subjected. A leader only was needed to induce a general revolt, and this leader was found in the person of William Tell.

4. William Tell, according to the received accounts, was born at Bürgelen, a secluded hamlet in the canton of



*Lake Lucerne.*

Uri, near the lake of Lucerne, about the year 1275; and, like his forefathers, was the proprietor of a cottage, a few small fields, a vineyard, and an orchard. When William had reached the age of twenty, his father is said to have died, bequeathing to him these humble possessions. Endowed by nature with a lofty and energetic mind, Tell was distinguished also by great physical strength and manly beauty. He was taller by a head than most of his companions; he loved to climb the rugged rocks of his native mountains in pursuit of the chamois, and to steer his boat across the lake in time of storm and of danger. The load of wood which he could bear upon his shoulders was double that which any ordinary man could support.

5. With other sources of happiness, Tell combined that of possessing an intimate friend, who dwelt amid the rocky heights separating Uri from Unterwalden. Arnold Anderhalden, of Melchthal, was this associate. Although similar in many salient points of character, there was still an essential difference between the two men. Arnold, of Melchthal, while he loved his country with an ardor equal to that of Tell, and was capable of very great actions, was not prepared for much patient suffering or long endurance of wrong. Tell, whose temperament was more calm, and whose passions were more influenced by reason than impulse, only succeeded in restraining his friend's impulsive character by the stern force of example. Meantime the two friends passed their days in the enjoyment of one another's society, visiting at intervals each other's humble residence. Tell foresaw, on the arrival of Gessler, many of the misfortunes which must inevitably follow his iron rule, and without explaining his views even to Arnold, of Melchthal, without needlessly alarming his family, endeavored to devise some means, not of bearing the yoke patiently, but of delivering his country from the galling

oppression which Albert had brought upon it. The hero felt satisfied that the evil deeds of the governor would sooner or later bring just retribution upon him; for this, and many other reasons, therefore, despite his own secret wishes, when Arnold poured out his fiery wrath in the ear of his friend, he listened calmly, and, to avoid inflaming him more, avowed none of his own views, or even feelings, in return.

6. One evening, however, William Tell and his wife sat in front of their cottage, watching their son amusing himself amid the flocks, when the former grew more thoughtful and sad than usual. Presently Tell spoke, and for the first time imparted to his wife some of his most secret designs. While the conversation was still proceeding, the parents saw their son rush toward them crying for help, and shouting the name of old Melchthal. As he spoke, Arnold's father appeared in sight, led by his grand-child, and feeling his way with a stick. Tell and his wife hastened forward, and discovered, to their inconceivable horror, that their friend was blind; his eyes having been put out with hot irons. The hero of Bürgelen, burning with just indignation, called on the old man to explain the fearful sight, and also the cause of Arnold's absence.

7. It appeared that that very morning the father, son, and grand-daughter were in the fields loading a couple of oxen with produce for the market-town, when an Austrian soldier presented himself, and, having examined the animals, which appeared to suit his fancy, ordered their owner to unyoke the beasts preparatory to his driving them off. Adding insolence to tyranny, he further remarked that such clod-poles might very well draw their own plows and carts. Arnold, furious at the man's daring impertinence, was only restrained by his father's ear-

nest entreaties from sacrificing the robber on the spot; nothing, however, could prevent him from aiming a blow at the soldier, which broke two of his fingers.

8. The enraged soldier then retreated; but old Melchthal, who well knew the character of Gessler, immediately forced Arnold, much against his inclination, to go and conceal himself for some days in the Righi. Scarcely had Arnold departed in this direction, when a detachment of guards from Altorf surrounded their humble tenement, and dragged old Melchthal before Gessler, who ordered him to give up his son. Furious at the refusal which ensued, the tyrant commanded the old man's eyes to be put out, and then sent him forth blind to deplore his misfortunes.

9. Tell heard the story of Melchthal in silence, and, when he had finished, inquired the exact spot of his son's concealment. The father replied that it was in a particular cavern of Mount Righi, the desert rocks of which place are unknown to the emissaries of the governor, and there he had promised to remain until he received his parent's permission to come forth. This Tell requested might be granted immediately; and, turning to his son, ordered him to start at once for the Righi with a message to Arnold. Walter obeyed gladly; and, providing himself with food, and receiving private instructions from his father, went on his journey under cover of the night.

10. Tell himself then threw around his own person a cloak of wolf-skin, seized his quiver full of sharp arrows, and, taking his terrible bow, which few could bend, in hand, bade adieu to his wife for a few days, and took his departure in an opposite direction from that pursued by his son. It was quite dawn when Walter reached the Righi, and a slight column of blue smoke speedily directed him to the spot where Arnold lay concealed. The intru-

sion at first startled the fugitive; but, recognizing Tell's son, he listened eagerly to his dismal story, the conclusion of which roused in him so much fury that he would have rushed forth at once to assassinate Gessler had not Walter restrained him.

11. Schooled by Tell, he informed him that his father was engaged in preparing vengeance for the tyrant's crime, being at that moment with Werner Stauffacher concerting proper measures of resistance. "'Go,' said my father, 'and tell Arnold of this new villany of the governor's, and say that it is not rage which can give us just revenge, but the utmost exertion of courage and prudence. I leave Schwytz to bid Werner arm his canton; let Melchthal go to Stautz and prepare the men of Unterwalden for the outbreak; having done this, let him meet me, with Fürst and Werner, in the field of Grütli!'"

12. Arnold, scarcely taking time to refresh himself with food, sent Walter on his homeward journey, while he started for Stautz. Walter, when alone, turned his steps toward Altorf, where unfortunately, and unknown to himself, he came into the presence of Gessler, to whom he uttered somewhat hard things about the state of the country, being led to commit himself by the artful questions of the tyrant, who immediately ordered the lad into confinement, with strict injunctions to the guards to seize whomsoever should claim him.

13. Meanwhile, certain doubts and fears, from he knew not what cause, arose in the mind of Gessler, and struck him with a presentiment that all was not right. He imagined that the people wore in their looks less abject submission to his authority, and, the better to satisfy himself of the correctness or erroneousness of this view, he commanded Berenger to erect at dawn of day, in the market-place of Altorf, a pole, on the point of which he was to

place the ducal cap of Austria. An order was further promulgated, to the effect that every one passing near or within sight of it should make obeisance, in proof of his honor and fealty to the duke.

14. Numerous soldiers under arms were directed to surround the place, to keep the avenues, and to compel the passers-by to bend with proper respect to the emblem of the governing power of the three cantons. Gessler likewise determined that whoever should disobey the mandate should be accused of disaffection, and treated accordingly; a measure which promised both to discover the discontented, and furnish sufficient grounds for their punishment. Numerous detachments of troops, among whom money had been previously distributed, were then placed around to see that his commands were scrupulously obeyed. History scarcely records another instance of tyranny so galling and humiliating to the oppressed, and so insolent on the part of its author.

15. The proceedings of Tell in the interval were of the deepest concern to the country. Having arrived within the territory of Schwytz, and at the village of Stainea, he called at the house of Werner, and, being admitted, threw at his feet a heavy bundle of lances, arrows, cross-bows, and swords. "Werner Stauffacher," cried Tell, "the time is come for action!" and without a moment's delay he informed his friend of all that had passed, dwelling minutely on every detail. And, when he had at length finished, the cautious Werner could restrain his wrath no longer, but exclaimed, clasping the hero's hand, "Friend, let us begin; I am ready!" After further brief conference, they, by separate ways, carried round arms to their friends in the town and neighboring villages. Many hours were thus consumed; and, when their weapons were at last distributed, they both returned to Stauffacher's house,

snatched some slight refreshment, and then sped on their way to Grütli, accompanied by ten of their most tried adherents.

16. The lake of Lucerne was soon reached, and a boat procured. Werner, perceiving the furious tempest, inquired of Tell if his skill would enable him to struggle against the storm. "Arnold awaits us!" cried William; "and the fate of our country depends on this interview!" With these words he leaped into the boat, Werner jumped after him, and the rest followed. Tell cast loose the agitated vessel, seized the tiller, and, hoisting sail, the little craft flew along the waves.

17. Presently, it is said, the wind moderated, and ere they reached the opposite side had ceased altogether—a phenomenon common in these mountain lakes. The boat was now made fast, and the conspirators hastened to the field of Grütli, where, at the mouth of a cavern of the same name, Arnold and Walter Fürst awaited them, each with ten other companions. Tell allowed no consideration of natural feeling to silence the calls of duty, but at once came to the point. He first gave a brief sketch of the state of the country under the Austrian bailiffs, and, having shown to the satisfaction of his companions the necessity for immediate and combined action, is related to have added: "We may have our plans frustrated by delay, and the time has come for action. I ask only a few days for preparation. Unterwalden and Schwytz are armed. Three hundred and fifty warriors are, I am assured, ready. I will remain in Altorf, and, as soon as I receive tidings from Früst, will fire a huge pile of wood near my house. At this signal let all march to the rendezvous, and, when united, we will pour down upon Altorf, where I will then strive to rouse the people!"

18. This plan of the campaign was agreed to; and it