



The White Book of Sarnen

Excerpt from the White Book of Sarnen

“This is the beginning of the three states of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden. ... The three countries had good peace for many years until the Counts of Habsburg came near them. Then it happened that the bailiff Gessler went to Uri and had a staff erected there under the linden tree ... and announced that everyone who passed should salute their hats ...

A gentleman named Tell, ..., walked past the stick several times without greeting him. The warrior sued him at the bailiff. Tell was a good marksman and had beautiful children. The bailiff had her fetched and forced Tell to shoot an apple off the head of one of his children. ... Tell took an arrow and put ... it in his gun. He took a second one in his hand, drew the crossbow, asked God to protect his child, and shot the apple from the child's head. The bailiff liked that, but he asked what he wanted to do with the second arrow. ... Tell replied: ... If I had shot my child if I missed, I would have shot you the bailiff ... but had him tied ... The warriors took him on a ship ... and sailed down the lake to the Axen. But there was such a strong wind that the bailiff and everyone else feared they would drown. ... This [the bailiff] said: If you want to do your best, I will loosen your chains so that you can help us. Tell answered: Yes sir, gladly. ... he saw that he could reach the slab, steered the ship there, took his gun, jumped out of the ship onto the slab, gave the ship another push and made it sway on the lake. Then he ran as fast as he could ... to Hohle Gasse near Küssnacht, where he arrived in front of the Vogt and waited. When he came riding along, he stood behind a bush, cocked his crossbow, shot an arrow at him and then ran back over the mountains to Uri.”

Source used: The

White Book of Sarnen. Wording and translation of the chronicle text by Bruno Meyer. Published by the government council of the canton of Obwalden. Sarnen 1984, pp. 30-47. (www.staatsarchiv.ow.ch)