

leaders. So the attack was renewed more savagely than ever; as if another disgrace were to be atoned for. Mortal thews and sinews are not iron and stone, and bulwarks of bolted granite go down often enough before the incessant lashing of the surge. It was only natural that the small defending force should at length be thrust back by the mere weight of the living torrent hurled against their front. Every inch of ground cost lives, yet, step by step, the Hacquemont men were borne back from the breach into the courtyard, in the midst of which rose the keep. Just then Ralph drew back a pace or two out of the mellay, and said some words in an undertone to one of his Italian veterans, who had been fighting close to his shoulder. When the tide of battle fairly turned, and the day looked utterly desperate, the five *soudards* had thrust forward and closed round their captain: just as you may see the old hounds pressing to the front when the pack breaks from scent to view. The *routier* nodded his head without speaking, and forcing his way backward through the press, entered the tower on the right. Thence, in a minute or so, he emerged, carrying Brake-speare's own pennon, with which he disappeared into the keep.

When the space grew broader—so that the assailants could bring their weight and numbers better to bear—it soon became apparent how fearfully the garrison was overmatched; yet they were too well trained and too ably maneuvered to make a disorderly retreat; and still presented so strong a front that there was no chance of their being surrounded as they fell back slowly on the open doorway of their last stronghold.