

## **Arnold Winkelried**

**James Baldwin**

A great army was marching into Switzerland. If it should go much farther, there would be no driving it out again. The soldiers would burn the towns, they would rob the farmers of their grain and sheep, they would make slaves of the people.

The men of Switzerland knew all this. They knew that they must fight for their homes and their lives. And so they came from the mountains and valleys to try what they could do to save their land. Some came with bows and arrows, some with scythes and pitch-forks, and some with only sticks and clubs.

But their foes kept in line as they marched along the road. Every soldier was fully armed. As they moved and kept close together, nothing could be seen of them but their spears and shields and shining armor. What could the poor country people do against such foes as these?

"We must break their lines," cried their leader; "for we cannot harm them while they keep together."

The bowmen shot their arrows, but they glanced off from the soldiers' shields. Others tried clubs and stones, but with no better luck. The lines were still unbroken. The soldiers moved steadily onward; their shields lapped over one another; their thousand spears looked like so many long bristles in the sunlight. What cared they for sticks and stones and huntsmen's arrows?

"If we cannot break their ranks," said the Swiss, "we have no chance for fight, and our country will be lost!"

Then a poor man, whose name was Arnold Winkelried, stepped out.

"On the side of yonder mountain," said he, "I have a happy home. There my wife and children wait for my return. But they will not see me again, for this day I will give my life for my country. And do you, my friends, do your duty, and Switzerland shall be free."

With these words he ran forward. "Follow me!" he cried to his friends. "I will break the lines, and then let every man fight as bravely as he can."

He had nothing in his hands, neither club nor stone nor other weapon. But he ran straight onward to the place where the spears were thickest.

"Make way for liberty!" he cried, as he dashed right into the lines.

A hundred spears were turned to catch him upon their points. The soldiers forgot to stay in their places. The lines were broken. Arnold's friends rushed bravely after him. They fought with whatever they had in hand. They snatched spears and shields from their foes. They had no thought of fear. They only thought of their homes and their dear native land. And they won at last.

Such a battle no one ever knew before. But Switzerland was saved, and Arnold Winkelried did not die in vain.