

JUNE 16, 1944

Salute The Soldiers

THE battle for Europe's coast as we write has been raging for 72 hours. Before we can reach our readers it will have lasted twice as many hours again. Before anything like a decision has come it may have continued for a month; and we shall not be so reckless as to pretend to see as far as that. But there is one piece of knowledge that we share with all our readers: thousands of men will be dead when the decision comes, tens of thousands wounded and maimed. They are great days that lie ahead of us, but they are also terrible days. We are very dull human beings if we see no more in this stupendous battle than victory over Germany. Unless we go on to victory over the things that make other wars probable it is a mockery to salute our soldiers to-day; to greet them going into battle or to cheer them returning. But in the meantime let us not forget one thing that this and every battle means: that the fighting men are being called on to die for our follies and transgressions. Battle can never mean less than that. It is the ordeal that comes when everything else has failed: our arguments, our threats, our bargainings, our diplomatic tricks. We fight when we have not enough wisdom and worthiness to maintain our way of life without fighting. So let us salute our soldiers—really salute them; thank them with our tongues and thank them in our hearts. Let us not forget that the poorest, humblest, most ignorant, even the most foolish soldier who lands on a European beach is a better man this week than a carpeted philosopher or statesman. Next week or next year the scale of values may change, but it is the fighting man who counts to-day. By him we stand or fall, go bond or free. If we can pray for him, let us pray; if we cannot pray, let us carry him day and night in our minds—somehow or other lend him such strength as we have, and such gratitude, and such faith. Then we may be able to listen to his story day by day without the shame that dims our pride in him.



By Julian Grenfell (1915)

THE naked earth is warm with Spring,
And with green grass and bursting trees
Leans to the sun's gaze glorying,
And quivers in the sunny breeze;
And life is Colour and Warmth and Light,
And a striving evermore for these;
And he is dead who will not fight,
And who dies fighting has increase.

THE fighting man shall from the sun
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,
And with the trees to newer birth;
And find, when fighting shall be done,
Great rest, and fullness after dearth.

ALL the bright company of Heaven
Hold him in their high comradeship,
The Dog-star, and the Sisters Seven,
Orion's Belt and sworded hip.

THE woodland trees that stand together,
They stand to him each one a friend,
They gently speak in the windy weather;
They guide to valley and ridge's end.

THE kestrel hovering by day,
And the little owls that call by night,
Bid him be swift and keen as they,
As keen of ear, as swift of sight.

The blackbird sings to him, "Brother, brother,
If this be the last song you shall sing
Sing well, for you may not sing another;
Brother, sing."

IN dreary, doubtful, waiting hours,
Before the brazen frenzy starts,
The horses show him nobler powers;
O patient eyes, courageous hearts!

AND when the burning moment breaks,
And all things else are out of mind,
And only Joy of Battle takes
Him by the throat and makes him blind,

THROUGH joy and blindness he shall know,
Not caring much to know, that still
Nor lead nor steel shall reach him, so
That it be not the Destined Will.

THE thundering line of battle stands,
And in the air Death moans and sings;
But Day shall clasp him with strong hands,
And Night shall fold him in soft wings.