

4.

St. Crispin's Day Speech

from *Henry V*

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

In addition to comedies and tragedies, William Shakespeare wrote historical plays.

The play leads up to the famous Battle of Agincourt between England and France fought on St. Crispin's Day in 1415. The English were hopelessly outnumbered, fighting to one. As King Henry enters, the Earl of Westmoreland laments, "Oh that we now had here but one ten thousand of those men in England that do no work upon the stage." This speech below is part of Henry's reply, made not only to Westmoreland but to all his soldiers. Despite the odds, England won the battle.

From Shakespeare's *Henry V*

No, my fair cousin; If we are mark'd to die, we are enough
To do our country loss; and if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.
By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
Such outward things dwell not in my desires.
But if it be a sin to covet honour,
I am the worst offending soul alive!

This day is call'd the feast of Crispian.
He that outlives this day and comes safe home,
Will stand upon this day the greatest hour
That ever man at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, shall see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say "These were my Saint Crispian."
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say "These wounds I had on Crispian's day."

Henry V is pronounced "Henry the Fifth."
enow: enough

Fest of Crispian: St. Crispin's Day, October 25, is the feast day of Saints Crispin and Crispinian, twins who were

martyred in 286. Interestingly, other famous battles were fought on this date, most notably the Battle of Balaclava, made famous in Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade."

Bedford and Gloucester were two of Henry's three younger brothers. Exeter, Westmoreland, Salisbury, and Warwick were trusted advisors to the king. Exeter was also Henry's uncle. Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury was a famous commander serving Henry IV, V, and VI.