

III. Questions 23 to 31 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from the play *Henry the Fifth*.

from HENRY THE FIFTH, Act IV, Scene i

CHARACTERS:

KING HENRY V — King of England

JOHN BATES

MICHAEL WILLIAMS } soldiers in the King's army

The army of KING HENRY V is camped at Agincourt, France, preparing to fight against the French army. KING HENRY is standing off alone among the tents, awaiting daybreak. He has disguised himself in a cloak borrowed from one of his officers.

WILLIAMS: Who goes there?

KING HENRY: A friend.

WILLIAMS: Under what captain serve you?

KING HENRY: Under Sir [Thomas] Erpingham.

5 WILLIAMS: A good old commander and a most kind gentleman. I pray you, what thinks he of our estate?

KING HENRY: Even as men wreck'd upon a sand, that look to be wash'd off the next tide.

BATES: He hath not told his thought to the King?

10 KING HENRY: No; nor it is not meet he should. For, though I speak it to you, I think the King is but a man, as I am. The violet smells to him as it does to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet, when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing. Therefore, when he sees reason of fears as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are; yet, in reason, no man should possess him with any appearance of fear, lest he, by showing it, should dishearten his army.

15 BATES: He may show what outward courage he will; but I believe, as cold a night as 'tis, he could wish himself in Thames up to the neck; and so I would he were, and I by him, at all adventures, so we were quit here.

KING HENRY: By my troth, I will speak my conscience of the King: I think he would not wish himself anywhere but where he is.

20 BATES: Then I would he were here alone; so should he be sure to be ransomed, and a many poor men's lives saved.

25 KING HENRY: I dare say you love him not so ill to wish him here alone, howsoever you speak this to feel other men's minds. Methinks I could not die anywhere so contented as in the King's company, his cause being just and his quarrel honourable.

30 WILLIAMS: That's more than we know.

Continued

BATES: Ay, or more than we should seek after; for we know enough if we know we are the King's subjects. If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us.

35 **WILLIAMS:** But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopp'd off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all, "We died at such a place"; some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly¹ left. I am afraid there are few die well that die in a battle; for how can they charitably dispose of anything, when blood is their argument? Now, if 40 these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the King that led them to it; who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection.

KING HENRY: So, if a son that is by his father sent about merchandise do sinfully miscarry upon the sea, the imputation of his wickedness, by your 45 rule, should be imposed upon his father that sent him; or if a servant, under his master's command transporting a sum of money, be assailed by robbers and die in many irreconcil'd iniquities, you may call the business of the master the author of the servant's damnation. But this is not so. The King is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers, the father of 50 his son, nor the master of his servant; for they purpose not their death when they purpose their services. Besides, there is no king, be his cause never so spotless, if it come to the arbitrement of swords, can try it out with all unspotted soldiers. Some peradventure have on them the guilt of premeditated and contrived murder; some, of beguiling virgins with the broken seals of 55 perjury; some, making the wars their bulwark, that have before gored the gentle bosom of Peace with pillage and robbery. Now, if these men have defeated the law and outrun native punishment, though they can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God. War is His beadle,² war is His vengeance; so that here men are punish'd for before-breach of the King's laws in now 60 the King's quarrel. Where they feared the death, they have borne life away; and where they would be safe, they perish. Then if they die unprovided, no more is the King guilty of their damnation than he was before guilty of those impieties for the which they are now visited. Every subject's duty is the King's; but every subject's soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier 65 in the wars do as every sick man in his bed, wash every mote out of his conscience; and dying so, death is to him advantage; or not dying, the time was blessedly lost wherein such preparation was gained; and in him that escapes, it were not sin to think that, making God so free an offer, He let him outlive that day to see His greatness and to teach others how they should 70 prepare.

WILLIAMS: 'Tis certain, every man that dies ill, the ill upon his own head, the King is not to answer it.

BATES: I do not desire he should answer for me; and yet I determine to fight lustily for him.

William Shakespeare

¹rawly — unprovided for

²beadle — chastiser, punisher