

# WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

*The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*

## The Peacemaker

JOYCE KILMER

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*In this poem, written in the last year of his life and the last year of World War I, the American poet Joyce Kilmer (1886–1918) offers a complex and moving picture of the American soldier then giving battle in Europe. When the United States entered the war, Kilmer was 31 years old. Although he was exempted from his service obligation (married with four children), Kilmer voluntarily joined the New York Seventh Regiment, later transferring to the “Fighting 69th” Regiment when it was chosen to be the first New York unit sent to France. During the war, he continued to write. Kilmer was killed while scouting for enemy gun positions on July 30, 1918.*

*What is the mood of the poem, and what is its image of the soldier? How can a warrior be not only a peacemaker, but the peacemaker? Why, according to the poem, does the soldier fight, and why does he “gladly” die? What is the connection between fighting for freedom and fighting to banish war? What is the meaning of the last two lines of the poem—and what is the connection between this earthly battle and the captivity of Jesus on the Cross? How, according to the poem, should the fallen soldier be remembered?*

Upon his will he binds a radiant chain,  
For Freedom’s sake he is no longer free.  
It is his task, the slave of Liberty,  
With his own blood to wipe away a stain.  
That pain may cease, he yields his flesh to pain.  
To banish war, he must a warrior be.  
He dwells in Night, eternal Dawn to see,  
And gladly dies, abundant life to gain.

What matters Death, if Freedom be not dead?  
No flags are fair, if Freedom’s flag be furled.  
Who fights for Freedom, goes with joyful tread  
To meet the fire of Hell against him hurled,  
And has for captain Him whose thorn-wreathed head  
Smiles from the Cross upon a conquered world.