

**THE WHITE SHIP. A LITTLE  
BOOK OF POEMS SELECTED  
FROM THE WORKS OF  
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI**

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The White Ship. A Little Book of Poems Selected from the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti by  
Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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## THE WHITE SHIP





THE WHITE SHIP.

HENRY I. OF ENGLAND.

25TH NOVEMBER 1120.

**B**y none but me can the tale be told,  
The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.  
(Lands are swayed by a King on a throne.)  
'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,  
Yet the tale can be told by none but me.  
(The sea hath no King but God alone.)

*King Henry held it as life's whole gain  
That after his death his son should reign.*

*'Twas so in my youth I heard men say,  
And my old age calls it back to-day.*

*King Henry of England's realm was he,  
And Henry Duke of Normandy.*

*The times had changed when on either coast  
"Clerkly Harry" was all his boast.*

*Of ruthless strokes full many an one  
He had struck to crown himself and his son;  
And his elder brother's eyes were gone.*

*And when to the chase his court would crowd,  
The poor slung ploughshares on his road,  
And shrieked: "Our cry is from King to God!"*

THE WHITE SHIP

*But all the chiefs of the English land  
Had knelt and kissed the Prince's band.*

*And next with his son he sailed to France  
To claim the Norman allegiance :*

*And every baron in Normandy  
Had taken the oath of fealty.*

*'Twas sworn and sealed, and the day had come  
When the King and the Prince might journey home :*

*For Christmas cheer is to home hearts dear,  
And Christmas now was drawing near.*

*Stout Fitz-Stephen came to the King,—  
A pilot famous in seafaring ;*

*And he held to the King, in all men's sight,  
A mark of gold for his tribute's right.*

*"Liege Lord! my father guided the ship  
From whose boat your father's foot did slip  
When he caught the English soil in his grip,*

*"And cried: 'By this clasp I claim command  
O'er every rood of English land!"*

*"He was borne to the realm you rule o'er now  
In that ship with the archer carved at her prow :*

*"And thither I'll bear, as it be my due,  
Your father's son and his grandson too.*

*"The famed White Ship is mine in the bay,  
From Harfleur's harbour she sails to-day,*

THE WHITE SHIP

*"With masts fair-poned as Norman spears  
And with fifty well-tried mariners."*

*Quoth the King: "My ships are chosen each one,  
But I'll not say nay to Stephen's son."*

*"My son and daughter and fellowship  
Shall cross the water in the White Ship."*

*The King set sail with the eve's south wind,  
And soon he left that coast behind.*

*The Prince and all his, a princely shore,  
Remained in the good White Ship to go.*

*With noble knights and with ladies fair,  
With courtiers and sailors gathered there,  
Three hundred living souls we were:*

*And I Berold was the meanest hind  
In all that train to the Prince assign'd.*

*The Prince was a lawless shameless youth;  
From his father's loins he sprang without ruth:*

*Eighteen years till then he had seen,  
And the devil's dues in him were eighteen.*

*And now he cried: "Bring wine from below;  
Let the sailors revel ere yet they row:"*

*"Our speed shall o'ertake my father's flight  
Though we sail from the harbour at midnight."*

*The rowers made good cheer without check;  
The lords and ladies obeyed his beck;  
The night was light, and they danced on the deck.*