

AGINCOURT

by

Michael Drayton

(1563–1631)

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AGINCOURT

Fair stood the wind for France
When we our sails advance,
Nor now to prove our chance
 Longer will tarry;
But putting to the main,
At Caux, the mouth of Seine,
With all his martial train
 Landed King Harry.

And taking many a fort,
Furnish'd in warlike sort,
Marcheth tow'rds Agincourt
 In happy hour;
Skirmishing day by day
With those that stopp'd his way,
Where the French gen'ral lay
 With all his power.

Which, in his height of pride,
King Henry to deride,
His ransom to provide
 Unto him sending;
Which he neglects the while
As from a nation vile,
Yet with an angry smile
 Their fall portending.

And turning to his men,
Quoth our brave Henry then,
'Though they to one be ten
 Be not amazed:
Yet have we well begun;
Battles so bravely won
Have ever to the sun
 By fame been raised.

'And for myself (quoth he)
This my full rest shall be:
England ne'er mourn for me
 Nor more esteem me:
Victor I will remain
Or on this earth lie slain,
Never shall she sustain
 Loss to redeem me.

'Poitiers and Cressy tell,
When most their pride did swell,
Under our swords they fell:
 No less our skill is
Than when our grandsire great,
Claiming the regal seat,
By many a warlike feat
 Lopp'd the French lilies.'

The Duke of York so dread
The eager vaward led;
With the main Henry sped
 Among his henchmen.
Excester had the rear,
A braver man not there;
O Lord, how hot they were
 On the false Frenchmen!

They now to fight are gone,
Armour on armour shone,
Drum now to drum did groan,
 To hear was wonder;
That with the cries they make
The very earth did shake:
Trumpet to trumpet spake,
 Thunder to thunder.

Well it thine age became,
O noble Erpingham,
Which didst the signal aim
 To our hid forces!
When from a meadow by,
Like a storm suddenly
The English archery
 Stuck the French horses.

With Spanish yew so strong,
Arrows a cloth-yard long
That like to serpents stung,
 Piercing the weather;
None from his fellow starts,
But playing manly parts,
And like true English hearts
 Stuck close together.

When down their bows they threw,
And forth their bilbos drew,
And on the French they flew,
 Not one was tardy;
Arms were from shoulders sent,
Scalps to the teeth were rent,
Down the French peasants went—
 Our men were hardy.

This while our noble king,
His broadsword brandishing,
Down the French host did ding
 As to o'erwhelm it;
And many a deep wound lent,

His arms with blood besprent,
And many a cruel dent
Bruised his helmet.

Gloster, that duke so good,
Next of the royal blood,
For famous England stood
With his brave brother;
Clarence, in steel so bright,
Though but a maiden knight,
Yet in that furious fight
Scarce such another.

Warwick in blood did wade,
Oxford the foe invade,
And cruel slaughter made
Still as they ran up;
Suffolk his axe did ply,
Beaumont and Willoughby
Bare them right doughtily,
Ferrers and Fanhope.

Upon Saint Crispin's Day
Fought was this noble fray,
Which fame did not delay
To England to carry.
O when shall English men
With such acts fill a pen?
Or England breed again
Such a King Harry?

(*Agincourt*, Michael Drayton - 1563–1631)

End

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