

**ROME OR DEATH**

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Rome or death by Alfred Austin

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**ALFRED AUSTIN**

# **ROME OR DEATH**



# ROME OR DEATH!

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON  
MDCCCLXXIII

TO HIS EXCELLENCY  
LORD ODO RUSSELL,

I DEDICATE

'ROME OR DEATH!'

IN IMPERFECT BUT CORDIAL TESTIMONY OF

HIS LOVE FOR ITALY,

HIS EMINENT PUBLIC SERVICES,

AND

HIS LONG-PROVED FRIENDSHIP FOR

THE AUTHOR.

ENGLISH



## P R E F A C E.



THE readers of 'Madonna's Child' will perhaps remember that it was professedly but an excerpt from the second of the four cantos, of which a poem, to be entitled 'The Human Tragedy,' will eventually consist. 'Rome or Death!' will form the third canto of the same work; but only in that sense is the one a continuation of the other. I should, however, add, that 'Madonna's Child' must be read before 'Rome or Death!' can be duly apprehended. When I next solicit the attention of my readers, it will be to submit to them 'The Human Tragedy' in its complete form.

It will soon be perceived that the following poem, even standing alone, is of a somewhat ambitious charac-



ter; and I half cherish the hope that it may contribute at least towards solving affirmatively the question, so often propounded of late, whether the political events and emotions of our own time admit of poetical treatment by a contemporary writer. I venture to think that they do; whilst strongly inclining to the opinion that it is only very recently any such opportunity has been offered him. From 1815 to 1848 Europe deliberately elected to rest and be thankful; and though it then for a moment turned uneasily in its sleep, deep slumber once again shortly supervened, not to be fully shaken off till, in 1859, the sun of Italy rose over the horizon. From that hour to this, we have lived surely in as great and stirring an epoch as any ever relieved by the play of vigorous human passions; the last seven years, more especially, of the life of Europe, having been one continuous drama of the highest order, upon which the curtain has not yet fallen. Themes truly heroic once more swarm upon the imagination; and the difficulty is, not to find a subject, but to select from a host of sub-

jects, all equally worthy of the muse. The aspirations of the Italian people after national unity, now happily fulfilled, have furnished the groundwork of 'Rome or Death!' The Commune of Paris will furnish that of the fourth and concluding canto of 'The Human Tragedy.' It is not the fault of an English poet if, reluctant to limit the range of his lyre to strains domestic or archaic, he has to cross the Channel in search of inspiration. It may be doubted if Calliope herself could turn to much account the wrangles of School Boards, the incidence of local taxation, or the payment of the American Indemnity.

The description of the campaign of Mentana, as given in the following pages, is in its broad outlines historically accurate; and if the reader should happen to know that the state of the weather or the period of the moon was not precisely such, at some particular moment, as he here finds them represented to have been, or if he should remember that more than one day actually intervened between the attack on Monte

Rotondo and the Battle of Mentana, I must ask him to believe that the disregard of literal fact in my treatment of these minor matters has not been engendered by ignorance. I think I may say, without presumption, and in order to inspire him with some little confidence in the narrative, that when I write of war, I write not at second hand, but as one who has followed it with his own steps, and seen it with his own eyes; and that in all which appertains to Italy, my sympathy has been assisted by no hasty sojourn in that seductive land, whether in the days of its affliction, during the period of its struggles, or in the present epoch of its complete regeneration. At the same time, I trust no one will suppose that my love for Italy is either prompted or accompanied by any vulgar hatred of the Church of Rome, or that I have intended, by a single line or word in the following pages, to inflame religious prejudice and rancour against a Creed for which, as having satisfied the acutest intellects, inspired the noblest actions, and been illustrated by the most perfect piety, I