

**DIES IRAE IN  
THIRTEEN ORIGINAL  
VERSIONS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649562329

Dies Irae in Thirteen Original Versions by Abraham Coles

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**ABRAHAM COLES**

**DIES IRAE IN  
THIRTEEN ORIGINAL  
VERSIONS**



KD29013



Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1859, by  
ABRAHAM COLES,  
in the Clerk's office of the District Court of the District of  
New Jersey.

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:  
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY  
H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY.



## INTRODUCTION.

**I**T would be difficult to find, in the whole range of literature, a production to which a profounder interest attaches than to that magnificent canticle of the Middle Ages, the *DIES IRÆ*. Fastening on that which is indestructible in man, and giving fitter expression than can elsewhere be found, to experiences and emotions which can never cease to agitate him, it has lost after the lapse of six centuries none of its original freshness and transcendent power to affect the heart. It has commanded alike the admiration of men of piety and men of taste. By common consent, it is as Daniel remarks: *sacræ poeseos summum decus et Ecclesiæ Latinæ κεφάλαιον est pretiosissimum*. Among gems it is the diamond. It is solitary in

its excellence. Of Latin Hymns, it is the best known and the acknowledged masterpiece. There are others which possess much sweetness and beauty, but this stands unrivalled. It has superior beauties, with none of their defects. For the most part they are more or less Romish, but this is Catholic, and not Romish at all. It is universal as humanity. It is the cry of the human. It bears indubitable marks of being a personal experience.

The author is supposed to have been a monk: an incredible supposition truly did we not know that a monk is also a man. One thing is certain, that the monk does not appear, and that it is the man only that speaks. He no longer dreams and drivels. He is effectually awake. The veil is lifted. He sees Christ coming to Judgment. All the tumult and the terror of the Last Day are present to him. The final pause and syncope of Nature; the shuddering of a horror-struck Universe; the down-rushing and wreck of all things—all are present. But these material circumstances of horror and amazement, he feels are as nothing compared with “the infinite terror of being found guilty before the Just Judge.” This

single consideration swallows up every other. The interests of an eternity are crowded into a moment.

One great secret of the power and enduring popularity of this Hymn is, undoubtedly, its genuineness. A vital sincerity breathes throughout. It is a cry *de profundis*; and the cry becomes sometimes—so intense are the terror and solicitude—almost a shriek. It is in the highest degree pathetic. The Muse is “Mater Lachrymarum, Our Lady of Tears.” Every line weeps. Underneath every word and syllable, a living heart throbs and pulsates. The very rhythm, or that alternate elevation and depression of the voice, which prosodists call the *arsis* and the *thesis*, one might almost fancy were synchronous with the contraction and the dilatation of the heart. It is more than dramatic. The horror and the dread are real: are actual not acted. A human heart is laid bare, quivering with life, and we see and hear its tumultuous throbings. We sympathize—nay, before we are aware, we have changed places. We, too, tremble and quail and cry aloud.

All true Lyric Poetry is subjective. The *DIES IRÆ* is, as we have seen, remarkable for its intense



subjectivity ; and whoever duly appreciates this characteristic, will have little difficulty in understanding its superior effectiveness over everything else that has been written on the same theme. The life of the writer has passed into it and informs it, so that it is itself alive. It has vital forces and emanations. Its life mingles with our life. It enters into our veins and circulates in our blood. A virtue goes out from it. It is electrically charged, and contact is instantly followed by a shock and shuddering.

Springing from its subjectivity, if not identical with it, we would further notice, the intensifying effect of what may be called its personalism, in other words its ego-ism. It is I and not We. Substitute the plural pronoun for the singular, and it would lose half its pungency. We have had occasion to observe the weakening effect of this in translation. The truth is, the feeling is of a kind too concentrated and too exacting to allow itself to be dissipated in the vagueness of any grouping generality. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. There is a grief that cannot be shared, neither can it be joined on to another's. It is not social nor common. It is mine

and not yours. It is exclusive, not because it is selfish, but because it has depths beyond the soundings of ordinary sympathy.

This is especially true of some of the intenser forms of religious experience, proceeding as they do from that which is most intimate and innermost, the penetralia of a man's consciousness, his most secret and peculiar self. There is an inner and privileged sanctuary of the heart, which is kept as a chamber locked up. It is hidden and sacred. It may be, that the individual, dwelling habitually in the outer courts of his being, rarely if ever enters into it himself. For man is twofold. A veil divides between the outer and the inner man. Gross and sensual, the majority of mankind are averse to lifting the concealing medium, for fear of unwelcome revelations and discoveries respecting themselves. Goethe is an example of this portentous preference for half knowledge: "Man," he says, "is a darkened being; he knows not whence he came, nor whither he goes; he knows little of the world and less of himself. I know not myself, and may God protect me from it."

In conversion to God this veil is rent from top to

bottom. There is a self-revelation. Behind the curtain, there in the Most Holy Place, where ought to be the Shekinah, the shining, sensible Manifestation of the Divine Presence, he beholds the Abomination of Iniquity set up. He awakes to the startling fact that he is "without God and without hope in the world." A voice of urgency is sounding in his ears: "Flee from the Wrath to Come." He anticipates the terrors of the Judgment. He feels that there is not a moment to lose. Instinct prompts, and the Word of God enjoins, that he seek to save himself first. He knows not whether others are in as bad a case as he. But of his own guilt and danger he has no doubt. An offended Maker confronts him, him in particular. So he prays and agonizes. His may not be "the thews which throw the world"—he is conscious of weakness rather than strength—yet singly and alone, he wrestles with God like Jacob, and prevails like Israel.

The Hymn is not only lyrical in its essence, but also in its form. It is instinct with music. It sings itself. The grandeur of its rhythm, and the affluence and chime of its fit and powerful words, are,