

Alfred Austin (1835-1913)

4 *The Last Redoubt*

I

Kacelyevo's slope still felt
The cannon's bolt and the rifles' pelt;
For a last redoubt up the hill remained,
By the Russ yet held, by the Turk not gained.

II

Mehemet Ali stroked his beard; 5
His lips were clinched and his look was weird;
Round him were ranks of his ragged folk,
Their faces blackened with blood and smoke.

III

"Clear me the Muscovite out!" he cried,
Then the name of "Allah!" resounded wide, 10
And the rifles were clutched and the bayonets lowered,
And on to the last redoubt they poured.

IV

One fell, and a second quickly stopped
The gap that he left when he reeled and dropped;
The second, - a third straight filled his place; 15
The third, - and a fourth kept up the race.

V

Many a fez in the mud was crushed,
Many a throat that cheered was hushed,
Many a heart that sought the crest
Found Allah's throne and a houri's breast. 20

VI

Over their corpses the living sprang,
And the ridge with their musket-rattle rang,
Till the faces that lined the last redoubt
Could see their faces and hear their shout.

VII

In the redoubt a fair form towered, 25
That cheered up the brave and chid the coward;
Brandishing blade with a gallant air,
His head erect and his temples bare.

VIII

“Fly! they are on us!” his men implored;
But he waved them on with his waving sword. 30
“It cannot be held; ’tis no shame to go!”
But he stood with his face set hard to the foe.

IX

Then clung they about him, and tugged, and knelt.
He drew a pistol out from his belt,
And fired it blank at the first that set 35
Foot on the edge of the parapet.

X

Over, that first one toppled; but on
Clambered the rest till their bayonets shone,
As hurriedly fled his men dismayed,
Not a bayonet’s length from the length of his blade. 40

XI

“Yield!” But aloft his steel he flashed,
And down on their steel it ringing clashed;
Then back he reeled with a bladeless hilt,
His honour full, but his life-blood spilt.

XII

Mehemet Ali came and saw 45
The riddled breast and the tender jaw.
“Make him a bier of your arms,” he said,
“And daintily bury this dainty dead!”

XIII

They lifted him up from the dabbled ground;
His limbs were shapely, and soft, and round. 50
No down on his lip, on his cheek no shade: –

“Bismillah!” they cried, “’tis an Infidel maid!”

XIV

“Dig her a grave where she stood and fell,
'Gainst the jackal's scratch and the vulture's smell.
Did the Muscovite men like their maidens fight, 55
In their lines we had scarcely supped to-night.”

XV

So a deeper trench 'mong the trenches there
Was dug, for the form as brave as fair;
And none, till the Judgment trump and shout,
Shall drive her out of the Last Redoubt. 60

1882

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