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Peter O'Brien from the author

THE ROUT  
OF  
TEL-EL-KEBIR.

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[See the *Times*' Correspondent's Telegram, dated "Ismailia, 15th Sept., 6 a.m.," which appeared in the *Times* of the 16th Sept. —see *Extracts*.]

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## THE ROUT OF TEL-EL-KEBIR.

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### PART I.

#### I.

IN silence, through the autumn night,  
The host advances to the fight,  
All eager, before morning's light  
Dawns on the drowsy foeman's sight,  
To wake him with their steel.  
And as they move past sandy mound,  
Steel clank, alone, breaks muffled sound  
Of thousands passing o'er the ground,—  
Or jolt of waggon wheel.  
On through the desert plain they go,  
With sinking footstep firm, but slow,  
For toilsome is the march, through sand,  
In Egypt's old historic land.  
Unwonted is the heat for men  
Bred in some highland mountain glen,  
Or who in England's level shires  
Have driven the plough for English sires,  
Or in the green isle in the west  
Have poorly clad lain down to rest.



And weight of iron and of lead,  
 For war's unpitying purpose dread,  
 Sinks deeply in the yielding sand  
 Feet used to tread a northern land.  
 By weight, and heat, and toil oppressed,  
 Some long to lay them down to rest ;  
 Nor are these cast in softer mould,  
 Their nerves less firm, their hearts less bold,  
 Than those whose lighter build and frame  
 More fit them for war's desperate game.

## II.

At length the welcome word is given  
 To rest beneath the starry heaven ;  
 And while no bugle call is heard,  
 "Lie down" is passed in whispered word.  
 For a short space, to husband strength,  
 The soldier lays his limbs at length ;  
 And muttered conversation low  
 At first is heard ; but lest the foe,  
 Through their videttes, their ears and eyes,  
 May guarded be against surprise,  
 Is sudden hushed. The stricken light,  
 Noted from far in moonless night,  
 Is quenched, by order sternly given,  
 And all is silent as the heaven.  
 Some dream of home, some long for fight,  
 This still, clear, starlit eastern night.



## III.

Looking to sky, to earth, around  
Upon the sleepers on the ground,  
How peaceful all; there's not a sound  
To tell of ghastly war.  
Toil, peril, sorrow, all seem past,  
Rest gently sinks from heaven at last,  
And peace from every star.  
In times of old, in this same land,  
Israel, in journeying through the sand,  
Lay peaceful down each balmy night,  
Watched by a glowing pillar's light.  
This host the Israelites you may deem,  
The stars may holy beacons seem,  
Without a stretch of fancy's range  
Too great, extravagant, or strange.  
These shadowy forms, in heart and thought,  
Differ from Israel in nought;  
Like hopes, like passions, mankind sway,  
Now, as of old, in Israel's day;  
And light of stars, like pillar's flame,  
Is still of heaven, from heaven, the same.  
If guiding fire be not so bright  
As that which guarded Israel's flight,  
As great, as mighty is the power  
Which at the first for midnight hour  
Made "lesser light to rule the night,"  
And stood round Israel as a tower.



## IV.

This army, you again may dream,  
Has passed, in spirit, o'er the stream  
In Charon's fabled bark ;  
It lies, just as in death it sank,  
Column by column, rank by rank.  
But nothing save the whitened bones  
Lies hid beneath the garment's fold ;  
As lay the host, 'midst sand and stones,  
As seen by prophet priest of old  
In vision drear and dark.  
But while you dream, a sudden breath  
Seems to pass o'er the field of death ;  
Through the clear air it whispering sighs ;  
Then up the shadowy masses rise,  
And the late seeming corpses stand,  
With arms in every living hand.  
So rose, to arms, when life was given,  
The dead, raised by a breath from heaven ;  
While the dried bones their flesh received,  
And flesh was clothed, and limbs were greaved.\*

## V.

Dream we no more. Stern war's alarms  
Have waked the English host to arms.  
Low-toned command again is given ;  
Onward the waggon-wheel is driven ;

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\* Ezekiel, chap, xxxvii.



star, <sup>7</sup> their guiding light

And forward, ~~eager for the fight,~~  
The columns move on through the night,  
Approaching nearer and more near  
The lines they seek, Tel-el-Kebir ;  
Till, in the morning's shadowy grey,  
The ramparts close before them lay.

VI.

A single shot tells that the foe  
England's advancing columns know ;  
And quickly, others from the scarp,  
Sound in the stillness clear and sharp.  
Then in a silence, like to death,  
The startled foe regains his breath,  
For, springing from white smoke and flame,  
The leaden storm of bullets came ;  
And then artillery's sullen boom  
Is heard, its flash seen through the gloom.  
High over head the missile flew,  
And far behind us dashed the dew.

VII.

In haste, the English turn to form  
The dreaded line, 'midst withering storm ;  
But rushing bullet, screaming shell,  
High-flying, mostly harmless fell ;  
And scarce the " thin red line " is formed,  
When the foe's trench is rudely stormed ;



For with a race, and long hoarse cheer,  
 That curdles Egypt's blood with fear,  
 Up the steep slope the English came,  
 Through the Egyptian sheets of flame.  
 Though torn by lead, on, on they crush,  
 And o'er the foremost foemen rush.  
 With swinging rifle, on they tread,  
 Trampling the wounded and the dead.  
 Mad with excitement, high-strung nerve  
 Carries them on without a swerve,  
 Till, yielding to the mighty sway,  
 The wretched broken foe give way.  
 And pity closed her ears; all vain  
 The prayer for life, the scream of pain.  
 By bayonet-thrust and missile torn,  
 The fleeing host to earth is borne,  
 On that fair, early, eastern morn.  
 And when serenely rose the sun  
 On El-Kebir, the fight is won.  
 Though dropping shots, far, far away,  
 Still tell of stragglers brought to bay,  
 Sweet pity once more holds her sway,  
 Beneath the morning's rosy ray.

## VIII.

Forget not, when the tale is told,  
 This truth taught from the days of old.



The power that guarded Israel's night,  
 That shattered Pharaoh's impious might,  
 That in the morning watch looked down  
 From pillar's cloud with awful frown,  
     And troubled spirit gave;  
 Could well have struck our hosts with dread,  
 Have strewn the desert with our dead,  
 And Egypt's army conquering led  
     As an o'erwhelming wave.\*

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## PART II.

Life passes like an April day,  
 From gloom to sunshine, grave to gay.  
 When sinks the sound of muffled drum,  
 Home with blithe quickstep soldiers come,  
     From comrade's new-made grave.

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\* *Extracts from the telegram, dated Ismailia, 15th Sept., 6 a.m.*

(See the *Times*, 16th September.)

“The general order given that no buglers were to accompany the force plainly indicated a silent march, with a view to



Where solemn service late was heard,  
 With minor chord, and whispered word,  
 Rings out the stirring "Wedding March,"  
 Loud echoing, 'neath cathedral arch,  
     Through chancel and through nave.  
 Such changes help us to forget  
 The sorrow born of vain regret;  
 They strengthen springing hope; but yet  
 Symbols they are of sentence fell,  
 "Unstable thou shalt not excel,"  
 Which, though not spoken at the fall,  
 Said of but one, applies to all;  
 Thus contrast still is felt a need;  
 Haply for pardon this may plead  
 For harmless jest: and, while you read,  
 Pray marvel not, with grave surprise,  
 That feeble art to contrast flies.

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surprising the enemy in their strong position at Tel-el-Kebir.  
 At 12.30 a halt was again made. . . . All then lay down,  
 and endeavoured to get what repose they could in the two  
 hours and a half given them. With the exception of a remark  
 from one or another to his comrade in an undertone, or here  
 and there a match lighted to kindle a pipe, which was quickly  
 greeted with "Put out that light," all was quiet and darkness.  
 The scene was impressive—a large army silently lying on the  
 desert, with a clear starlight Egyptian sky overhead; and  
 thoughts of home might well mingle with those of the stern



(AIR—"Araby's Daughter," from "The Fire Worshipers.")

## I.

FAREWELL—farewell to old Arabi's slaughter!  
 (Thus warbled Sir Garnet by Egypt's dark sea),  
 I think that my countrymen, over the water,  
 Will certainly press for a Peri-ge for me.

## II.

Around me shall listen each ardent young member  
 That often beside the famed woolsack has stepped;  
 With many a "swell," who in that upper chamber,  
 Through tedious debate, up to midnight, has slept.

## III.

Oh, Arabi! how were thy strong ramparts growing,  
 How proud was thy heart till my victory came!  
 Like wind from the east o'er a spring garden blowing,  
 It scattered thy army, and withered thy fame.

duty which in a few hours would engage them in deadly strife. At three the order to rise, given in an undertone, acted as effectively on the slumbering troops as the loudest word of command on parade, and immediately the black mass rose in the clear night air.

"A short march brought us at daybreak within a mile of the trenches. At 5.20 we heard a single shot, quickly followed by others, and in a very short time a sharp rattle of musketry showed that we were observed. For a few minutes this was



## IV.

But long shalt thou think of the men from the Highlands,  
 The Guards, Indians, Irish, Marines, and the doom  
 That came on thee from the diminutive islands,  
 With Cavalry charge and Artillery's boom.

## V.

But still, when the very late season is burning  
 With autumn sun's rays, both the young and the old,  
 The sleepest there to the Houses returning,  
 Will wake when the cost of the thing has been told.

## VI.

The Treasury clerks, when they see what the mess is,  
 By watching the growth of the sums day by day,  
 Will think of the bill, till neglecting their dresses,  
 They mournfully turn from the figures away.

all that was heard from the direction of the trenches. . . .  
 Just after the heavy fire of musketry began, the roar of the  
 artillery was first heard, and a shell came screaming high over  
 the heads of the advancing line, and fell far in the rear. . . .  
 Both shell and rifle bullets flew over our heads, doing little  
 damage. . . . The Marines and the Highland Brigade  
 suffered most severely, which was perhaps to be attributable to  
 the fact that they *had not time to deploy into line before the  
 heavy fire commenced.* . . . In twenty minutes from the  
 first shot being fired, all the firing in the front line of the  
 defences had ceased, and it was clear that our brave fellows had  
 completely routed the enemy."



## VII.

Nor shall Erin, beloved of her hero, forget me,  
 Though Parnell before me has got such a start;  
 Close, close by Lord Gough she a statue may set me,  
 Or erect it, perhaps, in wide Sackville-street's heart.

## VIII.

Farewell—be it ours to embark on the billow;  
 When everything's settled we'll sail o'er the deep,  
 Till we look at "The rock" as we start from our pillow,  
 Then turn in our hammocks and court again sleep.

## IX.

I'll dive in the billows in Biscay's bay darkling;  
 I'll plunge in the Solent—go right overhead;  
 I'll seek where the stars and the garters are sparkling,  
 And gather the gold, the gold, yellow and red.

*Extracts from telegrams in the "Times" of the 14th Sept.*

"Ismailia, Sept. 13.

"Tel-el-Kebir was carried this morning with a rush at day-break."

"Tel-el-Kebir, Sept. 13, 9 a.m.

"The last dropping shots have ceased . . . . .  
 Last night I left Kassassin at about half-past 11, and at 1  
 reached the bivouack established on the sand hills to the west,  
 . . . the soldiers lay sleeping heavily in ordered ranks.  
 There was no moon."



Farewell—farewell—the taste of that fountain\*

Will be lost in the smiles of the fair and the brave;

They wait for the hero, his deeds they're recounting—

They wait for the hero who sails on the wave.

21st September, 1882.

W. C.

Wellington Colomb

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\* Sir G. probably alludes in the poetical term "fountain" to the Sweet-water (?) canal, into which Arabi threw his dead camels, &c.

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Houses of the Oireachtas