

***WILLIAM HENRY  
GILES KINGSTON***



***OUR SOLDIERS:  
GALLANT DEEDS  
OF THE BRITISH  
ARMY DURING  
VICTORIA'S  
REIGN***

**William Henry Giles Kingston**

# **Our Soldiers: Gallant Deeds of the British Army during Victoria's Reign**

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# **W.H.G. Kingston**

## **"Our Soldiers"**

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### **Chapter One.**

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#### **The Afghan Campaigns—1839-42.**

In 1809 the reigning Ameer of Afghanistan, Shah Soojah-ul-Moolk, was dispossessed of his throne and an exile. Runjeet Singh, the Sikh ruler of Punjaub, plundered and imprisoned him at Lahore, and obtained from him the famous Koh-i-noor, the great diamond which is now among the crown jewels of Great Britain. Eventually Soojah escaped from Lahore and became a pensioner of the East India Company. For many years after the fall of Shah Soojah, anarchy ruled in Afghanistan, until in 1826 Dost Mahomed established himself upon the throne at Cabul.

Meantime Shah Soojah never ceased to plot for his restoration, and in 1832 came to an agreement with Runjeet Singh, in pursuance of which the latter undertook to assist him in an armed attempt to oust Dost Mahomed. The Indian Government, while professing neutrality, indirectly assisted Shah Soojah by paying his pension in advance.

In 1833 Shah Soojah's army was thoroughly beaten by Dost Mahomed before Candahar, though he himself escaped. But Runjeet Singh was more successful; he drove

the Afghans back into the Khyber Pass and occupied Peshawur, which province he held against all the attempts of the Afghan Ameer to expel him.

In 1837 the Shah of Persia, under the instigation of and with assistance from, Russia, and in spite of strong remonstrances by the British, made war upon Afghanistan and marched upon Herat.

### **Eldred Pottinger at Herat.**

The siege of this place commenced on the 23rd of November 1837, and lasted over nine months, when it utterly collapsed, owing mainly to the determination and courage of Lieutenant Pottinger, who had arrived in the city just before, and assisted the Afghans in the defence. Notwithstanding the assistance of Russian volunteers the Persian attack was but feebly delivered; still, but for the presence of Pottinger and the courage given by his example, the Afghan defence would have been equally spiritless. At length, after some days' bombardment, a general assault was made on the 23rd of June 1838, and repulsed by Pottinger with heavy loss. Soon after the Shah, hearing that a British expedition had been sent up the Persian Gulf to force him to retire, raised the siege and left Herat, which has remained up to the present in the hands of the Afghans—a fact which may be said to be in the first instance due to the heroic achievements of one young British officer, Lieutenant Eldred Pottinger.

### **The Afghan War.**

The Indian Government had now determined, for reasons into which it is not our province to inquire, to make war upon Dost Mahomed and to replace Shah Soojah upon the throne.

This war, which ended so disastrously to our arms and prestige, seems at this time, when it is possible to take an impartial view of the question, to have been one of wanton aggression against a prince well disposed towards our Government—and who, with whatever faults he had, was a strong and wise ruler, and accepted by his people—in order to force upon the Afghans a mere nominee of the British, and one whose authority could only be supported by the bayonets of an alien race. Such an enterprise was as discreditable to our councillors as it proved to be disastrous to our soldiers.

The army collected for this purpose consisted of the Bengal contingent, which, after leaving a division in reserve at Ferozepore, was 9500 strong, under the command of Sir Willoughby Cotton, and the Bombay contingent, consisting of another 6000, the whole being under the command of Sir John Keane.

At the same time, another force, nominally under the command of Shah Soojah, was to be raised in the Company's territories, to accompany him into Afghanistan. This army crossed the Indus near the fortress of Bukkur, entering territories famous from their association with the operations of Alexander the Great, and which had never before been traversed by British troops.

Marching from Shikapore, the army advanced for fifty miles through the dark defiles of the Bolan Pass, lofty

mountains covered with snow towering above their heads. It now entered a desert region, where provisions were not to be procured, and where on every side the troops were assailed by the fierce Beloochees, who attacked foraging parties and camp followers, and plundered the baggage left in the rear. Early in April, the troops marched through the vale of Shawl, forded many rivers, and passed the heights of Kozak, over which the artillery was dragged by the men with ropes, till at length, surmounting all difficulties, the army reached Candahar on the 27th of April 1839.

On the 27th of June the march was resumed, but it was necessary to leave a strong garrison at Candahar, and, strange to say, probably owing to the difficulties of transport, the siege-guns which had been dragged with so much toil through the passes were left behind, while supplies were so short that the army had to proceed on half rations.

### **Capture of Ghuznee—23rd July.**

On the 21st of July the army arrived before the famous fortress of Ghuznee, which was considered impregnable by the Afghans.

The city of Ghuznee lies between Candahar and Cabul, about 230 miles distant from the former, and 90 from the latter place. It stands on the extreme points of a range of hills, which slope upwards and command the north-east angle of the Balla Hissar. As the British advanced on it, and observed its strong fortifications rising up before them on the side of a hill, they saw that the place could not be reduced by artillery for want of the siege-guns left at

Candahar, and at the same time a high wall with a wet ditch in front made operations with scaling-ladders or mining equally impossible.

It was discovered, however, by Captain Thomson, who made an inspection under heavy fire from the walls, that though the gates had been built up the Cabul gate still existed, and he reported that this one, though at great risk, could be blown up, and so an attempt to take the place by storm could be made. The want of supplies made it absolutely necessary to take the place, and therefore Sir John Keane gladly accepted Captain Thomson's proposal.

The morning of the 23rd of July, just before daybreak, was the time fixed for the assault. The regiments told off for the service were the 2nd, 13th, and 17th (Queen's), and the Company's European regiment, under Major Carruthers, Lieutenant-Colonel Orchard, Colonel Croker, and Major Tronson. The advance consisted of the light companies of these four regiments. The night and morning were unusually stormy. The advance was placed under the command of Colonel Dennie of the 13th Light Infantry, and the main column under Brigadier Sale. The explosion party was directed by Captain Thomson, who had under him Lieutenants Durand and Macleod of the Bengal, and Captain Peat of the Bombay corps. Under cover of the darkness, the noise the men might make being overpowered by the roaring of the wind, the storming column advanced along the Cabul road, while the engineers carried up their powder-bags to the gate. Meantime the General filled the gardens near the city walls with the sepoy, who kept up a sharp fire



on the wall, while the light batteries opened hotly upon the works.

This demonstration fixed the attention of the enemy, and called forth a responsive fire. Suddenly a row of blue lights appeared along the walls, illuminating the place, and showing that the Afghans were manning them in expectation of an escalade. All this time the British engineers were quietly piling their powder-bags at the Cabul gate. It was a work that required great courage, and it was done well; but at first the powder failed to ignite, and Lieutenant Durand was obliged to scrape the hose with his finger-nails. Again the port-fire was applied. The powder exploded. The noise of the explosion was almost overpowered by the roaring of the guns and the rushing of the wind. Still, many an Afghan trembled at the ominous sound. Mighty indeed was the effect. Down with a crash came heavy masses of masonry and shivered beams in awful ruin and confusion. Now occurred a slight delay. It had been agreed that the signal for the storming party should be the bugle-call "Advance," but the bugler had fallen, and so Durand had to rush back to the nearest party he could find. At length the signal was given. The advance was sounded. Colonel Dennie at the head of his brave band rushed forward through the breach, amid clouds of smoke and dust, and soon the bayonets of his light companies were crossing the swords of the enemy, who had rushed down to the point of attack. A few moments of darkness and confusion, and then the foremost soldiers caught a glimpse of the morning sky, and pushing gallantly on, were soon established in the fortress.

Three hearty, animating cheers, so loud and clear that they were heard throughout the general camp, announced to their excited comrades below that Dennie and his stormers had entered Ghuznee.

Colonel Sale was pressing on to support Dennie, when, deceived by a false report that the latter had failed to enter the breach, he halted his column. There was a pause of painful doubt; but the true state of affairs was soon ascertained. Again the cheering notes of the bugle sounded the advance, and the British troops pushed on. But the enemy had profited by the pause, and numbers crowded to the breach. One of their number, rushing over the ruins, brought down the gallant Sale by a cut on the face with his sharp sabre. The Afghan repeated his blow as his opponent was falling; but the pommel, not the edge of his sword, this time took effect, though with stunning violence. He lost his footing, however, in the effort, and both rolled down together amid the fractured timbers of the gate. Sale now made an effort to master the weapon of his opponent. He snatched at it, but one of his fingers met the edge of the sharp blade. He quickly withdrew his wounded hand, and placed it over that of his adversary, so as to keep fast hold of the hilt; but the Afghan was active and powerful, and he was himself faint from loss of blood. Happily, at that moment Captain Kershaw, of the 13th, approached the scene of conflict. The wounded leader called to him by name for aid. He gave it effectually by passing his sabre through the body of the Afghan; who, however, continued to struggle gallantly. At length the Brigadier for a moment got the uppermost. Still retaining in his left hand the weapon of

his enemy, he dealt him with his right a cut from his own sabre, which cleft his skull from his crown to the eyebrows. The Mohammedan once shouted "Ne Ullah!" (O God!) and never moved or spoke again.

At length the enemy gave way. The British pushed on. The support, under Colonel Croker, advanced, and the reserve speedily followed; and soon the colours of the 13th Regiment, planted by the brave young Ensign Frere, as well as those of the 17th, were flying out in the morning breeze from the ramparts of Ghuznee.

The struggle within the fort, for a considerable time, was most desperate. In addition to a heavy fire kept up on them, the British troops were assailed by the enemy sword in hand, as well as with daggers, pistols, and other arms; but British courage, perseverance, and fortitude overcame all opposition, and the enemy were soon to be seen abandoning their guns, running in all directions, throwing themselves down from immense heights, and endeavouring to make their escape over the walls. By five o'clock the capture of the Afghans' last stronghold was complete. But there was much hard fighting within the walls. In the frenzy of despair the Afghans rushed out from their hiding-places, plying their sabres with terrible effect, though only to meet with an awful retribution from the musketry or bayonets of the British infantry. Some, in their frantic efforts to escape by the gateway, stumbled over the burning timbers, wounded and exhausted, and were slowly burnt to death. Some were bayoneted on the ground, and others hunted into corners and shot down like dogs; but though many an Afghan sold his life dearly, and cut to the last at his hated

enemy, the appeals of the helpless for mercy were never made in vain. And when resistance ceased, not a conquered enemy was injured.

So Ghuznee fell to the British army, and was made over to Shah Soojah. It cost the victors only 17 killed, and 165 wounded; of these last, 18 were officers.

Upwards of 500 of the garrison were buried by the victors; many more fell beyond the walls under the sabres of the British horsemen. Sixteen hundred prisoners were taken, and large stores of grain and flour fell into the hands of the conquerors.

The fall of Ghuznee—a fortress hitherto deemed by the Afghans impregnable—astonished Dost Mahomed, and was the cause of the ruin which soon afterwards overtook him.

### **Capture of Khelat—13th November.**

In the northern part of Beloochistan stands the strong mountain fortress of Khelat. The chief, Mehrab Khan, had offended the British, and it was resolved to annex his territories to the kingdom of Shah Soojah. Khelat is a place of commanding strength. The citadel rises high above the buildings of the town, and frowns down menacingly on its assailants. On the north-west of the fort are three heights. On these the Khan had posted his infantry, supported by five guns in position. General Willshire was sent to capture it, with the 2nd and 17th Queen's Regiments, the 31st Bengal Native Infantry, with two howitzers, four of the Shah's 6-pounder guns, and a detachment of local horse. On the morning of the 13th of November he found himself before the place. The Engineer officers reported that until

the heights were carried it would be impossible to proceed against the fortress; accordingly orders were issued for the attack. It was Willshire's hope that the enemy might be driven down to the gate of the fortress, and that the stormers might rush in with them. Gallantly our brave soldiers made their way up the heights—gallantly they were carried, and right nobly the guns were captured.

The shrapnel shot from Stephenson's batteries fell with too deadly an aim among the Beloochee footmen for them to hold their position on the hills. They fled towards the walls of their fortress, and the British infantry pushed hotly after them; but, in spite of all their exertions, our brave soldiers were not in time to secure an entrance—the gates were closed against their advance. The enemy's artillery, planted on the walls, was now brought into play. The British infantry were compelled to find shelter behind some ruined buildings, while our batteries, planted on the heights, opened upon the gate and the neighbouring defences. Two of Cooper's guns were brought within 200 yards of the walls. The gunners suffered much from the matchlocks of the enemy, but undauntedly continued to fire full upon the gate. At length it gave way. Pointing his hand towards the gateway, Willshire boldly rode down to show the infantry that an entrance was ready for them. Rising at once from their cover, with a loud hurrah they rushed on. Pennycuick and his men were the first to enter. The other companies eagerly followed, till the whole of the storming column were within the walls of Khelat.

Onward they struggled manfully towards the citadel. Every inch of ground was obstinately disputed. The citadel

was reached, but there was here a desperate resistance. Sword in hand, Mehrab Khan and some of his principal chiefs stood to give battle to their enemies. The Khan himself fell dead with a musket-ball through his breast. Eight of his principal sirdars fell beside him. Heaps of dead lay around,—many fine-looking men,—their shields shot through and broken, swords and matchlocks scattered about in every direction, telling of the fierce fight. A small party held out in an inner apartment; there was no reaching them, except by a narrow passage which admitted but of one at a time. Three or four attempted it, and were instantly shot dead. The little band of Beloochees would not trust the British. At length Lieutenant Loveday was sent up to them alone. It was a critical moment for him; but they listened to his proposals, and surrendered. And Khelat was won, the British loss being 138 killed and wounded.

These defeats had a very depressing effect upon the followers of Dost Mahomed, who, although still at the head of an army of 14,000 men, found that there was no courage in his faint-hearted followers, and that they could not be trusted even to be true to himself. His position being thus hopeless, Dost Mahomed fled from Cabul on the 2nd of August, and that city was entered in state by Shah Soojah, who then, though for a short time, was restored to the throne which he had lost thirty years before.

The army now ceased to be an expeditionary force, and became settled as an army of occupation. The officers sent for their wives and families, and for a time English society and English amusements may be said to have been established in Cabul. Still Shah Soojah was not accepted by

the people, his rule was exacting and cruel, and disaffection was rife in the country, which was rapidly preparing to rise.

In the meantime, Dost Mahomed was still to be reckoned with. After his flight from Cabul he and his son Akbar had gone to Bokhara, where for a time they were in captivity. Escaping thence, they reached Khartoum, where the Dost's family were under the protection of his brother Jubbar Khan. Here he found the tribes strongly in his favour, and soon gathered force wherewith to oppose the British who were concentrating at Bamian, where a small force under Colonel Dennie arrived on the 14th of September 1840.

### **The Battle of Bamian.**

On the 18th of September Colonel Dennie moved out with a detachment to drive a force of the enemy out of a valley near Bamian. Soon after eight o'clock, two horse artillery guns, under Lieutenant Murray Mackenzie, two companies of the 35th Native Infantry, two companies of the Goorkha corps, and about four hundred Afghan horse, marched out to meet the enemy. About half an hour afterwards, Dennie, with two more companies of the native infantry regiment, and two also of the Goorkha corps, followed, in support of the advanced detachment. Instead of coming merely upon the advance of the enemy, the Brigadier found an army in his front; but, in spite of the slender force at his command, and the apparently overwhelming numbers of the enemy, he did not hesitate for a moment. His men were eager to advance, and he himself was full of confidence and courage. The enemy had got possession of a chain of forts reaching to the mouth of

the defile, and were collected in bodies round the several forts, and upon the hills on either side of the valley. Mackenzie's guns began to play upon them. For some short time the Oosbeks, forming part of the Dost's force, stood the fire, but the guns were ably served, and the shrapnel practice told with terrific effect on dense bodies of men, who had nothing to give back in return.

The Oosbeks retreated; the British guns were pushed forward, opening a destructive fire, first from one distance, then from another, upon the wavering enemy. The Dost's army was soon broken to pieces, and the British cavalry were then let slip in pursuit. Following the disordered masses of the enemy for some miles along the defile, they cut down large numbers, and dispersed them in all directions. The defeat of the Dost's army was complete, and he and his son owed their lives to the fleetness of their steeds.

### **Dost Mahomed's last charge.**

Notwithstanding all this, Dost Mahomed, not yet beaten, was soon once more in command of a respectable force. The force which had been pursuing him under Sir Robert Sale came up with him on the 2nd of November. As our cavalry advanced upon him, Dost Mahomed, at the head of a small band of horsemen, strong, sturdy Afghans, but badly mounted, prepared to meet his assailants. Beside him rode the bearer of the blue standard, which marked his place in the battle. He pointed to it, and reined in his horse, then snatching the white *lunghi* from his head, stood up in his stirrups uncovered before his followers, and called upon them in the name of God and the Prophet to drive the



cursed Kaffirs from the country of the faithful. "Follow me," he cried aloud, "or I am a lost man!" Slowly, but steadily, the Afghan horsemen advanced. The English officers who led our cavalry to the attack covered themselves with glory; but the native troopers, those vaunting horsemen, treacherous not for the first time even now, and who were in after years to prove traitors of the darkest dye, fled like sheep. Emboldened by the dastardly conduct of the men of the 2nd Light Cavalry, the Afghan horsemen dashed on, driving their enemy before them, and not stopping till they were almost within reach of the British guns.

The British officers unsupported by their men met the full force of the Afghan charge, and fought bravely to the last. Lieutenants Broadfoot and Crispin were killed, while Captains Fraser and Ponsonby, though badly wounded, broke through their assailants.

The next evening poor gallant Dost Mahomed, seeing his cause was hopeless, gave himself up to the British at Cabul, and shortly after was sent to British India.

### **Action near Soorkhab—November 1841.**

The chiefs of certain hill tribes, Kuzzilbashes, Ghilzyes, and other robbers and bandits by profession, had been accustomed to receive subsidies to induce them to refrain from robbing any caravans or parties travelling in the neighbourhood of their territories. The expenses of the war in Afghanistan had been enormous; and it becoming necessary to retrench, it was unwisely determined to begin by cutting off the pay of these chiefs. They resented the measure, and assembling in vast numbers, took every

opportunity of attacking the British troops passing through the defiles of their mountainous country. Sale's brigade had reached Jugdulluck with little opposition; but on the next march it was seen that the heights were bristling with armed men, and a heavy fire was poured in with terrible effect from all the salient points on which the mountaineers had posted themselves. Sale threw out his flanking parties, and the light troops, skirmishing well up the hillsides, dislodged the enemy, whilst a party under Captain Wilkinson, pushing through the defile, found that the main outlet had not been guarded, and that the passage was clear. The march was resumed, but the enemy were not yet weary of the contest. Reappearing in great numbers, they fell furiously upon the British rearguard, and for a time the men thus suddenly assailed were in a state of terrible disorder. The energetic efforts of the officers, however, brought them back to a sense of their duty. Broadfoot, Backhouse, and Fenwick rallied and reanimated them. But the British loss was heavy; upwards of 100 were killed and wounded, and among them fell the gallant Captain Wyndham, of the 35th Native Infantry. Although lame from a hurt, at the moment of peril he had dismounted to save the life of a wounded soldier, by bearing him from the combat on his charger. When the rearguard broke before the onset of the Ghilzyes, unable to keep pace with the pursued, he turned, fought, and, overpowered by numbers, fell beneath the swords and knives of an unsparing foe. The force halted at Gundamuck. The political managers of affairs in Afghanistan fancied that this would prove the termination of

disturbances in that country. Unhappily the storm which was to break with such fearful violence was only now gathering.

### **Retreat from Cabul—6th January 1842.**

The British army had, as we have seen, advanced on Cabul, the capital of Afghanistan, in August 1839. Since that period it had been placed in cantonments outside the city. Major-General Sir V. Cotton had at first commanded in Afghanistan. He was succeeded by Major-General Elphinstone, who assumed the command in April 1841. On the morning of the 2nd of November 1841, the inhabitants of Cabul broke out in rebellion, and murdered Sir A. Burnes, the political agent, as well as his brother and Lieutenant Broadfoot, who sold their lives dearly. The rebellion extended rapidly through the country; supplies were cut off, and it was resolved to retreat from Cabul.

The amount of the British force was 4500 fighting men: the camp followers were about 12,000 men, besides women and children. The retreat commenced at 9 a.m. on the 6th of January 1842. It was as disastrous as any in the pages of history. A revengeful, active enemy, bitter cold and driving snow overwhelmed them; and of that great multitude, only one officer, Dr Brydon, reached Jellalabad in safety. All the rest had died from cold or the sword of the enemy—except those who had been delivered as hostages at the commencement of the retreat, or who had been taken prisoners; an account of whose release will be hereafter given.

## **Defence of Jellalabad—October 1841 to April 1842.**

Before it was suspected to what extent the insurrection in Afghanistan would reach, Sir Robert Sale was placed in command of a brigade which was ordered to return to Hindostan. His road led through the Ghilzye defiles. Here, for several days, he was attacked by the mountaineers, but fighting his onward way, he reached Gundamuck. Here he heard of the outbreak at Cabul. Deeming it important to push on, he left a considerable portion of his camp equipage at Gundamuck, under charge of some Afghan levies; but they proved traitors, plundered the baggage, and set fire to the cantonment. Captain Burn and the other European officers were pursued by the insurgents, but succeeded in reaching the British camp.

Sir Robert Sale renewed his march the next morning, but already the whole armed population of the district was on the alert. The Afghans crowned each height as soon as our pickets were withdrawn, swarmed like hornets round the camp, and were repelled only by the most strenuous efforts. They permitted the advanced guard and the main body to pass through the town of Futtehabad without interruption. Bodies of them even came in guise of unarmed suppliants to beg for protection. But no sooner had the rearguard passed the houses and fort of this town, than a destructive fire was opened upon it. Captain Broadfoot and his sappers turned fiercely round more than once, and inflicted vengeance for this treachery; and Colonel Dennie, in the end, dexterously decoyed the enemy away from their walls into the open plain, and then the cavalry, under Captain Oldfield and

Lieutenant Mayne, charging among them with headlong valour, strewed the ground with 150 slain. That night the force encamped under the walls of Jellalabad, and took possession of it next morning, the 12th of November. It was a most important object to occupy this place, in order to establish a post on which the corps at Cabul might retreat if necessary, and then form a link in the chain of communication with India. A glance at the map will show the immense distance which the British forces were from all support, with intricate passes, lofty mountains, deserts, and broad rivers intervening between them and India; while on every side swarmed hostile tribes, accustomed to warfare, and sworn to destroy them.

Jellalabad was the winter residence of the rulers of Cabul, and inferior only to that city and Candahar. The walls were, however, in a state which might have justified despair as to the possibility of defending them. They were also far too extensive for our small force, embracing a circumference of upwards of 2300 yards. There was no parapet, except for a few hundred yards. In many places the walls were not more than two feet high, while rubbish had accumulated to such an extent that there were roads over them into the country.

The population within was disaffected, and without were ruined forts, walls, mosques, tombs, and gardens, from which a fire could be opened at 20 or 30 yards. Captains Broadfoot and Havelock and Colonel Dennie assured the General that the works might be restored by adequate exertions, and it was therefore resolved to occupy the town.

The brigade was scarcely within the walls, when the plain was darkened by masses of the enemy. They had expected

that the British troops would continue their progress towards India, and looked for a rich harvest of plunder of their baggage between Jellalabad and Peshawur. It was determined to read them a salutary lesson, and Colonel Monteith was ordered to drive them away. He issued from the gate on the morning of the 14th of November, with horse, foot, and artillery, 1100 in number, of whom 300 were Europeans, and fell on the enemy with such vigour and skill, that the masses broke up and fled, leaving 200 dead on the field. At noon not an Afghan remained, and all molestation ceased for fourteen days. On the 15th, the work of clearing away the ruins and restoring the fortifications was commenced, under the direction of Captain Broadfoot. The day was spent by him in superintending the work, the evening was devoted to his plans and calculations. Working parties were told off, who laboured from dawn to dusk—officers and men worked with emulation; and in a few weeks the ramparts were ready to receive the guns, and everything around the town that could afford cover to the enemy was, as far as possible, cleared away. The chief cause of anxiety to Sir Robert Sale was the deficiency of ammunition, which a single prolonged engagement would go nigh to exhaust. The men were therefore ordered not to expend a single shot uselessly.

On the 29th of November, large bodies of Afghans poured down upon the plains from the surrounding valleys, and opened a desultory fire on the town. As they interrupted the workmen on the fortifications, Colonel Dennie sallied out of the gates soon after midday on the 1st of December, with 300 men from each regiment, to disperse them. The

Afghans fired a volley and fled—the troops followed. The guns dealt destruction among the fugitives; the cavalry, galloping in pursuit, drove some into the river, and cut down others, till 150 bodies strewed the plain. The garrison enjoyed a long period of repose in consequence of this spirited repulse of the enemy. At length news reached the gallant band of the disasters at Cabul; and Dr Brydon arriving in the city, confirmed the sad news. Councils of war were held, and there was some talk of evacuating Jellalabad; but there were brave spirits among the garrison, who saw, and loudly spoke, not only of the disgrace, but of the suicidal folly of such a measure. Their bolder counsels prevailed, and it was determined to hold out to the last extremity. There was Havelock, whose name was afterwards to be in the mouth of every British soldier, as one to be loved and imitated; there were Broadfoot and Dennie, true heroes of the noblest stamp.

On the 19th of February a letter was received from General Pollock, who had arrived in Peshawur, approving of their resolution to hold out, and promising to advance as soon as possible to their aid. Sir Robert replied that the whole of the horses of his cavalry and artillery must perish in another month if he was not succoured before that time, and that then a retreat even on a force advancing to his relief would be impossible.

Major Havelock and Captain Wade were seated by Sir Robert's side, the former writing the reply to General Pollock, when the house began to shake violently. A fearful earthquake was taking place. The shocks continued, without intermission, with frightful violence—a confused, rumbling

sound wildly mingled with the crash of falling houses and the outcries of the inhabitants. The earth was so uplifted that it was scarcely possible for the people to keep their feet. But the destruction of the defences was most appalling. All the parapets were shaken down, several of the bastions were injured, all the guard-houses were cast to the ground, a third of the town was demolished, and a considerable break made in the ramparts of a curtain in the Peshawur face, while the Cabul gate was reduced to a shapeless mass of ruins.

The garrison did not lose heart even under these appalling circumstances. The camp of the enemy they knew was only seven miles off, and he might be upon them in a few hours. It was also necessary to guard against a rush which any parties of the enemy concealed in the neighbourhood might make against the ruined walls. At the sound of the bugle the troops assembled on the ramparts. When it was ascertained that no enemy was near, they piled their arms, and set to work with brave determination to restore the defences. Temporary parapets of loose clods were thrown up, the earth was cleared out of the ditch, gabions were filled to block up the main breaches, and palisades fixed to impede the progress of assailants through others. In a few hours the walls wore a more encouraging aspect. The Afghans, when a few days afterwards they approached the fortress and saw the wonderful state of repair in which it had been placed, believed that it had escaped through the power of English witchcraft. The difficulties of the garrison, however, increased great anxiety was felt for the subsistence of the cavalry and artillery



horses. Foraging parties were sent out daily under an escort, and were constantly attacked by the enemy; and the close investment of the place by Akbar Khan made it impossible for them to get in the needed supplies.

At length, on the 11th of March, the Afghans approached so near the walls, that it was suspected that they purposed undermining them. To prevent this Colonel Dennie made a vigorous sally with 800 men, and ascertained that they had commenced no operation of the sort. Akbar Khan then advanced on the city with his whole force. It was a critical moment, but the hearts of none of the garrison failed them. He was received with so hot a fire from the ramparts, while horse and foot attacked him with such heroic courage, that he was compelled to fly, leaving more than 100 dead on the field.

Starvation now threatened the garrison. For many days the European regiments had been on half rations of salt beef, without vegetables, while the native troops subsisted mainly on flour; and it was doubtful whether this allowance would be continued beyond the second week in April. When, however, they were almost reduced to despair that help would come in time to preserve their lives, some large flocks of sheep were seen grazing on the plains before them. At first it was believed that they were placed there to lure them out to destruction, but the desire to capture them at all hazards became too strong to be resisted. About 200 men of the 13th, and the same number of the 35th, with some sappers and miners, were allowed to sally out to bring in the prey. They succeeded beyond their most sanguine expectations, and 500 sheep and goats were captured and

brought in amid shouts of laughter by the men. This success raised the spirits of the whole garrison, and made them more than ever determined to hold the fort until rescue should come.

On the 6th of April the situation again changed and the fortunes of the garrison once more seemed desperate. Spies had brought in rumours of a serious check inflicted upon General Pollock by the enemy at Ali-Musjid, and Akbar Khan had salutes fired in honour of this supposed victory.

Few of the officers believed these reports, but they were only the more eager to attack Akbar in force, and so, it victorious, effect their own relief, and support General Pollock if the report should turn out to be true. This plan of action was especially urged by Havelock upon the General, and though at first Sir Robert Sale, brave as he was, shrank from the responsibility of ordering so daring an effort, he in the end agreed. On the 7th of April the infantry marched out in three columns. The centre, under Colonel Dennie, consisted of the 13th, 500 strong; the left, of the 35th, under Colonel Monteith, mustering the same number of bayonets; and the right, under Captain Havelock, composed of one company of the 13th, another of the 35th, and the detachment of sappers under Lieutenant Orr, the whole amounting to 360. Captain Broadfoot lay on his couch, suffering from a dangerous wound received in a sortie on the 24th of March.

It was at this time reported in the town that Akbar Khan was preparing to retreat.

Without sound of bugle or drum, at early dawn the troops fell into their ranks and marched out of Jellalabad.

Notwithstanding the report of his flight, Akbar Khan's troops, 6000 in number, were found drawn up in front of his camp, his left resting on the Cabul river. Havelock moved on rapidly in advance with his column, and driving the skirmishers before him, pushed on towards the enemy's camp, the other columns following. Sir Robert Sale was with the centre column. At about three-quarters of a mile from Jellalabad, a flanking fire was opened from one of the forts on that column, and Sir Robert ordered Colonel Dennie to storm it. Accordingly, rushing on with his men of the gallant 13th, he passed the outer wall through an opening, but found himself exposed to a murderous fire from the inner keep. Here fell the brave Colonel Dennie, mortally wounded by an Afghan marksman. He was acknowledged by all to be one of the most gallant soldiers in the British army. This false move nearly produced disastrous consequences. Akbar Khan, seeing Havelock, who was much in advance, unsupported, brought down a body of 15,000 cavalry on his feeble column. Havelock posted the company of the 13th in a walled enclosure on his right, to pour a flanking fire on the enemy, and formed the rest into square. That he might be able to command both parties, he himself remained outside the square till the horsemen were close upon them. His horse rearing, he was thrown, and the animal galloped back riderless to the town. He would have been killed by the Afghans had not a sapper and two men of the 13th rushed forward and rescued him. The enemy's horse, charging with much resolution, approached within 30 yards; but their leader was shot, and, exposed to a heavy fire in front and flank, they retired in confusion. Again Havelock's column

advanced, and once more the Afghan horse charged it. Thrown into one square, it awaited the attack, which was more easily repulsed than the first. Sir Robert then sent Backhouse's guns to Havelock's assistance. The column, cheering them as they came on, advanced against the enemy's encampment and penetrated it, driving the Afghans headlong into the river. The other columns now came up, the camp was attacked on three points, and in a short time the enemy were dislodged from every part of their position, their cannon taken, and their camp burnt. Four guns, lost by the Cabul and Gundamuck forces, were recaptured, and a great quantity of ordnance stores and *materiel* was taken or destroyed. The field was strewn with the bodies of the Afghans, while the loss on the side of the victors amounted to only 10 killed and 50 wounded.

Thus the garrison of Jellalabad, after having been isolated in a hostile country for five months, surrounded by enemies, and constantly threatened with destruction, achieved its own relief. The peasantry now brought in ample supplies of provisions, and on the 16th of April the relieving force under General Pollock, having gallantly fought its way through the Khyber Pass, routing the Afridis who guarded it, approached



the long beleaguered city, an exploit second to none in the annals of warfare; and thus was accomplished the successful defence of Jellalabad.

### **Forcing the Khyber Pass—5th April 1842.**

Meanwhile, when the news reached India that a British army had been destroyed in Afghanistan, and that General

Sale, with another, was closely besieged in Jellalabad, a strong force was despatched under General Pollock to his relief. General Pollock had to encounter many difficulties in his march, but the greatest was forcing the Khyber Pass, which was known to be guarded by a numerous, active, and daring enemy. The troops had arrived at Jumrood, on the east end of the pass—on the west end was Ali-Musjid. The hills on either side of the pass were rocky and precipitous, presenting great obstacles to troops, guarded as they were by numerous bodies of Afridis, long accustomed to warfare. The difficulties were great, but they were known, and General Pollock prepared to surmount them. Brigadier Wild was in command of the advance guard, and General McCaskill of the rear.

Before dawn on the 5th of April Pollock's force set out from Jumrood to the entrance of the Khyber Pass. It was formed of eight regiments of infantry, among whom were the 9th Queen's Regiment, three cavalry corps, including two squadrons of the 3rd Dragoons, artillery, and sappers, in all some 8000 men. Brigadier Wild was in command of the advance guard and General McCaskill of the rear. The arrangement of the march was that the heights on either side should be occupied by infantry, the right being under the command of Colonel Taylor, and the left of Colonel Morley; and while these advanced along the heights the main column was to advance through the pass.

At three o'clock in the morning the army commenced its march. It moved off in the dim twilight without beat of drum or sound of bugle. The crowning columns moved off to the right and left, and commenced in silence to climb the