

84. The night of the 22nd passed quietly, but the songs and cries of the enemy could be heard in the surrounding villages.

I had received information that the 23rd of December, being the last day of the "Muharram," was fixed upon for their great effort, and I also knew that the flame of fanaticism would be fanned by the fact that the aged Mushk-i-Alam would, with his own hand, light the beacon fire at dawn on the Asmai heights, which was to be the signal for the commencement of the attack.

Possessing this knowledge, and knowing that the feelings of the people had been worked to the highest pitch of excitement by the preaching of their Moollas, I directed all troops to be under arms at a very early hour on the 23rd.

85. My information proved correct, and the appearance of the signal fire on the Asmai heights, shortly before daybreak, announced the beginning of the assault. Heavy firing almost immediately commenced against our southern and eastern faces, and by 7 o'clock A.M., an attack in force against the eastern side was fully developed, whilst a very large number of the enemy, provided with scaling ladders, were drawn up under cover of the walls to the south.

From 7 A.M. until 10 A.M. the fight was carried on vigorously; repeated attempts were made to carry the low eastern wall by escalade, but though the enemy on several occasions reached the *abattis*, they were each time repulsed, and many dead marked the spots where the assault had been most determinedly pressed home.

Soon after 10 A.M. a lull took place, as though the enemy had recoiled before the breech-loader, but at 11 A.M. the fight again grew hot, although it was not marked by the determination of the former period.

Finding that it was impossible to dislodge the enemy by any fire that could be brought to bear upon them from our defences, I determined to attack them in flank, and for this purpose directed four guns of G-3rd, Royal Artillery, and the 5th Punjab Cavalry under the command of Major W. R. Craster, Royal Artillery, and Lieutenant-Colonel B. Williams, 5th Punjab Cavalry, respectively, to move out through the gorge in the Bemaru heights.

This counter stroke at once told. The Afghans wavered and shortly afterwards broke.

86. By 1 P.M. all vigour had passed from the attack, and the time for the action of cavalry arrived. Brigadier-General Massy was directed to proceed with every available man and horse and do his utmost against the enemy, whilst at the same time a party of infantry and sappers moved out to destroy some villages to the south, which had caused considerable annoyance and which it was necessary the enemy should be driven from to facilitate the arrival of Brigadier-General Charles Gough's brigade the following day.

This work was successfully accomplished, but I regret to say cost the lives of two gallant officers, Captain J. Dundas, V.C., R.E., and Lieutenant C. Nugent, R.E., commanding the 7th Company Sappers and Miners, who were killed by the premature explosion of a mine.

Meanwhile a part of our cavalry had worked round to the base of Shah Sang, and succeeded in rendering a good account of the enemy in that quarter, whilst the Guides Cavalry and a squadron of the 14th Bengal Lancers, who had been manœuvring more to the eastward, had been equally fortunate.

87. By evening all fire had nearly ceased, and day-light on the 24th showed that the enemy, abandoning all hope of success, had dispersed,

not a man being found in the adjacent villages or visible on the surrounding hills. The city was clear of them, and so precipitate was their flight that, leaving their dead unburied where they fell, by mid-day many parties of them were upwards of twenty-five miles from Kabul, the rapidity of their retreat being doubtless accelerated by the knowledge that reinforcements were near at hand.

At 5 o'clock in the morning a party of the 72nd Highlanders occupied without opposition the fort of Mahomed Sharif, and later a force under Brigadier-General Macpherson, C.B., moved out to cover, and if necessary, aid the entry of Brigadier-General Charles Gough's column, which had halted the previous evening about six miles from Sherpur.

The cavalry, divided into two parties commanded respectively by Brigadier-Generals Massy and Hugh Gough, C.B., proceeded by Beni-Shahr and the Chardeh Valley in pursuit, but so rapid had been the enemy's flight and so retarded were our men by a heavy snow storm, that no success attended their efforts, though neither party returned to Sherpur until after night fall.

88. Our casualties between the 15th and 24th of December, are noted in the margin.*

Besides the deaths of Captain Dundas, V.C., R.E., and Lieutenant Nugent, R.E., already mentioned, I regret very deeply to have to record, on the 19th instant, that of Major John Cook, V.C., 5th Goorkhas, from the effects of a wound received on the 12th whilst bravely leading his men to the assault of the Takht-i-Shah. By Major Cook's death Her Majesty has lost the services of a most distinguished and gallant officer, and the Kabul Field Force a comrade whom one and all honoured and admired.

Lieutenant C. A. Montanaro, R.A., died on the 20th of a wound received the previous day. This promising young officer's gallantry in standing to his guns to the last on the 14th December I have before mentioned.

The wounded included Brigadier-General Hugh Gough, C.B., V.C., Lieutenant J. Burn-Murdoch, R.E., whose behaviour, on the occasion of his receiving his wound is reported by Lieutenant-Colonel Perkins to have been most gallant, and Lieutenants L. Sunderland, 72nd Highlanders, and C. F. Gambier, 5th Punjab Cavalry.

89. During the time that the enemy occupied

* Casualties from 15th to 23rd December inclusive.—Killed.—Captain J. Dundas, V.C., R.E.; Lieutenant C. Nugent, R.E.: 1 man, 5th Punjab Infantry; 1 syce; 1 follower; 1 man, No. 2 Mountain Battery; 4 followers, No. 2 Mountain Battery; 1 man, 92nd Highlanders; 1 follower, 92nd Highlanders; 5 men, 12th Bengal Cavalry; 1 man, G-3rd, R.A.: Total killed.—2 officers; 1 British and 7 Native rank and file; 1 syce; 6 followers. Total, 18. Wounded.—Brigadier-General Hugh H. Gough, C.B., V.C.; Lieutenant C. A. Montanaro, R.A. (died); Lieutenant J. Burn-Murdoch, R.E.; Lieutenant C. F. Gambier, 5th Punjab Cavalry; 3 men, 5th Punjab Cavalry; 9 men, 67th Regiment; 1 man, 72nd Highlanders; 1 man, 92nd Highlanders; 1 follower, 92nd Highlanders; 8 men, 3rd Sikhs; 1 man, No. 1 Mountain Battery; 1 follower; 1 man, 1 Mountain Battery; 1 man, 23rd Pioneers; 1 follower, 23rd Pioneers; 1 follower, 5th Goorkhas; 1 man, 28th Punjab Native Infantry; 1 man, 9th Lancers; 1 follower, 9th Lancers; 4 men, 12th Bengal Cavalry; 1 bheestie, 12th Bengal Cavalry; 3 followers, 12th Bengal Cavalry; 2 followers, 14th Bengal Lancers; 1 Native Officer, 5th Punjab Cavalry; 6 men, 5th Punjab Cavalry; 4 followers, 5th Punjab Cavalry; 2 followers, G-3rd, R.A.; 1 man, F.A., R.H.A.; 1 follower, 1st Bengal Cavalry; 1 Native officer, the Guides; 2 men, the Guides; 1 follower, the Guides; 2 followers, Ambulance Corps; 1 follower, Commissariat Department: Total wounded.—5 Officers (1 dead); 2 Native Officers; 13 British and 26 Native rank and file; 1 bheestie; 21 followers. Total, 68. And 24 horses killed, and 30 wounded.