

Poetry Across Time



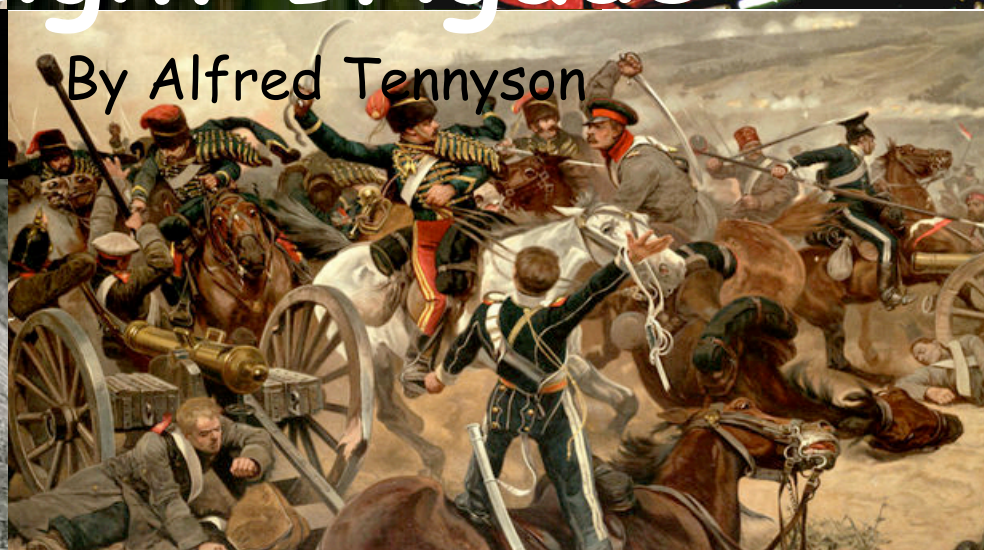
Conflict

scarcely believe the evidence of our senses: Surely that handful of men are not going to charge an army in position? Alas! it was but too true—their desperate valour knew no bounds, and far indeed was it removed from its so-called better part—discretion. They advanced in two lines, quickening their pace as they closed towards the enemy. A more fearful spectacle was never witnessed than by those who, without the power to aid, beheld their heroic countrymen rushing to the arms of death. At the distance of 1,200 yards the whole line of the enemy belched forth, from 30 iron mouths, a flood of smoke and flame, through which hissed the deadly balls. Their flight was marked by instant gaps in our ranks, by dead men and horses, by steeds flying wounded or riderless across the plain. The first line is broken, it is joined by the second, they never halt or check their speed an instant; the ranks, thinned by those 30 guns, which the Russians had laid with the most deadly accuracy, with a halo of flashing steel above their heads, and with a cheer which was many a noble fellow's death-cry, they flew into the smoke of the batteries, where they were lost from view the plain was strewed with their bodies and with the carcasses of horses. They were exposed to an oblique fire from the



The Charge of the Light Brigade

By Alfred Tennyson





The Crimean War: 1854-6

Britain and France feared Russia's ambition to spread its power southwards as the Turkish Empire collapsed. War broke out in 1854.

In September, the Allies landed in the Crimea, in southern Russia, and besieged Sebastopol. In October the Russians attacked the British base at Balaclava.

During this battle, the disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade took place. The British cavalry commander mistook his orders to retake some guns held by the Russians. Instead he told his men to charge the main Russian position, which was at the head of a valley bristling with artillery. The 600 horsemen gallantly obeyed but two thirds of the force were killed or wounded. The Charge is the best known example of the heroism and stupidity of war.

BBC NEWS

In detail: Charge of the Light Brigade



Infamous anniversary

One of the British Army's most infamous engagements took place 150 years ago.

On 25 October 1854, during the Crimean War, a misunderstood order sent 600 cavalymen thundering into heavy Russian gunfire.

The National Army Museum in London is marking the anniversary with a special exhibition.

Picture courtesy National Army Museum.

Lord Cardigan's Address:

'We advanced down a gradual descent of more than three-quarters of a mile, with the batteries vomiting forth upon us shells and shot, round and grape, with one battery on our right flank and another on the left, and all the intermediate ground covered with the Russian riflemen; so that when we came to within a distance of fifty yards from the mouths of the artillery which had been hurling destruction upon us, we were, in fact, surrounded and encircled by a blaze of fire, in addition to the fire of the riflemen upon our flanks.



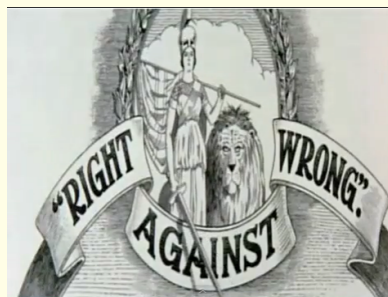
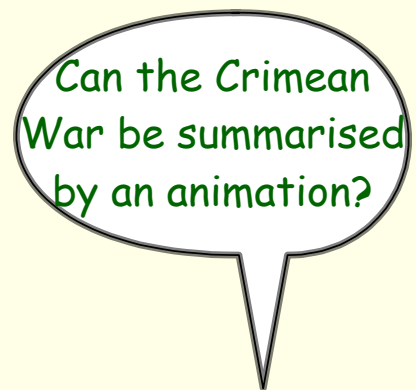
As we ascended the hill the oblique fire of the artillery poured upon our rear, so that we had thus a strong fire upon our front, our flank, and our rear.

We entered the battery - we went through the battery - the two leading regiments cutting down a great number of the Russian gunners in their onset. In the two regiments which I had the honour to lead, every officer, with one exception, was either killed or wounded, or had his horse shot under him or injured. Those regiments proceeded, followed by the second line, consisting of two more regiments of cavalry, which continued to perform the duty of cutting down the Russian gunners. Then came the third line, formed of another regiment, which endeavoured to complete the duty assigned to our brigade...'

House of Commons, 29 March 1855


Role of England in the Crimean War...

1. What does animation suggest about the role of England in the Crimean War?
2. Do you think they were right to go to war?




Why?

The Crimean was the first media war, where journalists reported events in a way that had never previously happened.



Why would they do it?



Surely that handful of men were not going to charge an army in position? Alas, it was but too true - their desperate valour knew no bounds.

The Times, 14 November 1854

At ten minutes past eleven our Light Cavalry Brigade advanced... They swept proudly past, glittering in the morning sun in all the pride and splendour of war... At the distance of 1,200 yards the whole line of the enemy belched forth, from thirty iron mouths, a flood of smoke and flame. The flight was marked by instant gaps in our ranks, by dead men and horses, by steeds flying wounded or riderless across the plain. In diminished ranks, with a halo of steel above their heads, and with a cheer which was many a noble fellow's death cry, they flew into the smoke of the batteries; but ere they were lost from view the plain was strewn with their bodies. Through the clouds of smoke we could see their sabres flashing as they rode between the guns, cutting down the gunners as they stood. We saw them riding through, returning, after breaking through a column of Russians and scattering them like chaff, when the flank fire of the batteries on the hill swept them down. Wounded men and dismounted troopers flying towards us told the sad tale... at thirty-five minutes past eleven not a British soldier, except the dead and the dying, was left in front of the Muscovite guns.



Charge of the Light Brigade

By Alfred Tennyson

Alfred Tennyson was born in Lincolnshire in 1809 and died in 1892. He became Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom in 1850 following the death of William Wordsworth and in 1884 wrote 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' as a dramatic tribute to the 673 British cavalrymen at the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War. For a long time, he was concerned about his mental state, fearing the 'black blood' of the Tennysons. This darkness informed much of his poetry, leading him to focus on loss and mortality. T.S. Eliot called him "the great master...of melancholia".



They rode courageously into the 'valley of death' knowing they were doomed from the start.

The Charge of the Light Brigade

1.

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!' he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

2.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

3.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

4.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

5.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them
Left of six hundred.

6.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

ALFRED TENNYSON

Poem

The Charge of the Light Brigade

Repetition used to emphasise the ...

1.
Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!' he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Sounds sinister.
Allows the reader to be prepared for events of the poem

Who is speaking here?

Reference from?

Repetition used throughout the poem, why?

2.
'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Repeating the command, showing that there is no going back.

Rhyme and rhythm representing the obedience of the soldiers.

What do the soldiers realise here?

Why has the poet chosen to use this word?

3.
Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

Surrounded by powerful weapons. Will they survive?

Alliteration emphasises the...

The calvary only had swords whilst the Russians had guns.

4.
Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

People wondered why they had been sent to charge.

Demonstration of courage, why?

What language techniques has been used? Why?

What has changed?
What does this show?

5.
Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them
Left of six hundred.

What are the soldiers now doing?

Sense of admiration touched with sadness.

Repetition reminds us...

Language technique used. Why?

6.
When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

Wants the survivors and the dead to be remembered.

How does the poet feel about the event?

ALFRED TENNYSON

Exploring the text:



Presentation of the Light Brigade

- * Find all the references to the soldiers.
- * How are they presented? Why?



Use of repetition

- * Track the repeated words in this poem?
- * What do you notice? How does Tennyson use repetition?



Direct address

- * What examples of direct address are there?
- * What do they help to achieve within the poem?



Exploring Themes:



THEME	QUOTE	EXPLAIN
OBEDIENCE	'Theirs but to do and die'	They didn't question the order to charge.
PATRIOTISM	.	
SACRIFICE	.	
HEROISM	.	
ROMANCE OF CONFLICT		



Endings:

When can their glory fade?

O the wild charge they made!

All the world wonder'd.

Honour the charge they made!

Honour the Light Brigade,

Noble six hundred!



Reflection...

- * Why are the punctuation marks important in this stanza?
- * Why is the word 'wild' ambiguous?
- * How is this stanza different to the others?



Look at the images below:



Can you find the quotation/idea
that they refer to?

Question Time!



1. What does Tennyson mean by
'Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die'?
2. What helps to create the beating
rhythm in the poem? What sounds are being imitated?
3. How does the poet convey the sense of how terrifying and
violent the battle was?
4. Where does Tennyson show his pity for the soldiers?
5. What do you think Tennyson thought of the Charge?
What impression does he give of the commanding officers?



The Charge of the Heavy Brigade

October 25, 1854

I.

The charge of the gallant three hundred, the Heavy Brigade!
Down the hill, down the hill, thousands of Russians,
Thousands of horsemen, drew to the valley—and stay'd;
For Scarlett and Scarlett's three hundred were riding by
When the points of the Russian lances arose in the sky;
And he call'd, 'Left wheel into line!' and they wheel'd and obey'd.
Then he look'd at the host that had halted he knew not why,
And he turn'd half round, and he bade his trumpeter sound
To the charge, and he rode on ahead, as he waved his blade
To the gallant three hundred whose glory will never die—
'Follow,' and up the hill, up the hill, up the hill,
Follow'd the Heavy Brigade.

II.

The trumpet, the gallop, the charge, and the might of the fight!
Thousands of horsemen had gather'd there on the height,
With a wing push'd out to the left and a wing to the right,
And who shall escape if they close? but he dash'd up alone
Thro' the great gray slope of men,
Sway'd his sabre, and held his own
Like an Englishman there and then.
All in a moment follow'd with force
Three that were next in their fiery course,
Wedged themselves in between horse and horse,
Fought for their lives in the narrow gap they had made—
Four amid thousands! and up the hill, up the hill,
Gallop'd the gallant three hundred, the Heavy Brigade.

III.

Fell like a cannon-shot,
Burst like a thunderbolt,
Crash'd like a hurricane,
Broke thro' the mass from below,
Drove thro' the midst of the foe,
Plunged up and down, to and fro,
Rode flashing blow upon blow,
Brave Inniskillens and Greys
Whirling their sabres in circles of light!
And some of us, all in amaze,
Who were held for a while from the fight,
And were only standing at gaze,
When the dark-muffled Russian crowd
Folded its wings from the left and the right,
And roll'd them around like a cloud,—
O, mad for the charge and the battle were we,
When our own good redcoats sank from sight,
Like drops of blood in a dark-gray sea,
And we turn'd to each other, whispering, all dismay'd,
'Lost are the gallant three hundred of Scarlett's Brigade!'

IV.

'Lost one and all' were the words
Mutter'd in our dismay;
But they rode like victors and lords
Thro' the forest of lances and swords
In the heart of the Russian hordes,
They rode, or they stood at bay—
Struck with the sword-hand and slew,
Down with the bridle-hand drew
The foe from the saddle and threw
Underfoot there in the fray—
Ranged like a storm or stood like a rock
In the wave of a stormy day;
Till suddenly shock upon shock
Stagger'd the mass from without,
Drove it in wild disarray,
For our men galloped up with a cheer and a shout,
And the foeman surged, and waver'd, and reel'd
Up the hill, up the hill, up the hill, out of the field,
And over the brow and away.

V.

Glory to each and to all, and the charge that they made!
Glory to all the three hundred, and all the Brigade!

ALFRED TENNYSON

The Last of the Light Brigade

THERE were thirty million English who talked of England's might,
There were twenty broken troopers who lacked a bed for the night.
They had neither food nor money, they had neither service nor trade;
They were only shiftless soldiers, the last of the Light Brigade.

They felt that life was fleeting, they knew not that art was long,
That although they were dying of famine, they lived in deathless song.
They asked for a little money to keep the wolf from the door;
And the thirty million English sent twenty pounds and four!

They laid their heads together that were scarred and lined and gray;
Keen were the Russian sabres, but want was keener than they;
And an old troop sergeant muttered, "Let us go to the man who writes
The things on Balaclava the kiddies at school recites."

They went without bands or colours, a regiment ten-file strong,
To look for the Master-singer who had crowned them all in his song;
And, waiting his servant's order, by the garden gate they stayed,
A desolate little cluster, the last of the Light Brigade.

The old troop sergeant was spokesman, and "Beggin' your pardon," he said,
"You wrote o' the Light Brigade, sir. Here's all that isn't dead.
An' it's all come true what you wrote, sir, regardin' the mouth of hell;
For we're all of us nigh to the workhouse, an' we thought we'd call an' tell.

"No, thank you, we don't want food, sir; but couldn't you take an' write
A sort of 'to be continued' and 'see next page' o' the fight?
We think that someone has blundered, an' couldn't you tell 'em how?
You wrote we were heroes once, sir. Please, write we are starving now."

The poor little army departed, limping and lean and forlorn.
And the heart of the Master-singer grew hot with "the scorn of scorn."
And he wrote for them wonderful verses that swept the land like flame,
Till the fatted souls of the English were scourged with the thing called Shame.

O thirty million English that babble of England's might,
Behold there are twenty heroes who lack their food to-night;
Our children's children are lisping to "honour the charge they made-"
And we leave to the streets and the workhouses the charge of the Light Brigade!

RUDYARD KIPLING

Links:

BBC illustrated history of charge:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/04/
uk_charge_of_the_light_brigade/html/1.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/04/uk_charge_of_the_light_brigade/html/1.stm)

Historical information about Charge and Crimean War:

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/themes/92/92728.html>

Times Report by William Howard Russell

[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/
The_Charge_of_the_Light_Brigade_%28article%29](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Charge_of_the_Light_Brigade_%28article%29)

Biography of Tennyson including recordings:

[http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/
singlePoet.do?poetId=1569](http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=1569)

Listen to poem:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/poetry/outloud/tennyson.shtml>

BBC Bitesize Focus on Poem:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/
english_literature/poetrytennyson/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/poetrytennyson/)

Radio 4 Programme discussing Charge

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b008md8x>

Article on 'Why is it still important?':

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3944699.stm>

