

The Charge Of The Light Brigade

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
1809-1892 (poem 1854)

This poem was written to memorialize a suicidal charge by light cavalry over open terrain by British forces in the Battle of Balaclava (Ukraine) in the Crimean War (1854-56). 247 men of the 637 in the charge were killed or wounded. Britain entered the war, which was fought by Russia against Turkey, Britain and France, because Russia sought to control the Dardanelles. Russian control of the Dardanelles threatened British sea routes.

Many in the west best know of this war today because of Florence Nightingale, who trained and led nurses aiding the wounded during the war in a manner innovative for those times. The War was also noteworthy as an early example of the work of modern war correspondents.

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.

'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 & die,
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd & 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.

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 & Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke,
Shatter'd & sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

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 & 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.

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!



Charge of the Light Brigade by Richard Caton Woodville (1855)