

## Document Analysis: Charge of the Light Brigade

DIRECTIONS: Use the information below in order to complete the document analysis of the poem *Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Be sure to include information from your reading on your document analysis chart.

### The Charge of the Light Brigade BY ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

<p>I 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.</p>	<p>II "Forward, the Light Brigade!" Was there a man dismayed? Not though the soldier knew Someone had blundered. 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.</p>	<p>III Cannon to right of them, Cannon to left of them, Cannon in front of them Volleyed and thundered; Stormed at with shot and shell, Boldly they rode and well, Into the jaws of Death, Into the mouth of hell Rode the six hundred.</p>
<p>IV Flashed all their sabres bare, Flashed as they turned in air Sabring the gunners there, Charging an army, while All the world wondered. Plunged in the battery-smoke Right through the line they broke; Cossack and Russian Reeled from the sabre stroke Shattered and sundered. Then they rode back, but not Not the six hundred.</p>	<p>V Cannon to right of them, Cannon to left of them, Cannon behind them Volleyed and thundered; Stormed at with shot and shell, While horse and hero fell. They that had fought so well Came through the jaws of Death, Back from the mouth of hell, All that was left of them, Left of six hundred.</p>	<p>VI When can their glory fade? O the wild charge they made! All the world wondered. Honour the charge they made! Honour the Light Brigade, Noble six hundred!</p>



"The Charge of the Light Brigade", a poem by British Poet Laureate Alfred, Lord Tennyson, recalls the disastrous historical military engagement that took place during the initial phase of the Crimean War (1854-56). Under the command of Lord Raglan, British forces entered the war in September 1854 to prevent the Russians from obtaining control of the important sea routes through the Dardanelles. From the beginning, the war was plagued by a series of misunderstandings and tactical blunders, one of which serves as the subject of this poem: on October 25, 1854, as the Russians were seizing guns from British soldiers, Lord Raglan sent

desperate orders to his Light Cavalry Brigade to fend off the Russians. Finally, one of his orders was acted upon, and the brigade began charging—but in the wrong direction. Over 650 men rushed forward, and well over 100 died within the next few minutes. As a result of the battle, Britain lost possession of the majority of its forward defenses.

The poem's popularity in England grew over the next fifty years because it is considered such a stirring expression of courage under fire, of heroism under impossible odds, of the might of the English military. Tennyson's images are powerful; he creates a scene of chaos and carnage with cannons thundering and shells falling. The men are stoic and unquestioning as English men are supposed to be, and they embrace their orders without offering critique or refusal. The men ride "boldly" and fight well in the hellish battle, in the "valley of Death" that is their burial ground.



Tennyson wrote this poem as a celebration of the heroic soldiers in the Light Brigade who fell in service to their commander and their cause. The poem glorifies war and courage, even in cases of complete inefficiency and waste. It is part of a sequence of political and military poems that Tennyson wrote after he became Poet Laureate of England in 1850, including "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" (1852) and "Riflemen, Form" (1859). These poems reflect Tennyson's emerging national consciousness and his sense of compulsion to express his political views.