Presentation:

The Charge of the Light Brigade

1. Who wrote it, who was he, and when was it written?

The Charge of the Light Brigade was written by Alfred Lord Tennyson, one of the most famous poets of the Victorian era. He served as Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom, meaning he wrote poems for important national events.

The poem was written in December 1854, only a few weeks after the real military event it describes: the Charge of the Light Brigade during the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War (1853–1856). Tennyson wrote it after reading newspaper reports about the battle.

The Crimean War was fought between Russia and an alliance of Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire, and Sardinia. Much of the fighting took place on the Crimean Peninsula, which today is internationally recognized as part of Ukraine.

2. What does the poem describe?

The poem tells the story of around 600 British cavalry soldiers who were ordered to charge directly at a Russian artillery position during the Battle of Balaclava.

The order was based on a misunderstanding. The soldiers rode into a valley surrounded by Russian cannons on three sides. Even though many of them realized that a mistake had been made, they obeyed their orders and continued the attack.

One of the most famous parts of the poem is:

“Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.”

This shows that the soldiers did not question their orders; they felt it was their duty to obey.

Throughout the poem, Tennyson describes:

- The courage of the soldiers.
- The chaos and violence of battle.
- The deadly Russian artillery fire.
- The sacrifice of the men who charged despite the odds against them.

3. Why did Tennyson write the poem?

Tennyson wrote the poem to honour the bravery and sacrifice of the soldiers.

At the same time, he indirectly points to the failure of military leadership. In the line:

“Someone had blunder’d”

he suggests that a serious mistake was made by the commanders who gave the orders. However, instead of focusing on blaming individuals, Tennyson focuses on remembering the courage of the men who carried out the attack.

The poem also helped shape public memory of the event. Even though the charge was a military disaster, it became remembered as a symbol of heroism, loyalty, and duty.

4. What connections can we make with today?

The poem remains relevant because many of its themes still appear in modern wars and conflicts.

A. The Crimean War and modern Crimea

One striking connection is geography. The poem is about a battle fought in Crimea in 1854. More than 150 years later, Crimea became the centre of another major conflict.

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine, and since 2022 the region has been an important part of the Russia–Ukraine War. This means that the same peninsula where the Light Brigade fought in the nineteenth century remains strategically important today.

B. The consequences of military mistakes

The Charge of the Light Brigade happened because of poor communication and unclear orders.

Modern armies use advanced technology, satellites, drones, and secure communications, but military mistakes still happen. The poem reminds us that when leaders make errors, ordinary soldiers often face the consequences. Military historians still study the Charge of the Light Brigade as a classic example of the dangers of unclear commands and poor communication.

C. Russia as an opponent in both conflicts

Another interesting connection is that Russia was the opponent in both the Crimean War and the current Russia–Ukraine War.

Of course, the political situations are very different. In the 1850s Britain and France fought Russia directly, while today Western countries mainly support Ukraine through weapons, training, intelligence, and economic aid. However, both conflicts involve concerns about Russian influence and control in the Black Sea region.

D. Heroism and sacrifice

The soldiers in the poem knew the attack was extremely dangerous, yet they continued.

Today we still hear stories of soldiers, medics, rescue workers, and civilians showing similar courage during wars and crises. The poem raises a question that remains relevant:

How should we remember people who show great bravery in situations created by political or military failures?

This question can be applied not only to the Crimean War, but also to conflicts such as the Russia–Ukraine War.

Conclusion

The Charge of the Light Brigade is more than a poem about a nineteenth-century battle. It tells a story about courage, duty, sacrifice, and leadership. Because it deals with themes that still appear in modern conflicts—including the ongoing importance of Crimea and the effects of military decisions—it remains relevant more than 170 years after it was written.