

Comparing and  
contrasting the  
charge of the light  
brigade and the  
defence of luck...



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“ The Charge of The Light Brigade” and “ The Defence of Lucknow” are two notable poems written by Lord Alfred Tennyson one of Britain’s finest poet laureates who lived during the 19th century. These two poems are based on two different battles which the Britons faced and fought with bravery and loyalty.

Within this essay I am going to signify the differences and similarities between the two poems.” The Charge of The Light Brigade” is based on the battle where the British and the French became allies with each other and emerged as a unit against the Russians. Both nations feared the dominance of the Russians thus they decided to unite since the Russians in that time were known as the Super power. The poem was written in the 19th century and Tennyson wrote this emphatically as a response to a newspaper article in “ The Times” by W.

H. Russell. Tennyson felt that W. H.

Russell was being too pessimistic about the performance of the British soldiers. This is why he decided to write a poem in the favour of Britain, glorifying the efforts of the British soldiers to show how brave and loyal the soldiers were. In this poem Tennyson emphasises on the British because he is a pro British poet laureate therefore he only wrote about the experience of the British soldiers and in contrast nothing about the French despite the fact that the two nations fought as one. The soldiers who fought for Britain are portrayed as patriotic warriors who did not only fight due to command but also for their beloved nation which they were proud to be part of. They refused to face defeat and go down and under but instead rise for victory

since that was their primary objective for the cause of Britain” The Defence of Lucknow” was one of the most famous episodes of the Indian Mutiny in 1857. It is based on a battle that took place during the time that India was a colony of England.

This battle was of high intensity between the British settlement in India against the rebels. This poem is set in Lucknow. The Britons used the fat of cows and pigs in order to oil their bullets for their guns. This caused major conflict between the Indians and the British due to the fact that the Indian society consisted of two different religions which were Hinduism and Islam who were offended by this due to religious restrictions. Hence the Muslims and Hindus united with each other and became allies to fight against the British army in an outrageous battle which the Indians considered to be crucial since both religions were offended and infuriated. The Indian soldiers were highly trained and equipped and were virtually unstoppable.

Tennyson uses this as a factor to emphasise on the fact how brave the British soldiers were because they were again in the minority compared to their opponents; the expertly trained rebels. These two poems are both based on two separate battles which took place in two completely different scenarios. One is based on the fear of dominance and the other on rebellion. However in both poems Tennyson emphasises on the courage of the British soldiers. Indeed in both battles the Britons are in the minority. For both of these poems Tennyson uses this as a fact to show how brave the British soldiers were.

In "The Charge of The Light Brigade" Tennyson predominantly describes how outnumbered and surrounded the British army was. In stanza 3 of "The Charge of Light Brigade" he mentions: "Cannon to the right of them, Cannon to the left of them, Cannon in front of them" (The charge of The Light Brigade, S: 3) This shows how they were in the minority and Tennyson is emphasising on their courage and bravery. "Ever the labour of fifty that had to be done by five" (The Defence of Lucknow S: 6) This quote portrays the scenario in which the British were and it tells the reader that any army who could still carry on fighting in a situation such as this would have to be immensely brave and loyal. By writing a poem as such about the battle makes the reader believe that although the battle was lost, the courage and bravery of the soldiers was that of those who win battles. In order to emphasise how well the British fought, Tennyson gives a very detailed description of the enemy of the Britons. If we look at "The Defence of Lucknow" here the Indian rebel soldiers were very highly trained and were perfectly armed and equipped.

They had spies which informed them of the people with high authority and skills in the British army in order to set a structured plan. To be in the minority against such a force meant that the British were ready to become martyrs for their nation with pride as Tennyson explains in this poem. "Death for their spies were among us, their marksmen were told of our best, So that the brute bullet broke thro' the brain that could think for the rest" (The Defence of Lucknow S: 6) These two lines signify how courageous the British soldiers were. To be able to have the will to fight such a powerful enemy surely embodies the spirit of courage.

In "The Defence of Lucknow" Tennyson describes how the British were being attacked in contrast to "The Charge of The Light Brigade" where he describes how the British attacked the enemy courageously with loyalty and bravery." Forward, the Light Brigade!" ("The Charge of Light Brigade" S: 2) Here Tennyson explains how the Britons were marching forward in "The charge of The Light Brigade" which means they were attacking with courage." Backward they reel like the wave, like the wave flinging forward again" (The Defence of Lucknow S: 3) This explains that in "The Defence of Lucknow" the British were being attacked continuously but withstood the intense pressure." The Defence of Lucknow" is a much longer poem compared to "The Charge of The Light Brigade". However, they both convey a strong message of how strong the British army was.

"Women and children among us, God help them, our children and wives! Hold it we might and for fifteen days or twenty at most 'Never surrender, I charge you, but every man die at his post!'" (The Defence of Lucknow, S: 2) These two lines explain that the British army was strong to such an extent that they could withstand without giving up for such a long period and would rather kill their spouse and children instead of handing them to the enemy as that would be much more painful for them. This verse also explains how Tennyson uses religious contents to possibly show that God was on the side of the British. Religious content is also used in the Defence of Lucknow." Into the valley of Death" (The Charge of The Light Brigade, S: 2) This verse refers to a biblical connotation which possibly evidences that God was supporting the British. However this verse is a contrast to the verse from "The Defence of Lucknow" due to the fact that that the verse from "The charge of The

"Light Brigade" mentions the awareness of British soldiers that they may die and accept to become martyrs whereas, the verse from "The Defence of Lucknow" seeks for God's help and guidance. In both poems Tennyson describes the situation that the Britons were in with much detail as if though he was there.

However, in "The Defence of Lucknow" he unfortunately describes the enemy to such an extent that he uses racist contents. This is a major contrast since it displays the difference between the enemies faced in "The Defence of Lucknow" and the "The Charge of The Light Brigade". He does so in order to describe the rebel soldiers as devils and how hard it is to fight the devil." Praise be to our Indian brothers, and let the dark face have his due!" (The Defence of Lucknow S: 5) These are highly controversial lines used by Tennyson mainly due to the fact that the poem is entirely emphasising on the Britons and so it has become permissible to use racial abuse which is very controversial.

This all sums up that Tennyson's message is to tell the readers about the might of the British and how all other nations are inferior to the Britons. Every time Tennyson intends to praise the enemy immediately after that he criticises them immensely as we can see from the verse above. In "The Defence of Lucknow" Tennyson mentions the flag of the Britons he does this to represent the honour and strength of the British nation." Floated in conquering battle...

" (The Defence of Lucknow, S: 1) This verse signifies how the flag remained up in the sky and floated calmly during the battle. It also exposes the might

of the British and the pride that they have for their nation. Tennyson doesn't mention the use of a flag in "The Defence of Lucknow" in contrast to "The Charge of The Light Brigade" where he doesn't consider mentioning the use of a British flag. This could be due to the fact that "The Defence of Lucknow" was a battle entirely concerning the British whereas "The Charge of The Light Brigade" was a battle where the Britons united with the French. However, Tennyson has several other ways of praising the Britons in "The Charge of The Light Brigade" which cover up for the lack of mentioning the flag in this poem. He mentions the sincerity of the Britons towards their duties.

"Never surrender, I charge you, but every man die at his post!" (The Defence of Lucknow, S: 2) This verse compares to how devoted the soldiers were in "The Charge of The Light Brigade". They were commanded to retain the force even if their lives were at risk and they fully obeyed to their duties. The following verse from "The Charge of The Light Brigade" is similar to the one above as it also describes how the British soldiers obeyed to any task they were ordered to do whether it was correct or incorrect." Forward, the Light Brigade! Was there a man dismayed?" (The Charge of The Light brigade, S: 2) This verse also includes a rhetorical question which notifies us that the soldiers were fully prepared to seek orders and act upon them without any hesitation. This shows how obedient and loyal they were. In "The Charge of The Light Brigade" the Britons are determined to attack their enemy and continuously moving forward.

This is also the case in "The Defence of Lucknow" but there is a point which can be noted. In "The Defence of Lucknow" the British tell their fellow  
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soldiers to take their own lives which is rather foolish because this consideration is only taken due to the fact that the Indians were hated by the Britons to such an extent that it would be a disgrace to die by the hands of an Indian. In "The Charge of The Light Brigade" however this isn't the case and every soldier is regarded as a martyr due to the might of the opposition. This gives us negative thoughts about the scenario in "The Defence of Lucknow" compared to the situation in "The charge of The Light Brigade". In the following verse Tennyson explains how the soldiers preferred to die by the hands of their fellow comrades rather than the Indians.

"Better to fall by the hands that they love, than to fall into theirs" (The Defence of Lucknow, S: 4) Here Tennyson exposes how the Britons preferred to be killed by their fellow soldiers rather than dying by the hands of the Indians which I personally think is rather ridiculous because there was no guarantee of them dying as they could've strived to survive. Due to the fact that the British were outnumbered in both battles we can see that Tennyson uses repetition when referring to the word 'death'. This is because it was clear that there was no escape as death was destined for many. "Into the jaws of death" (The charge of The Light Brigade, S: 3) "Death from their rifle bullets, and death from their cannon balls" (The Defence of Lucknow, S: 2) "Death in our innermost chamber" (The Defence of Lucknow, S: 2) These verses from both poems compare with each other as they emphasise that death was inevitable and that there was no escape from it. Death had reached their innermost chamber, The Britons were struggling and suffering yet fought to their best ability which meant death was inescapable.

Tennyson notes all the positive points of the British army and praises them



immensely whereas if there are any negative points he doesn't consider mentioning them.

In "The Defence of Lucknow" the commander of the Britons is mentioned and praised to such an extent that it makes the reader believe he was a man of high essence whereas in "The Charge of The Light Brigade" there is absolutely no mention of any commander. I believe this is due to the fact that the strategy of the British during that battle was a failure, thus the commander wouldn't be considered as an honourable man. The commander in "The Defence of Lucknow" is a total contrast to this therefore he is worth of mentioning." Lawrence the best of the brave" (The Defence of Lucknow, S: 2) Here we can see the praise for Lawrence the commander which is not the case in "The Charge of The Light Brigade" which is a notable contrast.

Tennyson also doesn't describe the Russians as enemies whereas he describes and in fact degrades the Indians with his description of them. Personally I believe this is simply because the Indians were hated and of course India was a colony of the British which automatically makes them arch rivals and enemies. The Russians of course couldn't be criticised because they slaughtered and outclassed the Britons and notably had the same skin colour therefore we don't see any racist contents used. As we can see in "The Charge of The Light Brigade" there are no descriptions of the Russians whereas the Indians are described as barbaric animals which gives the reader the message that Tennyson refers to the Britons as being the superior race in "The Defence of Lucknow". This all sums up to the fact that Tennyson entirely writes these two poems to praise the Britons excessively

in order to cover up for two tragedies for the British history. He has taken all the positive points and used them to praise the Britons.

Conclusion In conclusion I would like to mention that “ The Defence of Lucknow” and “ The Charge of Light Brigade” are both exceptional poems based on one main aspect which is the bravery, loyalty and the courage of the British soldiers. In addition it is the pride of the British nation which was displayed. Whether they won or they lost the battle the courage is what is noted in these poems. They are both based on two different battles which occurred for several different reasons but both contained the same courage, loyalty and bravery which Tennyson admires and emphasises on.

Tennyson uses immaculate techniques such as imagery to get the reader involved as if they are there at the battle scene. The details in which he describes the battles are highly descriptive. The use of the vocabulary that he uses emphasises on the might of the Britons as well as their attitude towards being loyal to their nation and their pride for it. The style in which he has written is patriotic and pro British. It represents Britain in the finest of ways as both battles were lost yet the reader can pick out positive points about the British soldiers throughout the poems. The poems embody the spirit of patriotism.

The two poems are for the cause of Britain as they praise the Britons due to the fact that Lord Tennyson was a patriotic poet laureate. Tennyson continuously portrays how the British struggled and how they are in the minority in both battles. He does so in order to show the significance to the reader of how patriotic these soldiers were and determined to fight with

utmost intensity for the cause of Britain their nation which they loved very dearly. In addition to that he also numerous mentions how eager the British soldiers were to win the battle and how courageous they were. Tennyson glorifies the Britons in the poems for their extraordinary efforts. He explains how the Britons faced an enormous task beyond their abilities in which they proceeded courageously and successfully considering the efforts they put in and how hard they fought.

Tennyson displays the excellence of the British soldiers and how desperately they wanted to avoid defeat despite the fact that they were in the minority. What must be mentioned by looking at both poems is that at present numerous readers may feel offended by reading "The Defence of Lucknow" due to the fact that racist contents are used. These are used for a specific reason but however do offend every individual from that culture. However this poem evokes sympathy from the reader because it mentions the soldiers' concern for their family. If they are to be included in the slaughtering then many innocent lives are to be taken which makes the reader sympathise for the British since they are being attacked. The soldiers who fought in the battles are described as patriots and honourable men who are role models and many people will think of their courage for they will be remembered in British history.