

The Charge of the Light Brigade.

BY PRIVATE JAMES LAMB, LATE 13TH HUSSARS (ONE OF THE SIX HUNDRED).



PRIVATE JAMES LAMB.



THE twenty-fifth of the present month is the anniversary of the Charge of the Light Brigade—an event never to be mentioned by Englishmen without a thrill of pride.

We have thought that, at such a time, an account of the famous exploit, told in the words of one who actually took part in it, would be of interest to our readers. The following is a description of the famous charge, by Private James Lamb, who only just missed winning the Victoria Cross on that eventful day.

On October 25, 1854, I was a trooper in the 13th Light Dragoons (now the 13th Hussars), and was in the foremost squadron that led the attack on the Russian guns on that never-to-be-forgotten morning. I was riding close to Captain Nolan when he was mortally wounded by one of the first shots from the enemy's

guns. The gallant captain stuck to his saddle, and his horse galloped shoulder to shoulder with us down the valley. The next discharge from the Russian cannon tore wide gaps through our ranks, and many a trooper fell to rise no more. Owing to the dense smoke from the enemy's guns, I lost sight of Captain Nolan, and did not afterwards see him alive.

We still kept on down the valley at a gallop, and a cross-fire from a Russian battery on our right opened a deadly fusilade upon us with canister and grape, causing great havoc amongst our horses and men, and mowing them down in heaps.

I myself was struck down and rendered insensible. When I recovered consciousness, the smoke was so thick that I was not able to see where I was, nor had I the faintest idea what had become of the Brigade. When at last I made out my position, I found I was among numbers of dead and wounded comrades. The scene I

shall never forget. Scores of troopers and their horses were lying dead and dying all around me, and many men severely wounded and unable to extricate themselves from their dead horses. Luckily for me, my horse was shot through the head, and, falling forward, pitched me clear. My own wound was not a very severe one, and I soon recovered sufficiently to endeavour to return to the British lines.

Just as I made a start, I looked around and spied two companies of Russian Rifles doubling out from the right rear of the position where their guns were stationed, and, as they dropped on one knee to fire a volley up the valley, I laid down close to my dead horse, having its body between me and the firers. I was not a moment too soon, as I had scarcely sheltered myself before the bullets came whizzing around me, and literally riddled the dead body of my horse and its saddle. After the volley

they were a body of Cossacks coming down to cut off our retreat; but I quickly discovered that I was mistaken, and that the horsemen were two squadrons of French Dragoons charging down to silence a masked Russian battery that was firing on our left flank, whose guns were covered by a regiment of Polish Lancers. This battery gave the gallant Frenchmen a warm reception by means of canister and grape, by which a number of saddles were emptied. But riding swiftly on, despite their losses, they charged right up into, and cut their way through, the Polish regiment, and wheeling round to their right flank, rode off and made good their retreat.

In the *mêlée* I saw a chance of capturing one of the stray horses of the French dragoon regiment whose rider had been killed, but before I could effect my purpose the animal bolted, and I was obliged to get along on foot.



"AFTER THE VOLLEY I VENTURED TO LOOK OVER MY DEAD HORSE."

I ventured to look over my dead horse, thinking to see the enemy reloading to fire again; but, to my surprise, I saw them mustering together quickly, and running to the rear of their guns. On turning round I saw a body of horsemen charging down the valley on my right front, and thought

During the short time in which the French Dragoons and Polish Lancers were fighting, I managed to get some distance up the valley towards our lines, and when near No. 3 Redoubt I saw two men supporting a wounded officer of the 17th Lancers. One of the men was a trooper

belonging to my own regiment, and the other was one of the 17th Lancers. The officer was faint and exhausted from loss of blood, and was feebly asking for water. Neither of the men who were helping him had their water-bottles with them, and mine had been shot through in the cross-fire when the Russians first opened fire upon us at the commencement of our deadly ride. I saw no chance of getting water other than by searching among the dead bodies on the battlefield. I accordingly retraced my steps, and was soon fortunate enough to find a calabash, half full of water, strapped to a dead trooper's saddle. I snatched up this calabash, and, as I made my way back, pulled out the stopper and had a good drink, as I was frightfully parched myself. I had to get along as sharply as I could, for the enemy were again on the move; but I succeeded in reaching the wounded officer without any

As we were moving painfully along I saw a trooper of another regiment, who had been severely wounded, and another endeavouring to get him off the field, but they were getting along very slowly. I went to their assistance, leaving the two men with the wounded officer, whom they eventually succeeded in carrying safely from under fire. I afterwards heard that this officer died the next morning, after having had one of his legs amputated. My comrade and myself managed to get the wounded trooper safely into our lines. I then went in search of my regiment, and at last found what was left of it—only about half remained. We went into action that morning 112 strong and came out with only 61. Of horses we lost 84, and had besides several wounded, some of which eventually recovered, while others had to be destroyed. As a matter of fact, out of the 112 horses of my regiment which took part in the charge,



"I SUCCEEDED IN REACHING THE WOUNDED OFFICER."

mishap, and gave him the water, which he gratefully acknowledged, and, turning to us, said, "Men, leave me here, and seek your own safety." But we would not leave him, and the other two troopers carried him off the field while I limped along by his side, ready to render any assistance I could, should the necessity arise.

only one, named *Butcher* (so called from the number and severity of its wounds), was brought back to England. This horse was presented to Her Majesty the Queen when the 13th Hussars embarked for India in 1874, and was kept at Hampton Court until its death about ten years ago. Our two regimental doctors had their hands full that

day. They were very busy taking off a leg or an arm here, extracting bullets there, and dressing the wounds, more or less severe, of others. The roll of my regiment had been called before I reached it, and I found I was reported "killed," or "taken prisoner," but I fortunately was neither, and am alive at the present moment, with the glory of being one of the survivors of "The Charge of the Six Hundred."

I must not forget to mention that the two men who gallantly succoured the wounded officer and carried him safely off the field were, shortly after landing in England, awarded the Victoria Cross as a reward for their bravery and humanity. Such is the fortune of war, I myself just missed obtain-

ing it. The colonels of the regiments of the Light Brigade got one each to be presented to the most deserving man of each regiment. Some of the colonels made the remark that one man was as much entitled to it as another. Through going down the valley in front of the enemy and bringing Captain Webb, of the 17th Lancers, a drink of water, I was allowed to draw lots for it with Corporal Malone, of my regiment, who assisted Sergeant Berryman to carry his officer off the field.* Malone being the oldest soldier got first draw, and drew the lucky straw.

* A description of Sergeant Berryman's feat, related by himself, appeared in the March number of THE STRAND MAGAZINE.



"BUTCHER."