

John Buckton

I was a private in the C troop of the 11th Hussars. Colonel Douglas and Captain Peel had charge of the regiment. It is a long time since the morning we made our charge, but I remember it well and painfully. As usual, we had been out since daylight. It was not a particularly cold morning, but it was rather foggy. We had been standing for hours by our horses, when I saw Lord Lucan give a paper to Lord Cardigan. — Did you apprehend its purport? — Well, we could see the guns in position, but we had no idea that we, the Light Brigade, would be ordered to take them without being supported by infantry. Of course we did not know what to think of it, and of course we got ready to obey.

I don't recollect whether we tightened the girths of our horses. I fancy we did not. You know there were six redoubts, three of which the Russians had taken from the Turks. My description of the locality is that there was a valley and hills right and left, and at the end of the valley — "The Valley of Death," you know — were the guns which we were ordered to seize. I should tell you that the regiments were arranged at our start in three lines — or rather, I may say, two lines and half a line. That is, two regiments in the first line, two in the second and one, I think, behind. The valley was not wide enough for us to go in one line. We went off at a trot, and at first we did not

see much; but we soon found what we were in for. We saw great numbers of cavalry and infantry at the rear of the guns, whilst on each side of the valley there were skirmishers who, as soon as they could, began to pepper us. I can give you no proper idea of what we did when we reached the Cossacks. Bullets fell thick and heavy amongst us — indeed, it seemed as if every man of us was doomed to destruction. However, we were not idle. We fought desperately, and many a Russian fell to rise no more. Their gunners we cut and hacked in every way, and but very few minutes elapsed before we had captured the guns. My horse was shot near the girth, and so near my leg that my trousers were covered with blood. Then your horse fell with you? — No, he kept up bravely, but every now and then I felt he gave a sort of jerk or quiver in his side, and I fully expected I should lose him. He took me back home, though, but he was shot in the camp the next morning. I also got a shot in the cloak rolled on the horse's back in front of me. So you see I was altogether very fortunate. Were your men in anything like order when you got to the guns? — Not the slightest; every man was for himself. We were all higgledy-piggledy, but fighting more like devils than men. We were being cut up in a dreadful way, and we could not stand it. An order was given by one of the colonels to retire, but I could not say who it was. Did you see the Polish Lancers? - Yes, on our way back from the Tchernaya river, whither we had driven the Russians. We saw, as we thought, the 17th Lancers, and we were going to retire under them, but we found that they were the Polish Lancers, who had been stationed to cut our retreat right off. On our way down the valley they had been behind a hill on our left, and now they had emerged, and formed a line right in our front. How we got through them I don't exactly know, but certainly I don't think they opened purposely for us to pass. Our poor fellows — the mere handful that were left of them — hurrahed and halloed as loudly as they could, and they apparently had an effect upon the Polish horsemen, for it was evident their horses had not, like ours, been trained to withstand the noise and din of

battle; and when they heard the British "hurrahs "and saw our brave fellows rushing towards them at such a mad pace, they became restless and turned round and about and before they could form again in any kind of way our men had bobbed through their ranks and were scampering up the hill before them. It was at this moment that the Russian guns re-opened fire on friend and foe alike. It was our belief that they thought the Lancers were clear out of the way, but such was not the case, and several of their horsemen fell.

Did the Lancers use their weapons? — Some of them pricked with their lances at our men as they passed, but they did not do much harm, owing to the fright and the manner in which our men had surprised them. The Chasseurs d'Afrique came to our assistance after we had passed the Polish Lancers.

By what were the English wounded? — Mostly with swords, but the shots did the mischief. It would take a good blow with a sword to kill a man, but a shot does it at once. When we reached the guns we had nothing but the Russian cavalry to contend with, sword to sword; but all the way down the artillery and infantry, especially the latter, had slaughtered us terribly.

Did the van get much the worse of it? — No, I think we all shared about alike. Of course, a cannon-ball would not be stopped by the first man it hit.

What did you do when you did get back — that is, the few of you that were left? - Well, we shook hands with one another as if we had been away for a long time. Our fellows looked pretty warm, I assure you, and their horses were puffing from the gallop up-hill. The chargers, however, did not appear at all frightened, but stood, when formed up, as calmly as ever they did on a field day. I was 23 years of age at the time. I served twelve years in the army — from Nov., 1848, to Nov., 1860, and because I joined under what was then called the "New (or twelve year) Act," I have never received a halfpenny of pension. What really happened, in a few words, was this: The Russians shot at us from the right and the left of the valley on our way to take guns from - what we thought — thousands of cavalry at the end of the valley, and they did the same thing on our way back. Try and imagine it.