

THE ORANGE AND GREEN RIOTS

(New York City: July 12, 1870 & 1871)

by Stephen J. Sullivan

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It has often been remarked that there is a sense in which Ireland has no history; as popularly received, all history has remained current affairs. This has been so particularly in matters of Anglo-Irish and Protestant-Catholic relations, where Cromwell, William of Orange, the Penal Laws, the Famine, Fenianism, and a host of other persons and events were all telescoped into one remembered yesterday.¹

Although the preceding was said in reference to Irish history, this rather shrewd observation is equally applicable to Irish American history. The Irish immigrant carried with him a potent sense of history. It has been suggested that the feelings of loneliness and nostalgia inherent in the immigrant experience heightened this sense—as well as the Irish American's attachment to the "Old Country."² Charles Stuart Parnell once noted that "Irish Americans were even more Irish than the Irish themselves in the true spirit of patriotism."³ Old fears, prejudices, and habits of thought mixed freely with new experiences, good and bad. The cultural baggage was in some ways adapted to meet new situations and needs. But significantly, in many other instances, the old ways were stiffened and perhaps more intransigent. To some extent, this was a form of protection against external pressures, but it also represented an attempt to preserve one's identity, to avoid being engulfed and overcome by the new culture. The immigrant, in short, strove to maintain some continuity in his life—a life that had already been turned on its head.

Such was the story behind the Orange and Green Riots of 1870 and 1871 in New York City. "Recent" Irish history was at least as responsible for the violent outbreaks as was the contemporary American situation. The Irishmen's sense of history and their ethnic rivalry were the basis for confrontation. The historical setting—that is, New York in 1870 and 1871—set it off. Contemporary factors such as Nativism, Fenianism, the Home Rule controversy in Ireland all stimulated and influenced it, to be sure. New methods were employed towards old ends. The Irish Catholics sought to use whatever political power they could muster through their hold on Tammany Hall and the Democratic Party. The Orangemen played upon non-Irish New Yorkers' nativism and appealed to Protestant solidarity. But the basic forces behind the violence lay somewhere in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The first of the two "Orange and Green" riots took place July 12, 1870. Protestant Irishmen (Orangemen) paraded to celebrate Battle of the Boyne Day—the anniversary of William of Orange's 1690 triumph over the Catholic James II which for all practical purposes sealed the fate of Ireland's Catholics. This first riot resulted in eight deaths and at least fifteen injuries, most of which occurred outside Elm Park where the Orangemen had gathered to picnic after their parade and where they had been surrounded and pelted with assorted projectiles by angry Irish Catholics late that afternoon. Although the Elm Park riot seemed catastrophic

at the time, it was to be merely a prelude to the terrible violence which rocked New York City the following July.

The 1871 Boyne Day riot, during which Irish Catholics clashed with Protestant Irishmen and their police and militia escorts on 8th Avenue, was the second bloodiest outbreak of urban violence in New York City—outdone only by the four-day-long 1863 Draft Riots. Sixty-eight people were killed or mortally wounded and over one hundred fifty were injured.⁴

Actually, to say that the Catholic Irish "clashed" with the Orangemen and their escorts is in a sense misleading. Almost all of the casualties were inflicted by the militia in a series of "indiscriminate volleys" which caught policemen, rioters, and bystanders in a deadly cross-fire. The firing was not "totally unprovoked" as Patrick Ford, editor of the *Irish World and Industrial Liberator*, would have us believe, but it does seem to have been extreme and uncalled for—despite the hail of rocks, bottles, and garbage which fell upon the paraders.

The riots are worthy of note for several reasons. First, the sheer magnitude of the casualty list seems to demand a suitable explanation. All told, at least seventy-six persons died and at least one hundred sixty five were injured as a direct result of the disturbances triggered by the Orange parade. Ninety-two persons were arrested.⁵ (These numbers represent absolute minimums; certainly countless injuries and perhaps a few deaths went unreported because the wounded were dragged away by relatives and were treated at home rather than in hospitals—escaping both newspaper and official medical notice.) As the second largest instance⁶ of urban violence in New York City history, the riots warrant attention.

But there are other more compelling reasons. The riots represent a wonderful case study of ethnic rivalry and the transformation of an old story by a new setting. The riots also present some interesting insights into a study of American society—particularly New York society. The varied reactions by different New Yorkers to these violent outbreaks are very informative.

The positions taken regarding the riots clearly illustrate feelings regarding nativism and ethnicity, reform politics and Tammany Hall, legitimate constitutional scruples and class feelings. The riots elucidate the opinions of New Yorkers on these subjects for the historian—as an event that literally required a reaction, an expression of public opinion. These responses, in turn, go a long way in uncovering the motivations of those involved.

The primary purpose of this paper, in fact, is to examine these motivations and what they suggest about life in New York City for the Irish immigrant. What moved the Orangemen—a tiny minority group—to provoke the retaliation of an ethnic group which existed in great numbers throughout the city and particularly in the areas through which they marched? What made the Orange display so offensive that the Irish Catholics found it necessary to obstruct it physically despite the opposition of Irish nationalist leaders (the Fenians in particular) and the Catholic church, both of whom feared that a riot would only underscore the contemporary American opinion of the Irish as surly, unintelligent, and disorderly? And finally, why did native-born Americans (of primarily Anglo-Saxon stock) feel compelled to intercede in what basically amounted to an intramural squabble?

The explanations are, as might be expected, quite complex,

and no group held a monopoly on right or wrong. I hope to show that the Irish Catholic objection to the parade was not irrational, as their contemporary nativist opponents and some later historians have claimed. The rioters' motives were a great deal more logical and understandable (if one only takes the time to look at them fairly) than their opponents would have posterity think. Then as now, the case cries out for understanding, not harsh words and polemics. Nor were the Orangemen or natives moved by merely "anti-poper" or "republican zeal." Fears and prejudices, old grievances and resentments, and legitimate differences regarding civil rights and proprieties fueled the disputes. These issues need to be sorted out and put into perspective before the riots can be properly understood. To this task, my essay is dedicated.

But first, a brief account of the events is required. First, I will document the 1870 "Elm Park Riot", then the 1871 "Militia Riot." Such a reconstruction is necessary since these riots are not commonly understood. Michael Gordon's description of the riots remains the best full length account.

THE ELM PARK RIOT: JULY 12, 1870

The Elm Park riot was the first of the two "Orange and Green Riots." On the morning of July 12, 1870, members of three New York Orange Society lodges and one Newark lodge held a procession to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne. Accompanied by delegates from the American Protestant Association and perhaps their families, the Orangemen paraded from lower Manhattan to Elm Park on West 92nd Street and 9th Avenue. Their plans included an afternoon of picnicking, dancing, and other assorted activities in celebration of the Catholic defeat at the Boyne River in 1690.

This historic victory by William of Orange ended the reign of the Catholic King James II and launched Ireland's Protestant Ascendancy. The Orangemen were descendents of the Protestant minority that had backed William and who had for the next two centuries held all political power in Ireland—Catholics being excluded by rigorous religious tests.

Such festive celebrations of Battle of the Boyne Day were common in Ireland—especially in the northern counties where Protestant control was tightest and Catholics dared not object. Great drums would be struck at midnight and bells would be tolled solemnly—reminding the conquered of the Battle's outcome and of their present subjugation. Festivities would last all day. Songs, speeches, and banners would exclaim the glories of Protestant rule. Naturally, Catholics were never pleased with the situation but in their powerless state could do little about it.

The situation was different in the United States, however, where the Irish Catholic immigrants far outnumbered their Protestant countrymen. Here such a celebration was less prudent, given the Orangemen's minority status and lack of control over the police and military forces. St. Patrick's Day was more widely publicized and more heavily attended. In fact, previous Orange celebrations had usually consisted of a picnic alone—or perhaps a small, unobtrusive procession. The 1870 parade was large, loud, and highly visible by comparison. And their route, which led them from Cooper Union up Broadway to 59th Street at Columbus Circle and then uptown on or near Western Boulevard (the northern section of Broadway) to Elm Park, may have been relatively direct but was certainly not uncontroversial.

"The Boulevard," as it was called, like many of New York's streets was being extended uptown as the city expanded at a tremendous pace. Thousands of laborers were employed on various public works projects such as the Croton Reservoir Aqueduct and the continuing development of Central Park (which



REPRO: BRAYO—New York, June 12, 1871.
(Harper's Weekly, 29 July 1971)

was not finished until 1876). The extension of the Boulevard alone employed several hundred laborers.⁷

Since these jobs were distributed by William Marcy Tweed in his capacity as President of the Department of Public Works, it is not surprising to learn that the vast majority of laborers were Irish Catholic immigrants. (As Tammany's largest and most consistent source of votes, Irish Catholics were given a great many patronage jobs.)⁸ The consequences of marching past these laborers in full Orange regalia must have been obvious to the Orange leaders.

The procession commenced at 10:00 a.m. from Cooper Union. At least 1,000 members of the Enniskillen, Gideon, and Prince of Orange lodges participated. Wearing Orange sashes, ribbons, and other readily identifiable symbols, they strode proudly through the streets. As they marched they held aloft banners reading "Boyne," "Derry," "Aughrim" — "names odious to Irishmen who can only see in them the humiliation of their race and the overthrow of their nationality," according to the *Tribune*.⁹ Their songs, such as "Protestant Boys," "Battle of the Boyne," and "Boyne River" celebrated the Catholics' repression of earlier times and vowed the vengeance of the processionists.¹⁰ No violence occurred either there or at any point along the Orangemen's northward trek, despite numerous overt provocations.

However, as insults, songs, and jeers continued, many Catholic workers did take action. The *Herald* noted that a "gang of laborers working on Croton Aqueduct quit work and spread the word that they intended to follow the Orangemen to Elm Park."¹¹

Two newspapers refer to a seriously provocative act at 59th Street and 9th Avenue, accusing the Orangemen of firing into St. Paul's church. The *Sun* reported "threats of demolishing the windows of the Church of St. Paul as they passed." The *Herald* reporter remarked that "in addition to inflammatory flags and music and jeers. . . [they] fired into Father Hecker's church."¹² A third report of the incident showed that the Irish laborers at least



DELIVERING CAPTURED ARMS AT POLICE HEAD-QUARTERS.

(Harper's Weekly, 29 July 1871)

thought that the church had been fired upon and that it was an important reason for some to quit work and seek revenge. When the *Herald* asked an unnamed Boulevard laborer in early July, 1871 why he objected to that year's parade, he responded:

Because when they are allowed to parade they don't know how to conduct themselves. They were allowed to show themselves 3 years in succession and no notice was taken of them until last year, when they could not pass the Catholic church on 59th Street without firing into it. That was the cause of the riot last year. The Catholics were quietly at work along the Boulevard, and there was no intention to attack them until the word was passed that they had fired into the chapel; then men quit work and followed them. So whatever happens, they brought it on themselves. Americans forget how they treated us when they had the power, and forced us to say Mass in ditches, and they would do so again. If they got the

upper hand in this city, a dog could not live under them.

While there was no immediate violence as a result of this incident, it is significant that the "gang of laborers" who quit work at the Croton Aqueduct to follow the parade did so "after" the parade had passed.¹⁴

Nor did the taunts and songs diminish as the parade moved farther uptown. Police reported that workers from 69th Street to Elm Park became outraged at the songs and "insulting language" and "that a good many quit work" and followed in a "trailing but reserved procession of their own."¹⁵ At 83rd Street, police were sent to protect the Orangemen but returned, reporting that they were not needed.¹⁶

Oddly enough, no violence occurred until at least two hours after the celebrants' arrival at Elm Park at approximately 1:00 p.m. Nor were there any reports of seething Irish workers surrounding the park at any time during that interval. Things were so quiet, in fact, that the small police detail (less than a dozen officers) which

accompanied the parade was dismissed upon arrival.

How does one account for such tranquility given the obvious tensions generated downtown? Why did not violence break out spontaneously along the parade route as the Orange parade passed? Some heated verbal exchanges had taken place between the paraders and the Irish workers and even between a group of laborers that included both Catholics and Protestants at 83rd Street. The *Tribune* reported that they were discussing violently the propriety of such displays in America but that no blows were exchanged—only words.¹⁷

One possible explanation for the long delay involves the presence of the Orangemen's wives and children. Significantly, no mention is made in any paper of women and children taking part in the parade itself—only in the picnic later in the day. On the other hand, no paper notes their absence. Perhaps they were sent to Elm Park ahead of their husbands and fathers. Why would the Orangemen endanger their loved ones deliberately? Or was it perhaps the very presence of these women and children which discouraged immediate attack by Irish Catholic workingmen? Did the Orangemen know the Catholics better than they would have the newspapers believe? If their families were present, the paraders must have been quite sure that the Irish Catholics would not retaliate for fear of injuring women and children. A third alternative, that of provoking a damning assault on women and children seems remote and unpardonable. Later, when the Orangemen were attacked in Elm Park, it was impossible to separate their families wholly from the fray. On the other hand, there exists substantial evidence that adult males wearing Orange sashes were the sole targets of the rioters.

Even if the Orangemen's families were present and discouraged immediate attack, the long delay is still not sufficiently explained. Perhaps the fear of losing their jobs caused some to reconsider and bide their time. Certainly, attacking the paraders in front of one's foreman (if the families were not present) or dropping one's tools and immediately following the parade might be sufficient reason for dismissal. (Many workers did lose their jobs this way.)¹⁸

Perhaps those involved first stopped off at saloons to make plans and work up some courage. It appears not, for no newspaper account makes mention of the liberal use of alcohol and no real "plan" existed. Co-ordination was very loose and impromptu at best. Nor is there any evidence that the Catholic clergy discouraged attacks as they did a year later. This is not to say, however, that they tacitly encouraged them. For the most part, they remained ignorant of the day's developments until it was too late. No problem was anticipated, so they were unprepared.

The clergy were not the only Irish Catholics unprepared for dealing with the Orange parade. Most, if not all Irish Americans—clergy, nationalist leaders, and laborers alike—were caught by surprise. Although APA supporters had reportedly been advertising the parade and soliciting support from other lodges throughout the state,¹⁹ the Irish Catholic community remained ignorant of the Orange plans. This led to confusion and delay as Catholic Irish considered their response.

The Fenian leaders especially lacked direction. Embarrassed and frustrated by the failure of their invasion of Canada the previous spring, they were against anything that might harm their cause by showing the Irish in a bad light. But they were unable to persuade enough of their rank-and-file—many of whom were Boulevard laborers—to forgo retaliation. They could do no more than delay and confuse the angry "mob." Members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (A.O.H.), which was closely connected with the Fenian Brotherhood and often drilled with them, were

probably torn between their loyalty to the Fenians and their anti-Orange feelings. For many, it appears the latter inclination won out. Lacking time to consult with their members in formal session as they did throughout July, 1871 in anticipation of that year's parade, any discussions they might have held were informal and unrecorded by the newspapers. The result could only be delay.

Elm Park occupied the area bordered by 91st and 92nd Streets and 9th and 10th Avenues. Formerly a private estate named "Elmwood," it was enclosed by great stone walls and formidable iron gates. It had become "Elm Park" in 1860 and was often hired by various groups for special occasions.²⁰ Soon after the police escort was dismissed, the Orangemen and their families—some of whom had skipped the parade and arrived earlier (bringing the total to about 2,000–2,500)—gathered to listen to a thirty minute speech given by the Worshipful Grand Master John J. Bond recounting the glories that they celebrated on that day. This, according to a *Herald* reporter, was followed by great cheers and "loud boasts as to their power to repel any attack from Fenians or Catholics."²¹ Since many were armed with knives and pistols, it was apparent that the later assault by the Catholics was not totally unexpected.²²

The prospect of such violence did not keep them from enjoying themselves, however. Soon after the speech ended, celebrants were dispersed throughout the park for picnics and other assorted entertainments. Many danced to band music. Some shot at a rifle gallery. Dozens filled the park's beer house.²³

Meanwhile, groups of laborers roamed the Boulevard seeking recruits. Foremen tried to keep their men at work. Some succeeded, often by threatened dismissals. Many failed, sometimes after half-hearted attempts. Some even joined the ranks. The *Herald* reported that "over 400 men quit work. . .

and armed themselves with handles broken from pick-axes and mallets, with small drills and with a peculiar weapon called a 'flying pike,' . . . a small pointed iron bar attached to a cord some 3 yards in length."²⁴

Three hundred strong at the outset, the "gang" numbered five hundred by the time it had reached the park—engaging in recruiting all the way up 8th Avenue.²⁵

The police did not learn of these movements until it was too late to prevent violence. Captain John C. Helme visited Elm Park at 2:00 p.m. and convinced the picnickers that they should end their festivities at 6:00 p.m. instead of at dark as they had originally planned. Adequate police protection would be provided at that time. After leaving the park, however, Helme's plans were suddenly changed as two laborers rushed up to him and informed him that Boulevard workmen were on their way uptown. The captain ran the eight blocks to the police station and immediately called in that precinct's reserves.

Next Captain Helme telegraphed Police Superintendent Jourdan for more help. Jourdan at first offered him fifty men but was persuaded by Helme to send one hundred fifty.

These arrangements took time. The reserves hurried uptown by coach, but the captain had to wait for all of them to arrive before organizing them and sending them to the park at about 3:30 p.m. In the meantime, the laborers' approach continued.

As the police neared the park from the west side, approximately fifty laborers made their way to the gate at 92nd Street and 9th Avenue. Four hundred more appeared at the park's southeast corner. (Various accounts place the total as high as 1,000 and as low as 100.) Most wore the flannel clothes of the common laborer—dirtied by hours of work on the Boulevard. Both groups began throwing rocks and paving stones over the walls at those inside the park. Some attempted to scale the gates or tear them down.

Shots rang out—it is pointless to speculate who fired first (although this is precisely what some papers did the next day.)²⁶

One “eyewitness” report tells of “30 armed Fenians” gaining entrance to the park with false identification. According to the *Sun*, these armed Fenians “then allegedly raced into the tavern and fired pistols into the crowd.” The *Times* places the Fenians inside the dance hall.²⁷

The battle at the park fences lasted just a few minutes. Angry laborers, shouting “Down with the Orange,” “Avenge your wrongs,” and “Down with the Irish traitors,” hurled a constant rain of stones on the picnickers inside. A reporter at the south fence counted “60 or 70” shots fired in the first seven minutes. These, he noted, caused more noise and panic than injury, although one Irish laborer was shot dead as he attempted to scale the fence.²⁸

The first shower of stones had sent those inside the park scurrying in all directions—looking for children or seeking cover. Some immediately headed for the exits, with the 8th and 9th Avenue streetcars as their ultimate destination. A half dozen were injured as they attempted to escape in the first few minutes. Vendors and merchants nearby quickly closed their doors and shutters.

A significant body of Orangemen and their supporters did not flee, however. They drew pistols and knives, stood their ground against those laborers who had already stormed the walls, or rushed to the gates to prevent more from entering. Although their Orange sashes made them easy marks, surprisingly few were killed or injured. They were well armed, to be sure, but so were their Catholic adversaries. Instead of pistols or knives, the Catholic laborers carried “crobars,” [sic] “hammers,” “pick axes,” “baseball clubs,” “wheelspokes,” “stones,” “handstaves,” “shovels,” and “thick tree branches.”²⁹

The invaders discriminately attacked only those men wearing Orange colors. A few women suffered cuts and bruises, probably from stones thrown in the first few minutes, but police felt it was important to point out to a *Sun* reporter that they had seen no attacks on women or children. In fact, the newspaper casualty list includes, with the exception of young James Brady, who was killed by an Orangeman’s rock or club, only adult males.³⁰

Actually, most injuries occurred outside the park as the Orangemen fled towards the streetcars. Ironically, the police had been systematically and rather effectively quieting the stone-throwing crowd when the Orangemen decided to risk flight to the streetcars. Had the picnickers remained in the park, it is likely that injuries would have been greatly reduced.³¹

Of course, those inside the park could not know that adequate police protection was on the way. Their reaction to being trapped by an angry, rock-throwing crowd was understandable. As they spilled out of the park to flee or to confront their attackers, fighting broke out throughout the Upper West Side. Brawling was reported as far north as 96th Street, as far west as 11th Avenue, and as far east as Central Park.

Although the fighting on the way to the streetcars was brutal, most serious injuries stemmed from attacks on the streetcars themselves. The cars, by now crowded with frightened people, had great windows and were protected by only a driver and conductor. Attacks on these vehicles were typically characterized in the papers as “barbaric” or “brutal.” The *Times* pointed out that women and children were hurt “seriously.”

The reports suggest that women and children were bruised and cut by flying rocks and broken glass.³²

[Let me take a moment to discuss these newspaper accounts. One must be careful when using the newspaper sources. Many

newspapers carried reports which directly contradicted their editorials. However, while the details, statistics, and descriptions presented in news stories are occasionally misleading, these accounts do provide a reasonably accurate composite picture of how the fight began, and what happened to the participants as the afternoon wore on. In this context, “a journalist is a journalist.” He will tell you what he sees, then tell you what he thinks about it. By concentrating on what he sees, and giving less credence to what he feels are the implications, the historian can gain a good understanding of what happened. Editors are a different matter. Their views are in general heavily slanted by their nativist prejudices. On the other hand, it is not from editorials that the historian gathers “the facts.” This is not to say that reporters did not irresponsibly pass along outrageous rumors. They certainly did.]

The streetcars were pelted with rocks and bricks for thirty blocks along 8th Avenue. The numerous attempts to board the streetcars and fight hand-to-hand with clubs, knives and fists led to severe injuries and a number of deaths.

The riot actually intensified at 59th Street and 8th Avenue near the Croton Aqueduct construction site as new participants joined the attack on the streetcars.

Nor was the violence one-sided. Pistol fire was “returned liberally from inside the cars” as it had been uptown. Boarding parties were repelled. Brawls erupted all along 8th Avenue. (Similar but less extensive fighting occurred simultaneously on 9th Avenue.)

Police, aided by a driving rain and a surprising amount of Catholic deference, quieted the uptown violence by 6:00 p.m. The disturbances downtown were stifled soon after. Newspaper accounts do not explain how the Orangemen and their families made it home from the riot scenes, but presumably a bolstered police escort prevented any further trouble.

The aforementioned deference towards the police by the Catholic Irish was noted by the *Tribune*:

One strange fact in connection with the riot: In no case was a policeman attacked by a mob of laborers. [The rioters] fell back without resistance whenever charged by the police.³³

Why was this true? It was, as the *Tribune* suggested, somewhat atypical of nineteenth century riots. The answer seems to lie in the makeup of the police force, and in the purposeful, discriminating nature of the mob’s attack. The police force had only recently been returned to local, that is, Democratic control. The force was now largely Irish Catholic, appointed primarily to work in the ward in which they lived. This was important, because during the 1870 Elm Park violence, as the *Tribune* noted, the rioters did not attack police. The officers were never the target of mob aggression as they had been in 1863 during the New York City Draft Riots when the force was under state, that is, Republican control. It is also interesting and significant that in 1863 the department’s rank-and-file were largely “Scots-Irish”-Protestant Irish.

Especially in 1870, but also to a lesser degree, as we shall see later in this essay, in 1871, the rioters fell back when confronted by police. Their enemy was the Orangemen; their attack was specifically directed at their Protestant rivals. In 1871, it was only when some militia companies blatantly showed support for the paraders that they became an explicit target. Naturally the police, whose job it was to protect the Orangemen, and the rioters, who in many cases were moved by a sense of duty to attack the processionists, were not to see eye to eye on either day. But what-

ever clashes took place resulted from attempts to attack Orangemen, not the police.

The rioters, especially in 1871, seemed to expect less resistance, or at least less vindictiveness, from the Democratic police—"because they are not likely to fire on their neighbors."³⁴ This, however, as noted above, went both ways. The police, in some instances—primarily in 1870—were less antagonistic to the rioters than the 1863 force had been. They even drove Orangemen back into the park with clubs in at least one instance in a futile attempt to separate the laborers and the picnickers. All in all, however, the police did their duty. A few officers were fired or jailed in 1871 for refusal to take to the streets against their Irish neighbors, but such problems took the form of refusals to report for duty, not open mutiny on the streets.³⁵ The police showed no reluctance to charge the crowds when it was necessary to disperse them. The rioters, on the other hand, were less willing to attack the police, hence making the job of control in some ways easier.

The subsequent coroner's inquest investigated six of the eight deaths reported in the newspapers. Its report, which was published in the *Herald*, the *Sun*, and the *Tribune*, on July 20, shed little light on the situation. Its verdict was banal:

That the deceased parties came to their death from injuries received at the hands of a person or persons unknown at Elm Park, Ninety-Second Street and Ninth Avenue, July 12, 1870.³⁶

The exact circumstances of most injuries remains equally unclear. In compiling a list of these injuries from various newspaper reports, one sees that most were the result of blows to the head by clubs or stones. The most seriously injured persons were brought to Bellevue Hospital. Many were treated at police stations or at the scene, and sent home. Others employed private physicians. Doubtless, many more received no professional help or if they did escaped the notice of the newspapers. The *Tribune* estimated that there were "at least 100 of whom there is no public record."³⁷

Significantly, only sixteen were arrested and only the militantly nativist magazine *The Nation* made but a single (editorial) reference to any robbery or looting.

In the immediate aftermath of the riot, the variety of responses told much about the fragmentation of New York society. Newspapers told of a bizarre occurrence which took place on the morning of July 13. Women could be seen casually searching for picnic baskets left behind in the confusion of the previous afternoon.³⁸ Others had different priorities. They visited Bellevue Hospital, the morgue, or the jailhouses looking for loved ones who might have been involved in the riot.³⁹

Hard feelings continued. Outside the home of Orange sympathizer Francis Wood (who had been killed) on 8th Avenue, "an immense crowd of [neighboring] residents" gathered threatening "to drag the corpse into the street and offer other indignities to the remains." They were dispersed by police detached to guard the body.⁴⁰

In the wake of the riot, newspapers condemned the Irish, lamented the city's lack of civil liberties, and occasionally criticized the Orangemen for intemperate provocation.

The American press made little attempt to understand Irish Catholic motives. All journalistic restraint disappeared as the Catholic "mob" was bitterly condemned.

The *Tribune* stated that "the fight between Irishmen of different and no religious beliefs was a chief subject of discussion" in New York City and that

The action of Catholic Irish in attacking the

Orangemen and their families while peaceably enjoying a pic-nic in a garden or park hired for the occasion, their brutal and continued assaults on the helplessly wounded and flying women and children was condemned in unmeasured terms.⁴¹

The *Times* purported that:

nothing whatever had been done to provoke [the] assault on the part of the Orangemen, except the circumstances of wearing the colors and insignia of their order.

Even if the statement had been true, the exception was important. The editorialist's conclusion that "the attack was premeditated and altogether unwarranted" might also be applied to his article. Others claimed that "the actual criminality is all on the side of the rioters" and that the rest was "wholly without provocation except [for] the clannish hatred of the rioters toward their Protestant fellow countrymen."⁴²

On the other hand, the paper chided the Orangemen because their "badges and ribbons [recalled] to the Irish Catholic mind bitter memories of his native land" and because Orange tunes were "offensive to a class numerous in every large city. . ." The editors perceptively pointed out that "Orangeism typifies English Supremacy in Ireland" and hence was more "political" than "religious." But while they scorned "a secret order which has no significance anywhere, except as a champion of British connection," they thought that "as a society to Protect the Protestant religion it might be useful."⁴³

George Templeton Strong wrote in his diary of the "Execrable Celtic *canaille*" that "the gorilla is their superior in muscle and hardly their inferior in moral sense."⁴⁴ Others argued that the Orangemen should have the same right to parade as Irish Catholics had on Saint Patrick's Day. Still others felt that only "true American holidays" ought to be celebrated.⁴⁵

Many feared "Catholic Power." As it increased, "Americans may have to fight for their principles as did William and his followers on the Boyne."⁴⁶ "An Orangeman's Daughter" wrote that "Orangeism and Fenianism are but other names for Protestantism and Popery."⁴⁷

Edith O'Gorman wrote to the *Times* asking what was the matter with a "Down with Popery" banner. After all it is

Down with oppression and Slavery! Down with ignorance and degradation! Down with idolatry and superstition! Down with superstition and licentious priests! Down with bloody inquisitions and gunpowder plots! . . . Catholics display a spirit of tyranny in their efforts to rule America with their motto, down with freedom and liberty! Down with the schools and the Bible! Down with science and progress! Down with intelligence and enlightenment! Down and to death with heretics and with all who refuse to believe the Pope infallible! Down with independence and free speech!⁴⁸

"Brutal," "ignorant," "ruffians," "base," "execrable," "turbulent," "bigots," "savage beasts," "licentious priests"—the use of these and other derogatory words to describe the Irish was consistent with contemporary nativist sentiment.

Irish reactions (those that found print) were interesting. John Boyle O'Reilly condemned *both* parties. The editor of the *Boston Pilot* was frustrated at the potential harm to the Irish image and Irish nationalist efforts. "Why must we carry, wherever we go, those accursed and contemptible island feuds?"⁴⁹ O'Reilly was worried primarily about "outside" (that is, native American) feeling. Similarly,

"Fenian" expressed well the Fenian Brotherhood's sentiments when he denied "any and all" reports of Fenian involvement.⁵⁰

Others, such as "Justitia" begged understanding:

You leave your native land to look for peace, prosperity and requited toil under the beautiful flag of America. You come here only to find your old enemy on the hated 12th of July was organized, to pursue you and yours, as of old, to the bitter end—under a new name [a reference to the APA] but with the old principles—would you tamely submit?⁵¹

The reaction of the mayor, A. Oakey Hall, is perhaps even more interesting. In an attempt to shield Tammany from further embarrassment in the wake of criticism over the police department's handling of the riot, Hall stated in a long letter to Police Superintendent Jourdan that the Orangemen were to blame for provoking the riot. They were blamed for

primary and proximate cause of the disturbance that resulted in the loss of life. . . [Their] right to parade becomes limited when there exist valid reasons to believe that the intentions of the procession were not wholly pacific or that their route of march or method of accessory is calculated to provoke a breach of the peace.

The Mayor referred to a state law that "makes it a grave misdemeanor for any person to use threatening or abusive language or gesture in the public streets."⁵²

While this letter was not made public until a year later, it had immediate effect on the situation. The Orange Lodges had planned another procession and picnic—tentatively scheduled for August 5. (The significance of this date is unclear.) When the Police Superintendent reportedly showed the Enniskillen Lodge Master the letter from Hall, the second parade was cancelled and the peace was kept intact for another year.

THE MILITIA RIOT: JULY 12, 1871

The following year, newspaper coverage of the "upcoming event" began in early July. *Irish World* editor Patrick Ford ran an editorial series entitled, "Who and What are the American People?"—timed to coincide with the pre-parade excitement. In his editorials, Ford argued that the United States was only a "political and not a natural nation" and that "the various races are one people only in the political order. . . In blood, in tradition, in social and domestic habits, they are many." The editor attacked "the Anglo-American element" who sought to Saxonize America, seeking to give an "Anglicized complexion to [America's] moral, religious, and educational institutions." Ford declared that, "I, for one, refuse to become a Yankee first, before becoming an American." He concluded that "as democrats, we are opposed to class ascendancy, as Irish-Americans, we are opposed to race ascendancy" and proceeded to link the Orange parade with this "Anglo-American" conspiracy.⁵³

On July 1, the *Tribune* reported a "rumor" that the "Roman Catholic secret societies were organizing, arming, and drilling bodies of men preparatory to a bloody fight with the Orangemen, who hold their annual pic-nic on July 12."

Rumors, criticism, and innuendo filled the editorials and news reports. Attempts to play upon nativist fears of Irish Catholic motives and behavior abounded.⁵⁴

Perhaps the most effective of these was the letter written to the *Times* on July 3 by Orange Grand Master John Bond. Bond asked "Protestants to aid us [the Orangemen] in maintaining the Protestant freedom our fathers bequeathed us in days gone by." He also hoped that "the better portion of the community" would

help him in his fight against "the fearful state of New York" in which even "liberty has taken her seat to Rome of the tyrants." The Orange Master painted a gloomy picture of evil men lurking throughout the city taking "hideous" directions from clandestine groups which took orders directly from Rome. Arguing persuasively that Protestantism and not just Orangeism was in danger, Bond concluded by posing two questions. First, he asked, "Shall we parade or shall we not?" Next, he virtually answered his own question with another, "Is America able to guarantee freedom in peace, law, and order to her Protestant citizens and her supporters, or is she not?"

By effectively appealing to Protestant solidarity, nativist fears regarding Catholic motives, and Americans' respect for the Constitution, Bond rallied a great deal of native American sentiment to a cause which many would otherwise have found repugnant or at least irrelevant.⁵⁵

Mayor Hall responded privately in a letter to Bond. Citing American and Canadian precedents, Hall declared that violence was likely and questioned the Orangemen's motives. He next denied the Orangemen's "right" to parade. While such demonstrations had always been allowed in a free society, they had never been a matter of right, the Mayor declared. This was clearly a different case. No one had the right to inflame the passions of another group in ways calculated to lead to violence. Hall appealed to Bond's reason and patriotism, arguing that the rekindling of old feuds could only hinder American unity. Would it not be "more politic to forego any popular or public demonstration of the event to which you and they [the Catholic Irish] attach so much importance?"⁵⁶

This bit of private diplomacy was only partially successful. Bond himself was convinced that the parade ought to be cancelled, "for the sake of American unity." He admitted, however, that he would be unable to persuade the majority of his comrades to refrain from marching on the 12th. Moreover, he warned, "The Orangemen are prepared, and if attacked, will stand their ground and will not show the white feather."⁵⁷

Hall was forced to take matters into his own hands, or rather to order the new Police Superintendent James Kelso to do so. Hall realized that he could not afford to alienate his Catholic support if the fall election was to be successful. Tammany could ill afford another embarrassment such as it had suffered the previous year—the 1870 Elm Park Riot.

Although Kelso apparently issued his July 10 General Order #57 cancelling the parade on his own authority, the fiction was all too transparent. The Tammany organization, especially Mayor Hall and the Board of Police Commissioners, were behind it from the start. Hall and his commissioners even argued over when Kelso ought to release "his" order.

Kelso feared that the inevitable violence would quickly spread out of control. Moreover, using great numbers of police and militia to prevent violence related to the parade would have left the rest of the city dangerously underprotected. While the new superintendent acknowledged the legal right of citizens to hold public demonstrations, Kelso argued that the police were empowered to prohibit any that seriously threatened public safety. Kelso accordingly ordered his police captains to forbid street demonstrations on July 12 by any party, and to arrest those who disturbed the peace.⁵⁸

The newspaper reaction to Kelso's pronouncement was scathing. Their contempt for Irish Catholics as well as for Tammany politicians was clear. Tammany's pandering to the Irish demands in pursuit of their all important vote was purportedly

exemplified by Kelso's Order. Nativist letters, resolutions and editorials argued that unless the Orangemen's right to parade was recognized and protected, constitutional government would be at an end. All civil liberties would be dangerously weakened, and freedom of religion would be wiped out entirely. Irish Catholics would use party machinery, it was argued, to institute papal decrees. New Yorkers' fear of "Tammany politicking" was further heightened by the famous *New York Times* expose of the Tweed Ring's monumental graft which had been published just two days before Kelso's prohibition (July 8). Typical was *The Independent's* "Surrender to the Mob," which editorialized that "in the riot of 1863, the government gained a victory over the mob, but in 1871 this same Irish Catholic mob, which hung negroes and killed babies, and burned orphan asylums, had but to threaten." The *Times* added that "the city authorities. . . now officially proclaim that Protestants have only such rights as Catholics choose to accord them."

Only the *Democratic World* supported Kelso's ban. The paper argued that while Catholic leaders tirelessly searched for ways to prevent bloodshed, Orange spokesmen seemed bent on provocation. Kelso had no choice but to prohibit the parade. To allow such a display would be as insulting as giving permission to the Ku Klux Klan to hold a rally in front of the Union League Club.⁵⁹

Many New Yorkers threatened political retribution. One "merchant and life-long Democrat" reminded the mayor that not all Democrats were Irish and noted that "a great many [of them] will turn with disgust from a party which will unite religion with politics." Another, calling himself "Democrat" promised that "if Kelso's Order is carried out, I will renounce the party, with thousands of others." Others such as "G.Z.H." agreed, but strongest of all was Junius Stening's condemnation of his "former party":

Your masters, the rowdies and roughs of New York, by whose suffrage you disgrace the high office you hold, influenced by bigotry and religious intolerance, forewarned you to prevent the parade of the Orangemen upon pain of losing their votes, and you yielded and so damned your name to infamy.⁶⁰

Although neither Hall nor Kelso could anticipate such an intense reaction on the part of the newspapers, their opposition was not wholly unexpected. Why then would they risk the wrath of the native population?

Mayor Hall and Superintendent Kelso had even better reason to fear the political consequences of another bloody Boyne Day. A government unable to protect its citizens on city streets would undoubtedly face reprimand in the fall elections. But an overly stern hand, used in too zealous a fashion against would-be rioters, would anger many of Tammany's Irish constituents—its most consistent supporters. The situation was delicate indeed.

Irish Catholic opinion as expressed in letters to the editors of the native dailies, and in the articles, letters and editorials of the *Irish World* and *Irish-American*, was clearly and bitterly opposed to the Orange parade. "D.H.L." was just one of the many Irishmen who specifically demanded that Hall cancel the parade. Another stated flatly that, "The Irish do not like to see a parade in their midst celebrating their downfall." "[I]t is a question not of religion, but of Irish nationality, [that] we want to settle." "The Orangemen celebrate the defeat of the people of Ireland fighting for their liberty." The *Irish-American* noted that the Orangemen did not honor the founder of a national religion, or a country's liberation, but rather the subjugation of one people by another.⁶¹

These and other statements in the press attributed to Irish



Thomas Nast's depiction of the 1871 Riot. (*Harper's Weekly*, 29 July 1871)

Catholic workingmen could do little to settle the Mayor's fears of violent opposition to the Orange display. One Irishman urged that Hall prohibit the parade because he thought that citizens will prevent or crush [it], beyond all doubt, perhaps at a terrible cost of blood and crime and outrage. True, the law can always punish lawlessness. . . but would it not be wiser to prevent it?⁶²

Hall could not help but agree with one laborer's assessment. If Orangemen parade with their banners, scarfs, and colors, playing Orange airs, the insult to the Irish citizens of this country will be so great and deep a one that in my opinion, it will be impossible to prevent serious trouble.⁶³

Prominent Fenians sought to counter these sentiments. Augustine Costello, chairman at a meeting of the Irish Confederation on July 9, asked those present to adopt a resolution calling for restraint on July 12. The Confederation's purpose, he declared, was "to establish a republican form of government" in Ireland and to put an end to "English rule and tyranny." The Orangemen's motives were, in fact, deplorable. They sought to incite riot, thereby casting an unfavorable light on Irish Catholics. They hoped to suggest to the world that the Irish were unfit for self-rule. By interfering with the parade, Costello claimed, Irish-Americans would be playing into the Orangemen's hands, "as it would evidently please England and retard the progress of Irish liberty." A long debate followed, but Costello's view was in the end voted down.⁶⁴

On July 11, the Fenian Brotherhood Council, apparently as yet unaware of Kelso's Order #57, issued a brief statement condemning "the contemplated demonstration by a political-religious society in this city tomorrow." Fenian brothers were to honor their pledge which included "promotion of law and order." Their *raison d'être* was furthering the cause of Irish independence, not perpetuating "dead" issues.⁶⁵

The Catholic Church also opposed violent obstruction of the

Orange parade. Archbishop John McCloskey feared that a riot would do further injury to the Irish image in America. He ordered his priests to include a warning in their July 9 sermons against harassing the Orangemen. He personally urged local churchmen to do all they could to prevent bloodshed.

On Sunday, parish priests dutifully followed McCloskey's instructions. Father Hugh Flattery asked parishoners at St. Theresa's to "turn the other cheek" as Christ had done to His executioners. Father William Quinn, pastor of St. Peter's, urged his flock to disappoint those newspapers that hoped for a riot which would discredit Catholics. And at St. Patrick's, Fathers Preston and Kenney used even stronger language. Obstruction of the parade would bring "success" to the Orangemen, declared Preston in his sermon. "Let it not be said that Catholics were led astray by leaders of a society, secret or otherwise, and made themselves not only unworthy of the faith, but practically—of course, not intentionally—worse enemies of the Irish name and Catholic religion than the Orangemen themselves."

On the other hand, many of these same priests were neither convinced of their own persuasiveness nor unsympathetic to their parishoners' feelings. Father Michael Curran recalled to a *Herald* reporter instances of Orange abuse of Catholics from his own childhood in the north of Ireland. The St. Andrew's prelate understood the fears and resentments of those who sought redress in America; he felt that it was "not right to bring those differences here to this country."⁶⁶

Others feared that a riot would lessen their influence over their congregations. If a riot did occur, the clergy would either be seen as impotent or, worse still, would be implicated as co-conspirators.

Some Catholics supported McCloskey's position outright. Other reactions were mixed. One Catholic echoed the priests' fear that, regrettably, the clergy could not dissuade the Irish from rioting and would only end up looking silly. Unlike the priests, however, this observer felt that the clergy's admonitions were rarely heeded on any subject. Another feared that the clergy might have unwittingly informed some who were unaware of the Orangemen's intention to parade on the 12th of that very fact.⁶⁷

But undoubtedly many Irish Catholics did not share McCloskey's position. One Brooklyn Hibernian told the *Herald* that he did know of the archbishop's position but grumbled that "I know too, that the Archbishop and his priests never suffered as we did in this business. They know nothing about it." Another, when asked if the clergy's appeal was persuasive, replied, "No Sir, by God! That time is past; it's all very well so long as the parade is conducted quietly, but when the music commences, then you'll see hot times." And at a July 10 A.O.H. meeting, a sarcastic resolution was unanimously adopted. It read:

As peaceable and law-abiding citizens, our thanks are due, and are hereby tendered, to the most Reverend Archbishop, and the reverend clergy of this city, for their efforts to preserve the peace of this community, and the good and wholesome advice which they gave their flocks in cautioning them against being drawn into any disturbance of the public peace; and . . . the members of this society will, by their actions and behavior, as good and peaceful citizens, show that they appreciate the counsel of their pastors, and will be guided by them in all things lawful.⁶⁸

Michael Gordon concludes that statements such as these prove the "ambivalence and even condescension with which some Irish Catholics" treated their clergy's pleas.⁶⁹ The key word here is

"some." For most Irish Catholics, defying the Church was serious business. This is not to say it was never done, only that it was not to be taken lightly. Without a doubt, some Irish Catholics were dissuaded from obstructing the Orange display. More significantly, countless others were torn by conflicting loyalties. They were forced to weigh the disapproval of their church against their desire to prevent the offensive Boyne Day parade. In this sense, their decision represented a struggle between two heartfelt "duties"—their moral obligation to obey their Archbishop and their solemn duty (as many saw it) to defend their "race" and religion against its ancient opponents. That the latter "duty" won out in many cases is testimony to its power.

In the end, neither the Fenian Brotherhood Council nor the Catholic Church could dissuade many from attacking the Orangemen. Even Police Superintendent Kelso's Order #57 prohibiting the parade failed to dissuade some "conspirators" from continuing to plan their July 12 "excursion." There was considerable Ancient Order of Hibernians activity both Monday and Tuesday nights. How many A.O.H. chapters knew of Kelso's Order before it was published in Tuesday's morning papers is unclear. It is certain that some knew as early as Monday evening. But many A.O.H. members apparently expected some sort of parade despite Kelso's ban.

Several Irish societies met on the night of July 11th to consider the proper course of action. Irishmen were generally pleased with Kelso's prohibition of the parade but many doubted the willingness of the Orangemen to comply. Nor did the account a young reporter brought to the Hibernian Hall convention meeting help anyone rest easier that night. The "cub" had been sent by his editor to several National Guard armories to see what, if any, preparations were being made for the following day. To his dismay, the reporter had noted that several units had already reported and that a few had been issued arms. Delegates feared the worst. A parade would take place after all. They agreed to reconvene at 9:00 a.m. the following morning.⁷⁰

What the reporter had in fact seen was the readying of the militia to prevent the Orangemen from parading in violation of Kelso's Order. But soon after he had delivered his alarming message at Hibernian Hall, the muster took on a wholly different meaning—one which most Irish Catholics would have undoubtedly found less pleasing. The parade would take place after all—by order of Governor Hoffman who had overruled Mayor Hall and Superintendent Kelso shortly before midnight Tuesday.

Because the police commissioners had overruled Mayor Hall and forced Kelso to issue Order #57 on Monday, July 10, Hoffman was left with a full day to weigh the public's reaction and its political implications for the Democratic party. (Hall had preferred issuing the order on Tuesday precisely because he wished to deny anyone a chance to make alternate plans on short notice.) The Governor countermanded the order, explaining this last-minute reversal with the unlikely excuse that he had "been only this day apprised while at the Capital, of the actual condition of things here [in New York City] with reference to the proposed procession tomorrow."⁷¹

Many were understandably skeptical. The *Tribune* stated flatly that the Governor was lying. The paper claimed that Hoffman had been informed of the parade and its political implications on Monday when he passed through the city. Furthermore, added a *Tribune* reader, two men sent a telegram about 1:20 p.m. [Tuesday], to Albany, stating that Kelso's proclamation was doing the party immense harm, and suggested that they had better allow a small procession over a short route, under military escort.⁷²

(Continued on page 46)