

# THE GREAT DRAFT RIOTS.

## A Graphic Account of Their Beginning in New York.

An eye witness of the great draft riots in New York in 1863 says in the Times of that city :

My regiment had completed its term of service but had not been formally mustered out. I had been at home in East Fifty second street two days. While seated near the window perusing one of the morning newspapers, shortly after 10 A. M. of the third day, my attention was attracted by shouts and the hurrying of people in the street toward and from Third avenue. Hastily donning my coat and hat I joined them. There were many inquiries as to what the matter was, and somebody answered "a fire." That appeared to be all that the majority of those who afterwards took part in the scenes about to be described then knew regarding what was going on. Near the southeast corner of Forty sixth street a four story brick tenement house was burning. The store had been opened on the previous Saturday as a place for drafting recruits for the army, and the drawing had proceeded unmolested that day. A dense crowd filled the street and sidewalks in front. In the midst of the crowd were several fire engines, and many firemen in the old volunteer uniform, but they were standing idle. I afterward learned that the mob had ordered them not to work. There were no policemen present, but there was no loud talking or disorder—no appearance of unusual excitement; no outward vestige of anger on the countenances of the multitude. An old fashioned wood case fire pump stood at the edge of the western sidewalk, about the centre of the block. This was mounted in turn by the then ward alderman, and successively by several other local politicians, who appealed to the mob to permit the firemen to work, but their words were received with shouts of disapproval. No violence was offered them, however. At length the cornice on the adjoining building on the north took fire. It was a similar edifice—one of a row—and was occupied below as a crockery store. The proprietor's name—Brady—appeared in gilt letters on a black sign on the face of the building. The incident was instantly taken advantage of by one of the former speakers. Remounting the pump he asked whether they (the mob) were going to permit Brady's house to be destroyed. 'He's a poor man,' he cried, 'and a neighbor. The house is all he has in the world. You have done for the drafting place. What more do you want? Let the firemen play on Brady's house.' At the beginning of the appeal all eyes had been turned towards the building indicated. There was a moment's hesitation and then a movement in the throng. 'Let them work!' rose from a hundred throats, when he had finished. Some of the firemen sprang to the brakes of their engines: others began to unwind the hose.

Moving about through the crowd, I had reached the side of a large brewer's dray, which was one of a row of wagons in front of a factory between Forty seventh and Forty eighth streets, on Third avenue. Just then a wild shout from down the avenue caused me to whirl about. In the moment given me to see I observed a solid mass of blue coated policemen moving rapidly up the avenue from Forty fifth street. They seemed to fill the street and to be marching with military precision. I also saw the mob scurrying before them, falling over each other, cursing and swearing with terror. Women and children were thick around them, and it appeared to me that hundreds were being trodden under foot. I also heard a scattering fusillade of pistol shots. All this happened in the flash of an eye. A burly German who had been standing upon the brewer's dray, took a flying leap and landed astraddle of my neck, crushing me flat to the sidewalk. He was off and away in an instant, and in another I had regained my feet. The scene had entirely changed. The mob had turned and were hurling paving stones down the street and hurrying rapidly in the same direction. A space of about twenty five feet wide and reaching from gutter to gutter in the pavement was bare directly in front of me. It has ever since been a puzzle to me to conceive how that pavement was torn up so quickly. The firemen and the engines had disappeared, and when I looked down the avenue not a policeman was to be seen. Subsequently noticing persons peering over the rear fences of the houses on the block below, I did so too, and in several of the yards saw uniformed dead bodies laid out upon the grass plats. That was the last attempt the police made to assert their authority that week that came under my observation. I was afterward told that they fired a volley from their revolvers. They then charged with their batons directly into the fleeing mob, who turned at bay and beat them back by sheer force of numbers and desperation. I have seen quick work in my time, but none quicker than that battle.

A new element of activity now seemed to pervade the mob that moved to and fro, inflamed with passion. A telegraph pole was broken down at the corner of Forty eighth street. In a moment hundreds of men had hold of the wires, pulling in unison. Pole after pole swayed back and forth a few times and then crashed to the ground. Looking again I saw men armed with murderous clubs formed of twisted wire. In a few minutes more the greater part of the fences near by had vanished and hundreds of pickets were welded threateningly in brawny hands. I heard a cry, 'A reporter,' and saw a thin young man in a brown coat and spectacles flying across lots between Forty seventh and Forty eighth streets with a yelling mob numbering more than a thousand after him. The chase kept on for three blocks. In the end the reporter cleared the stone fence and disappeared, while the foremost of his pursuers, in their eagerness, fell over it and each other. I learned afterward that he took refuge in the hook and ladder house and was successfully concealed by the firemen. This incident had barely elapsed when a light buggy drawn by a bay horse came down Lexington avenue and stopped at the northeast corner of Forty ninth street. One of the two inmates alighted and walked with quick, nervous steps along the north side of the street eastward. He was a short, thin man, with almost white beard and hair. He wore a long linen duster and a panama hat, and carried a light cane in his right hand. The street and walks were thinly peopled by those who, like myself, had been too late to join in the chase of the reporter. Several scanned him keenly as he passed, and then one man cried out: 'That's John A. Kennedy, superintendent of police.' There was a simultaneous rush toward him. He had reached within ten feet of where I was standing, about 100 feet from Third avenue. He turned toward the ditch, at its edge turned suddenly, and aimed a blow with the cane at the foremost of his pursuers; turned again, and ran down the slanting side of the ditch. But there was no safety for him there. The baffled hunters of the reporter had heard the cry, and they poured down the opposite side. There had been a shower in the early morning. In an instant Kennedy lay upon his back in a shallow puddle of water in the bottom of the ditch with a writhing, compact mass of human tigers struggling above him. One very tall, thin fellow in the centre brandished a heavy wood axe with both hands in the air, evidently intent on dealing the prostrate superintendent of police a blow with it, but he could get no opening. A few feet east of me stood a brawny laborer—to judge from his clothing and general appearance—gazing upon the scene with folded arms. Suddenly he shook himself and sauntered—that is the only word to describe it—down into the ditch. I saw his arms shoot out alternately twice—one, two, three, four blows straight from the shoulder—the mob staggered, separated and closed around him. In a moment more he, too, lay upon his back, his face covered with blood, and his clothing torn to rags. Once more the mob separated. They looked for Kennedy to finish him, but he was no longer there. I glanced westward but the buggy had also disappeared. That too, was quick work. Turning I saw the heroic laborer stagger up the side of the ditch, and go off unmolested in the direction of Third avenue. Some time afterward Superintendent Kennedy gave a service of silver plate to a petty local politician as a reward for having saved his life on that occasion. I knew the person alluded to very well, and did not see him there. The laborer's name was never published.