

HARPER'S WEEKLY.

SATURDAY, JULY 25, 1863.



THE DRAFT.

THE attempt to enforce the draft in the city of New York has led to rioting. Men have been killed and houses burned; worst of all, an orphan asylum—a noble monument of charity for the reception of colored orphans—has been ruthlessly destroyed, and children and nurses have lost every thing they had in the world.

The event should cause no surprise. It should have been anticipated. It was not reasonable to expect that the operatives of this large city—who have never been forced to realize the obligations of citizenship—should at once realize what is thoroughly understood by the people of almost every European town. It will take time to make them understand that every government must, for its own protection, enjoy the power of compelling its citizens to perform military service. And it will take still more time, reflection, and information to satisfy them that the Conscription Act passed at the last session of Congress is in reality fair, liberal, and humane; that it is far more generous to the operative class than the conscription laws of Europe, inasmuch as it tenderly guards orphans, widows, and aged parents from being deprived of their natural support, while it exempts very few indeed of the wealthier class. Every working-man who reflects will readily understand that the \$300 clause was merely intended to regulate the price of substitutes so as to prevent speculation in conscripts by the harpies who traded so successfully in volunteers; and that men of wealth, whose business affords livelihood to scores of people, would have obtained substitutes though this clause had never been enacted. Still it was natural enough that the operative class—especially that of so turbulent a city as this—should misconstrue the act; should imagine themselves aggrieved by the exemption of wealthy men on payment of money; and should attempt to resist the enforcement of laws both new to them and unquestionably unpleasant in their application. Even if these ideas had not occurred to them spontaneously, the leading organs of the Opposition took care that they should be reminded of their “wrongs.”

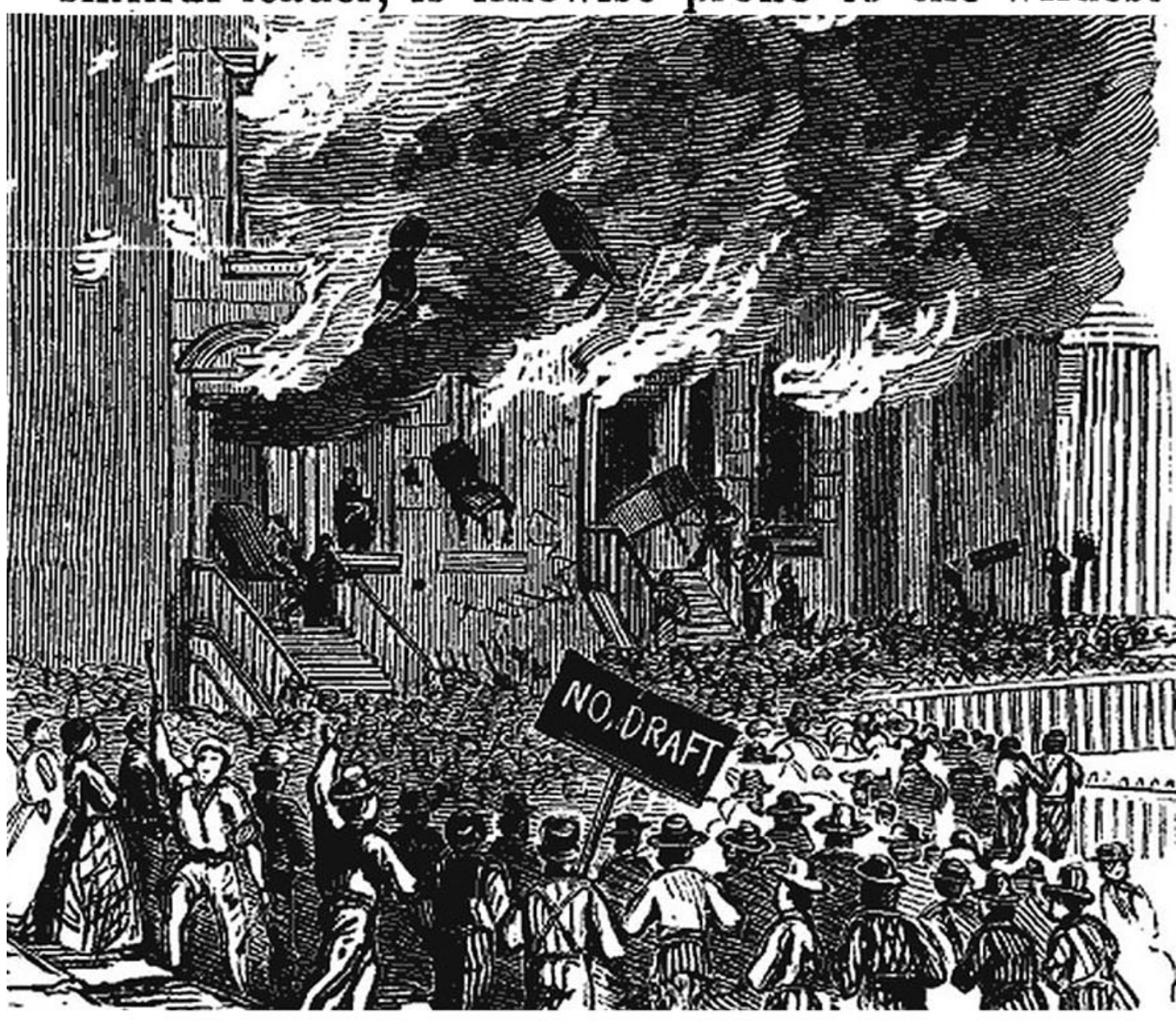
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For many days past the newspapers which are said to speak the views of the Democratic leaders have denounced the conscription as unequal, unjust to working-men, tyrannical, and outrageous. The writers of these articles probably knew perfectly well that, in the present circumstances of the nation, a conscription act was absolutely necessary, and that, on the whole, our present act was as fair a one as could be devised. But, in their malignant partisanship, they thought of nothing but the opportunity of making political capital against the Government. They sympathized with the working-man in the oppression under which he groaned. They denounced Mr. Lincoln as a reckless and imbecile tyrant. They denounced the war as a needless, fratricidal, and abolition war. And they wondered at the calm with which the operatives of New York submitted to the execution of a law which they declared to be utterly intolerable.

Under these circumstances who can wonder at riots breaking out? No man likes to be torn from his family and forced to serve in the ranks. If the individuals sentenced to undergo this fate can persuade themselves that the sentence is unjust, the law unconstitutional, and the authorities arbitrary, who can be surprised at their resistance?

Large cities, too, have their peculiar requirements, and one of these is periodical riots. Every large city has them. In Paris they occur once in every generation, and are called revolutions. In London they used to be more frequent than they are now; the authorities have learned how to deal with them, and now they are generally checked in the bud by an overwhelming display of military and constabulary force. Here they are a new thing. The Astor Place Riot is almost the only example on record; for the Dead Rabbit riots were suppressed almost before they had broken out. The affair of Monday last bore a closer resemblance to a European riot than any thing we have ever had here. The leaders and principal actors in the affair were boys—beardless youths of fifteen to eighteen. Behind these, and seemingly operating as a mere reserve force, was a body of men—operatives in foundries and factories, laborers, stablemen, etc.—who did the murdering of policemen, the gutting of houses, the firing of dwellings, etc., after the boys had opened the battle with volleys of stones. In all the crowds there was a fair sprinkling of women, not young, but married women, who were probably roused to fury by the fear of having their husbands taken from them by the draft. This kind of mixed crowd, though often good-humored and apt to be easily managed by a skillful leader, is likewise prone to the wildest



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excesses of passion and brutality. The boys and men invariably get drunk at an early stage of the proceedings; the women appear to become equally intoxicated with excitement; and all together commit crimes from which every individual in the crowd would probably shrink if he were alone. Such crowds are so cowardly that a handful of disciplined troops will scatter them like chaff; and so blood-thirsty that they will tear in pieces an individual against whom their fury happens to be directed, or burn a building in which women and children are situated without chance of escape.

There was nothing peculiar to New York, or to the Irish race in this riot of Monday. Precisely similar mobs have been seen in Paris, London, Vienna, Naples, and Canton. They are explosions of the volcanic element which lies dormant in the heart of every large city. Nor does the riot imply, as some of the papers try to have us believe, any such general disapproval of the Conscription law as should lead to its alteration or suspension. Though the draft was the original cause of the riot, it soon took the more familiar direction of an anti-negro demonstration, such as used to occur in this city at intervals of ten years or so before the Revolution of 1776, similar in kind to the no-papery riots of Lord George Gordon, in London, and the Jacobin riots in Paris during the revolution. Toward the close of the day, the rage of the mob was exclusively directed against colored people, who had no more to do with enforcing the Conscription Act than the Pope of Rome.

The question now is—have we a government capable of suppressing mobs? If we have, the demonstration of Monday will, after all, not prove without advantage, as it will teach the dangerous elements the duty of abiding the laws in future. If we have not, it is high time that we altered our present system, and established a government which could protect us.

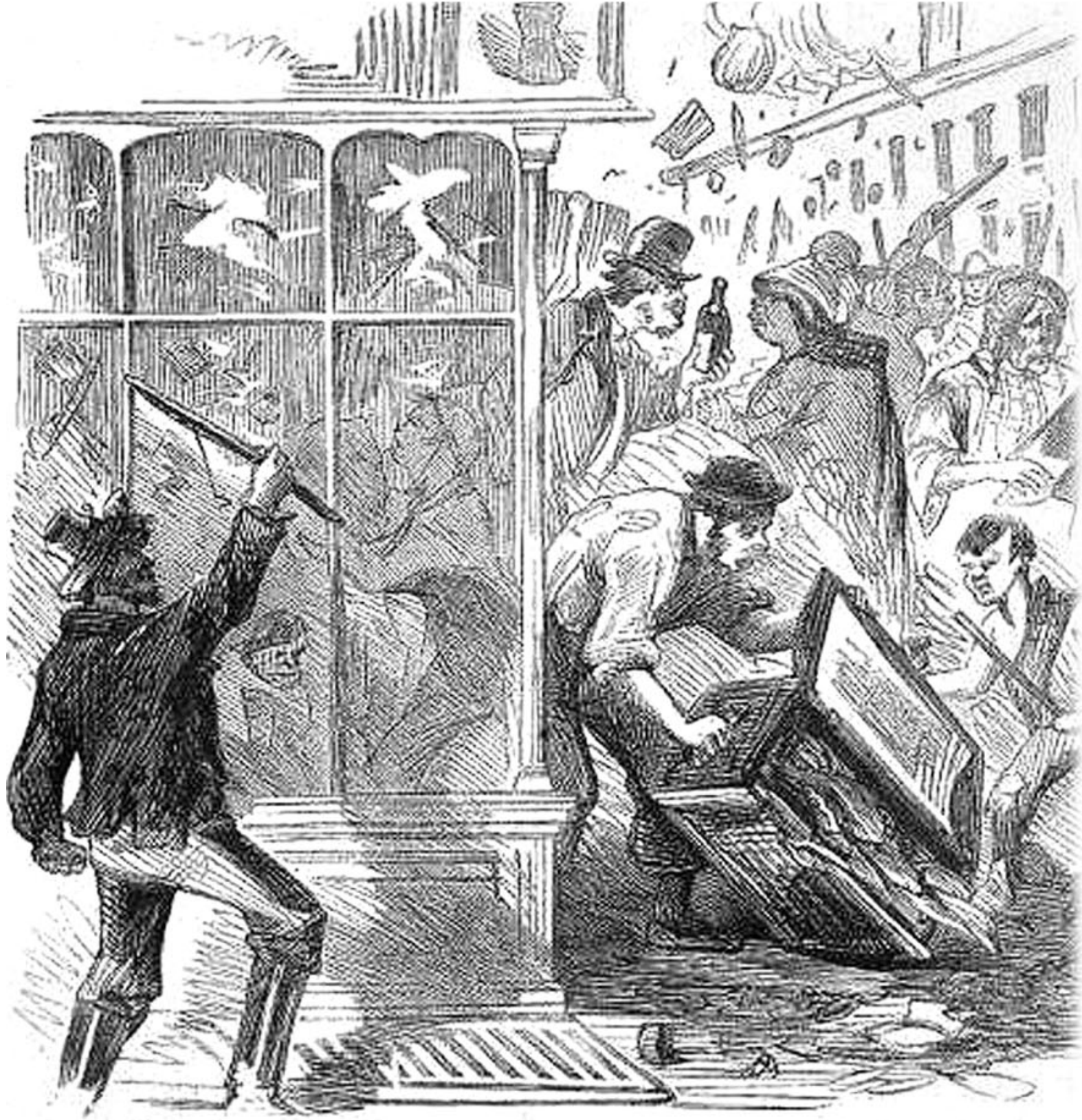
The rioters of Monday took advantage of the absence of the bulk of our city militia to commit acts which they would not have attempted had the Seventh and Seventy-first been here. But there are still thousands of able-bodied men in the city who can and ought to bear arms in such a cause as this. Let us see how they will turn out. We have several army officers of experience, who understand the scientific rules of street warfare; we shall see the dispositions they will make.

There are just two principles which should govern the conduct of our city authorities. The first is, that the law must be carried out whatever it may cost; for if we give way to the mob there will be an end of law and order in this community, and life and property will henceforth be held at the pleasure of the leaders of the mob. And, secondly, all experience shows that, in dealing with mobs, the most severe methods are the most humane. Mob violence,



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threatening life and property, and burning orphan asylums, can only be radically cured by grape and canister. All other remedies aggravate and protract the disease.



SACKING A DRUG STORE IN SECOND AVENUE.



NEW YORK—THE ATTACK ON THE TRIBUNE BUILDING.

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