

**The Philadelphia Riots of 1844:  
Reporting Ethnic Violence**

**Primary Reading**

***Six Months Ago, or the Eventful Friday, and Its Consequences.  
An Epic Poem. by R\*\*\*. Philadelphia: J.F.M. McElroy, 1844.***

'T WAS on a bright day, when the year was young, [1]  
And Nature, clad in all her beauties, trod  
This fair earth crowned with flowers—and the sky,  
Cloudless and deepest azure, bent above  
The Mighty One's creations smilingly,  
That men, high-hearted men, stood forth to tell  
Their fellows, credulous, and led astray  
By specious pretext, and more specious speech,  
The wiles insidious that a foreign band,  
Vile in its heart as in its language fair,  
Had used to bring our homes to slavery.

Men of the mightiest intellect, whose brows  
Indexed the high and generous souls within,  
Raised there their voices fearlessly, and told—  
Shame to our land to say—the ignorant,  
The unread and untaught, how Babylon,  
The mother of the harlot, and of earth  
The vile abomination, strove to rend  
Our rights away, and rear upon the soil

Where Freedom's brightest temple stands, and where [2]  
The blood of patriots for that freedom flowed,  
Her hellish inquisition, where presides,  
Impersonated in a shaven priest,  
Of the infernal realms the chiefest fiend.

They told them of the dogmas of a Church  
Whose bishops claim succession from the Christ,  
Through him who on Mount Olivet struck off  
The ear of Caiphas' servant, and exposed  
The policy of those who teach their slaves—

Poor unenlightened and benighted ones—  
 That they, mere mortals, can or bless or curse,  
 Condemn to everlasting fire, or throw  
 The robe of a bright immortality  
 Around the soul that on Death's confines stands.

And more they told their hearers, and the wish  
 Was with them when they spoke it, that the ends  
 Of earth might hear, and cherish, and believe  
 The truth incontrovertible, that o'er  
 The broad face of this smiling heritage,  
 Given us by our fathers, and for which  
 They fought, and bled, and died—the Jesuit,  
 His heart the birth-place and the home of guile,  
 Walked in his pride, exerting all his strength  
 To wrest our Bible from us, and to give  
 The young and unformed minds of this fair land  
 A mutilated version, teaching lies.

[3]

Above the heads of this stern-hearted band  
 The proud flag of the fairest land of earth  
 Waved in its beauty, and they felt as felt  
 Our patriot fathers, when, in ermined robe  
 And glistening diadem, Oppression strove  
 To set her iron heel upon their necks,  
 And give them Slavery's bitter cup to drink,  
 E'en to its very dregs; and there went forth  
 Their thunder tones upon the wavy wind,  
 By every zephyr to be borne along  
 Earth's chequered lace to its remotest bound.

Clad in the panoply of free-born men,  
 They spake as freemen should—as men to whom,  
 By that all-potent One whose throne is fixed  
 On yonder amethystine dome, and in  
 Whose hand a sceptre is that sways the world,  
 The right is given to express their thought.  
 They spoke as men implicit in their faith,  
 Of the Law's power and majesty—they felt  
 Secure upon the soil that Washington,

The best and bravest of the true and brave,  
 Aided by dread Omnipotence, had freed  
 From the oppressor's sword—they looked around  
 And saw the blue smoke curl from their own hearths, [4]  
 And wend its way to heaven, and mingle with  
 The soft blue there, an offering to God.  
 They knew themselves the owners of the soil,  
 Entailed by those who bought it with their blood,  
 And they were not afraid.

But there were those  
 Near them, but not of them, in whose vile hearts  
 The fellest passions reign, who stood aloof,  
 Each looking on his fellow with a scowl  
 That would have graced the dark Appolyon;  
 And ever and anon they struck their breasts,  
 Bursting with ire and hate, and all the black  
 And damning feelings of the man of sin.  
 Such feelings must have vent ! They come ! they come !  
 The slot-hounds of the Pope rush on their prey,  
 Scatter the advocates of Native Rights,  
 And tearing from its staff our blood-bought flag,  
 Trample and rend each brilliant star and stripe,  
 And mar its texture with their rabid slime.

And these were they, who, leaving their own land,  
 Made desolate by their intolerance,  
 And anarchy, and tiger-thirst for blood  
 And deeds of rapine; on our shores had sought  
 Protection—some from transportation, some [5]  
 From the base halter, but the major part  
 From fell starvation—and forgetting, as  
 All ingrates will, the friends that shielded them,  
 And soothed them in their hours of want and wo,  
 And gave them bread, and welcomed them to all  
 The cheering comforts of our own bright home,  
 Turned on their benefactors, adder-like,  
 And stung them, even to their deepest soul.  
 The god of day had thrice around the world  
 His golden ringlets shook, when, once again,

Unconquered and unconquerable, all,  
 The lovers of their country, to discuss  
 The point at issue, gathered near the spot  
 Whence, erst, the foes of order and of peace  
 Had driven them.

With flashing eye, and lip  
 Compressed, and brow, determination's throne,  
 One of our country's Ciceros stood forth,  
 And in a speech, persuasive and yet stern,  
 "Held by the ears his hearers," for a time.  
 In this man's diction there was not expressed  
 A thought t' incite the peacefully disposed  
 To riot, or t' engender in the minds  
 Of any other thoughts than those of peace.  
 Yet, there is wild commotion in that crowd:  
 High indignation from each eye looks out;  
 The brawny hands of men of might are clenched;  
 Age leans upon his staff and sighs, Ah, me!  
 And holds the wish to be a youth again.  
 Behold the passive cause !—that tattered flag!  
 What words are those? It droops, and they are hid!  
 Now, now the breeze is playing with its folds:  
 It rolls aloof, and all is palpable.

[6]

But now, above, around, on every side,  
 All seemed as peaceful as an infant's sleep.  
 It was a calm, such as in Tropic climes  
 Precedes the black-winged tornado, that sweeps  
 With lightning speed adown a lurid sky,  
 Twining its viewless arms round rock and tree,  
 And hurling each from its primeval bed;  
 Then dashing seaward in its wild career,  
 Wrecks the proud navies of the proudest realms.  
 Rome's dogs are up again; their yelp is heard,  
 And on they dash to their old work of blood.  
 See how they gnash their teeth :—they long to bathe  
 Their foul fangs in the gore of heretics,  
 And send them straight to Tophet, unannealed.

A widow's darling, and her only one,

A noble boy, amid that gathering stood,  
 Bearing the starry banner of our land: [7]  
 And ever and anon a flush went o' er  
 His manly features, as he looked aloft  
 And blessed that flag, and vowed within himself  
 That he, for one, would die in its defence.  
 He left his home a buoyant hearted youth,  
 The altar fire of freedom in his heart  
 Sending its hallowed warmth through every nerve,  
 And kindling in his noble veins a fire  
 That death, and death alone, had power to quell.  
 And when he fell—slain by some craven wretch,  
 Some skulking member of a hell-led herd,  
 Set on by fiends thrice blacker in their heart  
 Than is the chiefest of the imps of hell,—  
 Down went our glorious ensign in the dust,  
 Shrouding his quivering corpse;—(a nobler pall  
 Were not for him who wears a diadem.)  
 And while bold men a moment stood aghast  
 At this foul deed, the Hecates of a clan  
 Of worthless renegades shrieked shrilly out,  
*"Give them no quarters, Erin boys, Go Brash !"*  
 How great the turmoil now!! Now fiercely rise,  
 Above the yells of Rome's besotted slaves,  
 The shouts of free-born hundreds for revenge!  
*Our own soil crimsoned with a brother's blood,  
 Shed by a hireling cur! Revenge! Revenge!*  
 But what can they, unarmed, unsheltered, all,  
 With very devils in the guise of men, [8]  
 Wielding the rifle, and, assassin-like,  
 From some safe covert dealing wounds and death.  
 'T were vain, t' were worse than vain for them to stand!  
 With such unequal chances to resist  
 Were, in them, act as suicidal as  
 Is his who drives the knife to his own heart  
 Or quaffs the contents of the poisoned bowl.  
 They fly! they fly! but 't is no coward fear  
 That prompts to this. Nay, see, they bear along  
 Their desecrated flag, thrice hallowed now  
 That it is sprinkled with a martyr's blood.

Alas, poor Shiftier! it were hard to be  
 Cut down as thou wert in the bloom of youth;  
 Torn prematurely from the joys of earth  
 And made the tenant of the darkling tomb.  
 But lo, bright Fame has stricken from her scroll  
 The names of him of Corsica, and all  
 Of ancient Rome's proud Caesars, and enrolled  
 Thine, wreathed with fadeless laurels, boldly there.

Next to our Washington, the cynosure  
 Of her far searching eye is thine own name.  
 We may not paint the grief unspeakable  
 Of her who bore thee, when thy reeking corpse  
 Was laid by friends beneath her humble roof;  
 We may not tell how that fond mother hung  
 In dire affliction o'er thy clay-cold form,  
 And, an example to a sinful world,  
 As did the Nazarene, the Lamb of God,  
 For those who nailed him to the bloody tree,  
 Prayed for forgiveness for thy murderers.

[9]

The sun went down upon that scene of blood,  
 And when, from South to North, from West to East,  
 Throughout our lovely city's wide extent,  
 This fearful and high-handed deed was known,  
 One pulse decided moved each patriot heart,  
 And from our midst went up the shout; *Revenge!*  
 Yet, there were those—base-hearted, cunning knaves,  
 Who chuckled in their sleeves when they were told  
 These mournful tidings, and expressed them thus:  
 "Ho! glorious work this. Pity but the whole  
 Of those Republicans had not been in  
 The single form of him who bit the dust.  
 But, hold! they cannot last! ephemeral  
 As the frail flower are they, and this one blast  
 Will wither them forever." Then they swore,  
 By what such bare-faced traitors never knew,  
*Their honor*, that, in truth, t' was glorious news.

Sad brows were in the street and by the hearth,

And white-lipped fear stood by, while courage struck [10]  
 His manly breast and vowed to be revenged.  
 Now turn we once more where the martyred boy  
 Poured out his life's blood in the cause of right;  
 What see we there, beneath the veiled moon—  
 What mean those groups of men, fierce in their speech,  
 Furious in act and armored to the teeth ?  
 These are the Alien bands—the bigot slaves  
 Of Papal Rome, concocting hellish schemes.  
 And see, among them glide, in sable clad,  
 Smooth faced, well-fed and sanctimonious curs  
 Growling approval of the past day's work,  
 And urging all to do their best devoir,  
 Impunity to all who may survive,  
 And absolution full, and freedom from  
 Pains purgatorial to those whose fate  
 May be wounds mortal, or a sudden death.  
 Promising, and bell, book and candle curse  
 To all that falter in their *holy* work.  
 The next day's noon beheld of youth and age,  
 And manhood firm, a mighty gathering  
 Near where, in days of yore, unfaltering tongues  
 Declared our country's independency.  
 From every point they come! each pathway teems  
 With human forms! and high excitement moves  
 From breast to breast, as each to each recount  
 The fearful doings of the previous day; [11]  
 And with one voice they shout "Lead on! lead on!"  
 Bold hearts are there; and throwing to the wind  
 The flag so sullied by the ruffian hands  
 Of slaves, the basest of the slaves of slaves,  
 They form and onward to the bloody scene  
 Of yesterday, determined that *should scores*  
*For every one* of that vile pack of curs  
 That caused them once to fly, be counted there,  
 They would not yield an inch, but nobly die.  
 And did they not fulfill this high resolve?  
 And who of earth can blame them that they did?  
 Who? none but sycophants and demagogues—  
 Such vermin as were all too foul to live,

E'en in an atmosphere as putrid as  
 Was that of Sodom when the curse of God  
 Rolled o'er its bosom in sulphuric fire.

As traverse they our city's thoroughfares,  
 Some look as black as midnight on them; some  
 Turn them away, afraid by look or word  
 To give approval, and a few throw up  
 Their hats, give loud huzzas and join their march.  
 But let us forward to the sad result  
 Of this day's movement.

The disputed ground  
 Scarce gained, from loopholes in each domicil  
 A coward foe sends death along their line.  
 Death, he, the tyrant that of yore, when these  
 Consummate fiends had power, stalked him forth  
 In his most fearful form.

[12]

'Tis true he bore  
 No rack, no screw, no pulley, no dark den  
 Of deadly asps, nor wheel with murderous spikes;  
 Nor did he from the mother's mangled breast  
 Snatch the frail babe to feed his hellish fires.  
 But by his cursed instruments of Rome,  
 He sent the searching bullet to the heart  
 Of proud impetuous youth, and smeared the locks  
 Of tottering age with his own smoking gore.  
 See, what is that those stalwart men and true  
 Bear on their shoulders I and what means that wail?  
 Another of Columbia's sons has fall'n,  
 And from his mother comes that piercing cry.  
 She mourns her fair-browed boy, the only hope,  
 The only stay of her declining years.  
 Again, that young wife with dishevelled hair  
 Bending above her murdered husband's form—  
 Now, with wild actions parting on his brow  
 The raven curls that she so oft had twined  
 Around her graceful hands in happier hours;  
 Now starting from his bier and looking up,  
 With incoherent ravings, to her God.  
 And lo! where, anguish pictured in her face,

A bright-eyed girl is rushing 'mong the throngs  
 Of the fierce combatants, now looking here,  
 Now there, and calling on her lover's name;  
 She finds him writhing in a pool of gore—  
 Another victim to the papal herd.  
 Ah! who can paint that maiden's frenzied grief,  
 Or who the parting of that love-led pair?  
 We look upon the occident, and watch  
 The last bright beam of those that lit the sky,  
 Fade from its sphere, and leave the world in gloom.  
 Thus gazed this maiden on the pallid face  
 Of her betrothed—saw the last spark of life  
 Go out in those dear eyes whence spoke the soul  
 That won the best affections of her heart,  
 And turned away, a desolated thing  
 Her every bright imagining destroyed.

[13]

When will this carnage cease ? When will the hounds  
 Of thrice-damned Rome be surfeited with blood?  
 One more! and yet one more! lies low in death!  
 But stops the bigot here? Oh, no, no, no!  
 Urged on by hell's best patrons, still the slaves  
 Handle their weapons, and bereave the wife,  
 The mother, child, and father of their loved.  
 But let us draw a veil around these scenes,  
 And from the brows of beauty and of worth,  
 And lofty intellect, and courage sheen,  
 Dispel the sombre shade that hovers there.  
 Those who have looked with an unbiassed eye  
 On every movement of the patriot band  
 That one short year ago was brought to birth  
 By the foul bigot's deeds, have seen in it  
 The embryo of a giant, from whose arms  
 Both our old giant parties dwindled down  
 To shadows of the shades of what they were—  
 In less than one brief lustre, mangled, slain,  
 Shall fall and be no more. And though along  
 Earth's face regenerate an atmosphere  
 As pure as yonder heaven's pure self shall move,  
 The exhalations from each filthy corpse,

[14]

Instead of rising, shall descend to hell.

There are those in our midst whose narrow minds  
 Have in them no capacity beyond  
 The power to utter sentiments expressed  
 By some poor, paltry elf, *himself a clod*,  
 That have the vast effrontery to say—  
 "Yours is the fault, Americans, that those  
 Who seek an asylum upon our shores,  
 From the oppressor's yoke, make such returns."  
 Preposterous reasoning, this! Because, forsooth,  
 Americans will not stand by and see  
 The untamed renegades of other climes  
 Do murder on the natives of the soil,  
 We are proscribers, persecutors, all.  
 Can these be classed with those, the every pulse  
 Of whose expansive hearts is for the land  
 Beneath whose sunny skies they first drew breath?  
 And who the leaders of this niggard crew?  
 Cliques of the veriest knaves—the one nor worse  
 Nor better than the other, but the pair  
 Such as all men, *that are men*, must despise—  
 Such as would barter for a petty place  
 Their country's freedom, and give over all  
 That heaven has sanctioned. Hear them how they speak.

[15]

*Give me an office, aliens!* Here 's my spouse,  
 My soft eyed daughter, choose ye which, or *both*.  
 And here's my loving mother, and my sire,  
 My brothers, and my sons—take, take them all,  
 And as ye list, do with them—only give—  
*Give me an office!* Thus the panders speak.

Oh, Heaven! withhold thy wrath a little while—  
 The Cities of the Plain were doomed for sin  
 No greater than is that which; with a front  
 As brazen as the Colossus of Rhodes,  
 Now stalks the streets of this once fairy land.  
 But there are those, thousands on thousands strong,  
 Merged in one frame Herculean, that will cleanse

This Augwan stable of its filthy load,  
And make it once again a Paradise.

Then will the shades of Washington, Fayette,  
And all those other gallant men and true  
That helped to free our country from the sway  
Of stolid tyrants, from their high estate  
Look down upon us smilingly—and then,  
No base-souled demagogues with lying tongues,  
No party partisans, with specious speech  
And promises ne'er meant to be fulfilled,  
To excite their passions—the down-trodden ones  
Of every clime shall find a happy home  
Upon our shores, and from that triune God  
Who rules the destinies of countless worlds,  
Shall come down blessings on themselves and us.  
We see around us many a brilliant eye  
And smile-wreathed lip to cheer us in our work.  
Our mothers, daughters, sisters, and the fair  
That now are, or may some day be our brides,  
With voice, and look, and action, bid us on.  
Our watchword still is FREEDOM, *glorious word!*  
And rallying in our strength, our cry shall be,  
OUR GOD, OUR RIGHTS, AND DOWN WITH BIGOTRY.

[16]