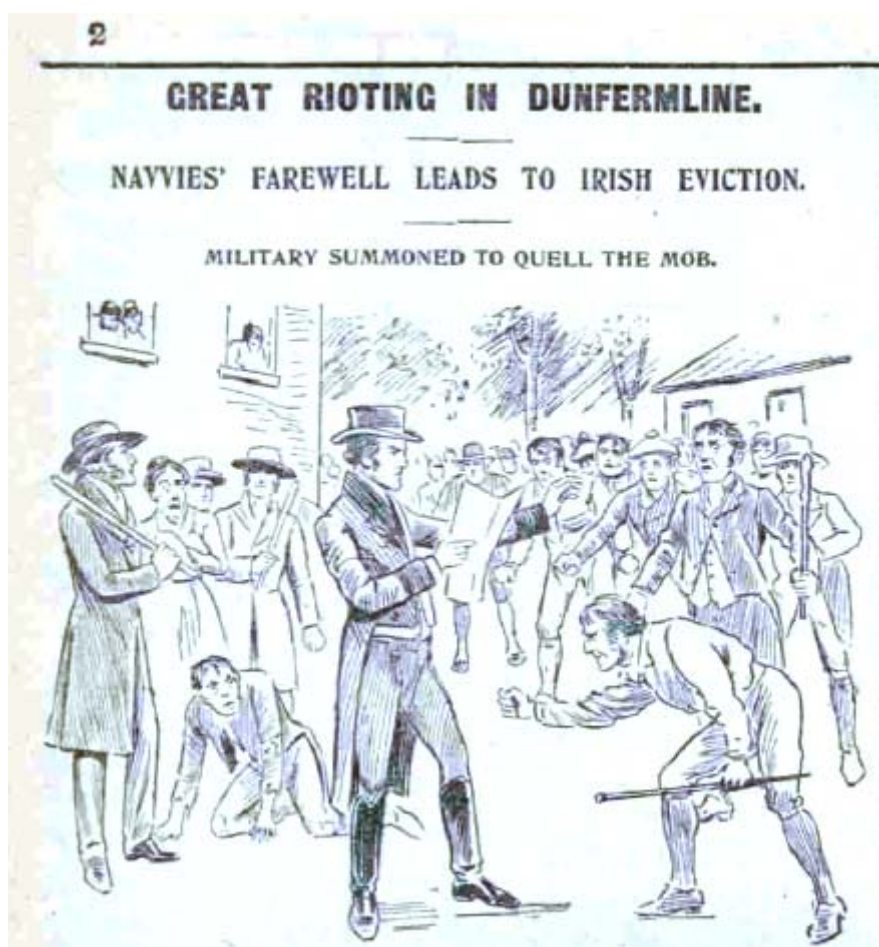


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## **GREAT RIOTING IN DUNFERMLINE.**

**NAVVIES' FAREWELL LEADS TO IRISH EVICTION.**

**MILITARY SUMMONED TO QUELL THE MOB.**



The peace of the good city of Dunfermline has been disturbed from time to time by serious strife, and on more than one occasion the authorities have found it necessary to read the Riot Act. One of the most alarming outbreaks occurred in 1850. It assumed the proportions of local international war, and is yet remembered by old worthies with a mind for the things of long ago.

A number of Irish labourers had been engaged for some considerable time in connection with the laying down of the railway in the West of Fife. These big brawny Celts, after the manner of their class, were inclined to indulge in intoxicants on each succeeding pay day. The orgies usually wound up with quarrelling, in which blood was occasionally spilt, but so long as the blood was Irish blood nobody cared very much. Things assumed a different complexion when the railway labourers turned their fists against the citizens of Dunfermline.

### **A Navvies' Farewell.**

The work upon which the navvies had been engaged was completed, and the order had gone forth that they must strike their tents and look for employment elsewhere. To signalise their departure they had a "pay-off" or "navvies' farewell" among themselves. The better part of a Saturday afternoon was spent in hard drinking, and when, towards midnight, the public houses were closed number of drunken labourers found their way to the streets of the city. Soon they began to quarrel, and ere long fighting was the order of the night. -The disturbances took place in the north end of the town, and thither great numbers of the citizens flocked to see the navvies maul and pulverise each other. For a time the streets assumed the appearance of a multiplied Donnybrook, and the spectators who enjoyed such scenes saw abundance of brutality.

### **Scots versus Irish.**

Nothing is more infectious than the spirit of fighting. Ere long some of the onlookers got involved in the dispute, and took sides with warring navvies. And from this the disturbance passed first general melee, and afterwards a battle of fisticuffs between Irish and Scots. The navvies were not prepared to suffer any interference. They struck out right and left. Their action had the effect of inciting the spectators to retaliation, and the international fight was continued until far on in the Sunday morning.

Peace was eventually restored, and the navvies, now partially sober, drew off to their quarters. So far as they were concerned the matter was probably at an end, but the townspeople who had been insulted at their hands were not inclined to forgive and forget. Nothing was done to renew hostilities on the Sabbath, but subsequent

events indicated that the day of rest had been employed as a time of meditation and how best reprisal could be carried out. Some of the Scots determined on declaring war on all Irish settlers in the district, and when Monday morning came a band of them proceeded to carry the declaration into effect.

### **A War Against the Celts.**

Their first objective were two Irish agricultural labourers, who were hoeing turnips in a field on Urquhart Farm. Inquiry elicited the fact that the men were working a rate much below that paid to 'women. This form of "cheap labour" did not commend itself to the natives of Dunfermline, and a crowd of wrathful denizens set out for the field where the men were employed.

One of the poor fellows was seized with violent hands, and ruthlessly thrown over a dyke. His companion, alive to the menacing disposition of the assailants, endeavoured to escape by hiding himself in a drain. But his action was observed by the rioters, who hauled him his hiding-place by the legs, and pommelled him soundly. The two labourers were the ordered to leave the locality at once if they desired to escape a more serious fate.

The attack on the turnip-hoers was but the beginning of the day's proceedings. The plan in the minds of the rioters to insist on every Irishman departing from the district, and their intention was to drive all the Celts down to Queensferry and compel them to cross the Forth. The unreasonableness of their demands became apparent when they turned their attention to decent respectable residents whose only crime was that they were Irish origin. They compelled no fewer than forty persons to abandon their work.

### **Attack on a Decent Weaver.**

One of these was Frederick Lennis, a decent weaver who had resided in Dunfermline for about twelve years, and who was a general favourite with his acquaintances. But these circumstances did not weigh with the infuriated mob. A few of them set off for the shop where Lennis was at work, and demanded that he desist.

"What for?" asked Lennis in astonishment.

"For being Irishman," was the fatuous reply. "All Irishmen are quit their work, and leave the town at once."

"Och thin." said the weaver, you needn't be in so great hurry. Allow me to work my cut out, and get my pay, and thin, sure, I'll go peaceably."

But they would not listen even to this request, and when they saw he did not immediately cease work they began to hustle him.

When they had got him into the street, he requested to be allowed to go home and get a better suit of clothes; but even time for this was denied, and the poor fellow was forced to join his countrymen who were being herded out of the "Kingdom."

### **Marched to Bothwell Haugh.**

As the was marched down by Bothwell Haugh, an acquaintance who noticed Lennis among the others exclaimed-

"What are you seeking here, Frederick?"

"Faith, and I don't know," replied the weaver.

"What were you doing?" asked his friend.

"In troth, I was doing nothing but working at my loom."

"And where are they taking you to?"

"Be jabbers! and that I cannot tell," replied the Irishman. Had they been driving me the other way, I might have thought they were sending me home to the ould country, but this is the wrong road for that."

The absurdity of evicting this peaceable weaver was at once apparent to his friends, and after they had interceded for some time with the leaders of the mob, Lennis was set at liberty and allowed return to his family.

As the day advanced the story of the doings the rioters got abroad. Many of the citizens of Dunfermline had no sympathy whatever with this scheme of wholesale eviction, and when the mob prosecuted their work they occasionally met with opposition.

## **The Mob is Opposed.**

Some Irishmen were engaged in the factory owned by Mr Erskine Beveridge. The rioters proceeded to that establishment, but the workers had got warning of their coming, and when the mob appeared at the gate they were met by a band of the employees, who defied them and peremptorily told them that they were prepared to defend their Irish mates. Thus opposed, the rioters deemed it prudent to retire, and seek additions to the ranks the evicted in quarters where sympathy with the Irish was less pronounced.

So determined were they that every Celt should be drummed out of the city that they did not hesitate to lay strong hands upon those whom they thought were natives of the Emerald Isle. To decide the point, test was agreed upon. The suspect was asked utter the word peas. If he pronounced it pays, he was deemed an Irishman and driven forth.

## **The Day's Evictions.**

The net results of the day's evictions amounted to forty-five persons. The majority were navvies. The remainder consisted of shoemakers, weavers, and masons' labourers. They were all herded together in the centre of the mob, and to the accompaniment of jeers and abuse driven forward towards Queensferry.

While the rioters were carrying out their lawless proceedings the Provost of the burgh Mr William Kinnis — and two the Magistrates—Bailies Johnston and Ireland—were busy swearing in special constables as a preliminary to restoring order. The action of these civic authorities was cordially seconded by the better class residents of the town, many of whom came forward to accept office in the special constabulary force.

By the time that a number sufficiently strong to cope with the rioters had been sworn in, the mob, driving its victims before it, had gone outwith the burgh, and the constables were of no use, except to quell any later disturbance should it break out. But the county authorities now took the matter up.

## **The Authorities Quell the Mob.**

The Sheriff-Substitute and the Procurator- Fiscal hired to Queensferry, and by taking a different route and hurrying forward they reached the Forth before the mob. On the way many of the rioters had fallen out of the ranks, and by the time Queensferry was reached the three thousand who left Dunfermline had dwindled to four hundred.

The Sheriff-Substitute took them in hand in person. He ordered the mob to stand out from the Irish whom they were evicting. When this had been done he commanded the Irishmen to march into an adjoining quarry. He then addressed the rioters, and in decisive tones informed them that if they proceeded further they did so at their peril.

The voice of the law is ever ominous to the crowd. The enthusiasm of the mob had been evaporating all along the route to Queensferry, and the peremptory tones of the Sheriff-Substitute broke down the last fence of their opposition. They consulted among themselves, and ere long considered it judicious to return to Dunfermline.

### **Guarding Against Renewal.**

The county officials deemed it wise to guard against a renewal of the rioting. They applied for military protection, and a detachment of the 13th Light Dragoons was soon on the march to their assistance. They came by way of Queensferry, and when they arrived at the quarry where the Irish were detained the Sheriff addressed the victims of the eviction and requested to know what they desired to do. Almost all of them indicated that they wished to return to their homes in Dunfermline. They were then marched back to the town under military protection, lodged in the Town-house for the night, and allowed to return to their homes early in the morning of the following day.

The news of how things were going in Dunfermline travelled to Townhill, and set the heather on fire in that quarter. Townhill Colliery gave employment to about sixty Irishmen. At the moment there was a strike among the miners of Lanarkshire, and the Townhill colliers anticipated that if they also struck their action would be nullified by the Irish, who, they anticipated, would continue at work, no matter how small the wages might be.

## **Expelling the Miners.**

They resolved on expulsion. One half of the Celts had been evicted when the colliery manager adopted vigorous measures to repress the disturbance. Arming himself with a pair of pistols, he boldly approached the leader of the mob, and threatened to blow out his brains if he did not at once order his gang to disperse. Bailie Johnston and the Town Clerk of Dunfermline timeously appeared upon the scene, and after some little discussion the rioting was quelled and peace restored.

The outbreak inspired a feeling of unrest in the public mind, and in order to allay alarm the authorities resolved to make public example some of the more prominent rioters. Warrants were issued for the arrest of the known ringleaders. They were brought to trial, and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. And so ended the Irish eviction of 1850.

