

50 BX 1770

AEK5296

Anti-Catholic

958409

Cath. Ch. in U.S.A. - Anti-Cath. Mov.



## POPE-DAY IN AMERICA.

---

BY JOHN GILMARY SHEA.

---

[Read before the United States Catholic Historical Society,  
January 19, 1888.]

THE present Pope has recently had a day—a day of Jubilee, commemorated in all parts of the world. The faithful testified their joy at the celebration of his sacerdotal Jubilee, and renewed the protestation of their heartfelt allegiance to the See of Unity, to the one whom Christ has set to govern His kingdom. Princes and rulers of all lands, Mohammedan and heathen, as well as Christian, sent their courteous offerings and congratulations to His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII.

The Pope has just had a day, and a glorious day. But is this my topic? No, I am going back into the past.

There was a time when, in New England and other colonies, the Pope had his day, which was very enthusiastically celebrated. This, as a matter of history, will doubtless be new to most of my hearers, for it is not brought into prominence in the current histories of the country, and few would trace the only remnant left of the old-time celebration—the Fourth-of-July firecracker—to its real origin.

The celebration of Pope-Day arose in a curious way. After the overthrow of the English commonwealth, and the restoration of Charles II., New England was in a dilemma.

The English Crown was asserting its rights over New England, and State holidays had to be observed. But how were the Puritans to keep Guy Fawkes' Day, the 5th of November? A few misguided Catholics, driven to desperation by the penal laws, had plotted to blow up King James I. and his Parliament, led on by government detectives, in all probability. But how could the Puritans, who, as a body, drove the son of James from the throne, and sent his head rolling from the executioner's block—how could they hold up Guy Fawkes to public execration for an unaccomplished crime, when their own hands were reeking with royal blood?

The case was indeed a puzzling one. But New England shrewdness saw a way out of the difficulty. A clergyman of the Established Church in England, when he found his flock growing listless and indifferent, or, what was worse, inclined to criticise him, used to give them what he called "Cheshire Cheese"; he began a series of philippics against the Pope. This always roused them to zeal and friendly feeling.

New England, in the same way, resorted to "Cheshire Cheese," and by a happy device pleased Court and people. They would celebrate the 5th of November with all due noise and honor; but they had the Pope carried around in effigy, instead of Guy Fawkes, amid the noise of firecrackers, and finally committed it to the flames amid loud huzzas.

Thus, though they sang

"Let's always remember  
The fifth of November,"

the day became, on this side of the Atlantic, not Gunpowder Treason, but Pope-Day. The contrast between that annual insult of the last century, and the recent ovation of all loyal hearts, the tributes paid by the rulers of English-speaking lands, is striking enough. "Viva il Papa-re!"

Boston, being a city of great cultivation and refinement, took the lead in celebrating Pope-Day. An effigy of the Pope was made, and generally one of the Devil; these were placed

on a platform, and carried by the crowd, who kept firing crackers, home-made at first, but when New England enterprise opened intercourse with China, the Chinese firecrackers were imported for use on Pope-Day.

On the front of the stage was a huge transparency, with inscriptions suited to the temper of the times. Boys below the platform worked strings, causing the figures to face toward the houses and make gestures.

At the head of the procession went a man ringing a bell, and bawling a song, which ended :

“ Don't you hear my little bell  
Go chink, chink, chink ?  
Please give me a little money,  
To buy my Pope some drink.”

Every house on the route of the procession was required to contribute to the expense of the show, under penalty of having the windows broken, or being otherwise damaged.

The procession passed through the Common, past the State House, and often ended on Copp's Hill, where the effigies were consumed in a bonfire.

Such was Pope-Day in Boston, which never dreamed in that day of the Old South Church existing to see Boston ruled by a Catholic mayor, the see of a Catholic archbishop, or its celebrating with loud acclaim an anniversary of a Pope.

The newspapers of the day sometimes described these processions on Pope-Day as being carried on “with great decency and decorum”! But it was not always so. In the course of time, one quarter of Boston thought itself badly treated in the arrangements for the procession. Then North End and South End each had a Pope, and the processions generally met on Union Street, where a fight took place for the possession of all the figures, the North Enders burning them on Copp's Hill if they won the day, while their antagonists, when successful, burned the Pope on the Common.

In 1745, the celebration of Pope-Day was especially disgraceful. A paper of the time says:

Tuesday last being the Anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, two Popes were made and carried thro' the Streets in the evening, one from the North, the other from the South End of the Town, attended by a vast number of negroes and white servants, armed with clubs, staves and cutlashes, who were very abusive to the Inhabitants, insulting the Persons and breaking the windows, &c., of such as did not give them money to their satisfaction, and even many of those who had given them liberally; and the two Popes meeting in Cornhill, their followers were so infatuated as to fall upon each other with the utmost Rage and Fury. Several were sorely wounded and bruised, some left for dead, and rendered incapable of any business for a long time to the great Loss and Damage of their respective Masters.

And he prints a letter from a subscriber, condemning the supineness of the authorities. This letter was as follows:

I hope you will not suffer the grand fray, not to say bloody, that happen'd before your Door last Tuesday evening to pass off without a public rebuke; and such an one as becomes a person zealous as well for the Peace and Good Order of the State as the Church. What a scandal and Infamy to a Protestant Mob, be it of the rudest and lowest Sailors out of Boston, or even of the very negroes of the Town, to fall upon one another with Clubs and Cutlashes in a Rage and Fury which only Hell could inspire or the Devil broke loose from chains there could represent! Is this a meet or sufferable show of Protestant zeal against Popery? Is this to honor the Protestant religion to the few French prisoners of war that are left among us? Or can our children or servants be safe in the streets at such a time if such Rioters be permitted? Or in a word, what madness must seize the two mobs, united Brethren, as they would appear against Popery, to fall upon each other, break one another's Bones or dash one another's Brains out?

Why this enormity above all others should be winked at, and the Inhabitants of the Town with their Dwellings left to the mercy of a rude and intoxicated Rabble, the very Dregs of the People, black and white, and why no more has been done to prevent or suppress such Riotous proceedings, which have been long growing upon us,



and as long bewailed by all sober Persons, must be humbly left to our betters to say.\*

But the voice of "decency and decorum" could not stop the celebration of Pope-Day. As politics grew fierce, first the Pretender, then obnoxious English statesmen, were burned in effigy with the Pope.

In 1755, "the Devil, the Pope, and the Pretender, at night were carried about the city on a bier, their three effigies hideously formed, and as humorously contrived, the Devil standing close behind the Pope, seemingly paying his compliments to him, with a three-pronged pitchfork in one hand, with which at times he was made to thrust his Holiness on the Back, and a lanthorn in the other, the young Pretender standing before the Pope, waiting his commands."

The newspaper which gives these details adds: "In their route through the Streets, they stop't at the French General's Lodgings,"—this was General Dieskau, then lying wounded and a prisoner in Boston,—"where a guard was ordered to prevent mischief by the M.c.b. The General sent down some silver by the carriers, with which after giving three huzzas, they marched off to a proper place, and set fire to the Devil's tail, burning the three to cinders." †

The passage of the Quebec Act, by which Catholics in Canada and the country northwest of the Ohio were maintained in the exercise of their religion, as it was under French rule, excited a bitter feeling in the Thirteen Colonies. This revived the Pope-Day celebration, and gave it new zest.

We have accounts of the observance of the day in several places in the year 1774:

The last public celebration of "Pope Day," so called in Newbury and Newburyport (Mass.), occurred this year. To prevent any tumult or disorder taking place during the evening or night, the town of Newburyport voted October 24, 1774, "that no effigies be carried

---

\* "Weekly Post-Boy," Nov. 18, 1745.

† "Annapolis Gazette," Dec. 4, 1755.

about or exhibited on the 5th of November, only in the day-time." Motives of policy afterwards induced the discontinuance of this custom which has now become obsolete. This year (1774) the celebration went off with a great flourish. In the day-time companies of little boys might be seen in various parts of the town, with their little popes dressed up in the most grotesque and fantastic manner, which they carried about, some on boards and some on little carriages for their own and others' amusement. But the great exhibition was reserved for the night, in which young men as well as boys participated. They first constructed a huge vehicle, varying at times, from 20 to 40 feet long, 8 or 10 wide, and 5 or 6 high, from the lower to the upper platform, on the front of which they erected a paper lantern, capacious enough to hold in addition to the lights, five or six persons. Behind that as large as life sat the mimic Pope and several other personages, monks, friars and so forth. Last but not least stood an image of what was designed to be a representation of old Nick himself, furnished with a pair of huge horns, holding in his hands a pitchfork and otherwise accoutred, with all the frightful ugliness that their ingenuity could devise. Their next step after they had mounted their ponderous vehicle on four wheels, chosen their officers, captain, first and second lieutenant, purser and so forth, placed a boy under the platform to elevate and move around at proper intervals the movable head of the Pope.\*

This same year, the two rival factions in Boston united in one celebration of what they called a Union Pope.

Even down in the Carolinas the day was observed, feeling being very strong there, as we may see by the fact that South Carolina alone, of all the States, made Protestantism the established religion in her first Constitution.

A letter from Charleston in November, 1774, says :

We had great diversion the 5th instant in seeing the effigies of Lord North, Governor Hutchinson, the Pope and the Devil, which were erected on a moving machine, and after having been paraded about the town all day, they were in the evening burnt on the common with a large bonfire, attended by a numerous crowd of people.†

---

\* "History of Newburyport," p. 249.

† "New York Journal," Dec. 15, 1774.



General and enthusiastic as was the celebration of Pope-Day in 1774, it was the last occasion of that crafty means to excite the ignorant and brutal to hatred and violence against Catholics, though it needs no philosopher to see in Pope-Day the genesis of some events in our own time.

Pope-Day ended with 1774.

The next year the din of arms sounded through the land. Protestant and Catholic alike shouldered their muskets, and marched side by side in the cause of America. Yet in the very camp of Washington, in the army where Catholic soldiers from Maryland and Pennsylvania were gallantly facing the foe, it was proposed to celebrate Pope-Day. But from the headquarters of the Army of Freedom came the words of George Washington, already strong in the attachment of his fellow-citizens :

November 5th.—As the Commander-in-Chief has been apprised of a design formed for the observance of that ridiculous and childish custom of burning the effigy of the Pope, he cannot help expressing his surprise that there should be officers and soldiers in this army so void of common sense as not to see the impropriety of such a step at this juncture; at a time when we are soliciting, and have really obtained the friendship and alliance of the people of Canada, whom we ought to consider as brethren embarked in the same cause,—the defence of the Liberty of America. At this juncture and under such circumstances, to be insulting their religion, is so monstrous as not to be suffered or excused; indeed, instead of offering the most remote insult, it is our duty to address public thanks to these our brethren, as to them we are indebted for every late happy success over the common enemy in Canada.\*

This was the funeral oration on the celebration of Pope-Day. It was heard of no more.

It would be presumption in me to continue, after George Washington has spoken.

But I will merely add that the firecrackers of Pope-Day have been transferred to the Fourth of July.

---

\* Washington's Works, iii., p. 144.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/popedayinamericashea>



