The 69th at Bull Run.

The annexed letter from one of the gallant 69th, who was taken prisoner with Colonel Corcoran at the Battle of Bull Run, gives some interesting details regarding that event, and the subsequent treatment of the prisoners by the Confederates, which have not heretofore been laid before the public :—

New York, Oct. 12, 1861.

To the Editor of the Irish-American :

Sir—As anything relating to the late campaign of the 69th, and the present unfortunate position of its brave Colonel and some of its members, must be interesting to your readers. I desire to lay before them through the medium of your wide spread columns, the following sketch as well to correct certain prevalent erroneous impressions as to present some facts on the subject hitherto unpublished, and unknown to the public.

Popular as the corps was, it had *many grievances* (most of which were owing to the hastiness of its organization, and the shortness of its term of service), but it seems to me that the report of Brigadier General Sherman after the battle of Bull Run, contains a statement which does the greatest injustice to the Regiment, and which has become the heavier grievance from being borne in silence and thereby tacitly admitted. He says, "after the repulse of the 2d Wisconsin regiment, the ground was open for the 69th, who advanced and held it for some time, but finally fell back in confusion." He omitted saying what many witnessed, and what Col. Corcoran, confirmed in Richmond (when we first saw the report) *that he rode up and ordered Col. Corcoran* to draw off his men, while we were still obstinately maintaining our ground, not only against the main strength of the Confederates hitherto engaged, but, also, while pressed hard on the right flank by the fresh troops (Johnson's) which Gen. Smith and Col. Elzey had just brought from Manassas, and which, according to the official report of these officers, numbered 8 000 men. I do not pretend to say that we could have held the position against such overwhelming odds, but as we did so until ordered to abandon it, simple justice and fair play should have prompted Sherman to tell the *whole* truth. The manner in which he managed, or rather mismanaged his brigade, *is more open to comment than the conduct of any* regiment during the day. Inferior in numbers as we were to the enemy, he increased the disadvantage by keeping one excellent corps idle (the 18th N. Y. V.), and bringing the others into action separately and successively, allowing one to be broken before another was brought to its support, and thus throwing away the only chance of success that remained. Notwithstanding the heavy reinforcements the Confederates had received, they were so badly beaten and disheartened up to this time that there can scarcely be a doubt but that a vigorous, simultaneous, and combined attack of Sherman's brigade and Keyes' would have carried their position Instead *of this, after our regiment (leading the column)* had turned their right under Gen Evans, dispersed and almost destroyed the crack corps of the South—the N. O. Zouaves, instead of following up our advantage and pushing home the flying foe we gave them time to change their position, concentrate their strength, and deploy their fresh troops. We have reason to be thankful that our ill timed delay was not entirely fatal to us, as it would have been had not Beauregard's order to General Ewall to [illegible] carried. Again, when our attack failed, and the retreat began, Col Corcoran endeavored to cover it by forming his men in square, in which order it moved to the point at which we crossed Bull Run, where on account of the woods and the narrowness of the path down the bluffs that formed the west bank, it had to be reduced to a column. Sherman, who was in the square, told the men to get away as fast as they could as the enemy's cavalry were coming. This prevented Col. Corcoran from reforming the men in square on the other side of the Run, a movement which would have not only effectually repelled the enemy, but would also have covered the retreat of every battery lost subsequently. It was in his endeavors to remedy the disorder and straggling caused by this "*license to run,*" that Col Corcoran (who, from the unfortunate and irreparable loss of Haggerty, and the absence of all his staff, was obliged to be somewhat in the rear) was cut off from the main body of the regiment, by the enemy's horse, and being able to rally only nine men, moved into a small house, to make a better defence, but was induced by some of his officers to surrender as resistance was hopeless Meantime about half a dozen men had joined him at the house, of whose arrival he was ignorant. Trifling as the reinforcement was, he surrendered so reluctantly that I verily believe had he known of it he would not have surrendered without a desperate fight. As I shared all his subsequent misfortunes, and witnessed the manly fortitude with which he bore them, the consistent dignity with which he repelled all overtures for any parole that would tie up his hands from the Union cause, and repulsed some Southern friends who endeavored to seduce him from it, it may not be improper to sketch his prison life. Owing to the inadequate arrangements for our accommodation in Richmond it was the afternoon of the 24th, before some of us got anything to eat, so that we had eaten only once in four days. The colonel was extremely exhausted, but desired all his men to be brought to him "that he might take a look at—and know," as he said, "those who had done their duty to the last." Learning that some had no money, and wanted clothing badly, he gave $20 out of his own scanty resources to be laid out for their use. He also purchased and sent a number of shirts to the wounded of his corps, and sent some money to many of them also. He was never allowed to go out, not even to the hospital, to see his wounded men, which latter I heard him complain somewhat of. He was kept quite apart even from us who were in the same building, although some of us managed to see him daily or oftener. I wish to contradict, however, a statement which has obtained universal currency about him, and which is an unmitigated falsehood. He never was in irons, nor was he threatened with them from his capture until his removal to Charleston on the 10th ult., when we last saw him. Rigidly as he was watched, and great as was the importance attached to his safe keeping—the consistent bearing of which I have already spoken, had won for him the respect of every Southerner, and though it at first drew on him the virulent abuse of the Richmond press, even it ultimately changed its tone and declared "that the consistent obstinacy of that most impudent and inveterate of the Yankee prisoners, Col. Corcoran, was preferable by far to the repentant professions and cringing course of some prisoners to obtain a parole." As to our general treatment it was harsh, although as long as any hope of the Government making an exchange remained, our guards were courteous and communicative, and I feel bound to say that the cavalry to whom we surrendered (the Clay Dragoons) acted in every respect like chivalrous and honorable men. Latterly, however, some regiments of raw recruits—mere conscript boys, whom the 10 per cent levy had drawn out, committed great atrocities on the prisoners, firing through the windows at us on the slightest pretence of breach of the regulations Several shots were fired into the room where the 69th were confined, and one man of the 2d N. Y. S. M was wounded in the arm. Shots fired into the buildings were said to have resulted fatally, but as we could not get to them I cannot vouch for the fact positively. Atrocities like these, coupled with the prospect of being sent further South, induced many to try and escape, but the great majority failed, and were put in irons As, however, none of the 69th, save two who were unsuccessful, had tried, your correspondent thought it became the honor of the corps to make an attempt, and, accompanied by Sergeant O'Donohue, of Co. K, and Peter Kelly, of Co. J, left Richmond on the 18th ult., passing the sentries in disguise. Captain McIvor, who intended to accompany us, was unfortunately suspected by the guard, and put in irons I regret to see he has since been sent to New Orleans. Our provisions (2lbs. of crackers) soon ran out, but Virginia is full of corn, and we lived on the enemy. After traveling a week (solely at dead of night) we came on the Confederate lines on the Potomac, above Aquia Creek, and after running into the most advanced cavalry outpost, from which we escaped narrowly, and coming in contact with sentries for miles along the river, we at length found shelter and concealment in a deserted fishing house. Having built a raft to reach the Potomac fleet which was in sight, it turned out to be too small, and O'Donohue embarked alone on it, and reached the *Seminole*, the captain of which, however, refused to send a boat for us who remained on the Virginian shore, and insisting on sending O'Dohue to Washington, we were left to our own resources, and built another raft on which we reached the *Penguin* during the following night, and were sent aboard the *Yankee*. We desire to acknowledge gratefully the kindness and attention we received from the gentlemanly officers and crew of the *Yankee*. The engineer, Mr. Carpenter, and one of the crew furnished me with a complete suit of clothing which took away my naked, half savage appearance, and the steward, Mr. Fitzpatrick, attended to our famished and ravenous appetites with similar humanity. As this aid was no way official, and came solely from a generous and humane spirit we shall always cherish grateful feelings towards these gentlemen. From Lieutenant Ross, of the Navy Yard, Washington, and the captain of the *Philadelphia* steamer, we received similar kind treatment. Trusting, that the length of this communication, will not render it objectionable,

I am, sir, yours truly,

JAMES M. RORTY.