

# CORRESPONDENCE OF THOMAS DEVIN REILLY

Taken From '98 and '48: The Modern Revolutionary History and Literature of Ireland by John Savage, originally published 1856.

*The letters written during his residence in Washington, a couple of which I give, exhibit his good, thoughtful nature, and show some of those finer – because private – feelings, by the aid of which one may estimate him. The following familiar epistle was in reference to the death of Dr. F. B. Ryan, a mutual friend, and whose professional and other attentions to his family and mine fully justified the tone in which he wrote.*

**WASHINGTON D.C., Sept. 18, 1853.**

MY DEAR JACK:

The news of Ryan's death which you sent me, has shocked me greatly. He was, indeed, a kind-hearted, noble fellow, and I am deeply sorry for him. We both have lost a true friend, and to Brennan the loss is that of a brother. If Joe thinks well of a monument or stone for him, let me know at once. I wish, however, we could do something for his unhappy wife. But I am unable to suggest anything here. If you hear of any thing being done by his friends, let me know at once. My poor wife, too, has been miserably ill since I left – Good God! What a desolation her loss would make.

I have not yet seen the President, but am waiting for the moment. I predicate nothing on good fortune, and do not shun the worst. I am much obliged to you for your note. Love to Meagher.

Ever yours,  
DEV.

*The following letter to the daughters of Captain Samuel C. Reid, whom he highly prized for having beaten his "ancient enemy," the Briton, at Fayal, in 1814, and in whose family he stood on terms of the warmest friendship and intimacy, contains some very pleasing allusions to himself and home, and some happy indications of his nature.*

**WASHINGTON, D.C., 1<sup>st</sup> Dec, 1853.**

SISTERS: - On this day five years ago, I had the honour of buying something between a hat and a cap, in some place near Chatham street. It is a long story – but as I landed the night previous, without either hat, or cap, or coat, or anything but a gold piece, which the Jew somewhere about the corner of Cherry, changed for “four eighty-four,” to oblige the other Jew from whom I bought the cap; it is one of the most remarkable events unrecorded in *modern* history. Suffice it to say that on this day, five years ago, I became a child of our great mother; and as I pay homage to her, and the stars and stripes, I seek a fairer and more ennobling emblem of the beauty and of the glory of Republicanism – I seek something to which even as good a married man as Gen. J--- must bow his head, to bend mine to you and to your mother. If I meet but lilies on the way-side, I must stop my horse to get down to worship them. Can you feel offended it, on this weary long path through existence, I pay the same homage to you.

Beauty is to me a thing immense – the line of a lovely woman’s face or arm, conveys to me, always did convey to me, all the “philosophy” “sages” coax themselves so much about. It conveys to me, this look on a woman’s face, the ideal of excellence. I see in it virtue, courage, right, fondness, love beyond all increasing, happiness to all about it, fidelity, incorruptibility, health, home, and that quiet, careful, dear care which takes us to its arms when we are young, and lays us, calling on the sextons not to let the stones grate upon our coffin-lid, when we die.

They have gone out to market. I am alone. I believe for the first, for a very long, time. I have, too, the happiness of not being compelled to write for a day or two. I thought the *very best* thing I could do, was to write to you. It will ennoble me to raise myself up beside the standards of grace and beauty so excellent. The poor vine so rich in bearing merry juice – the honey-suckle that used to creep into my windows, when as children we played about its leaves, all these had yet something to train them by, some great ideal of their own to whose altitude they wished to aspire. So it is with me. I remember taking pity once on a little rose-tree which was so small and weak, that you could hardly think it would live, if it was asked for the fun of it. I took it – I got my head broke for my impudence in interfering with mother’s

choicest, *petite*, Chinese rose – but, oh! It did the work. It grew up. It is now a beauty in my own island of flowers, and blushes with its deep damask among the vines and the honey-suckle which creep and festoon around the windows where I used, to meet a mother's smile, and where, for the first of my race, I was born. Well, it surely does a man good once in a while to look back to where he came from, and to *measure his latitude* in intellect, in virtue, and in the great ideals which *make intellect and virtue*. I thought that the best thing that I could do this day, was simply to write to you both. The town looks fine – nobody ever saw such preparations in Washington to get up *a regular "winter."* For myself, being alone and desolate out here, "on the corner of Connecticut Ave. and K. St.," in a --- (oh, I beg pardon, I was going to curse) very cold house, I have pretty much everything outside on the high-road with an off-slantendicular by-road or two to get over, to my satisfaction. I have likewise a room with a stove, and the neatest little furniture. In fact, if an angel from heaven would say she was coming here, Jennie would see all right for her, and could you ask a better servant than myself?

Of course I have been misrepresented. I know that in the course I have pursued and am pursuing, and that, till the thing is done, which is only to *pull down that British flag once more*, I am open to every attack. Well, I can take anything and live to do my work. More I do not wish, unless it be the smile and love of beauty; and oh! girls! Whenever you throw your arms about man, think what an inestimable treasure you throw around him. Greek and Roman, and Modern English, and Hollandeth Dutch, and all the Italians, and yet the "Crystal Palace" half-dozen committees have *sat* on art. Horace Greeley, for instance, has given *his* judgement upon much finer statues. Well, then, my critical judgement loses now, all its mere fanciful exactness. It may be that Powers has hit off the turn of reluctant and excelling beauty. It may be that according to the destiny of this vile and merely modern civilization, beauty may be to me as a forgotten picture, or as a lily which has faded. Yet, still, though buried down with all the misfortunes of existence, think of me, often, very often,

As your friend and worshipping servant,  
T. DEVIN REILLY.

A P.S. to M. and L. – The occasion of this is that they have just returned from market, and of course my wife wishes either to send you a whole rib-bone of this very valuable chicken, or else to ask you to come down and eat it, for herself; for you know that ladies always like to so do over, or overdo, all things.

DEAR MARY AND LOU: We have almost got a little cottage like Tone's – but yet, hardly yet, not so, we want some angels about our Godhead. Write somebody to one of us and say.

**R.**

*Friday Morning.*

I wrote all the enclosed last night, blots and all. I thought it should be torn when it is so blotted. But yet I thought again that it was the very best compliment to send to you both. Mary will see a soul even through blots like these, and Lou will rub away the blots and leave the soul all clear, as God first fashioned it.

To your dear mother my kindness and most loving love.

**R.**