

John Daly and 'The Bard of Thomond'

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John Daly, the noted Limerick Fenian and IRB leader, was arrested on the 11th of April 1884, in Birkenhead, on a charge of carrying explosives. On July the 9th of that year, while awaiting trial in H.M. Prison, Winsor Green, Birmingham, he wrote the following letter to his friend, Michael Hogan, known to all as "The Bard of Thomond":

From John Daly
H.M. Prison, Winsor Green
Birmingham
July 9th 1884

My Dear Bard

It may not be displeasing to you to hear from an unfortunate treason felony prisoner, awaiting his doom in an English prison, how often during his lonely hours, he has wished to heaven for some of the poetic genius of the Bard of Thomond, by which he may people his cell, and have a good square talk to them about the good old days. Be my soul Bard as small as this cell of mine is, I cram in to it enough of them bould warriors of yours to make a slashing row, and with two or three thousand Knights, of your own make, at their backs, I think we will be able to fight our way out of the country, and if possible back on to the banks of your own dear Shannon. I am not quite sure about what weed then do, we might build the walls and you might make us another Sarsfield and fight the blooming fight over again, or haveing seen enough of this unfortunate every day world of ours, you might take pity on us, and let us have one of your fairy palaces on the Shannon shore where we might begin our lives over again, lives such as could not be question'd by British authority. Unfortunately I'm not a poet so I have to live alone, and shoulder my troubles as best I can, and that I'll be able to do, so as well as others I have no doubt

But my Dear Bard if I were free tomorrow, and back in my own sweet City of Limerick, would I be happier in my mind than I am now, think you, I doubt if I would, for the chances are I'd be shund, and cold shoulderd if I wouldnt be a land leaguer, and have to work in with that hypocritical two faced Knave "The great I am", better known as Henry O Shea, and the others who pull with him, though they know him (some of them) as well as I do. Oh Limerick twas once a proud privilege to be a son of yours, but alas your burgess role is now open, only to those who learn to betray.

But independant of O Shea and the L.Ls, I might be met by the Revd T Nolan with a brick as I have not the smallst doubt that if that gentleman did happen to be around, and happen to have a brickbat handy he'd be sure to shy it at my head. Its quite possible Bard I may never again rest my eyes on that noble river, or flog its waters for an unsuspecting fish, but I'll ever love it and pray that its days of slavery may soon pass away.

Even now Bard I think I hear the loud roaring of its water tearing along over every obstruction, and hurling defiance at the robbers who trade on it, and who love it not.

God sent Bard that the people may some day learn a lesson from the river, and

refuse to be turned in to every channell that the tricksters make for them.

Hopeing My Dear Bard that you may live to see your lordly shannon flow as free as air.

And Believe me
very truly yours
J Daly

That John Daly, then aged 38, should have known and admired Michael Hogan, a man fourteen years his senior, is not surprising, for Hogan had, with the publication of his *Lays and Legends of Thomond* in 1867 (though bearing the date 1865) and the publication over a period of several years since 1867 of his "Shawn-na Scoob" pamphlets, gained a considerable reputation not only in his native city of Limerick but also much farther afield. "The Bard" had, too, a very nationalistic outlook, something which would undoubtedly have been the major reason for their friendship—indeed, Lady Wilde, mother of the more famous Oscar and wife of the noted surgeon and antiquary Sir William, is recorded as having written of his writings that "Every page affords brilliant evidence that the poet's ardour was kindled by that noblest of inspirations, Love of Country".

Apparently Daly's letter reached Limerick within a matter of days and "The Bard" replied promptly, sending a letter and a poem which reached Winsor Prison on the 14th of July, only five days after Daly's letter was sent! Although "The Bard's" letter reached Daly, the poem was confiscated by the prison authorities, as Daly's reply shows:

From John Daly
H.M. Prison, Winsor Green
Birmingham
July 14th 1884

My Dear Bard

I received your letter today, Monday the 14th, and that I was pleased as pie at geting it is true, and how disgusted I was later on at being informed that *I could not receive* the poems which you were so kind as to enclose, you nor nobody else will ever know.

I use the word disgusted "Bard", because its the mildest word I can think of (being in prison you see we must be mild) in the outside world I might be tempted to use stronger language, and who knows but I may be some day. No doubt Bard you would be surprised when you got my letter, but you see I got the notion in my head to write, and so I did.

I read of the breach of promise, and of J.Rs. assault on you, but of course had no chance of reading the cause of the assault, and is it not too bad, after your kindness that I am as far away as ever from "The Siege of the Golden Balls", and as for suppressing the second part, in consideration of the widow withe Golden hair, you may be right, but I dont see it. I understand she is now in business in Thomas St, I wish her luck. Need I say Bard how pleased I'd be to have your "Lays or Legends" old or new, as it would help me to pass away many a dreary hour, and in fancy take me back to the places, I love most on earth, but being in a prison I must forego the pleasure, and if I have to do so for the best years of my life, it will be some

consolation to feel that it is for Ireland, my own never to be forgotten Ireland, that poor land whos history is written so much in blood, and if a small portion of that torture so freely administer'd to her people should fall to my lot, why should I repine, instead of being proued, and hopeful. Proud and hopeful I'll be, and the English prisons and the Officials therein will never be able to say, that my lips ever uttered a whine.

Let me assure you Bard I would much rather not be here, but being here, I will be true to the milk my Mother gave me.

What you tell me about the Rev Tom astonishes me, he must have cut up terrible rough when Butler run him, and to die in England, twas good enough for him.

All you say of those unfortunate bosthoons of farmers is only too true Bard, they are the most selfish set of hounds in the country, but they have not made £40,000 by the league, a Bard the League is a good thing for the ram-shallans, who want cheap farms, cheap fame, and cheap drinks.

Good by Bard

till we meet again Believe

me ever the same, J Daly

Daly's two letters were retained by "The Bard", and with them was retained either a copy of the poem which he had sent Daly or the original poem itself—it may, have been returned to him by the prison authorities. The poem is not one of his best. but this can probably be explained by the haste with which it must have been written. Entitled "Address to John Daly in Prison" it reads as follows:

You were always single minded but your heart was hot as flame
You were fearless as an eagle and in spirit just as tame
Too much confidence misled you—in the tempters' snare you fell
And their dark designs betray'd you to a dreary felon cell.

Never was your heart deceitful tho your tongue was stern and bold
Your career was free and faithful—friend or foe you never sold
Rung your bold voice at your trial like the clearness of a bell
To acquit your friend Jim Egan, and give you the felon's cell.

Black and bitter was the sentence that consign'd your whole lifetime
To be chain'd with thieves and felons—All the carron crows of crime
Torn from brother, sister, mother, those that loved you true and well
And their hearts are always with you in your dreary felon cell.

Oft at midnight hours I see you in your grave like cell alone
With your manly features wasted, worn and wither'd to the bone
I behold a soul defiant worried by the hounds of hell
That's the picture of John Daly in his dreary felon cell.

Brutes and demons try to kill you with their wormwood and gall
Patience—Courage yet, John Daly God is stronger than them all.
How I see your pride eyes flashing as the welcome news I tell
John, your Country don't forget you in your dreary felon cell.



Yes, and sure your native Limerick makes your cruel cause her own
Yet there's flame and soul and sinew to be found in Garryowen.
Yes, the children of the women who defied sword shot and shell
Feel your suffering and your sorrow in your dreary felon cell.

Courage, John, the time is coming nearer than your hope may see
When your chains will fall asunder and again you'll walk out free
O But they'll burst an iron mountain with the muttering of a spell
Ere they bend your Irish Spirit in your dreary felon cell.

As a result of perjured evidence, John Daly was later sentenced to life imprisonment, and despite the fact that the lying witness admitted to his perjury four and half years later Daly was not freed, notwithstanding the pleas made on his behalf by John Redmond and others. Indeed, he suffered twelve and a half years of imprisonment, much of it spent in solitary confinement, before being released broken in health because of a protracted hunger strike—Daly was, in fact, the first political prisoner to use the hunger strike “weapon” against the British.

Despite his ill-health, John Daly plunged back into his nationalist activities on his release, though these were now more of a constitutional than military nature, *e.g.* in November 1898 he is reported as one of the principal speakers at the public unveiling by his fellow-Fenian John O'Leary of the fine statue to Charles Kickham in Tipperary town. In 1899 he was elected Mayor of Limerick, and before the year was four months old he attended the funeral to Mount St. Laurence Cemetery, Limerick, of his old friend Michael Hogan, “The Bard of Thomond”. Daly himself died on the 30th of June 1916, a month after the executions of the leaders of the Easter Rising, including those of his nephew Ned Daly, of Tom Clarke, a fellow-Fenian and husband of his niece Kathleen Daly, and of two of his closer friends among the younger generation of patriots, Seán Mac Diarmada and Con Colbert.

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Is mian liom buíochas a gabháil le Nóra agus Mairéad de h-Óir, garneachtanna an Dálaigh, as ucht cead a thabhart dom an dá litir agus an dán a fhoilsiú annso.