

MEMORIAL DISCOURSE

Trinity College Dublin

Trinity Monday 1930

Thomas Davis (1814-1845)

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It is now thirty-six years since the custom was established of assembling in this Chapel on our festival day to do honour to the memory of one of the most famous sons of Trinity College. The list of those already commemorated is impressive – scholars, theologians, philosophers, poets, statesmen. To-day we are to commemorate a young man who died at an age when most men are but on the threshold of achievement, but whose place on our roll of honour is secure, since, of all those who graduated from our University during the nineteenth century, he made the deepest impress upon the thought and life of Ireland. That is a high claim, but can, I believe, be sustained. I do not say that Thomas Davis was the greatest of our alumni in that century. I do say that in his brief life, in his five years as a national leader, he left an indelible mark upon the history of his and our native country.

He was a sower of many seeds. Some of them have borne luxuriant crops; others have as yet scarcely germinated. Much that has happened in Ireland is to be better than her past, Irishmen, especially young Irishmen, may still hearken with profit to his message.

Thomas Osborne Davis was born at Mallow, Co. Cork, in October, 1814. Like many Irish national leaders, he was of mixed blood, his father being of Welsh extraction. But his mother was Irish, and he was brought up in Irish surroundings. As a boy he was serious and thoughtful, and the same character was displayed during his years in Trinity College. He was by no means a youthful prodigy, but something of a recluse, neither distinguished academically nor conspicuous among his fellow-students, one of whom described him as “a book in breeches.” But he laid in a store of knowledge based on wide reading; and on many things he pondered deeply.

Trinity College was regarded at the time as the stronghold of Toryism. But the traditions of Grattan’s Parliament and the great days of Protestant nationalism had not been forgotten within its walls. By one man specially they were kept alive – Thomas Wallis. An original thinker, a rousing talker, a vigorous writer when he could be induced to write, he was one of those who accomplish little themselves, but much as a stimulus to other men. Through his influence, as well as his own reflections, Davis turned from the Toryism in which he had been reared to the Nationalism which became the driving force of his life. When he first emerges into the public eye, it is with guiding principles already fixed, with the main knowledge and assured judgement of a much older man, combined with the eagerness and enthusiasm of youth.

This was when he was already a graduate of some years’ standing, and the occasion was a meeting of the College Historical Society, then undergoing one of its terms of banishment

from College. In 1839 Davis was made President – for the Society in those days boasted a President as well as an Auditor. At the close of the Session, in June, 1840, he delivered his Address, in which he struck out a new line. The Society of that time seems to have specialized in flamboyant and rather empty oratory. “The style of speaking,” according to one of its members, “was vicious in the extreme, showy, declamatory, and vehement. To astound, not to persuade, was the aim of nine-tenths of the speakers.”

Davis talked real things. There is much criticism of the system of studies of the University, chiefly because it shuts out the literature and history of modern nations, and particularly of Ireland. Like most students, Davis is eager to reform his own University. He suggests how its defects might be remedied, either by reforms in the University system, or by study and discussion among students themselves. Throughout it is emphasized that education is for Life, that its end is to produce men, the sort of men that their own age, and particularly their own country, require. Beneath the more showy qualities of the orator, or the statesman, there must be intellectual capacity – “Thoughts, thoughts; the wise man against the wordy man all the world over.” And beneath this again there must be moral qualities. “it is the habit of rejoicing in high aspirations and holy emotions; it is charity in thought, word, and act; it is generous faith and the practice of self-sacrificing virtue,” that are needed in the leaders of a democracy.

But the real man, with his passionate eagerness, is chiefly revealed in those passages where he speaks of the needs of Ireland, and the duty of his hearers to her. He appeals to them, the men of his own class, to shoulder their responsibilities of leadership. “Gentlemen, you have a country. The people among whom we were born, with whom we live, for whom, if our minds are in health, we have most sympathy, are those over whom we have power, power to make them wise, great, good.” “To act in politics is a matter of duty everywhere; here of necessity.”

“I do not fear that any of you will be found among Ireland’s foes. To her every energy should be consecrated. Were she prosperous, she would have many to serve her, though their hearts were cold in her cause. But it is because her people lieth down in misery and riseth to suffer, it is therefore you should be more deeply devoted.”

This Address made a profound impression. To men like Wallis it appeared that a new light had suddenly arisen in Ireland. And from that time Davis stepped into the lead among his contemporaries, not seeking it – for there was no man more modest – but naturally, as of right because other men would have him for leader. At this time also were formed some of those friendships which meant much for the country later, especially with John Blake Dillon.

There followed several attempts at journalism, and then came the decisive step which led to the starting of that paper through which Davis exercised his main influence upon the life of Ireland.

Another youthful journalist, Charles Gavan Duffy, had for some time contemplated a newspaper of a new kind. Once or twice he had met Davis and Dillon. In the spring of 1842 a chance meeting led to a walk in the Phoenix Park, and there, “sitting under a noble elm in the park, facing Kilmainham,” the three young men determined on the starting of a weekly paper which they should own and control, devoted to the national cause in the broadest sense of that word. Duffy, as the most experienced journalist, was to be editor. The other two were to

contribute, and enlist their friends and acquaintances to help. After some discussion of alternatives, they decided on its title – *The Nation*.

There is something inspiring in the resolve of these three young men – aged twenty-six, twenty-seven, and twenty-eight – unknown to their countrymen in general, and with little apparent resources, to start a paper which should liberate, unite, and revivify their country. There was in their enterprise the zest and eager confidence of youth. Many circumstances of the time were favourable to their endeavour.

Ireland was beginning to stir with new life. For some twenty years after the Act of Union our history is a blank. Then comes the tremendous campaign, led by Daniel O’Connell, for Catholic Emancipation, carried to success in the year 1829. It had been followed by his further campaign for the Repeal of the Union, though that had not yet aroused the same enthusiasm. There were other hopeful forces at work. Father Matthew was engaged on his Temperance crusade, one of the greatest efforts for moral and social reform ever carried out at any time in any country. There was a new desire for education, evidenced in the springing up of Temperance and Repeal reading rooms. There was a fresh interest in Ireland’s history, archaeology, and traditions. In all these things there was a re-awakening of the national spirit.

Of this awakening spirit *The Nation* newspaper became the mouthpiece, and the young men who wrote for it the exponents. They were a remarkable group, including, as well as the original trio, men like O’Hagan, later a Judge, Thomas M’Nevin and Pigot, Clarence Mangan, the poet, and others who became notable. Others, not entirely in political sympathy, like William Carleton, the novelist, and Maddyn, the historian, contributed from time to time. Someone gave to the group the nickname of “Young Ireland,” and, though disliked at first, the nickname stuck and was accepted.

It is appropriate here to point out how largely Young Ireland and *The Nation* were products of Trinity College. Two of the three original founders were graduates, as were a large proportion of their associates. These men stand in the direct tradition of Trinity Nationalism, a tradition long-lasting and continuous. That oft-repeated charge that our University has stood in opposition to every Irish Nationalist movement is perversely untrue to a large section of the facts. In the eighteenth century nearly all the great names are ours – Molyneux and Swift, Flood and Grattan, Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet; and though in the nineteenth century our proportion is less, we can claim men became Nationalists by force of repulsion, by reaction against the surrounding Conservatism and Unionism of Trinity. That explanation might serve in the case of one or two men; it cannot account for so numerous and long-extended a list. Figs do not spring from thistles; and if a thistle produces a single fig, we may regard it as a miracle or a mistake. But if a reputed thistle continues to produce a fine crop of figs year after year, as we are forced to the conclusion that its botanical classification must be revised.

I do not ignore the other and contrasted traditions which have also had their place in the history of our *Alma Mater*. But I do say that Trinity College has an equal right to claim those of her sons who have taken the Nationalist as those who have taken the Unionist side; and, in so far as they have been worthy sons, to honour and take pride in the memory of both.

The Nation made its first appearance on October 15th, 1842, and was immediately recognised as a potent factor in Irish affairs. It speaks well for the eagerness of the time that it should have sold out the whole of its first edition of 12,000 in a few hours, and that for years its

circulation should have maintained a high level. For it was not a popular paper, as we understand the term to-day. It was published at sixpence – a much larger sum then than now. Many of its sixteen large pages were taken up with dry reports of current events. But it was not the news columns which gave *The Nation* its significance, but rather its editorial comments, its literary section, and the multifarious articles dealing with all manners of subjects relating to Ireland.

A certain Judge of the day, on being asked what was the *tone* of the new paper, replied that it was “Wolfe Tone.” Politically it stood for the assertion of Ireland’s complete national rights. Repeal of the Union, the re-establishment of a native Irish Parliament, were the political objectives. But there is little discussion of constitutional problems, and it is plain that the writers were not particularly interested in the precise form which Ireland’s freedom should take. If they honoured the memory of Tone – the advocate of complete republicanism – they had more to say of men like Grattan – who stood for liberty without separation. There is much denunciation of English rule, much bitter protest against the injustices under which Ireland was suffering. Resistance on the model of the Volunteers of 1782 – revolt, if there be no other way are advocated. But there is remarkably little denunciation of Irishmen of other parties, for *The Nation* always held that Irish unity was essential both for the winning and the maintenance of Irish freedom.

To Young Ireland Nationalism meant something much greater than the carrying of Repeal or any other political measure. It meant the building of a nation, united and complete. It meant, indeed, a country free politically, but also a country where there was a freedom for every man in it – political, social, economic, religious freedom. It meant education and the development of all that was good in the national heritage. Above all, it meant Self-Reliance, Irishmen could only make their nation great by their own qualities, their own exertions.

In *The Nation* the bulk of Davis’s writing was done. His principal contributions, in prose and verse, have been collected and issued in a number of editions. In judging of them it is always to be remembered that they were hasty productions written for a weekly paper. The versatility displayed is striking. But whether Davis is discussing Irish archaeology or history, or advising on industrial or social developments, or giving hints on reading, or discussing affairs in France, in the United States, in India – all these varied subjects are brought into connexion by their bearing on the central aim of building the Irish nation.

In such writing there is much that is ephemeral, much that has been superseded. Irish history and archaeology, for example, were new subjects for study in Davis’s day. The field has since been parcelled out among experts, producing lengthy tomes. Davis would have heartily welcomed those tomes. Yet it is still often possible to get a better sense of the meaning - the feel – of Irish history from the hurried and sketchy papers of Davis than from the carefully documented studies of later writers. He would never have claimed to be an impartial historian. Impartial historians are few, and not to be found among men who are writing with a purpose. But he had two of the greatest qualities of a historian – insight and thoroughness. His longest historical disquisition – on the Irish parliament of 1689 – was highly praised by Lecky.

Some of his articles are decidedly modern in tone. He discusses industrial development; he favours the utilization of the water-power of the Shannon and other rivers. In language which might be used by the Irish Tourist Association he exhorts Irish tourists to visit their own

country first. He would conserve not merely Ireland's material, but her mental and spiritual resources. He writes on the "Absenteeism of Irish Genius" in words still applicable. Speaking of Irish writers, he says: "If, after having long and repeatedly deserved success, they are still neglected by a public too lazy to inquire, too vulgar to appreciate, or too stingy to sustain and reward such men, their hopes fall, their attention wanders, their union is shattered; they either abandon public literature altogether, or leave a country which they honoured in vain." "The first and greatest duty of an Irish patriot, then, is to aid in retaining its superior spirits. Men make a state. Great men make a great nation. Without them, opportunities for liberation will come and go unnoticed or unused. Without them liberation will come without honour, and resources exist without strength."

He urges the maintenance of the Irish language, in his time spoken habitually, as he says, by "half the people west of a line drawn from Derry to Waterford." A people without a language of its own is only half a nation. A nation should guard its language more than its territories – 'tis a surer barrier, and more important frontier, than fortress or river." Yet he inserts a warning which might be kept in mind to-day: "If an attempt were made to introduce Irish, either through the national schools or the courts of law, into the eastern side of the island, it would certainly fail, and the reaction might extinguish altogether."

He even touches upon the dangers of what would now be described as "evil literature." But, unlike most of those who today denounce the evil, he knows and insists upon the one real remedy – the making available of good literature and the spread of taste for it. He never tires of reiterating the need of Ireland for books, the duty of self-education. One of the most valuable things that he and the other writers of *The Nation* did was to place good, cheap books in the hands of the people. They strove to fulfil their own exhortation, "Educate that you may be free."

Davis's verse is an even more surprising phenomenon. It also was written, week by week, for the columns of *The Nation*. And he had never tried his hand at verse-writing till he began to do it for the paper. As John Mitchel afterwards described it, "From a calm, deliberate conviction that among other agencies for arousing national spirit, fresh, manly, vigorous national songs and ballads must by no means be neglected, he conscientiously set to work to manufacture the article wanted."

Such conditions are not favourable for the production of poetry of the first rank. Davis was not a poet in the sense that Mr. Yeats is a poet, or in the sense that his own contemporary, Sir Samuel Ferguson, was. To admirers of present-day poetical fashions his verse is unlikely to make a great appeal. In the first place, it is all perfectly intelligible. Davis says that in his mind in the simplest and most direct manner possible. He cared little for the mechanism of his verse, and very much for the message. Crudities and faults of style might easily be pointed out. "Freedom" is not a good rhyme with "need them; nor is "anthem" with "grant him"; and these all occur in the same verse. I regret to say also that Davis is partly responsible for giving currency to that atrocious rhyme of "Ireland" with "Sireland," now enshrined in the "Soldiers' Song." But Davis is less a modern poet than an Irish bard born out of due time. He wants to reach and be read by the man in the street or in the field, and to give him a pride in his country. For this purpose his verses are admirable. And Ireland has made them her own, so much her own that few of those who sing or repeat them can tell the name of their author. Songs like "A Nation Once Again" and "The West's Awake" have become

part of the national heritage. In the historical ballads like “Fontenoy” and the “Lament for Owen Roe” he shows that he can catch the spirit of stirring events in Irish history.

“Did they dare, did they dare, to slay Owen Roe O’Neill?”

“Yes, they slew with poison him they feared to meet with steel.”

“May God wither up their hearts! May their blood cease to flow!

May they walk in living death, who poisoned Owen Roe.”

And throughout there is inculcated again and again the lesson that the Irishmen of to-day must prove themselves worthy of their forefathers. Unable to make the laws of his country, Davis set himself to make the songs; and so he influenced the future of her history, politics and laws included.

Davis may be partly appreciated through his writings; but they do not give us the full measure of the man. He never thought of himself as a *litterateur*. He was by nature and inclination the man of action. He wrote not for the sake of writing, but to move men, to get things done. As Duffy expresses it, “He fired not rockets, but salvos of artillery.”

His work on *The Nation* was combined with constant activity in politics, especially in the Repeal Association. Here Daniel O’Connell occupied an unchallenged position of leadership. In the eyes of the world he *was* the Irish National Movement. But he was now growing old; he was surrounded by underlings of poor quality; and owing to the nature of his previous achievements, was regarded by many outside the party as a sectarian rather than a national leader. Davis and his associates respected and followed O’Connell: but they had a broader view of Irish nationality. They desired to win national liberty, not by a victory of one Irish section over another, but by a victory of all Irish sections combined over English domination.

That appeared a more feasible project then than it did in later years. Grattan’s Parliament, with its memories of Protestant nationalism; “Ninety-eight,” with its memories of Northern Presbyterian revolt, were within the recollection of men still living. The campaign for Roman Catholic Emancipation had inevitably dug a gulf between the religious sections, but it seemed practicable to fill the gulf. Davis might well expect other men to take the road he had taken himself. And many were, in fact attracted by the broad and tolerant nationalism expressed in *The Nation* as well as by its literary and educational programme. After two years’ work Davis could declare that the Irish Tories were becoming Nationalists, that the Whigs were beginning to favour a Federal system of self-government, and that, though not achieved, there was a real prospect of a united Irish demand. Some unexpected recruits, notable among them Smith O’Brien, had already come right over to the Repeal camp. “The elements of Irish nationality,” said Davis, “are not only combining – in fact, they are growing confluent in our minds.”

These tendencies *The Nation* sought to foster. It welcomed each approach towards the national programme, even if it fell short of acceptance. It insisted that there was room for all Irishmen, for all Irish tradition. Duffy’s insistence on printing “The Boyne Water” and other Orange songs in the collection of *Ballad Poetry of Ireland* is one small indication of the attitude. Davis expressed it in verse: -

*“So start not, Irish-born man,
If you’re to Ireland true,
We need not race, nor creed, nor clan,
We’ve hearts and hands for you.”*

But obstacles abounded. O’Connell’s leadership was often disconcerting. He had his own difficulties, especially that which has confronted every Irish National leader, in that he was seeking simultaneously to break away from England and to unite his countrymen, a section of whom valued the English connexion. Young Ireland had this difficulty in a greater degree, since they were both more ready to revolt against England than he was, and also more anxious that he conciliate all Irishmen. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that neither he nor they had thoroughly thought out their policy.

In the earlier part of the Repeal agitation – the campaign of monster meetings – they resolutely backed him. And when the Government proclaimed the meeting at Clontarf, and O’Connell submitted to the proclamation through fear of bloodshed, they were bitterly disappointed. They had reason. O’Connell was devoted to what would to-day be called “non-violence,” yet had encouraged the people to believe that, if the Government sought to suppress his movement, he would fight. He trusted, in fact, to bluffing the Government into acceptance of his demands, and the Government called his bluff. But if O’Connell can be censured for giving the impression that he would resist, and then not doing so – a fatal political blunder – it is also noteworthy that Young Ireland, if they seriously contemplated resistance, seem to have taken no active steps to prepare for it. Leaving aside the question of the ethics of resistance, to proclaim that an unarmed and unprepared nation will fight is political folly.

When O’Connell fell back at Clontarf, Young Ireland devoted themselves to the longer but sounder method of education, agitation, and the winning over of opponents. But O’Connell scarcely appreciated their policy. By unwise actions he several times alienated men who might have become allies, such as the Federalists. At other times he seemed ready to forego the national demands in return for lesser concessions from the English Whigs. His son, John O’Connell – an ambitious but mediocre young man – disliked and feared the weight which the Young Ireland group were securing. At a time when unity within the national movement was essential bickerings and suspicions arose. There came a definite difference of opinion with regard to the new colleges which the Government offered to found. Young Ireland, with their eagerness for education, welcomed the proposal; O’Connell, more zealous for the cause of religion than even the Bishops of his Church, denounced it as a “godless education.” Hints that Davis was irreligious, or opposed to the Roman Catholic Church, were put about in some quarters. And finally there came a scene of open dissension between O’Connell and Davis at a meeting of the Repeal Association. The actual cause – the College question – had nothing to do with Repeal. But it is plain that the divergence which then became apparent was due also to more fundamental differences and misunderstandings. For the moment it seemed that Young Ireland would have to withdraw from the Association. The immediate difficulty was, however, smoothed over, through cordial co-operation was made more difficult.

This was a severe set-back; but Davis and his associates had the resilience of youth. Their cause was gaining ground; they had their lives in front of them; they must have felt that the

future was in their hands. They set themselves to the task of building and rebuilding. And among them Davis is always the leader and the inspiration. We can picture him ever busy, now in *The Nation* office, now at the Repeal Association on Burgh Quay, again at his home at 61 (now 67) Lower Baggott Street; working out to-day some scheme of political agitation, the next some education project; encouraging one of his friends to write the biography of some famous Irishman, another to investigate economic conditions; inspiring each to do his best work, while doing the lion's share himself; with a genius for friendship; affectionate and beloved; modest and unassuming, but ever resolute and resourceful; a combination of idealism with practical capabilities such as is rarely found; and ever growing to the stature of a real national leader.

But his time of leadership was shorter than he or they could have dreamt. Suddenly Davis was stricken down with scarlatina, and in a few days he was dead, on September 16th, 1845. He had not yet reached his thirty-first birthday.

His death was received with an outburst of sorrow. Men of all parties united to give him a public funeral. To his friends and associates the loss seemed irreparable. "What Davis did," said O'Hagan, "was but a mere promise of the things to come, and he been spared to form the mind, and lift up the spirit of his countrymen."

The death of Davis at that early age is bound to occasion two questions: -

What would he have become if he had lived?

What difference would it have made to Ireland?

That he would have given us some literary works much beyond what he had actually achieved is certain. He had several important projects in view, including a History of Ireland. His political career is more difficult to conjecture, since no statesman can shape his course as he will. It is largely determined by events beyond his control. But considering how he had already won the confidence of men of all parties, and the undisputed leadership in his own, it is difficult not to imagine him an outstanding national statesman.

His pre-eminence in the Young Ireland group was only too apparent after his death took place. They had lost the leader who held them together. We may apply to them the words he wrote himself in the "Lament for Owen Roe": -

"But what, what were ye all to our darling who is gone?

The Rudder of our Ship was he, our Castle's corner stone!"

Thenceforward they found themselves in increasing difficulties. The quarrel with O'Connell deepened. There were divided counsels and splits within the group. The trend towards extreme measures of revolt became more definite, and the counter-measures of the Government more severe till an end came in the abortive rebellion of 1848. Within five years nearly all the members of that brilliant band of young men were dead, or in prison, or in exile. Davis might have saved that situation – though we cannot be certain. One thing he could not have prevented. In one sense he was *felix opportunitate mortis*, since he did not live to see the Great Famine and its results. That would have broken his heart.

But if Davis had survived and held his party together, he might have proved to be the leader for whom Ireland had been looking and has not found – even yet – the man big enough to

combine her parties and sections into a real united nation. In that case self-government might have come much earlier than it did, and in a manner much better for all, through the demand of a united nation, not by a party victory. Whether Davis could have accomplished this we know not. But he is the one man in the nineteenth century who might have proved big enough to do so. He knew that the greatest of political victories are not those in which you beat down the opponents of your policy, but those in which you win them over to your side.

But if Davis's name stands partly for hopes unfulfilled, his message has not been forgotten. His songs and writings have influenced Irishmen in each succeeding generation. In the Gaelic revival – in the large sense of that term – part of his teaching was worked out. Sinn Fein – using those words in their earlier and better sense – was founded upon his doctrine of self-reliance, and Arthur Griffith spoke of him as master. And in our own day part at least of his political aspirations have found fulfilment.

Ireland has assimilated part of Davis, but by no means assimilated the whole. The greater part of the country has achieved the freedom he sought in the political sense; and by no man was less of a doctrinaire than he as to the precise form which freedom should take. But we cannot doubt that the present settlement would have had one immense blot in his eyes – the division of the country. The Ireland he stood for was an Ireland all-embracing, united, complete. Nor can we doubt that he would have disliked other tendencies in our day, by which the conception of Irish nationality is being further narrowed.

An Ireland consisting of three-fourths of the country, which ignores the remaining fourth as if it were placed in the Antipodes; a “Gaelic Ireland,” in which those of other race or speech should be regarded as foreigners or interlopers; a “Catholic Ireland,” in which those who did not hold the faith of the majority (including many of the most notable names in our history, among them that of Davis himself) should be ignored or merely tolerated: all those conceptions he would have scorned and despised, as false to Ireland's history, as unworthy of Ireland's destiny as too narrow and too mean for the great Irish nation of his hopes.

His own all-embracing conception of nationality was plainly expressed:-

“What matter that at different shrines

We pray unto one God?

What matter that at different times

Our fathers won this sod?

“In fortune and in name we're bound

By stronger links than steel;

And neither can be safe nor sound

But in the other's weal.

“Here can the brown Phoenician,

The man of trade and toil –
Here came the proud Milesian,
A hungering for spoil;
And the Firbolg and the Cymry,
And the hard, enduring Dane,
And the iron Lords of Normandy,
With the Saxons in their train.

“And oh! It were a gallant deed
To show before mankind,
How every race and every creed
Might be by love combined –
Might be combined, yet not forget
The fountains whence they rose,
As, filled by many a rivulet,
The stately Shannon flows.”

No less do we need to learn to-day what Davis ever taught – that a free nation must be a nation of free men, that it cannot be built by the petty-minded, the rancorous, the slothful, the cowardly. It is in the moral qualities of her citizens that a nation finds her most essential resources:

“For freedom comes from God’s right hand,
And needs a godly train;
And righteous men must make our land
A nation once again.”

Here Davis teaches not merely by his writings, but by his own life and character. In the character sketch of him *The Nation* immediately after his death, four qualities are emphasized. They are truth, unselfishness, earnestness, and industry. They are qualities needed to-day in Ireland, as in every free nation.

A friend of Davis, who had caught the underlying spirit of his message, though not seeing eye to eye with him politically, has embodied his feelings on learning of Davis’s death in one of the most moving poems written in Ireland during the last century, the “Lament for Thomas Davis,” by Sir Samuel Ferguson. I quote some of the stanzas:-

“I walked through Ballinderry in the spring-time,

When the bud was on the tree;
And I said, in every fresh ploughed field beholding
The sowers striding free,
Scattering broadcast forth the corn in golden plenty
On the quick seed-clasping soil,
‘Even such, this day, among the fresh-stirred hearts of Erin,
Thomas Davis, is thy toil!’”

* * * * *

“Young husbandman of Erin’s fruitful seed time,
In the fresh track of danger’s plough!
Who will walk the heavy, toilsome, perilous furrow
Girt with freedom’s seed-sheets now?
Who will banish with the wholesome crop of knowledge
The flaunting weed and the bitter thorn,
Not that thou thyself art but a seed for hopeful planting
Against thy resurrection morn?”

* * * * *

“But my trust is strong in God, who made us brothers,
That He will not suffer those right hands,
Which thou hast joined in holier rites than wedlock,
To draw opposing brands.
Oh, many a tuneful tongue that thou mad’st vocal
Would lie cold and silent then;
And songless long once more should often-widowed Erin
Mourn the loss of her brave young men.

“Oh, brave young men, my love, my pride, my promise,
‘Tis on you my hopes are set
In manliness, in kindliness, in justice,
To make Erin a nation yet;

Self-respecting, self-relying, self-advancing,
In union or in severance, free and strong –
And if God grant this, then, under God, to Thomas Davis
Let the greater praise belong.”

Here in Davis’s and Ferguson’s own University, three generations after those words were written, we may yet say our Amen to that hope.