

Camp of the 28th Regiment Mass Vol
Near Falmouth Va June the 1st/63

My dear sir¹

It is under very peculiar circumstances that i now adress you First never having adressed you by letter before Secondly on acount of my present position which no doubt seems so unaccountable to you To you as the father of my dear wife i do not wonder that it should seem very very [sic] strange that i should volunteerly joine in the bloody strife of the battlefield And to her dear mother i know it must be still more painfull As a mothers love for her children is the most pure and enduring Her care for their happiness and welfare is the most anxious and painfull On Margarets acount it must seem to you all very misfortunate Especialy when looked at from such a distance as all circumstances whether good or bad become magnified in proportion to the distance we are from them It is but natural that you should feel so And with regard to my present position i can very well understand your feelings I know pretty well in what light people view soldiering in Irland Nor do i wonder that such a feeling exists For i consider an Irishman who volunterly enlists in the British service merits the utter contempt of his countrymen Seven centuries of persecution Chürches Convents and Monesteries plundered and destroyed Conviscated property Murdered patriots and inocent women and children slaughtered in cold blood With innumerable other barbarities of the most fiendish discription which from time to time have been comited in unfortunate Irland by that prostitute of nations that amalgamation of hipocrisy base treachry and debauchry called the British Government Should rise like a mountain over the despicable Irishman who would volunterly join her service with the possibility of living by any other means and crush him into eternal oblivion In this country it is very different Here we have a free government just laws and a Constitution which guarentees equal rights and priveleges to all Here thousands of the sons and daughters of Irland have come to seek a refuge from tyranny and persecution at home And thousands still continue to come Here they have an open field for industry And those who posses the abilitys can raise themselves to positions of honor and

emolument Here Irishmen and their decendents have a claim a stake in the nation and an interest in its prosperity Irishmen helped to free it from the yoke of Britain and to build on this soil the best and most liberal goverment in the world They have borne a willing and a formidable part in the subsequent wars of the country with England and Mexico And have rushed by thousands to the call of their adopted country in the present unfortunate struggle Their blood has stained every battlefield of this war Thousands of Irlands brave sons lay mouldering in the soil of Virgenia Missouri Maryland and Tenesee and in every state where a battle has been fought And should those brav lives be sacrafised in vain The heart of every true Irishman will answer no emphaticaly no They had a vital interest in the preservation of our national existence the perpetuation of our instutions and the free and untrameled exicution of our laws We who survive them have a double motive then to nerve us to action We have the same nationel political and social interests at stake not only for ourselves but for coming generations and the opressed of every nation for America was a comon asylum for all And we have the stern fact before us that thousands of our race have sacrafised their lives in this cause and should we now fail to suport it they would have faught bled and dyed in vain Would to God that every man in the loyel states felt truly and unselfishly how great an interest he has in the supression of this helish rebellion No rebellion the world ever saw was so fouly plotted nor originated from such slight cause If they could but see the great and vital consequences that now hang between victory and defeat they would rush like an avelanch upon this cursed rebellion and sweep it from the land But in this as in all civel wars base treachery selfish interests and incompetency are playing their part Had this been a war with any foreighn power it would have been ended in half the time The question has often been asked and not a few foolishly adhere to the idea[:] What have foreighn born citizens to do with this war they will say The agitation of the question which brought on this war originated and was kept up by a party composed almost wholly of native born citizens They were the cause of the war and let them fight it out Silly argument If you and i and a third

party are joint owners of a piece of property and you and him differ about the course to to [sic] be pursued in the management of that property he becomes exasperated and undertakes to destroy it rather than that you should manage it according to your own conception of what was best. Am I to stand by with folded arms and see him accomplish his designs without raising a hand in defence of my own rights. I should be false to both your interests and my own if I would. And so is the foreign born citizen who holds himself aloof from this struggle. False to his own and his fellow citizens interests for he would allow the third party to destroy his government and deprive himself and his fellow men of their rights and liberties. And this is especially true of Irishmen. America is Ireland's refuge. Ireland's last hope. Destroy this republic and her hopes are blasted. If Ireland is ever ever [sic] free the means to accomplish it must come from the shores of America. To the people of different nations who have emigrated here and become part of its native population Ireland owes nothing. In fact they are rather her debtors. But to this country Ireland owes a great deal. How many thousands have been rescued from the jaws of the poorhouse and from distress and privation by the savings of the industrious sons and more particularly by the daughters of Ireland who have emigrated here. It is impossible to estimate the amount of distress and misery that has been warded off from the down-trodden and tyrant-crushed people of many of the poorer districts of Ireland by this means. Without this field for their industry those noble-hearted girls could never have rendered this service to their friends. But would have been a burden on them at home to crush them still deeper in distress. Ireland is bound to this country by the strongest ties of blood and sympathy. Her sons have penetrated to the remotest parts of the union. They are interwoven like a network over the whole face of the country. Their influence is felt in every section and it is increasing and will continue until at no very distant day the Irish element will be the most powerful and influential in the land. When we are fighting for America we are fighting in the interest of Ireland striking a double blow cutting with a two-edged sword. For while we strike in defence of the rights of Irishmen here we are striking a blow at Ireland's enemy and oppressor.

England hates this country because of its growing power and greatness. She hates it for its republican liberty and she hates it because Irishmen have a home and a government here and a voice in the counsels of the nation that is growing stronger every day which bodes no good for her. England hates this country because we have out-rivaled her as a naval power and are fast out-riveling her as a commercial power. There is but one step more which a few years of peaceful progress will accomplish that is to surpass her as a manufacturing nation and England's star of ascendancy will have set to rise no more. Those are powerful motives with an Englishman when you touch his pocket you awaken his worst passions. And thus because England feared that America by her growing trade and commerce would draw the gold from her own coffers she has plotted for years to destroy her growing rival. It was in England that accursed agitation of the slavery question originated. Thousands of pounds have been collected yearly to carry it on. The originators of it found willing dupes in this country to carry out their program. Ambitious men and greedy politicians seized on it as a means by which to get themselves into influential and lucrative situations. Thus the agitation was kept up until it shook the country to its very foundation. Those are but a few of the many powerful motives that influence Irishmen to take up arms in defense of this government. Such motives as impelled those brave sons of Ireland Generals Shields² Muligan³ Corcoran⁴ and T. F. Meagher with many others talented and influential to unsheath their swords and expose themselves to all the hardships and dangers of war. Such motives have influenced me with the desire that I have felt from my childhood that I might one day have an opportunity when the right man to lead should be found and the proper time should arrive to strike a blow for the rights and liberty of Ireland. For such an opportunity this war is a school of instruction for Irishmen and if the day should arrive within ten years after this war is ended an army can be raised in this country that will strike terror to the Saxons' heart. It is just nine months since I joined the service. I am color sergeant of my regiment. I carry the green flag of Erin. All the Irish regiments carry the green flag as well as the national flag. I received the green flag on last St. Patrick's day. I feel proud.

to bear that emblem of Irlands pride and glory and it shall never kiss the dust while i have strenght to hold it I have but one regret and that is on my dear wifes acount she of course is lonesome and freted on my acount She is not however in any want of means for her suport during my absence her only trouble is about the dangers to which i am exposed but i am in no trouble on this acount I put my trust in God i know that he can protect me here as easily as if i was in a fortified tower with no enemy to asail it I hope this war will soon come to an end then we will be happy together once more and i hope at no very distant day to see you all nothing could give me greater pleasure then to go to see you and see that dear old land i love so much And now i must draw to a close for i am short of space and had to crowd this so that i fear you can scarcely read it And now my dear father and mother sisters and brothers acpt from my heart my best wishes my warmest love and cincerest prayers that God may shower his choicest blessings on you all May all happiness both spiritual and temporal be with you farewell

Yours sincerely
PETER WELSH

Mr Patrick Prendergast

1. This letter was addressed to Margaret's father, Patrick Prendergast, living in Ireland.

2. Born in Ireland, James Shields (1806-1879) came to the United States in 1826. Before the war he was very active in Democratic politics and served with distinction in the Mexican War as a brigadier general of Illinois volunteers. Appointed brigadier general of U. S. Volunteers in 1861, Shields campaigned in the Shenandoah Valley, winning recognition at Winchester (May 25, 1862) and Port Republic (June 9, 1862) before resigning his commission on March 28, 1863. *DAB*.

3. James A. Mulligan (1830-1864) was born in Utica, New York of Irish parents. Mulligan practiced law and edited a Roman Catholic newspaper called the *Western Tablet* before the war. During the war he was offered a commission as brigadier general of U. S. Volunteers, but he declined the promotion so he could remain in command of the Irish regiment, the 23rd Illinois, which he had raised. He was mortally

wounded at Winchester, Virginia on July 23, 1864 and died three days later in the enemy's hands. *Appletons' Cyclopaedia*.

4. Born in Ireland, Michael Corcoran (1827-1863) came to the United States in 1849. He joined the 69th New York State Militia as a private, but rose to command it before the war commenced. He led the 69th at First Bull Run, was wounded, and was captured by the Confederates. Finally exchanged in August 1862, he was commissioned brigadier general and organized the Corcoran Legion. He was killed in August 1863 when his horse fell on him while he was riding with General Meagher. *Appletons' Cyclopaedia*.

