

**LIFE OF
ROBERT EMMET**

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Life of Robert Emmet by D. J. O'Donoghue

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BY

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D. J. O'DONOGHUE,

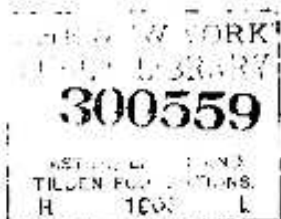
Author of

"LIFE OF CARLETON," "LIFE OF MANGAN,"
"FORTS OF IRELAND," ETC.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE approaching centenary of the death of Robert Emmet offers sufficient reason for the production of a new biography of one who fills so large a place in the memories of the Irish people. What seemed to be most required was a brief and direct account of his life rather than a book overloaded with unnecessary detail, and made prosy by interminable moralising as in the case of Madden's biography; one keeping rather to the strictly ascertained facts or to those which seem to be borne out by sufficient evidence to justify their inclusion, than an attempt to form glowing periods with no special reference to the admitted data of Emmet's life. The actual history of Emmet's attempt to accomplish a revolution has been somewhat obliterated by rhapsodical accounts of his career, and not a few readers have gathered from them an altogether erroneous impression of the real qualities of a romantic but hardly great leader. It would be absurd to pretend that Emmet had the genius of Wolfe Tone. His aims

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were perhaps purer, and he had a great capacity for inspiring affection among those who knew him, but he had little of the faculty of getting himself obeyed. His impulsiveness and generosity, and implicit belief in the motives of other men, were admirable traits in themselves, but they practically unfitted him for the *role* of the deliverer of a nation. At any rate, that is the point of view of this book. His picturesque and winning figure will always remain in the Irish heart, but it is essential to remember also his limitations. One may recognise fully the nobleness of his aims, and point with admiration to his aspirations, without thereby adopting the idea that he was capable of effecting a revolution in Ireland.

I have said, or at least implied, that Madden's biography of Emmet is heavy reading. Those who have attempted to get through it will bear me out in this implication. It is also frequently inaccurate, but that of course is not unnatural considering the difficult task he had to do. It is only just to say that to his labours we are largely indebted for the accumulation of material which exists upon the period of 1798-1803.

He was the pioneer, and his work is, like all pioneer work, rudely done. Some of his inaccuracies, however, were easily avoidable. A statement

of his has led to a serious error in the first chapter of this work. When writing it, I had not access to the Dublin Directories of the period of Emmet's birth, and therefore accepted Madden's declaration that Dr. Emmet removed to Stephen's Green *after* Robert's birth, and the consequent error that the latter was born in Molesworth Street, Dublin. Later opportunity, however, proved that the younger Emmet must have been born in the house in Stephen's Green, his father having unquestionably removed there prior to the year 1778. This important correction was not discovered until after the first chapter of the present work had been printed off.*

All writers seem to have accepted, in so simple a matter, the statement of Madden, and even Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet, in his massive "Memoirs of the Emmet Family," did not discover the mistake.

It is perhaps, necessary to say that the authorities chiefly consulted for the purposes of this work, have been, apart from the obvious Madden and other writers on the Irish side, Lecky's "History

* Since the above was written I observe that a writer (Mr. D. A. Quaid) has dealt with the subject very ably and exhaustively in the *United Irishman*, and has completely proved that Emmet was born in Stephen's Green.

of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century," the "Castlereagh Correspondence," and the "Cornwallis Correspondence," and a good deal of the pamphlet literature of the time—all, indeed, which seemed likely to throw any light on the subject, or helped to corroborate Madden and others in any detail. Dr. Emmet's work, already mentioned, was, of course, carefully consulted, and as it is an almost unknown book (only one hundred copies having been printed privately, for family purposes, and only two or three of these having found their way into Ireland), it is believed that this is the first time it has been utilized in any publication. All that can be claimed for the present little book is that it has placed on record all that is definitely known of Robert Emmet, and that it is an impartial account of one whose career and character have appealed more strongly to the Irish people in general than any figure in Irish history since Owen Roe and Sarsfield.

D. J. O'D.

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