

# EMMET AND HIS IDEALS.

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We are assembled here to-night to pay a tribute to one of Ireland's illustrious dead, and to renew our vows of allegiance to the cause and the principles for which he died.

It was not without some misgivings and a considerable amount of diffidence that I undertook to address you on 'Emmet and his Ideals.'

There is a sacredness attached to the subject that naturally deters one from approaching it unless he feels himself fully impressed with a due sense of its solemnity and national importance, and unless he is gifted with great powers of eloquence which I am not. I am not an orator, nor do I believe much in oratory. The rhetoric I would like to hear is the crack of the rifle and the rattle of the machine gun when directed against the power of England. I had the pleasure of listening and contributing to such rhetoric and of seeing its effects. It was more pleasing to my ear than the sweetest music, or than anything I could hear from any platform in Ireland, or even from my countrymen on the floor of the British House of Commons. My only apology then for addressing you is that I have ever been in complete sympathy with the ideals of Emmet, and that I always humbly, but I hope faithfully, lived up to the doctrine of Irish nationality which he followed and for which he cheerfully and heroically gave his young life. In that magnificent and fearless address which Emmet delivered from the dock, after his condemnation by the notorious and infamous Norbury, he appealed to his countrymen not to write his epitaph until Ireland had taken her place among the nations of the world. We cannot unfortunately write his epitaph yet; but we can without in any way violating his solemn dying injunction do something to propagate his principles and the principles of Tone in order, to hasten the day when we can write it. We can do something to keep his ideals and his memory alive in the hearts and minds of our countrymen, and we can take from those ideals

the lessons which he intended should be taken from them for the benefit of Ireland. By many writers of popular fiction Emmet is presented to us enveloped in the glamour of romance. His attachment for Miss Curran and not the solid and intensely national side of his character has been the theme for numerous stories by those hysterical scribblers who cater for the reader whose highest ideal of literature is the 'penny dreadful'; but we who revere his memory should insist on the setting before the youth of Ireland of the glorious ideals that consumed the soul of Emmet and dominated every action of his life. There is, however, one American writer, Washington Irving, who happened to be in Europe in 1803, and who while making Emmet's attachment for Miss Curran the theme of one of his sketches, speaks of him in the following terms:—

'His fate made a deep impression on public sympathy. He was so young, so intelligent, so generous, so brave, so everything that we are apt to like in a young man. His conduct under trial was so lofty and intrepid. The noble indignation with which he repelled the charge of treason against his country—the eloquent vindication of his name—and pathetic appeal to posterity in the hopeless hour of condemnation—all these entered deeply into every generous bosom, and even his enemies lamented the stern policy that dictated his execution.'

Washington Irving though did not know England or he would never say she lamented the execution of any Irishman.

Robert Emmet was the youngest brother of Thomas Addis Emmet, who was one of the most brilliant of the leaders of the United Irishmen. Young Emmet imbibed from the members of his family those principles and ideals which grew with his growth and strengthened with his years. His surroundings were in every way favourable to the development of his Nationalist principles, not alone in the home circle but in Trinity College, where he was a student, and which was then honey-combed with United Irish Clubs, by whose members he was trusted. He was twenty years of age when the Rising took place in 1798. He saw the incidents that led to the Rising. He witnessed its triumphs and its failures. He saw the atrocities perpetrated by a cowardly British soldiery on unoffending women and children, just as we saw them in South Africa during the late war. He

saw the disbandment of the Irish Volunteers. He saw the destruction of the Irish Parliament and the consequent destruction of Irish trade and commerce. He saw, so to speak, Ireland, his beloved country, being strangled to death in the snake-like coils of England, just as she is being crushed to-day by the same monster, and her life-blood sent gushing in torrents through the Cove of Cork to fatten the land of America, while our Irish Parliamentarians smilingly bespeak a friendly reception for England's King. All these things sank into the soul of Emmet, who was a cultured and high-spirited Irishman, and he determined to take action and, if possible, save his country. Expecting in 1803 that there would be a rupture between England and France, and an invasion of the former country, Emmet formed the daring and brilliant design of seizing Dublin Castle and establishing a provisional government. To the carrying out of this design he brought a well-trained and well-balanced mind. His career in Trinity College was marked by great distinction. We are told that 'he showed a great aptitude for the exact sciences, and his fondness for mathematics and chemistry continued during his life.' He was a close reasoner, a powerful debater, and a keen student of the art of warfare and of military tactics and engineering. Everything points to the fact that Emmet endeavoured to equip himself in every way to take part in or lead the Insurrection which he so brilliantly planned and all but carried into successful effect. The account which he has left us of his 'Plan of Insurrection' and his 'Manifesto of the Provisional Government' proves that there were in him the materials for a great military leader or a successful statesman. That Emmet was no crack-brained enthusiast but a man of great resource there is abundant evidence. Thomas Moore, the poet, who was a friend and fellow-student, has left us his impressions of him:

'Were I,' he says, 'to number, indeed, the men among all I have ever known, who appeared to me to combine in the greatest degree pure moral worth with intellectual power, I should amongst the highest of the few place Robert Emmet wholly free from the follies and frailties of youth—though how capable he was of devoted passion events afterwards proved—the pursuit of science, in which he eminently distinguished himself seemed at this time the only object that at all divided his thoughts with that enthusiasm for Irish freedom, which in him was a hereditary as well as a national feeling—himself being the second

martyr his father had given to the cause. Simple in his habits, and with a repose of look and manner indicating but little movement within, it was only when the spring was touched that set his feelings, and, through them, his intellect, in motion that he at all arose above the level of ordinary men.'

Drawingroom critics have written and spoken of the hopelessness and folly of Emmet's attempt, of his hair-brained scheme; and while recognizing his unselfishness and enthusiasm, have taken it for granted that his plans never had the possibility of success and were inevitably doomed to failure. There is no justification for this view. The colleagues of Emmet in his attempt to retrieve the fortunes of 1798 were no impracticable enthusiasts. They were men who had been through the fire of battle and who had heard the merry clash of steel kissing steel. Myles Byrne, who had learned the soldier's glorious trade with the pikemen of Wexford, and who later on was a distinguished officer under the Great Napoleon, expressed the opinion that Emmet's scheme was the wisest and most skilfully-planned of any in the history of Irish revolutionary movements. Thomas Russell, the colleague of Tone, and who was trained to the art of war, Michael Dwyer, the hero of the Wicklow mountains, Jimmy Hope, who fought by McCracken's side at Antrim, the Irish exiles on the continent—Arthur O'Connor, Thomas Addis Emmet, MacNevin, and others—were parties to his counsels and approved of the projects, which were formed after mature deliberation and consultation. The central point of his plans was, as you all know, to seize Dublin Castle, and so by striking at the heart of the seat of government to paralyze at one blow its operations in the provinces. A bold move like this must succeed altogether or succeed not at all. There can be no question of half-success. The day was lost not through any defect in the plans but through the culpable lack of discipline, the disobedience and the drunkenness of his followers. The evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1803, was the date fixed for the Rising in Dublin. Madden says that Emmet was dogged by informers and traitors, and that the authorities were perfectly aware of all his plans. I do not believe that the facts justify such a view. The explosion in Patrick Street was the first incident that aroused the suspicion and vigilance of the Government. We must look elsewhere for the cause of failure. Some of Emmet's chief advisers

began to get weak about the knees when they saw the hour of trial and danger draw near, and wanted the Rising delayed; others, like the messenger sent to Michael Dwyer, criminally neglected their duty; others deliberately endeavoured to thwart an immediate rising, like the man who misled the Kildare men into the belief that the rising had been postponed; others neglected to turn up at the appointed time, and, finally, Emmet himself, after the killing of Lord Kilwarden, got disgusted, and neglected to send up the rocket which was the signal agreed upon between Byrne and himself. This chapter of Irish history has its lessons for all of us. Let it never be forgotten that the disastrous failure that brought Emmet and Russell to the scaffold and broke the hearts of the surviving veterans of '98 was brought about, not by lack of skill or foresight in preparation, not by the treachery of informers, or the vigilance of the Government, but solely by the lack of discipline, the disobedience, the drunkenness and the unpunctuality of the followers on whom Emmet relied to carry his plans into effect. A man who needs to be stimulated by liquor in order to fight for his country's freedom is not worth having. Ruinous and criminal as are the consequences of excessive drinking, unpunctuality and disobedience to orders are still greater crimes. Let us individually and collectively, if we really love Ireland and wish to serve her, cultivate the virtues of self-discipline, obedience, sobriety, punctuality, and tolerance.

Emmet aimed at the complete freedom of Ireland from English domination. Other Irishmen have aimed at the same thing; but Emmet five years before saw an insurrection which was backed by a powerful organisation stamped out and the country drenched in blood; yet he heroically determined to try again, and by one of the most brilliantly-devised schemes ever conceived almost succeeded. Cannot my young countrymen take a lesson from these few facts which I have put before them with regard to Emmet's Rising, and is there not something in these facts which they could try to emulate. Let them remember that passage in his dying speech in which he says, 'When my spirit shall have joined the bands of martyred heroes who have shed their blood on the scaffold and in the field in defence of their country, this is my hope, that my memory and name may serve to animate those who may survive me.' Though foully done to death nearly 108 years ago, thank

God his memory and name have served to animate those who came after him, and will continue to animate future generations until 'Ireland a nation can build him a tomb.' In the struggle to build up an Irish nation I would ask our Orange brethren to bear in mind Emmet's own words that 'we war not against property—we war against no religious sect—we war not against past opinions or prejudices—we war against English dominion.'

Followers of Emmet, like myself, are sometimes accused of foolishly urging our people to appeal to arms. That is not true now, nor has it ever been true of us. We have lamented, and still do lament the useless waste of Irish money on the numerous parliamentary movements, cost of elections, fruitless law expenses, and such like vagaries. Our contention is that if all this countless wealth that has been thrown away from Emmet's time to our own had been husbanded, had been employed in maintaining what was left of our industries, in educating our people, and purchasing arms ready to be put into the hands of Young Ireland when the occasion arose, that when the Boer war broke out we should have been in a position to add a new Republic to the Republics of the world instead of witnessing the destruction of two of them which stood as models of what good Republics should be. There are Irishmen who quite honestly believe that it would be madness to dream of fighting England under any circumstances and that there is no hope for this country except through the good graces of the English Parliament and people. I, who have been privileged to see some thousands of highly-trained British soldiers fleeing like a flock of sheep before the rifles of a few hundred farmers know differently. Moreover, with many thousands of my countrymen, I am of the opinion that England will never concede anything that Ireland can accept unless she be forced to it against her will by all the pressure we can exert against her. But we have no deep-rooted quarrel with any section of our countrymen that honestly think otherwise, and who believe that by the sweet persuasion of their honeyed eloquence they can induce England to grant us freedom. We regret that they cannot see eye to eye with us; we would like to convince them that they would do better by their country in utilizing their energy and undoubted ability in some other sphere than by

seriously hoping they may free Ireland by talk. However, we men who are called 'advanced' desire above all one thing, and that is to avoid a quarrel with any section of our countrymen while the fight with England goes on. But while we seek no quarrel we are prepared to take up any that may be forced upon us. We are not prepared to flinch one inch from the policy that has been sanctified by the blood of a thousand martyrs.

A foreign ruler is to land on our shores a few months hence to receive the grovelling homage of his garrison, and to listen to the whining adulation of place-hunters. We are seldom or ever without some epidemic in Ireland—sometimes it is typhoid fever, again it may be the measles or the whooping cough—now it is a royal visit. No doubt, there will be plenty of shoneens found in the country to advocate the presenting of an address to this stranger King, but the young men of Ireland must make their power felt, and do their utmost to prevent any so-called Nationalist, no matter how powerful or influential he may be, from prostituting the name of Ireland, and misrepresenting the feelings of the manhood of our race. When this gentleman visits Dublin, girt around with steel, we must try and force the conviction on him and on his advisers that at last we have come to the knowledge that God created us the equals at least of every race on earth, and that we will willingly accept no ruler except one of our own free and untrammelled choosing. We will, of course, be told that Home Rule will follow in the footsteps of this foreign King. Let us reserve our gratitude for the gift until we receive it. If they mean to give Home Rule why do they not do so before this royal visit takes place? All history teaches us to place no reliance on Saxon faith. For political reasons it has become advisable for the King of England to show that he rules over an Empire that is united and ready to work in harmony throughout the world at the bidding of his ministers. That is why he comes to our shores; that is why promises are held out to us; that is why so many who have given themselves out as Irish patriots now—bought by English hold and promises—advocate a friendly reception to the English monarch. Once this visit is an accomplished fact there will remain no earthly reason for fulfilling the promises so freely given. When did English statesmen ever hesitate to break their most

solemnly plighted oath when given to the mere Irish? But granting that they do give us Home Rule, it would in no way satisfy our aspirations and our demands. Home Rule is not the be-all and end-all of our hopes.

The necessity of placating Ireland is clearly shown by a speech made a week or so ago in the English House of Commons by a Cabinet Minister—the commander-in-chief of the army at the famous battle of Stepney. Alluding to the international advantage England would gain by having a contented Ireland at her side, he said:—

‘If we can rally the Irish nation round the monarchy, if we can secure that good government which Mr. Gladstone desired in his generation, then we shall have gained an advantage for the British Empire equal to many divisions of the fleet and the army.’

Yes, they see the necessity now of trying to stifle our manhood with a beggarly mess of porridge, and just at the same time, by the way, they propose to spend 68 millions on their Army and Navy. Of course, the mere fact that Germany intends to spend nearly an equal amount on her Army and Navy has got anything to do with England’s professions of friendship for Ireland. However, the wrongs of centuries are not going to be wiped out or forgotten in a day simply because some English statesmen now belatedly think that it is once more to England’s interest to conciliate and humbug us. If Ireland was an independent nation it might be to her interest to have a treaty with England, but we must go into the business with free hands. We have been told that the friendship of Ireland is worth several divisions of England’s army and fleet. It is; but how much more would she recognise its value if we could cut off or materially reduce the number of our people who at present voluntarily take service with her armed forces, and thus give their aid and their lives towards the enslavement of their motherland. Why should the stalwart sons of Nationalist tenant farmers police this land for a foreign Government? Why should so many foolish Irishmen enter into the service of the most cowardly and degraded army in the world? Why should Irishmen fight and win the battles of the country that has always trampled on their just aspirations? When I was a boy there was a great agitation raging throughout the land under the motto, ‘No Rents.’ I would like to

suggest to the youth of Ireland another agitation under a motto as brief as 'No Rents,' namely, 'No Recruits.' Let it ring out clear and high: 'No Recruits for England,' 'No Recruits' for the cowardly nation whose sons unaided have never been able to win a battle against another armed nation. Let the army that conquered at Stepney—the army that burned to death two unknown men—do its own fighting in the next war, and if you do, I can promise you that the war will be of very short duration. It is time for Irishmen to learn that they owe neither duty nor allegiance to England. If they are anxious to fight why do they not fight for their country's freedom? But what about the mighty English Navy say the wiseacres? My friends, that Navy has not been tried in recent times, and when it is tried I have not the faintest doubt but that it will prove as rotten and as incompetent as the great British Army proved itself to be on the battlefields of South Africa. They have got the ships, 'tis true; but where are the men? If war broke out to-morrow between Germany and England or between America and England the English Fleet would be driven off the seas inside six months. As you are aware, the manoeuvres that take place each year never pass over without several 'regrettable incidents.' When such things occur in times of peace, what would it be like when the American or the German guns were turned on them, and when, to add to their difficulties, the man in the airship would be dropping dynamite on their decks. Why, they would be so panic-stricken that they would ram one another in their haste to run away. The world would then learn what the Boers discovered during the late war—that the colour of the National flag of England was not red, but white. England's days are nearly numbered. Fifty years hence there will be nothing left of her Empire but an evil memory. Germany and America are fast becoming her masters at sea; Canada is deserting her; South Africa will shortly be a vast Republic; Australia needs her not; and India and Ireland hate her, and are longing for the day when they will be strong enough to throw off her yoke. A great European war in which England will have to fight for her very existence, cannot be delayed many more years, and Irishmen must then be prepared to fight for their freedom, or else history will recall that after a long, weary struggle carried on for centuries against overwhelming odds that the

men of this generation were unworthy of Emmet, unworthy of the men who had gone before them, and that they did not deserve to be free because they were unwilling to risk their lives in order to obtain that freedom.

I for one, though, have still got confidence in the grit, the pluck, and the determination of my countrymen to avail themselves of the first opportunity that presents itself of striking a blow for freedom.

Emmet's epitaph must be written in letters of blood. Our martyrs have not died in vain. This land is ours by every right of God and man, and no outside power has any right whatever here. No power on God's earth can prevent us from obtaining our freedom if we only act together and fight together with courage and determination.

'O, then, never fear for Ireland, boys, for she has soldiers still,  
For Rory's boys are in the wood and Remy's on the hill.'