

New book explores Michael Davitt's life after the Land League

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THERE are few lives that enjoy a second act, but in the case of Michael Davitt, we can say he had a second and even a third. And what a cast of characters to populate them: Leon Tolstoy, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Teddy Roosevelt, Randolph Hearst (role model for Citizen Kane) and socialist Eleanor Marx. Even Lady Agatha Russell, widow of the Liberal Prime Minister Earl Russell, who had ruled Ireland during the Famine was friendly with the son of an evicted tenant. The 'father of the Land League' is rightly remembered for his work and leadership during the Land War of the 1870's and early 1880's, but the truly remarkable, eclectic and extensive activities of his mature years – which range from the Rockies to Russia geographically, and include counter espionage, journalism, penal reform, women's rights, anti-imperialism and romance in terms of activity – remain largely in the shade.

Carla King's new comprehensive biography of the Straide man, entitled 'Michael Davitt – After The Land League 1882-1906', more than a decade in preparation and writing, uncovers Davitt above and beyond the Land League, focusing particularly on the 24 years between his leadership of the Land League and his death in 1906.

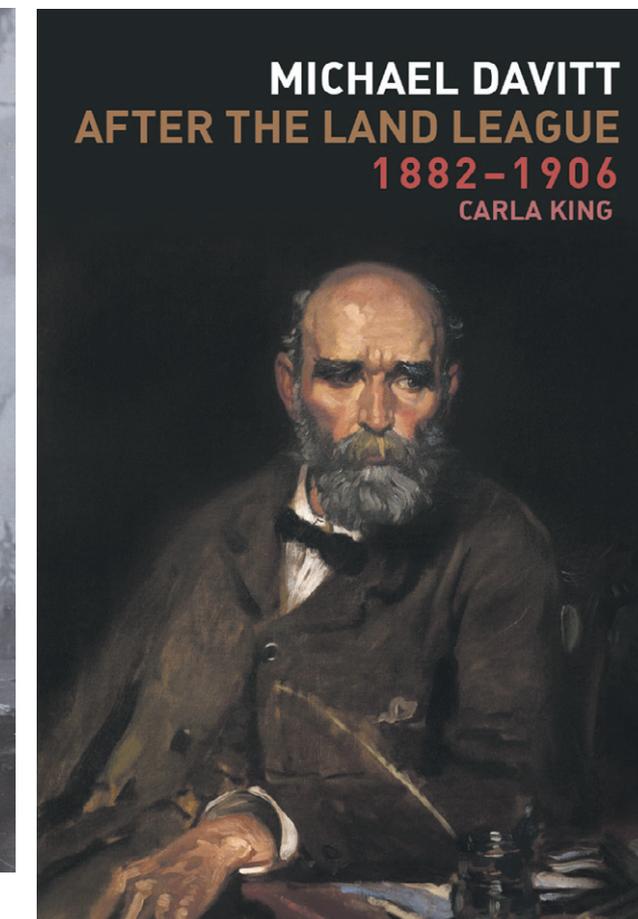
Michael Davitt's early life and role in the Land League have been well-served by historians;



▲ **EXPEDITION** Davitt in a fur coat in Russia, 1905. Pic courtesy of The Board of Trinity College Dublin

however, his mature years remain largely in the shade. 'Michael Davitt - After the Land League' brings Davitt's later story back into the light as Dr Carla King unveils the leading themes in Davitt's life post Land League: education, democracy, prison reform, imperialism, the advancement of women and his unstinting support for the labour movement. Davitt was a parlia-

mentarian, a journalist, an advocate for penal reform, a champion of human rights before the concept even became fully defined. He even almost bankrupted The Times of London. His continued dedication to the land question and Irish affairs never faltered, as evidenced by his focus on Home Rule, the Plan of Campaign and the United Irish League.



EXTENSIVE TRAVELLER

IN an era that predates air travel and mass communication, the extent of his travels and advocacy is startling. Davitt journeyed across Western Europe to the United States, the Middle East, Russia, and Australia, championing the rights of indigenous peoples, highlighting religious persecution, and seek-

ing to advance the causes of the marginalised and disenfranchised. His passion for international affairs from Anglo-American relations, British imperialism to the Boer War and Russia's treatment of its Jewish population are all here, rich in the telling. King has painstakingly studied thousands of Davitt's letters, as well as his books, journalism and reports

to deliver an utterly compelling and comprehensive representation of an extraordinary man. Often overlooked in surveys of 20th century history, Davitt gave voice to a strand of radical, secular, anti-imperialist nationalism that was far ahead of its time.

THE WRITER

CARLA King was for many years a Lecturer in Modern History at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (now Dublin City University). She has published various works relating to Davitt, including Michael Davitt: Collected Writings, 1868-1906 (2001); Michael Davitt, Jottings in Solitary (2003); and co-edited with WJ McCormack, John Devoy's Michael Davitt: From the Gaelic American (2008). She has also contributed articles on Davitt to scholarly and popular journals. Indeed, Carla contributed an article to our own 'Davitt Remembered' supplement which we produced to mark the 100th year anniversary of the death of one of Mayo's greatest sons back in 2006.

Carla is daughter of the late Justin Keating, TD, and granddaughter of artist Seán Keating, her grandmother's family came from Kishinev (in Moldova), scene of the Russina pogrom about which Davitt wrote.

MORE The new book, which features 16 pages of rare and previously unpublished images, is available in bookshops, and from www.ucdpress.ie. RRP is €50.

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