

THE FATHER OF THE LAND LEAGUE.



Y future generations, the present period of Irish history, will certainly be regarded as one of great importance. Its importance consists not only in being a period of transition from thralldom to freedom, during which all other great events of the world are eclipsed by this final struggle of the Irish nation, fighting for her national rights, but also in the fact that in this struggle are engaged some of the proudest names that adorn the political history of mankind

Yes, when generations shall have come and gone, and the memory of the living shall have faded away in the long lapse of ages, if we are to judge from the history of the past, we are surely justified in conjecturing that, the names of the great Irish leaders of the present period will still live green, not only in the memory of their own nation, but even in the memory of the world. We have an O'Connell, who successfully championed the cause of the true Faith, against an odious system of legalized religious intolerance; a Parnell, who successfully championed the cause of the freedom of his fatherland against the tyranny of the Saxon power; and a Davitt, whose grand struggle so well begun, gives fair promise, in its happy consummation, to end forever the frightful outrages of heartless landlords against a long oppressed people. Yes, the name of Michael Davitt deserves to live in the hearts of the Irish people for ages and ages to come, for it was he who inaugurated this warfare against the greatest enemies of their homes, against landlordism.

The early years of this national hero, were not spent, as might be supposed, in great institutions of learning to prepare him for the onerous task of his after life. No, but the school of stern, aye harsh experience tutored him and thoroughly prepared him for it.

He first saw the light of day in a little place known as Straide, Co. Mayo, in 1846. His father was a very respectable and industrious farmer. But these were days of gloom and sorrow for many an Irish heart, and such indeed they proved to be for the Davitt family, for early in the year 1853, their landlord, with the characteristic clemency of his class in Ireland, cast them out on the roadside because they were unable to do an impossibility, to give him more money for rent than could be obtained from the fruits of the soil on which they lived. This was the first lesson young Davitt received to prepare him for the great fight he would afterwards engage in, and though he was then a child of tender years, this was a lesson he could never forget.

The Davitt family, crossed over to England, settled down in Lancashire, in a place called Haslingden. Here the father found employment in the insurance business, while the youthful Michael busied himself at some sort of light work in a cotton mill. While fulfilling his duties here, he one day met with a severe accident, and through it lost his right arm. This probably proved a piece of good fortune to him, for while he was unable to work, he had an opportunity to attend school. He afterwards learned the art of printing and in the meantime tried by every means possible to increase his yet scanty store of knowledge.

When a mere boy, in his teens, he manifested a lively interest in the political affairs of the land of his birth, and contributed articles both in prose and verse to the *Irish People*, the then official organ of the Fenian Movement in Ireland. Later he joined this organization and devoted himself heart and hand to its interests. This led to his arrest in 1870. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to fifteen years peral servitude. The treatment he received during this term of his incarceration was worse than brutal. He lived it through however, and was liberated