

MICHAEL DAVITT

The cable has just announced the death in Dublin of Michael Davitt. Michael Davitt was perhaps, all things considered, the most able living Irish leader. Although in recent years he has remained out of Parliament voluntarily, nevertheless his influence with the Irish party and with the Irish people has remained greater than that of any other one person. He knew the story of Irish oppression from actual experience. He was born in the hamlet of Straide, in the County of Mayo, in the year 1846, in the very darkest days of his nation's agony. He early received a bitter and dreadful lesson in the wrongs that the Irish tenants were compelled to suffer. When a child of seven years he witnessed his father and mother and two sisters flung out on the roadside by the landlord and the humble cottage that they had called home burned to the ground. His father was an intelligent, hard-working tenant who had managed, somehow, to keep his family alive through the famine years only to be utterly ruined by the rent laws. The evicted tenant and his family left Ireland and settled in Lancashire, England. The boy Michael early went to work in a mill where his arm was so injured by being caught in the machinery that it had to be amputated. This accident was responsible, no doubt, in a large measure for changing the course of his life. No longer able to work at manual labour, he was forced to supplement his scanty education by hard and continued study and he soon gained a reputation in literature and politics. At the age of eighteen he was contributing poetry to the official organ of the Fenian movement, the "Irish People." His activity made him a marked man for the government informers. He escaped until the year 1870, when he was arrested in London, charged with being an agent for the exploded Fenian movement. That movement had long ceased to exist but Davitt was convicted and sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude. For seven years he endured the horrors of the prisons of that day and was compelled to associate with criminals of the most hardened and loathsome character. In 1878 he was pardoned with the understanding that he should leave the country, that being the usual condition of amnesty for political prisoners of that day. On his arrival in Dublin more than a hundred thousand people with bands and banners turned out to meet him. Even that joyous occasion brought bitterness to Davitt for his comrade McCarthy, who had served with him in prison, overcome with the joy of freedom, suddenly died. Davitt then paid a short visit to his native country and soon left for the United States, where his mother and sister then resided. He was met in this country with an enthusiastic greeting. The leaders of the old Fenian movement crowded about him. They had divided into factions, but they all held Davitt in high esteem and were anxious to know what course he would take. Davitt, although an aggressive fighter, was always a practical leader. He possessed all the brilliancy of other Irish leaders, but in addition thereto he possessed more poise than most of them. Davitt clearly saw that Fenianism had failed. He realized that Home Rule as an abstract question could bring no immediate relief to his stricken country. The experience of his family when he was a lad taught him at an early age the most vital difficulty in Ireland was the land question. He conceived the idea of combining all the Irish movements Parliamentary and non-Parliamentary, Home Rule and non-Home Rule, Fenian and non-Fenian, into one great movement for the liberation of the Irish tenants from the thralldom under which they labored. He withheld his support from all existing movements and boldly undertook a movement for sweeping away the system known as Irish landlordism, and for the creation of national peasant proprietary. His cry was that the people of Ireland should be made the owners of the land of Ireland. His plan was to carry on a campaign of agitation. He was wise enough to understand that the Irish people could gain nothing through the sword. Some of the Fenian leaders vehemently opposed him because he opposed the employment of force. The question that Davitt had to contend with in 1878 and 1879 was much the same question that John Redmond is now contending with. There were Home Rulers in those days who opposed seeing their movement put in the background for this new land movement, but Davitt faced all difficulties bravely. After much hard labor he determined to raise the standard of his campaign in his native county, and at a point almost on the site where

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thirty years before his father's home had stood. The first meeting was held on the 28th of April, 1879, at Irish-town. Throughout the summer similar meetings were held in the district, and on the 21st day of October, in response to a circular from Parnell and Davitt, a convention of tenant farmer delegates was held in the city of Dublin. This was the beginning of the Irish National Land League, and the campaign launched on that day by Michael Davitt has held the attention of the English government for the past thirty-five years. Davitt was the father of the Irish Land League, and to him more than any other one person, is due the fact that Irish farmers are now becoming the owners of Irish soil.

In 1880 Davitt again came to the United States to establish a branch of the League. British detectives followed him in his pilgrimage from New York to San Francisco, and carefully noted every word that he uttered. The result was that when he returned to Ireland in 1881 he was again arrested and sent back to penal servitude. After serving about a year he was again liberated, only to be again arrested in 1883. While he was a convict in Portland prison in 1882 he was first elected to Parliament from County Meath, but the House of Commons, by a vote, promptly declared him disqualified. After he was released for the third time, he was asked by several Irish constituencies to stand for election, but he refused on the ground that it was impossible for him to take the oath of allegiance to the British government, and it was not until 1891 that he could be induced to forego his prejudices in this respect. From that time on until 1899 he represented some Irish constituency in Parliament. In October, 1899, he resigned his seat in a ringing speech, in which he declared that he could not represent a government that carried on such an unholy war as the British Government was then waging against the Boers. From that time on he gave his entire attention to travel and writing. Mr. Davitt earned his living during all his public career chiefly by journalistic and other literary work. While in Portland prison he wrote "Leaves from a Prison Diary," which was widely read. In 1891 appeared his "Defence of the Land League," and just recently his history of the Boer War has come from the press.

Michael Davitt will rank as one of the greatest patriots of history. Among many famous men who have struggled for Irish nationality he will take high rank. His whole career has been given up to a fight in behalf of the lowly and oppressed. He was not a politician for revenue. Once he was compelled to resign his seat in Parliament because of bankruptcy proceedings against him. No man ever fought more courageously under more adverse circumstances. Through years of painful suffering and imprisonment he fought on unflinchingly and without yielding. The object of his fight was the betterment of his own people at home and the English democracy as well. The working people of England

will mourn his death as much as the Irish peasantry. His friend, John F. Finerty of Chicago, voices the sentiment of those interested in the Irish movement on this side of the Atlantic, when he says: "No greater loss to Ireland has occurred since the death of Parnell, and no man was more devoted to liberty and humanity than he. In that respect he resembled O'Connell. Davitt was quite as popular with the British democracy as with the Irish. The working people of England adored him, feeling that he stood as much for them as for Ireland. He has done the cause of Ireland immeasurable good, and to the tenant farmers his service was the greatest ever rendered. Eventually the Irish people will become the owners of their soil, and they will owe this chiefly to Michael Davitt. The full measure of his service will not be appreciated until twenty-five or fifty years hence, when Ireland has become prosperous and free."—*The Irish Standard.*

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THE REAR GUARD

He strolls in to Mass at the "Sanctus," Or may be a moment before; And lest he should bother his neighbors, He drops on one knee at the door.

Good seats near the altar are vacant, In fact there is room and to spare; But why should he push himself forward? He'd be so conspicuous there.

He doesn't look up at the altar, But keeps his gaze bent on the floor; We notice him yawning a little, As though it all were a bore.

He squats for the last benediction, And then, ere the service is through, We look for him there in the back-ground And find he has melted from view.

So strange! Now we fancied we saw him Last night at the vaudeville show; It seems to us then he was fighting To get in the very first row.

He must have been there before seven— Oh, surely some minutes before; He headed the line that was waiting Outside the gallery door.

And, when the door opened good gracious! How active he was in the race Upstairs, and then over the benches And down to the very front place.

My! how he applauded the singing, And laughed at the jokes that were cracked; His eyes never leaving the footlights, Transfixed till the very last act.

This can't be the same man this morning, This slowest and dullest of chaps; We must have seen some other fellow Last evening—his brother, perhaps.

T. A. Daly.
In Catholic Standard & Times.

Intangible Taxes in Texas

The people of Texas wonder why the nation is so perturbed about regulating railroad rates. It is one of their many distinctions that they regulate not only the rates, but the railroads themselves. Nor do they fear the growth of the American plutocracy. "It is just as easy to manage the corporations as to have the corporations manage you," say the legislators from the rice fields, the "piney woods" and the "llano estacado," the bustling cities and the mesquite grown ranges, and even from "the forks of the creeks and the heads of the canyons." Indeed, after taxing every visible bit of corporation property in Texas—and some additional miles of railroad that projected over the border—the last Legislature, after deep and subtle thought, somewhat hard to explain, but really very enlightened, passed an "intangible tax law." This taxes all corporation values that one cannot see or put one's hand on.—*The World's Work.*

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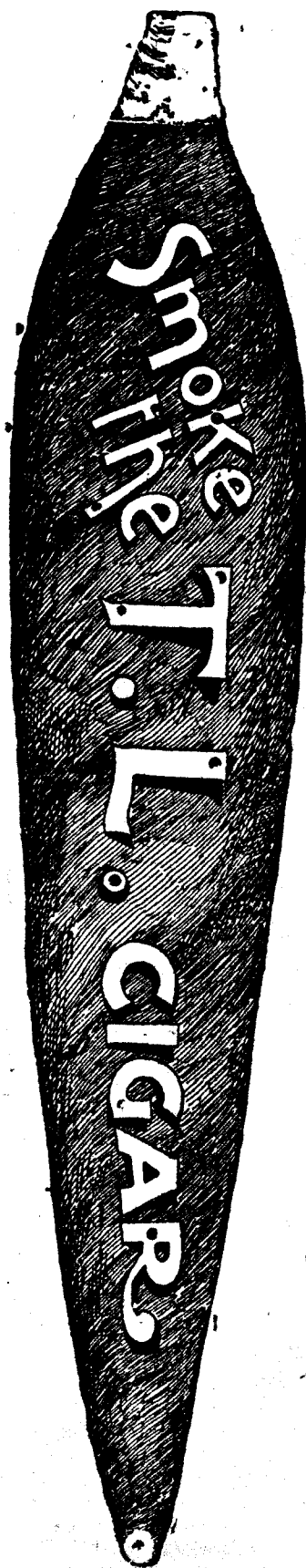
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