Eviction scene in the West of Ireland 1879, by Michael Rynne

The smaller illustration below is a contemporary graphic of a poor tenant farmer’s cottage during the same period.

DAWN pamphlet

This pamphlet appeared as a special supplement in DAWN 50. Further copies available at 10p postfree from DAWN, 168 Rathgar Road, Dublin 6, Ireland
On 20 April 1879 a huge demonstration of tenant farmers was held in the village of Irishtown in County Mayo in the West of Ireland. About 7,000 took part in this event. As a result the rents due to the estate of a deceased brother of Queen Victoria were later reduced by 1/3. One of the organisers of this peaceful and effective protest was the son of a former tenant farmer, Michael Davitt.

The success of the Irishtown meeting convinced Charles Stewart Parnell that he should get involved in the land agitation. On 1 June Parnell addressed the land meeting in Westport. On 16 August Davitt founded the National Land League of Mayo in the town of Castlebar. Then following a public meeting in Dublin on 23 October the Irish National Land League was formed. Fenian leaders like John Devoy and Michael Davitt himself, referred to the leadership of Parnell, who was appointed President of the Land League. But the real credit for founding and mobilizing the Land League must be given to Davitt.

This short pamphlet has been prepared to mark the anniversary of the founding of the Land League. Those involved in the preparation of the pamphlet are particularly interested in the non-violent aspects of Davitt's life and thought. For more details about the League itself and the parliamentary activities which accompanied it the reader is referred to several standard histories of the period.

This pamphlet is not written in a naïve spirit of hero worship. Michael Davitt was indeed a most important figure in the troubled agrarian history of nineteenth century Ireland, and perhaps in the early history of the modern British Labour Movement. Davitt had outstanding human qualities, yet he had several faults, like many Irish nationalists who sympathized with the Boer cause during the years 1899-1902 he seems to have been indifferent to the racist attitudes of the Boers towards the 'Kaffir' population of South Africa. Davitt was not a racist by nature. He hated British imperialism and the British upper classes who controlled the Empire. Yet he liked the British people on the whole. He shared the same urban background as his fellow English, Welsh, Scottish and Ulster working class activists. He had a high reputation among British labour and liberal societies. Davitt calls the Kaffirs who supported the English side in the war 'savages'. But in his travel book on Australia he shows considerable human sympathy for the Aborigines and the Maoris. Such carefully written comments about non-white peoples.

Another controversial trait was his attitude to non-violence. His terrible prison experiences did not make him hate all things British. For he realized that members of the British poor also suffered under the same prison system. So it is to alleviate the plight of British prisoners by presenting prison reform after his release on ticket-of-leave in 1877. Yet he did hate the upper classes who caused such misery to his own country and to the British prisoners. He hated unscrupulous and violent. He was particularly appalled by the agrarian outrages against people, property and animals. (Some of these outrages were as vindictive and inexplicable as later events in the rural areas of Kenya during the Mau Mau emergency, or the more recent Jallianwala atrocities in rural India - yet such violence sometimes had method in the madness, and was committed against a background of real, economic and political grievances.)

But did Davitt in his secret also hope for a day when there would be mass disestablished violence? In a subtle essay Justin horniman assessed what would happen, and concludes that Davitt, was contradictory in his attitude, yet "Davitt, at heart, was a non-violent man caught in a web of violence."

Another fault of Davitt was his political modesty. He had the judgment to see that Parnell was the greatest political leader the Irish people would have for several decades, and he, like so many of his friends, deferred automatically to Parnell's magnificence. This modesty was, after the Kilmarnock Treaty of 1886, to allow the dismantling of the land agitation as Parnell switched the Irish social scene totally towards the Parliamentary stage. If Davitt had asserted himself his radical ideas on land ownership might have gained acceptance among the landless labourers. As events transpired rural Ireland was to become a country of conservative peasant proprietors. Many also owed their ownership of fifty or more acres to the efforts of Davitt and the Land League were to pay political and financial benefits labourers during the first sixty years of this century - surely not the kind of rural transformation envisaged by Davitt. Under R.U.C. and nationalist pressure, rural Ireland is becoming dominated today by large cattle ranches in some areas and by large village offices in others, and urban workers have become used to present the low taxes being paid to the State by the well-to-do in the agricultural sector.

We will not attempt to assess Davitt's place in Irish and British History. We have only looked at the generally accessible published sources. It is certain that Davitt's contribution to the historian who has ignored or played down by historians and most school textbook writers. Clearly a detailed analytical history of Davitt's life and times is called for. In a footnote on page 111 of the T.P. Lyons paperbacks edition of that squeezing biography of Parnell the historian F.S.L. Lyons informs us that Professor T.W. Moody has been working on a history of Davitt and the land movement that work is published we will be able to make a sound judgement on Davitt and the several paradoxes of his life.

In the meantime the centenary of the founding of the Land League is an occasion for us to recall Davitt's infiltration towards a non-violent approach to social change. His ideas however worthy they may appear are deserving of careful examination.

-- Doreen Lyons --
DAVITT AND THE LAND WAR - A HUNDRED YEARS ON
simon o'donohoe

The most significant revolution in modern Irish history was arguably not the period from 1916 to 1921 but the Land War of 1879-1882. It was the social upheaval of that time which transformed Irish society. It also saw the emergence of the modern mass movement between the various powers in Irish life: Church, state and middle classes.

But the Land War, which started one hundred years ago this year, has a special significance for those who seek a non-violent solution to Ireland's contemporary problems. It would be a mistake to imagine that it was not accompanied by much violence, but the important fact remains that the leaders of the Land League intended only to use non-violent methods and that by and large their methods prevailed. Yet many of their leaders such as Michael Davitt, John O'Conner Power, Matt Harris and others had all received their first political experiences as Fenians. Davitt, who campaigned non-violently all his life in the Irish Land League, Scottish Crofters' Party and the British Labour Movement, never renounced the use of violence to achieve political ends. It is a vindication of non-violent politics that so many skilled nationalist politicians should choose non-violent over violent methods in one of the most troubled periods of Irish history. Their success contrasts with the failure of violent nationalism to achieve its goals by violence during the nineteenth century. The reason for their success was that they achieved organised mass movement involving tens of thousands of poor people, rather than a conspiratorial clique which scored mass organisation.

BRITISH AND IRISH ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

The background to the Land War was the absorption of the Irish economy into the industrial economy of the British Empire. We refer to the greater interdependence of the British and Irish economy by the 1870s. This had been created by the extension of the railways throughout Ireland in the middle economic problems continue. It is important to remember that the political leadership of the Land League also faced similar prospects in their own age and turned, on the whole, to non-violent agitation as a solution.

The failure of the potato crop in 1847 removed the fears of famine, and a similar failure of the British harvests in 1879 cut off migratory labour work as a supplementary source of cash income. In the past such problems had usually been accompanied by agrarian outrages and assassinations; why then did a mass political movement develop as it did at this time?

Here again we come across interesting parallels with contemporary Ireland. Rising standards of living between the Famine and the 1970s had given the tenant farmers of Ireland more to lose and higher expectations. Such as people in Ireland today are reluctant to lose the prosperity of the 1960s, so the rural population of Ireland a century ago wanted to preserve their newfound prosperity. But above all the Irish tenant farmers had been politicised by events between 1850 and the late 1870s. The first political lessons were

(continued next page)
Learned in the 1870s when the Tenants League association had campaigned for the "three Fs", i.e. fixity of tenure, fair rent and free sale.

Although this league was involved mainly with the more prosperous tenant farmers it nevertheless brought the land question into the forefront of Irish politics. A more significant event for smaller tenants was the founding in 1880 of the Irish Republican Brotherhood or Fenians. This was the first nationalist revolutionary organisation in Ireland which was not led by the clergy, or by middle class intellectuals, but grew its strength from the mass of the people. Another development was that the Irish were no longer represented at Westminster by Liberal MPs but by the Home Rule Party of Isaac Butt and Charles Stewart Parnell. Parnell was willing to co-operate with Fenians and land Leaguers, so the mass of the Irish people had a voice in the British Parliament. When we consider also that tenant farmers were more likely to be literate and to have been better able to affect political campaigns financially we can understand why the Land League developed when it did.

LAND LEAGUE AGAIN

The land agitation began after a meeting at Irishtown, Co. Mayo, on 20 April 1879 organised by James Daly, editor of the County Telegraph. The aims of the Land Leagues were essentially the three Fs but Davitt wanted to go further than this and have the land of Ireland nationalised. But the Fenians and the Nationalists feared that land from locally elected councils and parliaments would be co-operatively owned. Even the more conservative Land Leaguers such as Daly and Parnell were prepared to go beyond the 'three Fs' and have the land sold to the tenants after being purchased by the government from the landowners. This is essentially what happened, and Davitt is often accused of being out of touch with the wishes of the majority of tenant farmers in proposing his socialist solution, but this view oversimplifies the situation because the class differences among the tenants themselves. Paul New in his well researched Land and the National Question in Ireland (Dublin 1979) draws attention to the class differences among the tenant farmers, some large and prosperous, others small subsistence farmers.

He also drew attention to the fact that many farmers were struggling against rack-renting landlords therefore he had to modify, inevitably these class differences led to disputes over the aims and methods of agitation. With Davitt representing the interests of the poorer tenants and labourers. Wealthier tenants were not prepared to lose everything in the struggle with their landlord, while others who were faced with eviction or starvation anyway had no qualms about pursuing their cause to the bitter end. It is not surprising therefore to find the main centres of land agitation in the West among farmers living at or near subsistence level.

The non-violent methods of the land leagues are now well known. It was their method which gave the English language a new word 'boycott'. This stems from the methods used against a landlord called Captain Charles Boycott, resisting evictions and refusing to occupy the occupancy of evicted tenants to show that landlords also widely used in the agitation as well as refusal to pay rent.

LAND ACT 1881 AND AFTERWARDS

Gladstone's "Land Act of 1881 effectively granted the 'three Fs' and Parnell reacted by deciding to 'test the Act'. This was to be done by bringing before the land court only carefully selected cases. Since many high-rented farmers were too badly situated in a legal respect of their rents this was a dead-end for most Irish tenant farmers accept the wealthier; the others simply could not wait for a reduction. But this concession, better harvests and divisions in the land league effectively put an end to the main land agitation. Davitt was alienated from Parnell by, among other things, Parnell's decision to put an end to the 'ladies' land league'. The women had continued while Parnell, Davitt and the other male leaders had been in prison in 1881. It was a sign of the radicalism produced by the land agitation that women should have played such a prominent part.

The land war had a great psychological significance for the Irish people, as Joseph Lee puts it: "The land League taught the tenants the simple but symbolic gesture of not buffing their cage to landlords".

It also helped to consolidate the process whereby the Catholic clergy were forced to adopt a leadership to secular leaders such as Parnell in politics. The Irish town meeting itself was against rent increases by a landlord who was a Catholic clergyman. (Charles Geoffrey Burke was acting as executor for his brother's estate. As a result of the Irishtown demonstration he granted tenants a 25% reduction in rents.) And Archbishop NASALE of Tuam found his oppositions to the land agitation being ignored. The hierarchy eventually was forced to come to terms with Parnell for fear of losing their influence, a clear sign of how everything had been transformed.

The most significant change of all was the growing national consciousness of the Irish people. Tenant farmers and others now realised the necessity to transcend local and provincial grievances in order to achieve their ends, and demands for home rule grew accordingly. Gradually over the next century the land of Ireland changed hands from landlords to peasant proprietors.

Maybe we have something to learn from the methods that the League used, in answer to the problem of our own day, or perhaps we could take the advice that Davitt gave to the Irish artist Orpen about seventy years ago: "You are young, take my advice, don't join any side, just live, and learn to understand the necessities of this world that god has been kind enough to give us to live in. There is nothing that spoils its beauty more than party politics and intrigues, or taking sides in any way against your fellow men. These things have ruined this beautiful world for me for years".

Notes
2. William Orpen, Stories about Ireland and myself. 1924

Michael Davitt, page 4

Simon O'Donnell, a history graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, is interested in ecology and nuclear questions.
DAVITT AND NON-VIOLENCE

JUSTIN MORAHAN

The title of this article poses a problem for anyone who attempts even a summary reading of Michael Davitt's life. For, on the question of violence, Davitt was somewhat of a paradox during his chequered and adventurous career. From my own attempted brief look at his personality - and I do not pretend that I have anything like the full picture - I see a man who suffered such and who had such cause for retribution and revenge, but who, in spite of this, showed an extraordinary touch of humanitarianism; and he often leaned in the direction of non-violence. I also see a man who was at odds with himself on the question of war - one, I think, who detected the reality of war, but who could be carried away - and was carried away - by his rhetoric. It is not just that there is evidence of a progression in Davitt's mind from his early Fenianism to a certain type of non-violent action and a later return to some kind of militarism; at given periods of his life the conflict between violence and non-violence is evident in his person. Some of his speeches were, therefore, regarded as incitement to violence by some, a license to violence by others, or a condonation of violence by yet others - depending on the viewpoint and prejudices of those who commented on them. Even now it is difficult to discern from some of these speeches whether Davitt was keeping the hounds in check while hunting like them, or unleashing hounds whose bloody work he, of course, could not have personally engaged in. My own opinion is that Davitt, at heart, was a non-violent man caught in a web of violence.

Davitt's sufferings - by eviction and emigration at 4, the loss of an arm at 11, an abnormal imprisonment which lasted from his 24th to the 31st year, and other shorter imprisonments - never appear, from the tone of his writings, to have embittered him. And although he was a gun runner, he appears even before and during his first imprisonment to have detected violence. When his chaplain struck his head in the dark of his cell, pretending fear of being shot by 'this Fenian', Davitt told him gently that he could not harm a rat. 1 This contradiction - the gentle Davitt collecting areas for killing - is one that he never escaped for the rest of his life. On his release in 1877, according to John Devoy, he resumed activities with the Fenians, 2 but now Davitt turned to open agitation rather than conspiracy and tried to induce Parnell, unsuccessfully, to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.), "without the silly oath of secrecy". Francis Sheehy Skeffington maintains that at this stage Davitt wanted a small secret society storing up arms for future revolution, open agitation on the land question, support of labourers' claims, abolition of workhouse and active participation in local affairs by men who had hitherto remained aloof. 3

On Davitt's first visit to America in 1876, Devoy admits, inadvertently I think, that he was to some extent at least an apostle of non-violence. 4 In the 'New Departure' telegram sent by Devoy, with Davitt's approval, there is no mention of armed struggle. Indeed Davitt returned with a big job to win 5 over Fenians to "The New Departure".

OUTRAGES CONTINUED

Davitt severed his allegiance with the Fenians in 1882 having spent 25 years in the Brotherhood, but it is interesting that the land league which he founded and whose armed methods were non-violent once began in 1879, largely with the help of Fenians in the West of Ireland. It would appear that a section at least of the Fenians were persuaded to enter on what, in fact, was a non-violent campaign. The difficulty in giving it that credit, however, lies in the fact that that atrocities or 'outrages' were carried out by extreme militarists on men, women, child and beast that can only be described as thedash of violence, the land league was not "able to contain and there is no doubt that its organisation was strengthened by the fear instilled in wavering conscription of..."
he declared: "The Executive have no sympathy whatever with any effort to coerce any person in Ireland into joining a branch of the Land League. I wish that to be clearly known." 6

In January he repeated in the same way he had told 50,000 people the previous night in Jackville Street. That was that while they abused coercion they should not be guilty of coercion themselves. The Land League, he said, did not desire to contaminate anyone who honestly disagreed with them. 9 Again in Tramore he said:

"Continue to abstain from all acts of violence, as in the past. We have the honour of our country at stake. We are striving to a great moral principle and we will allow nothing on the part of our passions to stand in the way." (Ibid.) And again:

"Abjure to the programme of the League and repel every incentive to terrorism." (Ibid.) And again:

"So injurious in the power of Irish landholders to perpetrate upon our people could justify in the least degree the unfeeling brutality which inflicts injuries or sufferings upon helpless and defenceless animals in revenge for the wrongs committed by their owners." (Ibid.) and there were innumerable such appeals. But the outrages continued. In 1881 alone there were 16 killings, 41 wounding, 92 houses burned into, and over 4,000 reported felonies over agrarian disputes. The people singled out for these attacks were people who had disobeyed the directives of the Land League. Some of them had been boycotted. While Davitt persistently opposed the atrocities it can also be said that no League leader advised a boycott of people who were known to have carried them out.

That Davitt sometimes fell down on his principles or seemed to renounce his opposition to the atrocities committed in the name of the Land League was, I think, to his use of rhetoric and violent metaphor which bear a valid, non-violent interpretation for the people to believe that physical outrages were happening all around them. One example occurred in his speech at the Curragh in December 1880:

"Agitate, organise and combine until every peasant of this island is kicked bag and baggage out of Ireland." 6

Davitt was jalled for similar utterances in Navan. And yet, from prison he wrote to the Galway Leaguers that he was opposed "to the dynamic policy on every possible ground - humane, moral, political and tactical." He held in the utmost contempt those whose only contribution for Ireland's sufferings was to blow up some English town, to the destruction of innocent lives and the consequent legitimate exasperation of the English people... into an active hostility to the people supposed to be responsible for these barbarities." 9

Davitt's attitude to organised war is almost as paradoxical as his attitude to organised violence. In his long volume on the Boer War, written after his departure from Parliament in 1889, I can detect very little feeling of aversion for the countless killings recorded. Instead, Davitt, wrapped up in the excitement of being a war correspondent who is watching his old enemy's war machine in difficulty, uses all the imperialistic argot of the military that is always used to cover up the ugliness of human butchery. It is difficult to imagine that the man who in earlier days had quoted Dr. Russell approvingly on the Battle of the Bismarck, could himself pen the account (below) of the Battle of Talana Hill.

Here are the two passages juxtaposed:

"Let your readers fancy masses of coloured rags glued together with blood and brains, and pinned into strange shapes by fragments of bone. Let these monstrous men's bodies without heads, legs without bodies, heaps of human entrails attached to red and blue cloth, and disembowelled corpses in uniform, bodies lying about in all attitudes with skulls shattered. Faces blown off, hips smashed, bones, flesh and gay clothing all pounded together as if hurled in a mortar extending for miles, not very thick in one place, but recurring perpetually for weary hours; and they cannot, with the most vivid imagination, come up to the sickening reality of that butchery. So nightmares could be so frightful." 10

(Battle of Delaw)

"Pretorius trained his Griqua on the British camp, and sent his first pair of shells over the town, right into the center of the enemy's position, some three miles away. The response to this "top of the morning" salute from Talana Hill was instant. The English guns belched forth their reply and soon the side of the hill was being pounded by British artillery... The British fire was, however, generally ineffective. Cape English was more effective. Pretorius handled his little battery with admirable coolness and developed a much greater accuracy of aim than did his British adversaries below." 11

(Battle of Talana Hill)

CONTRADICTORY PERSONALITIES

And so the contradictions multiply. There is the Davitt in Australia so sensitive to the plight of the Aborigines, 12 and the Davitt in South Africa so insensitive to the feelings of the Kaffirs. 13 But what Irish politician of today, North or South, could rival the following speech (Delivered at Oglethorpe in America, January 1867?) for ambiguity on the question of violence in a nationalist cause?

"No one", said Davitt, "knows better than our chairman, Mr. Ford, (great cheering) how unscrupulously I have striven during the past few years to keep the Irish struggle within the bounds of constitutional effort and free from the more determined policy which he and thousands of other Irish nationalists in America honestly believed to be the only means of coerqing England into justice... I believed and still believe it to be unwise to resort to the use of undisciplined forces against disciplined power... I have also been apprised of methods of reckless retaliation even..."

(continued next page)
though they might offer an opportunity to Irish nationalists of initiating the act of the captive judge of Israel; because determined though such a resolution might be for England's crimes against Ireland and Justice, a humanitarian policy of revenge is at least suicidal." Nevertheless he warns that if the people are once convinced that the Executive are bent on extermination "not all the influence of all the Irish leaders in the world will ever suffice to prevent some supreme act of retaliation which a mankind people may be driven in desperation to contemplate." (Defeating heroes again and again removed) "If coercion is attempted, thousands of men will feel called upon—nay compelled by their conscience, their consciences and their liberty to sacrifice their lives if necessary to show the world by one supreme act of desperation that, despite as England's power may be, there are means by which justice can be vindicated and outraged rights revenged, even against a culprit as great as the Government of the British Empire." 14

Sadly I conclude that Michael Davitt, gentle, noble, courageous and forgiving man that he was, tried but failed to extricate himself or others fully from the meshes of violence that were tangled around his name. Of those of his time who were assassinated with him, he was perhaps the noblest Roman of them all.

- Justin Morahan

Justin Morahan is founder of 'Love, Peace, Justice' and has been editor of the newsletter of the same name. He comes from Mayo — Michael Davitt's county.

Michael Davitt was sentenced to 15 years penal servitude in July 1876 after having been convicted of treason-felony in connection with the Davitt gang running in England. His first two years were spent in solitary confinement at Millbank penitentiary. His cell was 10 x 8 feet, had a stone floor, no table or stool or fire. His bed was 3 parallel wooden planks. There was a dish for food which also served as a chamber pot. In the daytime he used it as a headless stick to pitch oakum in a stowing position for ten hours.

He was transferred to Dartmoor in 1877. Here his cell was 7 x 6 ft., with corrugated walls and a slate floor. The only ventilation was an opening of three leaves at the bottom of the cell door. The food consisted of putrid meat and astonishingly long black beetroots were often found in the latter. Bread and tea were also featured on the cordon blue menu.

During his imprisonment Davitt 6th an assortment of jobs, some of them monotonous and degrading. Work done included: writing, stonemasonry, crushing putrescent meat bones for use in the "bone shed" beside the prison cesspool, and working at the wringing machine in the wash-house.

Michael Davitt AND PENAL REFORM

He was transferred in 1872 to Portsmouth and after one month was sent back suddenly to Dartmoor. (This sudden change is believed to have been a mean trick played on his nerves by mean warders.) He spent 6 days in solitary confinement and at Easter 1876 on a diet of bread and water for answering "here" instead of "his" during a roll call.

Towards the end of 1877 he was released on ticket-of-leave. He weighed only 8 stone and 10 pounds. An average person of his height (about 6 ft.) should have weighed 13-15 stone.

Prior to his trial in 1870 Davitt had spent some months at Clerkenwell House of Detention and Seagate Prison. He therefore had comprehensive firsthand experience of the British prison system and was well qualified to speak about its multiple defects.

REFORMING SEAL

In the year after his release Davitt gave evidence before the House of Lords Commission on secret prison life — known as the Kilbroney Commission. Naturally he spoke about the privations he and other Irish Penitentiary had endured, but he went on to make general recommendations about the prison system as it affected the prison population as a whole. His suggestions included: separation of youths from adults; 'star' status for first offenders; separation of hardened thieves from 'less susceptible' prisoners; ending of the silence rule; reduction in the Initial period of solitary.

The Kilbroney Report adopted several of his suggestions without specifically mentioning that Davitt had made them.

In 1885 Davitt published a lengthy 'Leaves from a Prison Diary'. In it he describes with accuracy and wit all the main types of orinal to be found within the confines of a prison. He expresses disgust at the 'social depravity' of rape and homosexual, but also observes that:

"The society, law, government or any other man you please to call that power, which assumes responsibility in a state that generates this class of men, is accountable before God for the degradation of those who its
providence had moulded in His own form, and answerable to His justice for the inhumanity of their punishment." (p. 94)

On the same page he praises the work of the noted English penal reformer, Howard. In contemporary Britain the Howard league for Penal Reform still works for the cause.

**CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

Davitt was very conscious of the connection between poverty and crime against property. He had this to say about pickpockets:

"Let the State dole out what remains of city alms, let every low drink-house be swept away, and let society apply itself in solemn earnest to provide not only better houses for the poor but opportunities for more elevating occupation, and then, and not till then, will the low pickpocket and the bruising type of ruffian begin to be improved off the face of civilized life." (p. 109)

In particular Davitt stressed that bad housing conditions contributed considerably to crime against property:

"Let those who are permitted to graduate in criminal pursuits under the tuition of the low drink-house and the brutal, and to be subject to the desecration of crowded and ill-ventilated dwellings in the slums of cities and towns, are dealt with by the administrators of the law as if they were offenders against a society that had done its utmost to preserve the necessities of social disease which breed the convict population of Portland (Prison) and its kindred establishments." (p. 205)

Davitt was an enlightened Victorian. He was not to ascribe material causes to social phenomena, yet his moral upbringing (as a Church of Ireland (with an evangelical outlook) inclined him to attach some importance to the element of free will or personal responsibility in each human being's character. He saw a certain weakness in human nature — some theologians call it original sin — but on the whole he tended to emphasize the poverty factor in the formation of criminal habits — an emphasis which contemporary Irish nationalists, including clergy, gutter journalists, police, lawyers and politicians often neglect when making shock-horror pronouncements about ‘rising crime'.

Davitt wrote magazine articles, one pamphlet, a lengthy book and some chapters in another book, on the subject of prisons. As a member of a Parliamentary Committee he visited his old ‘ alma mater' of Dartmoor. He took data for the guidance of those who were drafting the improved Prisons Bill. That same year he published his book *Life and Progress in Australia* in which some of the final chapters were devoted to an account of the prison system in the various states of Australia. He praised the system compared to the English system. He noted that in Australia there was no prison labour such as treadmills for the sake of torturing prisoners. Instead he found prison work was useful. (As already stated, Davitt was a progressive Victorian; he subscribed to the better tenets of the utilitarian philosophy then in vogue.)

Wardens in Australia, he found, did not irritate prisoners with petty commands. He noted also that serious prison offences were tried by visiting magistrates rather than by Governors, thus giving defendants a better chance of just treatment.

Concern with penal reform has for long been part of the convivial tradition, especially among American and British Quakers. Davitt did much and said much during his busy and varied life to make society aware of the injustices it inflicts on the poorest of the poor who fall foul of property and other laws. He suffered in prison for his Irish nationalist activities, but his nationalism did not blind him to the fate of his British non-political fellow prisoners. Some of the penal reforms he suggested may strike us today as being mere common sense; in his time they were radically humanitarian. Some of his suggestions were taken in the extreme. Much of his penological and criminological analysis is still relevant and remains to be implemented if the contemporary British and Irish penal systems are enlightened and constructively replaced.

Davitt's main writings on prisons should be required reading for all Irish social workers, journalists, lawyers, prison officers — and prisoners.

- Garreth Byrne -

**READER LIST**

By Michael Davitt:
- The Prison Life of Michael Davitt, Dublin 1856
- (also contains his evidence to the Kimberley Commission of 1875-1876 National Library of Ireland)
- Leaves From a Prison Diaries, 1855
- The Penal System of Penal Servitude, (article) *Contemporary Review*, August 1879
- Life and Progress in Australasia, London 1898

By T.W. Moody:
- Michael Davitt in Penal Servitude (two parts) *Studies* 1941, pp. 517-530
- 1942, pp. 16-30
- Michael Davitt, 1856-1906: a survey and appreciation (three parts) *Studies* 1946

**General Reading**

Paul Bew, Land and the National question in Ireland 1830-82 (Dublin 1979)

P.J. Lyons, Ireland since the Famine (*Fontana* paperback)

P.J. Lyons, Charles Stewart Parnell (*Fontana* paperback)


Michael Davitt, The Fall of Penalities in Ireland

M.E. Collins, The Land Question 1879-1882 (Dublin 1974) — a good introduction to the subject, contains much documentation and contemporary graphics.

Joyce Marlow, Captains Boycott and the Irish (London 1973)


MICHAEL DAVITT, PAGE 6