

# New book on Davitt reveals a hidden and intriguing history

A fascinating new book on Michael Davitt has just gone on sale and is certain to be featuring on Christmas shopping lists in Mayo this week.

The work of Dr Carla King, the book was a decade in the making and is unquestionably the most authoritative account of Davitt's life after the Land League. Up to now, biographies of the Straide-born patriot have inevitably focused on the years before and during the Land League, the campaign for which he is best remembered in Ireland.

But Davitt enjoyed a truly varied and fascinating life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Dr King has conducted exhaustive research to bring to life the story of a man whose remarkable impact on Irish and international history has never been properly acknowledged.

The cast of characters that populate the pages of *Michael Davitt: After the Land League, 1882-1906* is simply astonishing and reflects the diversity of Davitt's life. At various stages, Davitt came into contact with Leon Tolstoy, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Teddy Roosevelt and Randolph Hearst, who was the role model for Citizen Kane, and socialist Eleanor Marx. Lady Agatha Russell, widow of Liberal Prime Minister Earl Russell, who had ruled Ireland during the Great Famine, was friendly with Davitt, who, of course, was evicted as a child from the family home at the height of the Famine.

The truly eclectic and extensive activities of Davitt's mature years, which range from the Rockies to Russia geographically, and include

counter-espionage, journalism, penal reform, women's rights and anti-imperialism, have remained largely in the shade. Indeed, the Land League has become such a dominant feature of Davitt's life that little consideration has been given to his many other activities. Fortunately, that anomaly has been addressed and Dr King's masterful biography means that historians will now have to entirely reassess Davitt's contribution to global politics, journalism and social reform.

In an era that predates air travel and mass communication, the extent of Davitt's 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 people, highlighting religious persecution, and seeking 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 the Jewish population all feature in this intriguing biography. He even almost bankrupted *The Times* of London.

Dr 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.

Published by UCD Press, *Michael Davitt: After the Land League, 1882-*



**Michael Davitt in Russia in 1905, just a year before his death.**

*1906* weighs in at more than 700 pages and includes 16 pages of rare and previously unseen images. This impressive hardback publication is

selling at €50, which may seem pricey but it really is a magnificent publication that is deserving of every accolade it receives.