

Redpath, James

by Patrick Maume

Redpath, James (1833–91), journalist, abolitionist and Land Leaguer, was born 24 August 1833 in Berwick-on-Tweed on the Anglo–Scottish border, eldest of nine children (two sons and two daughters survived to adulthood) of Ninian Davidson Redpath, schoolmaster, and his wife Maria (née Main). Redpath often used the pseudonyms 'Berwick' and 'Tweed'.

Early life and emigration to America In 1839 the Redpaths moved to the nearby village of Spittal (Northumberland), where Ninian ran a school for the British and Foreign School Society; here James received his formal education. The Redpaths belonged to the rigorist seceder presbyterian church. Ninian wished his eldest son to enter the church's ministry, but James became a religious sceptic. In the 1860s he briefly underwent an evangelical conversion, and later dabbled in spiritualism, but in general wavered between unitarianism and atheism. He retained, however, desire to oppose injustice in a secularised version of the prophetic idiom, and admiration for contemporary prophetic protestors.

At the age of 13, James became an apprentice printer-journalist in the office of the *Berwick and Kelso Warder*. Around 1849 the Redpaths emigrated to Martin Township, Allegan County, Michigan, USA. Redpath rejected farming and worked as a journalist in Kalamazoo and Detroit before joining the *New York Tribune* (1852–4). He moved in bohemian journalistic circles and acquired a number of lifelong friends, notably the poet Walt Whitman (1819–92).

Anti-slavery campaigner In 1854 Redpath undertook a walking tour of the southern United States, for health reasons and because of curiosity about slavery; he financed it by short periods of employment on southern newspapers. The experience transformed him into a militant abolitionist. On returning to New York, he drew up a series of letters describing conditions in the slave states, signed 'John Ball Junior'. These were published in the *Liberator* (edited by the veteran abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison (1805–79)), and further letters appeared in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* as the result of subsequent travels in the south in 1854–5. The letters were collected as *The roving editor; or, Talks with slaves in southern states* (1859). By May 1855 Redpath joined a newspaper in St Louis, Missouri, which sent him to the Kansas Territory to report on the developing conflict over whether Kansas should become a free or a slave state. Redpath rapidly became an active participant on the free-state side, and befriended the militant abolitionist John Brown (1800–59), who was engaged in violent guerrilla warfare against equally violent pro-slavery settlers. Redpath saw Brown both as a father figure and as a Carlylean prophet-hero driven by sincere Calvinist belief in a world of compromisers and shams, and was drawn into Brown's subsequent plans to organise a slave insurrection in the south.

On a visit to Massachusetts, Redpath married (14 April 1857) Mary Kidder (née Cotton), a *divorcée* with a son and daughter by her first marriage. On leaving Kansas, the Redpaths settled in Malden, Massachusetts, in August 1858. After the failure of Brown's attack on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in October 1859, Redpath openly defended Brown and promoted his image as a martyr in two books, the family-approved *Public life of Captain John Brown* (1860) – glossing over such awkward episodes as Brown's killing five pro-slavery settlers during the Kansas conflict – and *Echoes of Harper's Ferry* (1860), a collection of tributes.

Redpath worked for the government of Haiti (1859–62), encouraging American blacks to emigrate to the black-ruled republic to develop it and to introduce salutary protestant influence. After the collapse of this scheme he became a publisher. His firm published several titles by black and abolitionist authors, a cheap series aimed at troops on active service, and works on current issues, including a tract against capital punishment by Redpath. When his publishing business failed in 1864, Redpath became a war correspondent with Gen. Sherman's union army. From February 1865 he briefly superintended the school system in Charleston, South Carolina (recently captured by union troops), but his insistence on racially integrated schools led to his removal by the military authorities on 30 June. He returned to freelance journalism before founding (1868) the highly successful Boston (later Redpath) Lyceum Bureau, which organised lecture tours by distinguished authors (notably Mark Twain (1835–1910)) and other public figures, including some of his abolitionist and 'radical Republican' friends such as the African-American leader Frederick Douglass (c.1818–1879).

In the late 1870s Redpath suffered personal and professional upheavals. In response to health and financial pressures, he sold the Redpath Lyceum Bureau in October 1875 and left Boston for New York. (The bureau survived into the 1920s.) Redpath's marriage had broken down and, after a (probably) unrequited infatuation with a young southern novelist, he established a relationship in 1877/8 with Carrie May Chorpening (née MacLellan; widow of a Captain Dunlap, married George Chorpening, one daughter; divorced 1878), with whom he lived in New York city. They married on 15 September 1888. Redpath had no children by either of his marriages, though his stepson by his first marriage took his surname.

Redpath disappeared from New York in September 1879 and reappeared in Jamaica a month later, claiming to have suffered amnesia; he travelled to San Francisco (where he observed with distaste the anti-Chinese demagogue Denis Kearney (qv) and his predominantly Irish followers) before returning to New York.

Redpath comes to Ireland Redpath's commissioning by the *New York Tribune* to visit Ireland and report on the extent of distress and on the three rival relief funds run by the duchess of Marlborough (qv), Dublin's lord mayor (Edmund Dwyer Gray (qv)), and the Land League under Charles Stewart Parnell (qv), thus coincided with deep personal crisis. (He later claimed that 'he owed his life to Ireland, for his health

had been restored by his visit there' (*Nation*, 11 June 1881). According to Redpath, he came to Ireland with no particular knowledge, and a certain prejudice against the catholic Irish. This is consistent with the general attitude of the *Tribune*, a reform-Republican paper inclined to associate Irish-American catholics with corrupt and authoritarian political 'bosses', sympathetic to upper-class British reformers such as Gladstone and Bright, suspecting Irish distress to be exaggerated, and dismissing Parnell as an unscrupulous demagogue comparable to Denis Kearney.

Redpath recalled having believed as a boy that the great famine and the poverty of the Irish were due to their being lazy and catholic, but 'got rid of that notion in America' when he saw that catholic Irish immigrants worked as hard as their protestant counterparts (*Nation*, 15 May 1880). He arrived in Dublin early in February 1880 and promptly went to Land League headquarters, where he demanded to see the records to discover the extent of distress, 'if any'. When given access to correspondence, he was taken aback by the accounts of suffering (one of his *Tribune* articles is composed of extracts from a week's messages). Redpath then interviewed Lord Randolph Churchill about the duchess of Marlborough's fund. While Redpath always spoke of Queen Victoria with contempt and accused her of stinginess towards famine relief, he initially said the duchess of Marlborough did some good by shaming the British upper classes into contributing, but was soon declaring that both the duchess and the Dublin lord mayor, instead of being thanked, should be blamed for the miserliness of their personal contributions to the funds over which they presided.

Redpath's identification with the Land League was consolidated by the heavy RIC presence at league meetings – which he thought a flagrant violation of free speech and assembly – and by a guided tour in Mayo, where he was horrified by the sheer poverty and raggedness of the people, by hearing accounts of the great famine and the clearances which accompanied it, and by a lengthy interview with Lord John Browne (1824–1903), 4th marquess of Sligo (1896–1903), which left Redpath with the impression that Irish landlords regarded their tenants with the same arrogant contempt he had witnessed in southern planters towards their slaves. Redpath was also impressed by the hospitality of the people and their praise for America as the land of freedom. Thereafter he saw the Irish conflict as a replay of the anti-slavery struggle; he repeatedly equated Michael Davitt (qv) with Garrison (and Parnell with Washington and Lincoln), compared American support for the Land League to ante-bellum British assistance to American abolitionism, claimed that the living conditions of the poorest Connacht peasantry were even worse than those of the slaves he had seen in the 1850s south, compared the RIC's repression of tenants to the Ku Klux Klan's upholding of white rule in Mississippi, and contrasted Irish landlordism unfavourably with the notoriously exploitative sharecropping system of the southern states of America. (Radical abolitionists such as Redpath accused slaveholders of wishing to recreate a European-style feudal-aristocratic society in America, and abolitionists often emphasised sexual exploitation of female slaves by their masters,

as Redpath publicised alleged sexual exploitation of tenants' female relatives by landlords such as Lord Leitrim (qv).)

Most of the correspondence Redpath had seen in the Land League headquarters originated from local catholic priests, and priests were also his principal guides on his local journeys. Despite his own religious views, Redpath frequently expressed outspoken admiration for Irish priests as leaders and defenders of their people, comparing them to his own Scottish covenanting ancestors. (Redpath described the amusement of Bishop Thomas Nulty (qv) at Redpath's refusal to address him as 'my Lord' because this was contrary to his republican principles.)

Second visit: Captain Boycott and Lord Mountmorres Redpath returned to America early in May 1880, but was back in Ireland at the beginning of July as correspondent for the *Tribune*, the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, and the *Boston Pilot* (edited by John Boyle O'Reilly (qv)). On this occasion his activities were concentrated in Kerry and in the Galway/Mayo region; he definitively crossed the line from reporter to participant by joining the Land League (he was elected a member in October 1880) and addressing numerous public meetings. His declarations that, while the military weakness of the people made an immediate uprising to establish an Irish republic impossible, securing peasant proprietorship would go a long way towards establishing that desirable goal, were praised by the *Irish World* of Patrick Ford (qv) and denounced by Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (qv) as pusillanimous, while loyalists commented that 'Redpath' was an appropriate name for a supporter of the bloodstained Land League, and the pro-landlord *Dublin Evening Mail* thought 'the pestilent Mr James Redpath # surpassed in defiance all the other speakers put together' (22 October 1880). He interviewed Parnell in the house of commons, and was breakfasting with him when Parnell was served with the summons for the abortive state trials of December 1880–January 1881. (At one point it was rumoured that Redpath himself would feature as a defendant.)

In Kerry, Redpath reported on conditions on the Lansdowne estate and other neighbouring properties, drawing on the local editor Timothy Harrington (qv) and on Margaret Cusack (qv), the 'nun of Kenmare', who was shocked by Redpath's admission (when she asked about the alleged Marian apparition in Knock, Co. Mayo) that he did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. In Connacht, Redpath mainly operated on the Galway/Mayo borderlands, delivering speeches at Leenane (18 August 1880) and other places calling for the ostracism of land grabbers and other enemies of the league. He was heavily involved in the organised ostracism of the land agent Charles Boycott (qv) near Ballinrobe. According to Redpath's later recollection, while he was dining with Fr John O'Malley (qv) on 25 September they discussed the coinage of a new term for such social ostracism and the priest came up with 'boycotting'. Redpath popularised the new word, first published in one of his articles for the *Inter-Ocean* (12 October 1880).

On 25 September Redpath addressed a Land League meeting in Clonbur, Co. Galway, observed by the local small landlord Lord Mountmorres (1832–80), who was murdered later that night. Redpath attracted loyalist criticism by subsequent speeches in which he suggested that Mountmorres's murder had been caused (and possibly justified) by his public criticisms of Fenianism and his acting as a spy for Dublin Castle, implied that he had sexually molested tenants' womenfolk, criticised Queen Victoria for allowing Lady Mountmorres a grace and favour apartment in Hampton Court Palace (which he described as a 'fashionable poorhouse'), and stated that he had no respect whatsoever for the queen. Although Redpath also warned his audiences against bloodshed and advised against armed uprising, the accusation that Redpath incited Mountmorres's murder became one of the principal loyalist indictments of the Land League and was emphasised during the Parnell commission hearings of 1888–9. (Parnell told the commission that he privately remonstrated with Redpath over his language, but reiterated that he respected Redpath's services to the Irish cause.) Redpath also denounced John Bright and William Edward Forster (qv) as 'buckshot quakers', and his attacks on Gladstone led to a breach with the *New York Tribune*, which continued to criticise Parnell and see Gladstone as a genuine reformer frustrated by whig allies.

On 14 November Redpath went back to America, where he embarked on a nationwide lecture tour describing the sufferings of the Irish and raising funds for the nationalist movement; he delivered some 100 lectures of up to three hours' length, sometimes speaking seven nights a week. Nationalist press reports, and Davitt's sketch of Redpath in *The fall of feudalism in Ireland* (1904), emphasise that the adherence to the Parnellite/Land League cause of such a well-known publicist with no previous Irish connections greatly assisted it in winning support outside the Irish-American milieu. His rhetoric also attracted British official attention; the home secretary justified the passage of legislation criminalising seditious speech and publications by alleging that Redpath made anti-protestant sectarian remarks and said landlords should be shot down like beasts of prey. (Redpath attributed these claims to garbled reports.) When subsequent remarks by Redpath (predicting in July 1881 that British aristocrats visiting the western United States would be shot dead or held hostage for the release of interned Land Leaguers) were raised in the commons, Irish nationalist MPs pointed out that Redpath was not himself Irish and that if the Land League was responsible for his utterances so was the free-trader Cobden Club, of which Redpath was a long-standing member.

Redpath returned to Ireland in June 1881, this time as correspondent for twenty-five to thirty American newspapers. He also corresponded with the Irish nationalist press on such matters as the successful tenant agitation in Prince Edward Island (Canada) as a model for Ireland, and persuading Americans to boycott Ulster linen. Redpath worked with Thomas Sexton (qv) and received expenses payments for addressing Land League meetings. While touring Donegal Redpath was seriously injured in a jaunting-car accident, which forced him to abandon plans to lecture in Britain. Shortly before his return to America, Redpath encountered David Ross Locke (1833–

88), proprietor of the *Toledo Blade* and well-known abolitionist satirist under the pen-name 'Petroleum V. Nasby', who had come to Dublin as part of an European tour. Locke was decidedly hostile to Irish nationalism, but after Redpath took him up the Galtee mountains in Co. Tipperary and showed him the living conditions of the poorest tenants, he was instantaneously converted to support for the Land League and accompanied Redpath on a speaking tour of Co. Cork. Much of the Irish material in Locke's semi-fictionalised account of his European tour, *Nasby in exile* (1882), derives from Redpath's experiences rather than Locke's own. Redpath sailed for America from Queenstown on 5 October after attending a major rally and banquet (at both of which Parnell spoke) in Cork city. A small proportion of his writings on Ireland were collected as *Talks on Ireland* (1881).

Upon returning to the United States, Redpath remained active in the cause of Irish nationalism, again combining extreme rhetoric with relatively moderate politics. (For example, though now regarding John Devoy (qv) as a personal friend and working closely with him, he continued to advocate parliamentary tactics; he opposed the 1881 'no rent' manifesto, to the dismay of some separatists who accused him of having formerly called them cowards for not advocating the shooting of landlords; he balanced cautiously in the dispute between Parnell and Davitt, while continuing to express the warmest regard for both leaders; he condemned the Phoenix Park murders of 6 May 1882 while refusing to describe Frederick Cavendish (qv) as 'Lord' and calling Thomas Henry Burke (qv) 'the Mephistopheles of Ireland'.) From July 1882 to September 1884 he was proprietor and editor of *Redpath's Illustrated Weekly*, which combined advocacy of Irish nationalism with literary causes, and had Thomas Sherlock (1840–1901) as its Dublin correspondent. After the failure of the weekly he continued to write in support of Irish nationalism in Irish-American and catholic journals, while supporting himself by more general freelance work. His other journalistic projects included ghost-writing Jefferson Davis's reminiscences. (Redpath developed personal respect for the former confederate president without moderating his own abolitionism.)

Redpath's Irish nationalist activities brought him into contact with radicals such as the Irish-American trade union leader Terence V. Powderly (1849–1924) and the radical New York priest Edward McGlynn (1838–1900), with whom he joined in supporting the unsuccessful 1886 campaign of Henry George (1839–97) for the mayoralty of New York.

Redpath suffered a series of strokes in 1887–8 which left him partially paralysed. He paid a final visit to Ireland (January–April 1889), reporting optimistically on the prospects for Gladstonean home rule and addressing a number of indoor meetings under police supervision. He died in St Luke's hospital, New York city, on 10 February 1891 of injuries sustained in a road accident; Fr McGlynn (who had been excommunicated for his Georgist views) delivered the eulogy at his unitarian funeral and cremation, where an American and an Irish flag were displayed; O'Donovan Rossa was among those present.

It would be a mistake to overlook either Redpath's personal volatility, over-idealisation of the Land League and its leaders, and his bringing to the Irish conflict a touch of American frontier violence, or his genuine horror at Irish poverty and ability to transcend widespread prejudices for the sake of justice. He exemplifies the complex relationship between nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish nationalism and a wider North Atlantic radical tradition, which fitfully transcended significant differences in social, racial and religious attitudes.

Freeman's Journal, 18 Feb., 3 June, 1 July, 18 Aug., 17 Sept., 22 Nov. 1880; 19 Jan., 25 Feb., 13 July 1881; 25 May, 14 Dec. 1882; 24 Feb. 1883; 15 Apr. 1886; 31 Jan., 20, 23 Oct. 1888; 28 Jan., 4, 14 Feb., 4 May 1889; 11 Feb. 1891; *New York Tribune*, 2, 5, 8, 12, 17, 19, 23 Mar., 3, 9, 11, 12, 17, 19, 21, 27 Apr., 1, 3, 7, 15, 23 May, 15, 22, 29 Aug., 14 Sept., 3, 10 Oct., 2, 8, 9, 14, 16, 20, 24 Nov., 13 Dec. 1880; *Nation*, 10 Apr., 15, 29 May, 5, 12 June, 3, 10, 31 July, 7, 28 Aug., 11, 18, 25 Sept., 2, 16, 30 Oct., 13, 20 Nov., 4, 25 Dec. 1880; 1, 8, 29 Jan., 12 Feb., 19, 26 Mar., 9, 30 Apr., 14 May, 11, 25 June, 2, 16, 23, 30 July, 6, 20, 27 Aug., 10, 17 Sept., 1, 8, 15, 22 Oct., 5 Nov. 1881; 18 Mar., 6 May, 3, 17 June, 29 July, 12 Aug. 1882; 8 Mar., 11 Oct. 1884; 10 Jan., 7, 14 Feb., 7, 21 Mar., 2 May 1885; 12 Feb., 2 Apr. 1887; 3, 17 Mar., 14 Apr., 22 Sept. 1888; 11 May 1889; *Dublin Evening Mail*, 7 July, 2, 15, 27, 28 Sept., 12 Oct., 4, 10, 15 Nov., 3 Dec. 1880; 27 July, 1, 12, 22, 23, 25 Aug., 16, 19, 21 Sept., 2, 3, 30 Oct. 1881; *Ir. Times*, 28 July, 16, 27 Sept., 11, 27 Oct., 3 Nov., 1, 21 Dec. 1880; 8 Jan., 18 Apr., 21 June, 2, 27 July, 24 Aug., 26 Sept., 3, 27 Oct. 1881; 8 Nov. 1882; 23, 24 Feb. 1883; 5 Mar., 26, 29 June 1889; 4 Mar. 1890; 11 Feb. 1891; *Ir. World*, 7, 21, 28 Aug., 4, 11, 25 Sept., 2 Oct. 1880; 12 Feb., 5, 19 Mar. 1881; *Belfast Newsletter*, 28 Sept., 6, 11, 13 Nov., 15, 21 Dec. 1880; 31 Dec. 1881; *Nenagh Guardian*, 29 Sept. 1880; 20 Apr., 11 May, 22, 29 June, 29 Oct. 1881; 19 Sept. 1888; *Warder*, 13 Nov. 1880; 1 Oct. 1881; M. F. Cusack, *The case of Ireland stated* (1880), 102–03; ead., *The life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God* (1880 ed.), 407n; *Southern Star*, 16 Apr. 1892; Charles F. Horner, *The Life of James Redpath and the development of the modern lyceum* (1926); Joyce Marlow, *Captain Boycott and the Irish* (1973); John R. McKivigan, *Forgotten firebrand: James Redpath and the making of nineteenth-century America* (2008)