

*Boris de Zirkoff
on Gerald Massey*



Bio-bibliography of Gerald Massey by Boris de Zirkoff, from his *H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. VIII, pp. 465-67.

GERALD MASSEY WAS AN ENGLISH POET AND EGYPTOLOGIST, born in a hut at Gamble Wharf, on the Canal near Tring, May 29th, 1828. He was the son of Wm. Massey, a canal boatman, and his wife Mary. His father brought up a large family on a weekly wage of some ten shillings. Gerald said of himself that he had no childhood. He received a scanty education at the national school of Tring, and was put to work when eight, at a silk mill in same town. Worked from five am to six pm, earning from ninepence to one shilling and threepence a week. Later he tried straw plaiting. The marshy district of Buckinghamshire induced ague, so he went to London at fifteen, and became an errand boy. Reading was his absorbing passion from childhood; gradually he developed poetical inclinations; during leisure time he studied French, and the works of Thomas Paine, Volney and Howitt. Published in 1848 his first volume of *Poems and Chansons*, with a bookseller at Tring, selling some 250 copies at one shilling each. The revolutionary spirit of the time caught his enthusiasm, and, joining the Chartists, he applied his pen to the support of their cause. In 1849, being 21, began editing at Uxbridge a paper written by workingmen and called *The Spirit of Freedom*, in collaboration with John Bedford. Contributed, in 1850, some powerful verse to *Cooper's Journal*. His sympathies veered then to the religious side of the reforming movement, and he associated himself with the Christian Socialists under Frederick Denison Maurice; he acted as secretary of the Chr. Socialist Board and wrote verses for *The Christian Socialist*. In the same year he published a second volume of poems, *Voices of Freedom and Lyrics of Love*. In 1851, he welcomed Kossuth to England in a forceful poem, and later championed the cause of Italian unity. A third volume of poems, entitled *The Ballad of Babe Christobel and Other Poems*, published in 1854, fully established his position as poet of liberty, labour and the people; this work went through five editions in one year and was reprinted in New York. Tennyson and Ruskin acknowledged his talent. Five further volumes of poems appeared within a short time.

Massey also sought livelihood in journalism. From 1854, he wrote for the *Athenæum*; Charles Dickens accepted poems from him for *All the Year Round*; the first issue of *Good Words*, 1860, had a poem of his on Garibaldi. In the meantime, Massey had married and found it hard to bring up a family on the proceeds of his pen. He left London for Edinburgh, in 1854, where he wrote for *Chambers' Journal*. He also took to lecturing at literary institutes, on poetry, pre-Raphaelite art and Christian socialism, attracting large audiences. Moved to Monk's Green, Hertfordshire, in 1857, then

to Brentwood, Coniston. While living for four years at Rickmansworth, found a helpful admirer in Lady Marian Alford; her son, Lord Brownlow, provided him, in 1862, with a house on his estate, called Ward's Hurst, near Little Gaddesden; he remained there until 1877. It was during this sojourn that Massey developed an absorbing interest in psychic phenomena, issuing, in 1871, a somewhat credulous book on Spiritualism, which he afterwards withdrew. Soon after, he made three lecture tours in America; the first, 1873–74, included California and Canada; the second, 1883–85, included Australia and New Zealand; the third opened in 1888, but the fatal illness of a daughter brought it to an early close. Massey lectured chiefly on mesmerism, the mystical interpretation of the Scriptures, and spiritualism, printing privately many of his discourses.

Among these lectures, special mention should be made of the following ones:

The Historical [Jewish] Jesus and the Mythical [Egyptian] Christ.

Paul the Gnostic Opponent of Peter, not an Apostle of Historic Christianity.

The Logia of the Lord; or, the Pre-Christian Sayings ascribed to Jesus the Christ.

The Devil of Darkness in the Light of Evolution.

The Seven Souls of Man, and their Culmination in Christ.

Gnostic and Historic Christianity.

The Name and Nature of the Christ (in the *Agnostic Annual* of 1888).

The Hebrew and Other Creations Fundamentally Explained.

Luniolatry: Ancient and Modern.

H.P. Blavatsky repeatedly quotes from these lectures and refers the reader to them, both in her individual articles and in *The Secret Doctrine*; while careful to state that she does not endorse many of Massey's deductions, she nevertheless upholds to a very great extent many of his views and especially the uncontrovertible facts and evidences which he brings forward.

In regard to the character of Gerald Massey, the following passage occurs in the pages of *Lucifer*.¹

His is a richly stocked mind, full of learning, where there is no room for narrow-minded prejudice. His noble endeavours to raise the British working-man to higher aspirations and ideals have made his title clear to ennoblement in the list of benefactors of humanity and won the respect of the greatest thinkers of our age.

Gerald Massey contributed a number of articles and poems to the then newly-started *Lucifer* magazine. Among these, the one raising the question: "Are the Teachings ascribed to Jesus contradictory?" seems to have been one of the contributing reasons which prompted Madame Blavatsky to write her epoch-making essay on "The Esoteric Character of the Gospels." Most of G. Massey's contributions to *Lucifer* may be found in Vol. I, October–November, 1887, and January–February, 1888.

¹ Vol. III, p. 74

The latter part of his life was devoted to the study of ancient Egyptian civilization, a subject which engrossed him completely as the years went by. The results of his many-sided, extremely painstaking, though somewhat diffused scholarship were published in three voluminous works:

A Book of the Beginnings. London: Williams and Norgate, 1881. 2-vols. 4to.;¹

The Natural Genesis. London: Williams and Norgate, 1883. 2-vols. 4to.; and

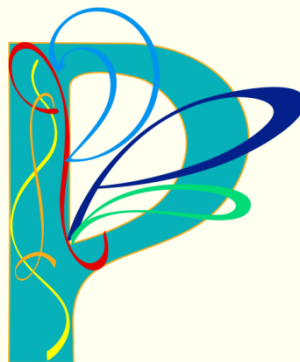
Ancient Egypt the Light of the World. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907. 2-vols. 4to.

As far back as 1863, his resources were augmented, on Lord Palmerston's recommendation, by a civil list pension of £70 to which were added another £30 by Lord Salisbury, in 1887. Massey lived at New Southgate, 1877–90, at Dulwich, 1890–93, and from 1893 at South Norwood.

Gerald Massey died October 29th, 1907, at Redcot, South Norwood Hill, and was buried in the Old Southgate Cemetery. He had been married twice, his first wife having died in 1866. He had 7 daughters and 2 sons in all.

As a poet, his greatest recognition came from American readers, and he is believed to have been the original of George Eliot's *Felix Holt*. His poetry is rugged, full of vigour, fertile imagination and lyrical melody. There is no doubt whatsoever that Madame Blavatsky had a great respect for his ideas, his mystical interpretation of various Biblical sayings, and his dedication to the cause of freedom and the amelioration of the condition of the poor.

See for further data regarding Gerald Massey: *Review of Reviews*, London, December 1907 (portrait); *Book Monthly*, London, September 1907 (portrait).



¹ Reviewed apparently by H.P. Blavatsky herself, in *The Theosophist*, Vol. III, February, 1882, pp. 127-28.

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