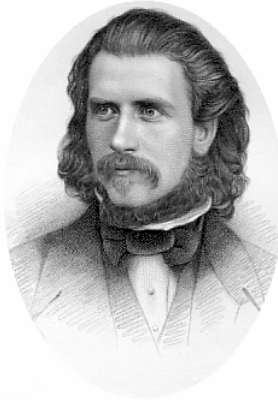


GERALD MASSEY
Poet, Author and Evolutionist
CENTENARY 2007



29 May 1828 – 29 October 1907

This year marks the centenary of the death of Gerald Massey. A man of varied talents, he spent his early life fighting the cause of the working man as a political (“Chartist”) agitator, radical journalist and poet. He later became a noted essayist and literary critic, lecturer, and a Shakespearian researcher (as such, he published well-argued theories on a subject of continuing controversy and lively debate, the circumstances surrounding Shakespeare’s Sonnets).



But undoubtedly Massey’s enduring reputation will rest on his work as an evolutionist, research that he commenced in middle life and which absorbed his later years until his death in 1907. Braving much censure and ridicule, he advanced new theories on human and religious origins in which he identified Ancient Egypt as the origin of civilisation. Many of his theories have since been validated, in particular the now generally accepted ‘Out of Africa’ origins and early migration flows of humans, which geneticists are now establishing using DNA analysis and comparison techniques that Massey could never have imagined.

The aim of this brief commemorative booklet is to act as a small but authoritative tribute to the man. The Massey website (Gerald-Massey.org.uk) contains David Shaw’s biography together with much of Massey’s poetry, his literary critiques, lectures, articles, reviews, correspondence and his main works on Shakespeare’s Sonnets, all of which are made available for reference and further study. Numerous illustrations amplify the text and hyperlinks give instant access to most cited references. Also included are a selection of the literary work of other radical/artisan poets and writers of Massey’s era, Ernest Jones, Thomas Cooper, John James Bezer and W. J. Linton being among those that he knew personally.

(Thomas) Gerald Massey was the eldest son of William Massey, a canal boatman, and his wife Mary. He was born into a life of poverty at Gannel Wharf, Tring, in Hertfordshire. Put to work (a 72 hour week!) in the town's silk mill at the age of eight, he later turned his hand to the local cottage industry of straw-plaiting for the manufacture of straw hats. Self taught, as were many artisan writers of that time, by the age of 19 Massey was composing both lyrical verse

*Spring is coming; lovely Spring!
Soon her liquid silvery voice
Will through waving woods be ringing,
In her bow'r of roses singing,
Where the limpid streams rejoice...*

and poems of political and social protest.....

*...we are crush'd and trodden under
By imps of power, who long have torn
The fair rose of toilworn pleasure,
Flinging us the piercing thorn...*

....and it was at Tring that his earliest poetry collection, "Original Poems and Chansons," was published at a shilling a copy.

In the early 1850's Massey (by then living in London) joined the Christian Socialists, embracing their aims of co-operation and at the same time becoming more actively involved within the Chartist movement, where he aligned himself strongly with George Julian Harney's views on social rights. By his early twenties Massey had already been on the editorial staff of several radical newspapers, including *The Red Republican*, *The Friend of the People* and *The Star of Freedom*, to which he contributed republican articles and fiery poetry aimed at the working man

*..... our fathers are praying for pauper-pay,
Our mothers with death's kiss are white!
Our sons are the rich man's serfs by day,
And our daughters his slaves by night!*

In 1850 Massey married. His wife, Rosina Jane, was a noted clairvoyant who provided him with an impetus to explore the subject. His conclusions, formed over a number of years, influenced much of his later studies and lectures on spiritualism

in Britain and abroad, and also some of his poems, most notably the ballad, "A Tale of Eternity".

In 1854 Massey's most cited poem, "The Ballad of Babe Christabel", was published with other lyrical poems and attracted the attention of Hepworth Dixon, Editor of the widely read literary periodical, the *Athenæum*. Favourable reviews in that and other journals and newspapers assured Massey's entry into literary society. Dixon also introduced him to Lady Marian Alford, who was attracted to Massey's poetry. She was able to assist him with her patronage over a period of some 25 often difficult years, including housing his family on a farm on her family's estate at Ashridge, near Berkhamsted.

In 1855, Massey moved to Edinburgh to take up an editorial post with the *Edinburgh News*, but the appointment was short-lived. By 1857, redundancy coupled with the death of two of his children and his wife's growing depressive illness forced his return to England. Here he gained a foothold as a poetry reviewer for the *Athenæum*, a post that he held for the next 10 years. He also commenced lecturing.

For many years Massey's main livelihood was as a travelling lecturer, initially speaking on literary subjects. The press often reported his talks as being crowded and well received....

"...the lecture proceeded with that rippling eloquence of which Massey was such a master. His voice – always full, musical and mellow – had lost none of its resonance, and his hearers were alternately dissolved in tears or shaking with laughter. Tender glances from bright eyes were thrown upon him, and before he had progressed half an hour it required no particularly acute observer to discover that half of the young ladies in the hall adored him. When he began to recite the "Bridge of Sighs" [Thomas Hood] you could have heard a pin drop...."

Massey's later lectures tended to focus on spiritualism, which had a wide following during the 19th Century, and on subjects relating to mythology and religion – unsurprisingly, his talks touching on religion sometimes met with *loud* controversy....

...Gerald Massey delivered two lectures, on Spiritualism, to large and intelligent audiences at Barnard Castle; the subject was handled in a masterly style, orthodox theology was fought on its own ground, several ministers were there to hear it, and such was the artillery brought against the old creeds that the

most independent thinkers declare that its foundations are terribly shaken; raving priests and foaming bigots raised such an uproar with the old cry, "the church is in danger;" and an attempt was made to get Mr. Massey out of the town before completing his engagement....

....this was an age when one questioned the literal interpretation of Genesis at some personal risk! Besides lecturing throughout Britain, Massey made three overseas lecture tours, each taking in the U.S.A., while his 1883-85 tour extended to Australia and New Zealand.

From 1860, Massey became increasingly interested in Shakespeare's Sonnets and following much research he published his theories on the identities of those involved. *Shakspeare's Sonnets never before interpreted* (1866) is an interesting, readable volume that he later updated. In Massey's view some sonnets are dramatic and others personal, while the evidence points to Lady Penelope Rich (the "Stella" of Sir Philip Sidney's love poem *Astrophel and Stella*) as Shakespeare's "Dark Lady", while Shakespeare himself; Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton and his wife, Elizabeth Vernon; and William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke, are the other participants.

Massey's last significant poetry, "A Tale of Eternity and other poems" appeared in 1870; it was around this time that he began his controversial research into the origin and development of western religions, work that took over 30 years to complete. His conclusions, published in three books (*A Book of the Beginnings; The Natural Genesis; and Ancient Egypt*), represent an enormous amount of research into the development of myth, symbol, language and religion. Using a system of typologies as a means of classification, he took origins further back than James Frazer in his *Golden Bough*. The major sections included totemism, primitive customs, numbers, time, mythical creations etc. Massey considered that mythology is a mode of representing certain elemental powers by means of living types that were superhuman – like phenomena in nature, *i.e.* representation on the ground of likeness. They were the representatives of certain natural forces, from which the earliest gods evolved. 'Things' were used to express thoughts, and these 'things' became symbols – outward and visible shapes of ideas – the beginning of gesture sign-language by imitation being earlier

than words. Massey treats mythology as ‘the mirror of prehistoric sociology’ and states that the earliest expression of culture originated in Africa, spreading world-wide through waves of migration.

Ancient Egypt (1907) provides the completion of his earlier in-depth works, encapsulating the results of his research with more recent material. In twelve sections, Massey expands his thesis from the earliest human sign language, through totemism and ancestral spirits, to astronomical mythology. He demonstrates the early development of religion from both these and ancient Egyptian sources and shows the parallels between Egyptian, Hebrew, Gnostic and Christian religious structures.

Massey’s evolutionist ‘Darwinian’ ideas, together with his opinion regarding African origins were sufficient to condemn him in the eyes of many critics. But the *Quarterly Journal of Science* commented that if his work could be presented in a condensed form, it would represent a valuable – almost necessary – companion to Darwin’s *Descent of Man*, the one complementing and supporting the other. His ideas also received support from, among others, the explorer Richard Burton.

Concerning the value of Massey’s works today, he ranks among the more significant of our minor Victorian poets, his early ‘radical’ poetry also being of interest to social historians. His essays on literary subjects present well-studied and perceptive observations on the authors, poets and literary subjects of the age. Although there have been a number of more recent books and theories on the circumstances surrounding Shakespeare’s enigmatic Sonnets, Massey’s opus still ranks as a conceivable analysis of attribution, of dedicator and dedicatee and of the other hazy personalities. Since his death in 1907, ongoing research in genetics, archaeological anthropology, philology and astro-mythology has, largely, vindicated many of his evolutionary theories, in particular his conclusions concerning the African origin and migration of the human species. Other linked studies also show connections to his earlier theories, and these together with ‘the development of mythology,’ remain subjects worthy of further investigation. It is in this field, of evolution, that Massey’s most enduring reputation is likely to rest.

A CRY OF THE UNEMPLOYED.

'TIS hard to be a wanderer through this bright world of ours,
Beneath a sky of smiling blue, on fragrant paths of flowers,
With music in the woods, as there were nought but pleasure known,
Or Angels walked Earth's solitudes, and yet with want to groan:
To see no beauty in the stars, nor in Earth's welcome smile,
To wander cursed with misery! willing, but cannot toil.
With burning sickness at my heart, I sink down famishèd:
God of the Wretched, hear my prayer: I would that I were dead!

Heaven droppeth down with manna still in many a golden shower,
And feeds the leaves with fragrant breath, with silver dew the flower.
Honey and fruit for Bee and Bird, with bloom laughs out the tree,
And food for all God's happy things; but none gives food to me.
Earth, wearing plenty for a crown, smiles on my aching eye,
The purse-proud,—swathed in luxury,—disdainful pass me by:
I've willing hands, an eager heart—but may not work for bread!
God of the Wretched, hear my prayer: I would that I were dead!

Gold, art thou not a blessèd thing, a charm above all other,
To shut up hearts to Nature's cry, when brother pleads with brother?
Hast thou a music sweeter than the voice of loving-kindness?
No! curse thee, thou'rt a mist 'twixt God and men in outer blindness.
"Father, come back!" my Children cry; their voices, once so sweet,
Now pierce and quiver in my heart! I cannot, dare not meet
The looks that make the brain go mad, for dear ones asking bread—
God of the Wretched, hear my prayer: I would that I were dead!

Lord! what right have the poor to wed? Love's for the gilded great:
Are they not formed of nobler clay, who dine off golden plate?
'Tis the worst curse of Poverty to have a feeling heart:
Why can I not, with iron grasp, choke out the tender part?
I cannot slave in yon Bastille! I think 'twere bitterer pain,
To wear the Pauper's iron within, than drag the Convict's chain.
I'd work but cannot, starve I may, but will not beg for bread:
God of the Wretched, hear my prayer: I would that I were dead!

GERALD MASSEY

GERALD MASSEY AND CHARTISM.

By Prof. Owen R. Ashton,
Emeritus Professor in Modern British Social History,
Staffordshire University. June 2007.

The Chartists' sustained campaign between 1838 and 1858 across Britain for the Six Points of the People's Charter was the first mass political movement by working people in modern history. The Chartists' avowed object was the creation of a democratic society based upon universal suffrage, secret ballot, equal electoral districts, the removal of property qualifications for parliamentary candidates, payment of MPs, and annual parliaments. At a time of considerable industrial and social change in the country, Chartism was more than just a narrowly defined parliamentary reform movement. Under the leadership of Feargus O'Connor MP and through the columns of his *Northern Star* newspaper, this sophisticated mass movement mobilised a powerful opposition to the New Poor Law Act of 1834 and the Rural Police Force Act five years later; it also acted as vehicle for the agitation against excessive factory hours of work and was an important voice in the debate on the reform of the nation's currency.

Chartism seriously troubled the Victorian authorities by its organisation of mass meetings, conventions or anti-parliaments, fiery oratory, threats and actual outbreaks of violence, particularly in 1839, 1842 and 1848. Contemporaries were rightly alarmed too by the Chartists' creation of an alternative radical, political culture at the heart of which were their own churches, schools, clubs and institutions, and one in which countless men and women wrote their own hymns, protest poetry and prose to express their hopes for social justice.

Branch activist at Uxbridge, Chartist internationalist, industrial co-operator and radical journalist, Gerald Massey played a key role in the creation of this rich and radical way of life. Coming to the movement late he nevertheless made his mark nationally: in the Chartist press and on the platform he became one of the movement's most talented and inspirational worker-poets and writers. Any serious study of the Chartist legacy cannot fail to recognise the standing in which Gerald Massey was held both within radical politics and late Victorian literature.

In this short, commemorative booklet, as elsewhere in traditional form and on-line, David Shaw and Ian Petticrew have performed a valuable, scholarly service in 'keeping the Chartists on the map'.

JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN GENESIS: THE “MASSEYAN” VIEW.

By Dr. Charles Finch, Director of International Health,
Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta. June 2007.

There is a continuing controversy among students of the past that is usually posed as a dichotomy between a ‘diffusionist’ and an ‘anti-diffusionist’ view of history:

- The diffusionists posit that whenever a complex of similar or identical cultural traits are shared between two widely-spaced groups of people, it means that one group is the giver and the other the receiver of such traits.
- The anti-diffusionists insist that different groups of human beings can discover or arrive at identical customs, beliefs, and techniques independently, without any intervening influence of one group upon the other.

Clearly, there is abundant evidence in favour of the anti-diffusionist opinion, but its validity and cogency recede to the nothingness when the number of shared cultural traits accumulates past a certain point. Then, only a diffusionist viewpoint can explain the phenomenon. In fact, it has been postulated that if two cultural groups share at least 12 traits in common, it is presumptive evidence of diffusional influence of one upon the other. The more discernible shared traits there are beyond that threshold, the more certain it is that diffusion is the explanation for that commonality.

Gerald Massey was a diffusionist, plain and simple. For him the issue was unarguable: the religious ideas and symbols whose genesis is in the Nile Valley, flowed outward from Africa eventually giving birth to both Judaism and Christianity. The number of parallels between those two religions on the one hand and those of Nile Valley religion on the other, are simply too abundant to admit of any other conclusion. The above-mentioned threshold of correspondences that distinguishes a diffusionist explanation from that of independent development is so far surpassed in the comparison of Judaeo-Christian and Nile Valley religions that the unbiased observer, in Massey’s view, is compelled to admit that Judaeo-Christian religion is the end-product of the Nile Valley world-system. The story of Horus presages that of Moses; the epic of Osiris, the mummified and anointed Kerest, prefigures that of Yahushua, the resurrected Christ. For Massey it was a Nile Genesis and only through understanding the Nile Genesis is the Judaeo-Christian epoch intelligible.

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