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CONTENTS

Frontispiece, Gerald Massey.

Gerald Massey, Dudley Wright ........................................... 449

Revolution and the Culturalist Conception of History, William Nathanson 458

What Is Your Creed? Helen Nelson Glassford .......................... 468

More "Arguments About It and About." Henri Vanderbyll ......... 476

Piety and the Poseur's Policy of Power, Hardin T. McClelland .......... 491

Kapporoth, Julius J. Price .................................................... 499

Psychology and the Communist, Janet B. T. Christie ................. 504

Progressive Theology, Harold Berman .................................. 508

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Frontispiece to The Open Court.
GERALD MASSEY, one of the earliest Christian Socialists, is now one of the great unknown; he is not even a name to the present generation. Yet he made a great fight for freedom and hesitated not to point out England's faults and blunders. He was born at Gamble Wharf, near Tring, in Hertfordshire, on 29th May, 1828, in a stone hut, which was occupied by his parents as a permanent home at a rental of a shilling a week. His father was a canal boatman and when in full employment, which was not always the case, earned ten shilling a week. The "education" of Gerald was limited to occasional attendance at a school conducted by one of the neighbors, a fee of one penny a week being paid for each child attending. At an early age, however, Gerald, in common with his brothers and sisters and the other children of the neighborhood, had to turn out and swell the family income, even though his contribution for a full week's employment might not exceed ninepence or a shilling. His first situation, when he was but eight years of age, was at a silk-mill, where his hours of labor were twelve a day. When a fire occurred which burned this mill to the ground he became a straw-plaiter.

At the age of fifteen, Gerald went to London, where he secured a situation as an errandboy. Until then, he had read but little and that with difficulty. His library had been limited to the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, and Robinson Crusoe, with a few Wesleyan tracts. But when he went to London his reading was greatly extended. The story is best told in his own language:

"Till then, I had wondered why I had lived at all, whether

It was not better not to be
I was so full of misery."
Now I began to think that the crown of all desire, and the sum of all existence, was to read and get knowledge. Read, read, read! I used to read at all possible times, and in all possible places; up in bed till two or three in the morning—nothing daunted by once setting the bed on fire. Greatly indebted was I also to the bookstalls, where I have read a great deal, often folding a leaf in a book and returning the next day to continue the subject; but sometimes the book was gone, and then great was my grief! When out of a situation, I have often gone without a meal to purchase a book. Until I fell in love, and began to rhyme as a matter of consequence, I never had the least predilection for poetry. In fact, I always eschewed it; if I ever met with any, I instantly skipped it over, and passed on, as one does, with the description of scenery, etc., in a novel. I always loved the birds and flowers, the woods and the stars; I felt delight in being alone in a summer-wood, with song, like a spirit, in the trees, and the golden sun-bursts glinting through the verdurous roof; and was conscious of a mysterious creeping of the blood and tingling of the nerves, when standing alone in the starry midnight.

"But until I began to rhyme, I cared nothing for written poetry. The first verses I ever made were on 'Hope,' when I was utterly hopeless, and after I had begun, I never ceased for about four years, at the end of which time I rushed into print.

As an errandboy I had, of course, many hardships to undergo, and to bear with much tyranny, and that led me into reasoning upon men and things, the cause of misery, the anomalies of our societary state, politics, etc., and the circle of my being rapidly outsurged. New power came to me with all that I saw and thought and read. I studied political works—such as Paine, Volney, Howitt, Louis Blanc, etc., which gave me another element to mould into my verses, though I am convinced that a poet must sacrifice much if he write party-political poetry. His politics must be above the pinnacle of party zeal: the politics of eternal truth, right, and justice. He must not waste a life on what tomorrow may prove to have been merely the question of a day. The French Revolution of 1848 had the greatest effect on me of any circumstance connected with my own life up to that time. It was scarred and bloodburnt into the very core of my being."

When about eighteen years of age, he published in his native town of Tring a volume entitled, Poems and Chansons, which was printed and published privately and sold at a shilling a copy. He
may now be said to have embarked upon a literary and journalistic career, for, in 1848, when only twenty years of age, he became editor of *The Spirit of Freedom*, a paper published in the Chartist interest. In 1849 he became acquainted with Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley, who were engaged in promoting the co-operative system. To the first named he inscribed the following verses:

God bless you, Brave One, in our dearth,
Your life shall leave a trail of glory;
Around the poor man's homely hearth
We proudly tell your suffering's story.

All Saviour-souls have sacrificed,
With nought but noble faith for guerdon;
And ere the world hath crown'd the Christ,
The man to death hath borne the burden!

The Savage broke the glass that brought
The heavens nearer, saith the legend!
Even so the Bigots welcome aught
That makes our vision starrier-region'd!

They laid their Corner-stones in dark
Deep waters, who up-built in beauty,
On Earth's old heart, their Triumph-Arc
That crowns with glory lives of duty.

And meekly still the martyrs go
To keep with Pain their solemn bridal!
And still they walk the fire who bow
Not down to worship Custom's idol.

In fieriest forge of martyrdom,
Their swords of soul must weld and brighten:
Tear-bathed, from fiercest furnace, come
Their lives heroic-temper'd—Titan!

And heart-strings sweetest music make
When swept by Suffering's feeling fingers!
And thro' soul-shadows starriest break
The glories on God's brave light-bringers.
Take heart! tho’ sown in tears and blood,
No seed that’s quick with love, hath perisht,
Tho’ crept in barren byways—God
Some glorious flower of life hath cherisht.

Take heart! the rude dust dark Today,
Soars a new-lighted sphere tomorrow!
And wings’of splendour burst the clay
That clasps us in Death’s fruitful furrow.

In 1851, Massey published *Voices of Freedom and Lyrics of Love*, and when he was twenty-two years of age he became one of the secretaries of the band of Christian Socialists, believing that in the tenets of that political faith was to be found the remedy for the oppression of the poor that prevailed.

“Having had to earn my own bread by the cheapening of flesh and blood thus early,” he wrote, “I never knew what childhood meant. I had no childhood. Ever since I can remember I have had the aching fear of want, throbbing in heart and brow. The currents of my life were early poisoned, and few, methinks, would pass unscathed through the scenes and circumstances in which I have lived; none, if they were as curious and precocious as I was. The child comes into the world like a new coin, with the stamp of God upon it; and in like manner as the Jews sweat down sovereigns, by bustling them into a nag to get gold dust out of them, so is the poor man’s child hustled and sweated down in this bag of society to get wealth out of it, and even as the impress of the Queen is effaced by the Jewish process, so is the image of God worn from heart and brow, and day by day the child recedes devilward. I look back now with wonder, not that so few escape, but that any escape at all to win a nobler growth for their humanity. So blighting are the influences which surround thousands in early life, to which I can bear such bitter testimony.”

In 1854 appeared Massey’s *Ballad of Babe Christabel and Other Poems*, which met with an enthusiastic reception, running through five editions in the first year. He sojourned for a year in Edinburgh, and at the termination of his visit he published *Craigerook Castle*. He then joined the staff of *The Athenaeum* and during the ten following years wrote a considerable number of the reviews which appeared in the pages of that periodical. For several years also he wrote on literary subjects in the columns of the *Quarterly*
Review. *Robert Burns and Other Lyrics* appeared in 1859; an edition of his *Collected Works* in the following year; *Havelock's March and Other Poems* in 1862, and *Shakespeare's Sonnets Never Before Interpreted* was published in 1866. This last-mentioned work drew the following notice from *Punch*:

Your monumental book's a trifle bulky  
(Five hundred pages turn some critics sulky,  
My massive Massey), but 'tis full of meat,  
And sown with Song as masculine as sweet.  
Mellifluous echoes of the master-rhymes,  
Whose music filled the Great Armada times  
Three centuries since, and still moves heart and brain.

More than the pageantries of Drury Lane.  
"Tush! none but minstrel's like of sonneting,"
Sings Shakespeare's self with an ironic ring.  
Minstrels at least will thank you for the rest  
Who have not time with heart for the Great Quest  
After the Secrets of the Sonnets, these  
May dip and taste where there's so much to please  
Both student bee and social butterfly;  
Whilst all will track with grateful heart and eye  
Your slaughtering of that colossal sham—  
Egregious Donnelly's Great Cryptogram.

Massey was a wartime poet—a true patriot, imbued with an ardent love for his country, but not blind to the many injustices inflicted by her citizens. His earlier poems were written and published at the time of the Crimean War, to which they contain many references. Some of these could, with profit, be read and applied at the present day.

**OLD ENGLAND**

There she sits in her Island-home,  
Peerless among her Peers!  
And Liberty oft to her arms doth come,  
To ease its poor heart of tears.  
Old England still throbs with the muffled fire  
Of a Past she can never forget:  
And again shall she banner the world up higher;  
For there's life in the Old Land yet.
They would mock at her now, who of old lookt forth
In their fear, as they heard her afar;
But loud will your wail be, O Kings of the Earth!
When the Old Land goes down to the war.
The Avalanche trembles, half-launcht, and half-rive,
Her voice will in motion set:
Oh ring out the tidings, ye Winds of Heaven!
There's life in the Old Land yet.

Let the storm burst, it will find the Old Land
Ready-ripe for a rough, red fray!
She will fight as she fought when she took her stand
For the Right in the olden day.
Rouse the old royal soul, Europe's best hope
Is her sword-edge by Victory set!
She shall dash Freedom's foes down Death's bloody slope;
For there's life in the Old Land yet.

WAR WAITS

And England slumbered in the lap of Peace,
Beneath her grand old Oak, which, hale and strong,
Rode down the storm and wrestled with the winds,
To rise in pomp of bloom and paean of song,
Green with the sap of many hundred springs;
And tossed its giant arms in wanton life,
Like Victory smiling in the sun of Glory.
She saw not how the worms ate out its heart.
Life deftly masks the hiding-place of death;
And Ruin leads his bride in a garland green
For sacrifice. So England slept in peace.
And in the glamour of her dream she saw
Brave fancies foot it holding Freedom's pall,
Waving their funeral links for bridal lights.

Came Nemesis, her lightnings stabbed the dark,
To show the way, and startled England woke!
Behold the glorious creature leaping from
Delilah's lap, to the battle chariot,
Like Sternness stript for strife. Grim-wooing War
Mirrors his terrible beauty in her face;
On fire to bring the death-strokes hand to hand.
Her heart is dancing to a loftier tune;
For God has called His Chosen once again,
And the old Guard of Freedom takes the field,
Rejoicing in the glory of her strength,
Like some proud cataract she shoots for the strife,
And hurl's her hurrying waves of valour down.
The glorious shudder of intrepid blood
Hurtles through all her veins, and Victory's voice
Cries from the inmost oracle of her soul.
Her swift avenging armaments shall flame
O'er land and sea, sublime as when of old.
With a colossal calm she rode the waves
Of War, that heaved magnificent in storm.
The noble prophecy of ripened age
Was on her youthful brow; fulfilment comes.
She lifts the Ark of Freedom in her arms,
Safe through the deluge of a warring world.

Gerald Massey was a Political Poet. He suffered from a sharp appreciation of the evils wrought by others. He had delivered himself from his environment and had risen in a noble manner from the trials and temptations that beset his earlier career; had become the victor in a desperate struggle with poverty, but he realized that while he had risen and overcome, others had fallen and succumbed. He wrote the following when he was but twenty-six years of age:

"I have been congratulated by some correspondents on the uses of suffering, and the riches I have wrung from Poverty; as though it were a blessed thing to be born in the condition in which I was, and surrounded with untoward circumstances as I have been. My experience tells me that Poverty is inimical to the development of Humanity's noblest attributes. Poverty is a never-ceasing struggle for the means of living, and it makes one hard and selfish. To be sure, noble lives have been wrought out in the sternest poverty. Many such are being wrought out now, by the unknown heroes and martyrs of the Poor. I have known men and women in the very worst circumstances, to whom heroism seemed a heritage, and to be noble a natural way of living. But they were so in spite of their poverty, and not because of it. What they might have been if the world had
done better by them, I cannot tell; but if their minds had been enriched by culture the world would have been the gainer.

"Battle on bravely, O sons of Humanity!  
Dash down the cup from your lips, O ye toilers!  
Too long hath the world bled for tyrants' insanity—  
Too long our weakness been strength to our spoils  
For Freedom and Right, gallant hearts, wrestle ever,  
And speak ye to others and the proud words that won ye  
Your rights conquer'd once, shall be wrung from you never;  
Battle on! battle aye! Heaven's eyes are on ye!  
And Earth has no sight half so glorious to see,  
As a People upgirding its might to be free!"

"Dear God! what hosts are trampled 'mid this killing crush for gold!  
What noble hearts are sapp'd of love! what spirits lose life's hold!  
Yet a merry world it might be, opulent for all, and aye,  
With its lands that ask for labor, and its wealth that wastes away.  
This world is full of beauty, as other worlds above;  
And, if we did our duty, it might be full of love."

Gerald Massey took a deep interest in Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and kindred subjects, on which he lectured in the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries. His new interests, however, enticed him away from poetry, to such a degree that he was once described as "the most unpublished of living authors," but his belief in the persistence of life after death was firm-rooted, and his experiments in the realm of communication with the departed were not undertaken from mere curiosity or as a pastime. In his introduction to My Lyrical Life, published in 1890, he wrote:

"My faith in our future life is founded upon facts in nature and realities of my own personal experience; not upon falsification of natural fact. These facts have been more or less known to me personally during fifty years of familiar face-to-face acquaintanceship, therefore my certitude is not premature; they have given the proof palpable that our very own human identity and intelligence do persist after the blind of darkness has been drawn down in death. The Spiritualist who has plumbed the void of death as I have touched this solid ground of fact, has established a faith that can neither be undermined nor overthrown. He has done with the poetry of desolation and despair; the sighs of unavailing regret, and all the
passionate wailing of unfruitful pain. He cannot be bereaved in soul! And I have had ample testimony that my poems have done welcome work, if only in helping to destroy the tyranny of death, which has made so many mental slaves afraid to live."

But Egyptology, as well as Spiritualism, found attraction for him, and he is, perhaps, known better for his volumes, six in number, in three couples on The Book of the Beginnings, published in 1881; The Natural Genesis, published in 1883; and Ancient Egypt, the Light of the World, published in 1907, the year of his passing away.

In 1863, he was granted, on Lord Palmerston's recommendation, a Civil List pension of £70, which the Marquess of Salisbury increased to £100 in 1887. From 1866 to 1877 he lived at Ward's Hurst, near Little Gaddesden, in a farmhouse provided by Lord Brownlow. In the latter year he removed to New Southgate, where he remained until 1890, when he migrated to Dulwich. In 1893, he removed to South Norwood, where he passed away on 29th October, 1907, in the eightieth year of his age, his remains being interred in Old Southgate cemetery.

The career of Gerald Massey suggested the character of Felix Holt, the Radical, to George Eliot, and his work received at various times high appreciative notices from, among other, Walter Savage Landor, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Henry Taylor (author of Philip Van Artevelde), Bishop Connop Thirlwall, Walter Bagehot, and Hugh Miller. He was twice married: first to Rosina Jane Knowles (buried in Little Gaddesdon Churchyard, 23rd March, 1866), by whom he had three daughters and a son, and second, in January, 1868, to Eva Byron, by whom he had four daughters and a son.