

David Mather Masson 1822-1907

Writer, editor and academic

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David Mather Masson was born in Aberdeen on 2 December 1822, the eldest child of William Masson, a stone-cutter, and his wife Sarah Mather. After graduating from Marischal College, Aberdeen, in 1839, Masson moved to Edinburgh to study for the ministry but abandoned this in favour of a literary career. In the midst of the Disruption crisis, he returned to Aberdeen and edited the *Banner*, a weekly paper advocating Free Church principles, from 1842 to early 1844.



After spending much of 1844 in London, Masson returned to Edinburgh and worked for W & R Chambers writing histories for their Educational Series. In 1847 he moved to London where he continued to work for Chambers and wrote articles for various periodicals. He made a wide circle of friends in London, including Thomas Carlyle and the Italian nationalist Joseph Mazzini, and met his future wife, Emily Rosaline Orme.

Masson was appointed Professor of English Literature at University College London in 1852 and from 1858 to 1868 he also edited the literary monthly *Macmillan's Magazine*. In 1865 he was appointed Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at Edinburgh University, a post he held until he retired in 1895. He took over as editor of the *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* in 1879 and was appointed Historiographer Royal for Scotland in 1893.

Masson was an active supporter of university education for women, lecturing on English Literature to the Edinburgh Ladies Educational Association, later the Edinburgh Association for the University Education of Women. The first hall of residence for women at Edinburgh University was named Masson Hall in his honour when it was opened in George Square in 1897.

Masson married Emily Rosaline Orme in 1853. Their only son, David Orme Masson, was appointed the first Professor of Chemistry at Melbourne University in 1886. Their second daughter, Helen, married George Lovell Gulland (1862-1941), later Professor of Medicine in Edinburgh 1915-28. Their other two daughters, Flora (1856-1937) and Rosaline (1867-1949), had successful careers as writers, and Flora also trained as a nurse at St Thomas Hospital in London, and was matron at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford in the early 1890s before returning to Edinburgh.