

# Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

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The George MacDonald Society

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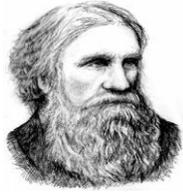
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# *Orts*

## **The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 2, September 1981**

Our second General Meeting held on the 6th May, had the pleasure of welcoming two of our members from abroad. From America, Professor Joyce Hines and from France, Mlle. Georgette Lormant.

To both these ladies I must express my gratitude for the effort they had taken to attend.

Our thanks are also due to the Charles Williams Society for announcing our existence to their members.

The meeting itself went well, despite the long flight of stairs which had to be climbed to reach the room put at our disposal. I myself arrived somewhat early and walked into the room which to my surprise was filled with a number of young people deeply involved with the more complicated aspects of yoga.

However, this athletic crowd kindly left on time and the room was given over to the less energetic pursuits of literary society.

The minutes of that meeting are enclosed with this newsletter so I will say no more on that subject.

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I do not know how many members have had the opportunity of reading the many newspaper reviews of George MacDonald's Lecture tour of the U.S.A. in 1872/3. The reports contain many interesting comments on MacDonald himself and his style of address.

This extract is taken from The Methodist Recorder of February 8th, 1873. "MacDonald charmed an immense and appreciative Pittsburg audience, on the evening of January 30th, with an analysis of Shakespeare's play of Macbeth. He was announced for another topic, - Tom Hood - but his trunk, with books and manuscripts, was wrong shipped, someway, and he substituted "Macbeth"."

"He riveted attention from the beginning and held it, entranced, to the close. The EVANGELIST says, of this lecture: "He remarked, generally, by way of introduction of Shakespeare's writing, that the plot is never the principle thing. Humanity is the stage on which the great dramatist plays, and the plot is merely subservient to this. Macbeth he described as a soldier of great physical courage, a courage which may be wholly unaccompanied by the highest kind of courage. He was possessed of a vivid imagination and was of a highly nervous organization.

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Lady Macbeth was possessed of but little imagination, had but a feeble moral sense, and was swallowed up in ambition for her husband. He did not think she was a bad woman at the start.”

“He sketched in a masterly manner the fearful progress they both made in evil, when once they had yielded to temptation. Such topics as the sinfulness of ambition, the wrongs a man may do to his conscience, the fearful progress in moral deterioration which is made by men or women when they first follow their inclinations without self-restraint, were handled with a thrilling power.”

“He touched most interesting question in intellectual and moral philosophy, in theology, as well as in literary criticism; and the preacher whose sermon should produce as deep and salutary an impression might well be satisfied. And yet the lecture sparkled with wit and humour throughout.”

The writer of this piece then actually met George MacDonald.

“He is a sturdy Scotchman, straight, broad-shouldered, full-bearded, and entirely innocent of anything like professionalism or affection.

He is natural, easy, genial, without any pet-phrases or kill-time mannerism. One feels in company with a hearty friend, in sitting near Macdonald, seeing his manly face and hearing his honest brogue. He is accompanied by his wife and eldest son; while ten children still remain at the homestead in London. We were shown a photograph of the whole family – a sunny-faced and radiant group. With little Maurice among them, the lad who suggested, his mother said, by his quaint sayings, that weird writing, “On the back of the North Wind”.”

The article concludes by saying,

“Well, MacDonald does not come often, nor shall we ever see or hear his like in our Smoky City more. We shall have renewed pleasure in his books, and stronger faith in the great life whose light we have seen and whose warmth we have felt.”

Glowing words indeed. Although most of the actual reviews were of a complimentary nature, MacDonald, did not escape the attentions of the gossip columns. This extract is taken from a newspaper called The Capital, unfortunately I do not have the date, under the heading “Social Gossip”.

“Mr George M[a]cDonald, the author, is the guest of Mr and Mrs Russell Gurney, at whose hospitable mansion he has been tenderly nursed during his late sickness. On Monday night a select few were entertained by Mr and Mrs Russell Gurney, with Professor Tyndall as the lion of the occasion.

By the bye, speaking of George M[a]cDonald, reminds us of a rather good story told at the expense of a charming little girl, who one day last week was invited to an entertainment where she was to meet this author. Wishing to appear familiar with the work of the celebrated writer, she wrote a friend in the city that she has “been invited to meet the great lecturer,” and begged her friend to send her his books, whatever they might be. The friend supposing that by the

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lecturer she meant Professor Tyndall, sent over all that learned man's works. Our beautiful little impromptu bluestocking did her level best to cram from the occasion, and read so much that her little head grew dizzy. She mastered the titles, however, and feeling well armed for the encounter, attended the entertainment. She had the honor of having Mr M[a]cDonald presented to her, and on the first favorable opportunity she opened on him:

“Oh! Mr M[a]cDonald, I am so delighted to meet you. I have read all your beautiful books.”

George M[a]cDonald bowed gracefully.

“I do think your “Fragments” so lovely.”

George M[a]cDonald stared like a featherless owl.

“But the most thrilling of all is the “Glaciers of the Alps”.”

The poor pen-driver could not utter a word. Indeed he seemed to be catching his breath as if he had received a blow below the belt.

“And how brilliant you are on Light and Sound! Do, Mr M[a]cDonald, tell me how you produce such beautiful things.”

The Englishman came to the conclusion that the little girl was chaffing him, especially as some audile smiles in the immediate neighbourhood told him certain people were being amused, so he coloured up to the hair, and fled the encounter in such confusion that the company feared he was suffering from a relapse of his late sickness. But we are happy in saying that it was only a slight attack of “cram infantum Americanus”, and that he is now convalescent.

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I heard recently that St George's Wood, the house that MacDonald lived in for the last few years of his life was for sale.

Built in 1900 to designs of Robert Falconer MacDonald's, it was given to Louisa Powell MacDonald for her lifetime.

Following MacDonald's death, the house remained in the family for a short time and was then bought and turned into a girl's school. About fifteen years ago the house became a maternity home.

If any of the three acres of woodland and gardens survive intact around the house I very much doubt if the building will be bought as a residence; more likely it will be redeveloped, but in any case I will try to take some photographs of the house – just in case!

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If anyone would like to write on any subject for the Newsletter or the Journal please send letters, articles etc., to the address below.

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