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The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 35, April 1995

A MEMORY OF THE MACDONALDS IN U.S.A.

An almost forgotten trace of the MacDonald family is still visible in Asheville, North Carolina, U.S.A. This is a weatherworn stone plinth, part of a memorial to Louise, the wife of George MacDonald's son Ronald, in Riverside Cemetery. Ronald had become headmaster of a local episcopal school in Asheville; Louise was taken ill soon after they arrived in America and died not long after. Lilia MacDonald came over in 1890 to act as her brother's housekeeper.

The subject has been investigated by Dale Slusser who lives in Asheville and hopes to have a plaque put on the plinth which still stands. She contributes an article on the subject to the next issue of **North Wind**.

'MYTHLORE'

A set of the magazine 'Mythlore' is being purchased by the Society, partly with the profits from book sales. This publication rather resembles 'seven', also coming from U.S.A., but from the west coast. Ostensibly it focuses on Tolkien, Lewis and Williams, but in practice it has a wider range than that of 'Seven'. 'Mythlore' will be added to the MacDonald Collection in Kings College, London.

NEWS FROM HUNTLY

If 'Orts' was a newspaper, the largest headlines would be demanded by the present story.

George MacDonald's childhood home, The Farm at Huntly, later known as Greenkirtle, is not of great size—larger than Wordsworth's Dove Cottage, smaller than the Brontes' Haworth Parsonage—and it was not his home in adult life at all. Yet a man's own country and his childhood are vital to his nature, and all those devoted to MacDonald's work are deeply concerned with the fate of this building. When it was put on the market in January there was great activity, and stress, in the MacDonald Society who naturally wanted it but had practically no resources for the purchase. The Secretary was tireless in approaching authorities for help

including the Landmark Trust, Gordon District Council, Historic Scotland and the Scottish National Trust. Much sympathy was felt but the prospect of actual grants was poor. However, those who were persistently optimistic ('Good is coming to me—good is always coming') were justified when the Johannesen family of California saved the situation in the style of the benevolent millionaire in the traditional novel.

Several of us have been fortunate in meeting the family in this country and know there is no question of fantastic wealth but these are hardworking business people who actually took up printing and binding in order to see that MacDonalds works were kept readily available to the public. Other reprints are of course being produced in America, but not 'from the ground up' so to speak. Their well-made volumes are not thought of as goods to be marketed at maximum profit but as vital messages to a world deeply in need of spiritual renewal.

The Johannesens were quick to put out a circular announcing the exciting story: 'Mr and Mrs Black (the previous owners) sold Greenkirtle to Seth, our son. It is a dream come true since we first visited the Blacks in 1989. Seth plans Greenkirtle to be his second home on and off while also working at our Whitethorn (California) saw mill to pay back the family home mortgage. We shall work together to make Greenkirtle useful to the many MacDonald enthusiasts that might like to visit and stay in the Huntly area. It can be used year round beginning April 1995. Cullen is a half hour's drive away. Trains stop in Huntly. Lush green hills all round...'

Andy Johannesen's delight is perfectly clear, as is his generous wish to share it with all those who have found help and inspiration in George MacDonald. The purchase should be landmark in MacDonald studies and in Society's development.

(Please note that the Johannesens' publications are now being handled from a different address and **should no longer be ordered** from that of the Secretary. Details are given elsewhere in this issue.)

OTHER NEWS FROM HUNTLY

Those who are concerned with preserving the essential character of Huntly have been disturbed by the possibility that a portion of Glamourhaugh Park, not far from the town centre, may be used by the Gordon District Council for new housing. The park was given to Huntly by the Troup family and intended to be kept for public use in perpetuity. However, it has happened that such intentions have been set aside in many locations for business or housing reasons, and the Council has said its housing situation absolutely necessitates use of part of the property. This was discussed and protests were heard about twelve months ago. We are not fully informed on the present position but understand no decisive action has yet taken place. It may be that other areas have proved to be possible sites after all, and the wishes of the original benefactors are being respected.

JOHN DOCHERTY'S STUDY OF MACDONALD AND CARROLL

The Secretary of the George MacDonald Society has just brought out a pioneering study of the friendship of these, the two most important of nineteenth-century writers for children, MacDonald and Carroll. Forty years of 'opposition in friendship' had a decisive effect on their fantasy writing—MacDonald's early short stories and **Phantastes** and **Lilith**, and Charles Dodgson's (Carroll's) **Alice** and **Sylvie and Bruno** books. These stories lend themselves to comparative study because in them the authors deliberately parody each other's life-styles. Dodgson's humorous criticism highlights many crucial aspects of MacDonald's religious exposition, plot structure and literary allusion not recognised by any other critics.

For example, many aspects of the theme of exploring the microcosm in MacDonald's seminal fantasy **Phantastes** are criticised in **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**, where Alice explores the different parts of her soul-body in the course of learning the four cardinal Virtues. MacDonald does the same sort of thing with Dodgson's stories but also a major part of their humour.

When Dodgson's **Sylvie and Bruno** was published, MacDonald responded with **Lilith**, in which he exposes the spiritual superficiality of Dodgson's episodes, the sentimentality in his descriptions, the dangers inherent in his dalliance with young children, and above all what he saw as Dodgson's egoism. In a short summary chapter, the relationship between the two writers is seen as an outstanding illustration of Blake's dictum that 'Opposition is True Friendship'.

Full details of price and how to order are given on the enclosed leaflet. The pre-publication price is valid till the end of June, and 20% can be saved by ordering on the phone and using your Mastercard/Visa. Please note this great saving on a volume of truly original research and discovery. Docherty's work will show any reader he has much to learn about all the works discussed even if he thinks he is already thoroughly familiar with them.



GEORGE MacDONALD

George MacDonald is one of the greatest writers to come from the North-East of Scotland. He is best known as a children's writer and author of such famous books as "The Princess and the Goblin," "The Princess and Curdie" and "At the Back of the North Wind". His fairy tales are famous the world over and his adult fantasy novels "Phantastes" and "Lilith" established a new kind of writing in English which has had an enormous impact on twentieth century literature.

George MacDonald has influenced many other writers including C.S. Lewis, W.H. Auden, G.K. Chesterton and T.S. Eliot.

His books are still widely read and have been translated into many languages. MacDonald was also popular as a Scottish novelist. Several of his best novels are set in Huntly and the surrounding countryside. The characters in these books were often based on people he grew up with and many of the scenes and settings exist today.

The Gordon District Council have just produced a practical and attractive MacDonald 'Life Story and Town Trail' for Huntly packed with information and containing a good sketch map which seems to be just what visitors need. Not many towns of comparable size have treated their famous men so well. There are many line drawings by Kate Robertson, and the authoritative text is by the late Bill Raeper.

SEVEN MAGAZINE: VOLUME 11

The Americans magazine 'Seven' reappeared with Vol. 10 after a considerable break. We are now most pleased to receive the publisher's gift of Vol. 11. It is produced by the Marlon Wade Center at Wheaton College, Illinois, U.S.A. and devoted to the study of a group of Christian writers, MacDonald, Chesterton, Own Barfield, C.S. Lewis, Tolkien, Dorothy L. Sayers and Charles Williams. This issue is not given over to a single author, but among the variety there is plenty about George MacDonald. (I wonder if the magazine staff refers in its lighter moments to its own 'Magnificent Seven'?)

The MacDonald Society is somewhat concerned about the dangers of commercialism and 'hype' which were discussed in 'Orts' recently. The tendency is clearest in the case of C.S. Lewis, exemplified in the case of the film **Shadowlands** which is treated here by a number of writers in a valuable symposium. It is relevant to the cartoon film of MacDonald's **The Princess and the Goblin**, which is also reviewed. It is only too easy to see how even with good intentions the basic meaning of a fairy tale like this can be distorted and the whole message blunted.

'Seven' has a substantial article by the late Bill Raeper on 'MacDonald, James Hogg and the Scottish Folk tradition', a subject with which he was very familiar. I myself had not noticed some important Scottish traits under the surface of what seems a purely English tale like **At the**

Back of the North Wind.

Reviews are included of the following new publications:

Rolland Hein's anthology **The Heart of George MacDonald** (Harold Shaw, 1994. \$24.00 hardcover.)

Also by Rolland Hein: **George MacDonald, Victorian Mythmaker** (Star Song, 1993. \$22.99 hardcover.)

Glenn Sadler: **An expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald** (William B. Eerdmans, 1994. \$29.99 hardcover.)

This copy of 'Seven' will be placed in the Society's library in Kings College, London. Vol.10 is also being donated by the Secretary, completing the set up to the present.

Information about contents of past issues, price etc. can be obtained from the Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Illinois 60187-5593 U.S.A.

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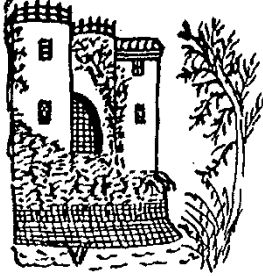
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NEW DISTRIBUTOR FOR THE JOHANNESSEN MACDONALD EDITIONS

Members are asked to note that the series of MacDonald reprints published by Johannesens, U.S.A., is no longer obtainable from John Docherty at his Forest Row, Sussex, address; he has in fact moved to a new home, details given at the end of 'Orts'. The books are now handled by:

Mrs R Johnson

61 Longsdale Road

Lincoln LN2 2JS

Tel 0522 532967

who will supply literature on the subject.

MACDONALD IN OUR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

When visiting public libraries I usually notice that MacDonald's books are available in increasing numbers (in spite of the strange political prejudice which apparently leads some libraries to ban books with the word 'princess' in their titles). Of course the children's books and fantasies are most frequently seen. I was surprised to find two different libraries with MacDonald's novel **The Elect Lady** in stock, although in the form as printed and awkwardly renamed **The Landlady's Master** by Michael Phillips, one of the enthusiastic publishers of MacDonald in California. 'Landlady' means something different over there! I wonder why librarians ordered this out-of-the-way book, so much less appealing than the best of the Scottish novels. The large-type edition was chosen, so elderly readers must have been particularly aimed at. Michael Phillips remarks that it has never been well-known, and I once found out that C.S. Lewis had never read it. The publisher found it 'a delightful surprise', however, he tells us.

A NEW MACDONALD PAPERBACK

Wordsworth Classics are an inexpensive paperback range, priced about £1. They recently brought out **At the Back of the North Wind** with the original illustrations by Arthur Hughes.

TALK AT LAST YEAR'S A.G.M

The Rev J.S. Pridmore gave a talk at the Society's winter A.G.M. on the theme of MacDonal'd's Christmas Stories, a subject ideally suited to his gifts and a source of enjoyment to everyone. This was recorded on tape and will be available for members to acquire later on when the pressure of Rev Phil Streeter's work permits the preparation of the tapes.

"Everyone... has a beast-self—and a bird-self, and a stupid fish-self, yes, and a creeping serpent-self too which takes a good deal of crushing to kill! In truth, he has also a tree-self and a crystal-self, and I don't know how many selves more—all to get into harmony. You can tell what sort a man is by his nature that comes oftener to the front."

LILITH.

"Essential beauty is infinite; and, as the Soul of Nature needs an endless succession of varied forms to embody her loveliness, countless faces of beauty springing forth, not any two the same, at every one of her heart-throbs; so the individual form needs an infinite change of its environments, to enable it to uncover all the phases of its loveliness."

PHANTASTES.

REMINDERS

We are still looking for a person or persons who can give us help or advice on fund-raising and contacting firms and individuals who make grants for activities such as our Society's. The matter continues to be urgent. Please contact the Hon. Secretary if you can help at all in this way.

We also remind members to renew their subscriptions punctually please, thus saving work for our Secretary and Treasurer, Rachel Johnson, 61 Longdales Road, Lincoln LN2 2JS. Tel. 0522 523967.

CONTACTS

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