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George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin, The Princess and Curdie*. edited by Roderick McGillis (Oxford, O.U.P. World's Classic Series, 1990) one volume p/back, £4.95.

George MacDonald Society

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**George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin*,
The Princess and Curdie. edited by Roderick McGillis
(Oxford, O.U.P. World's Classic Series, 1990) one volume
p/back, £4.95.**

There could be no better way of introducing anyone, child or adult, to George MacDonald than through this one-volume edition of MacDonald's two best-loved stories. It has the usual faults of the World's Classics paperbacks—too many typographical errors, thin grey paper, and a curious notation for references—but apart from this it is in a different class from other paperback editions. The return to MacDonald's paragraph divisions immeasurably increases the dignity of many descriptive passages and is something young readers in particular will appreciate. And this is an accurate text, free from the inexplicable alterations and omissions which disfigure most "children's editions." To give just one example: where the audacious footman has his finger snapped off, the Puffin editions (p.180) has: "Then indeed did the footman run." McDonald wrote, and this edition has: "Then indeed the footman ran, and did more than run, but nobody heeded his cries."

Many critics have claimed to recognise a negativity in the second story. McGillis considers how this misunderstanding has arisen and in a penetrating analysis shows how the feminine power so effective in *The Princess and the Goblin* gives way to the aggressiveness of masculine power in *The Princess and Curdie*. McGillis points out how important it is to the second story that the king has lost his queen—his feminine principle. MacDonald realises that the resulting disintegration cannot be annulled. He is not pessimistic. He avoids ending the story conventionally at Curdie's high-noon because he does not wish to imply **[end of page 80]** that there can be a static paradise on earth.

Like Blake, MacDonald worked all his life to understand the dynamic cycles of human existence and the interaction of the masculine and feminine principles. He avoids mystic solutions for the same reason that he had rejected Calvinism, because to him they seemed to stand outside the human condition. He speaks to us so powerfully because—unlike his anti-hero Anodos at the end of *Phantastes*—he does not float above us in an ideal realm.

When G. K. Chesterton says of *The Princess and the Goblin*: “of all the stories I have read . . . it remains the most real, the most life like,” he is thinking not of some shadowy ideal, but of life as a struggle towards Christ. The reality which Chesterton recognises pervades both books. As McGillis says: “Despite the obvious difference in tone and action, these two books do speak to each other. Like Blake’s innocence and experience, they satirize each other.” **[81]**