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## The Genesis of *The Wind From The Stars*

Gordon Reid

My knowledge of George MacDonald began in boyhood and grew gradually over the years. The first books of his that I read were *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*, both gifts from my grandmother.

The next meeting with MacDonald was mediated by C. S. Lewis's 1946 *Anthology*, which I came across when I was an undergraduate at Oxford. Oddly enough, while I found MacDonald's thoughts stimulating, and copied several into my book of favourite quotations, nevertheless I was not impelled to go and read MacDonald's works. Of course, at that time I did have many other things to read if I wanted a degree.

At any rate, it was not until I was rector of an Edinburgh parish of the Scottish Episcopal Church that I began to read MacDonald's works. One of my parishioners, Marion Lockhead, gave me *David Elginbrod*. She was herself a writer who loved George MacDonald: she used to maintain that he ought to be included in any modern Calendar of Saints (her other main candidate for this honour was Dr Johnson).

What appealed to Marion about MacDonald was his ability to describe real goodness and to make it interesting and attractive. As a Scot, she also revelled in the dialogue of the characters in MacDonald's Scottish novels. In this *Anthology* I have included two of David Elginbrod's prayers—when read aloud they are magnificent. Encouraged by Marion I read many of MacDonald's novels, some of the poetry, and both *Phantastes* and *Lilith*.

It was only a few years ago, when I was re-reading Lewis's *Anthology*, that I noticed that three quarters of his extracts were taken from the three volumes of *Unspoken Sermons*, which I had never seen. This, combined with the fact that I had a multitude of [end of page 12] favourite passages scattered through the novels and poems, made me first think that another George MacDonald *Anthology* might be possible, and that it would be interesting to include examples of MacDonald's Christian thought from everything he had written. So I reread all the MacDonald books I possessed and went to the British Library to read the rest.

I was astonished to discover that, on the whole, I found the sermons dull. Of course, the same MacDonald was there, whose thoughts and beliefs I treasured in the novels, fantasies, children's books and poetry. But it was

a MacDonald in a medium which obscured rather than exposed his deep insight. On reflection, I realised that perhaps I should have expected this, since MacDonald himself had doubted whether this was what he should be doing.

One joy was to find embedded in the sermons the gems that C. S. Lewis had extracted. But I soon decided that my first instinct was right, to take the majority of passages for the new Anthology from MacDonald's other works. Readers will, of course, find that extracts from novels may hint at events before or after the moment described, and at characters otherwise unknown. This could be irritating, but my hope is rather that it will be tantalising, and that one result of the publishing of this Anthology will be an increase in those who want to read MacDonald's works.

George MacDonald is being rediscovered at this present time. Many who knew him only as the mentor and inspirer of C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton are at last asking the (seemingly obvious) question: "If he was so important to such great thinkers as these, should I not rush to know him too?" Happily, many of MacDonald's works are now being reprinted, and much more work is being done on his life and work. I hope that *The Wind From The Stars* will be a small encouragement to this. **[13]**