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The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 48, Fall 1998

1998 A.G.M.

As last year, the 1998 A.G.M. of the Society will be held at St Stephen's Church, Westbourne Park Road, London W2. The date and time has been fixed as October 16th at 7 pm for 7.15. St Stephens is near the eastern end of Westbourne Park Road, a few hundred yards from Royal Oak Station, which is on the Hammersmith and City Line. Turn left out of the station and Westbourne Park Road is the second road on the right.

Mythopoeic Society Annual Conference-Mythcon XXIX-Wheaton College, July 1998.

As many members will be aware, the Mythopoeic Society's primary interest is in the writings of C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien. However they are also very interested in the work of the other members of the Inklings and in the literary predecessors of the Inklings, amongst whom MacDonald is the most prominent. 1998 is the centenary of the birth of C.S. Lewis and of his life-long friend and fellow-Inkling Owen Barfield, and also the centenary of the death of MacDonald's lifelong friend and fellow mythopoeic writer Lewis Carroll. So celebration of the life and work of these three men naturally took up the greater part of the Mythcon. However, there was time for a slide show, *George MacDonald: Images of His World* by Larry Fink, and a panel discussion by five MacDonald Society members. Also the Johannesens had a stall, astonishing people who previously had been unaware of the high quality of their unexpurgated MacDonald reprints. Their sales were good, with several people purchasing complete sets.

A big advantage of holding a Mythcon at Wheaton is that people can combine the conference with a few days before or afterwards working on the splendid collections at the Wade Centre. So many people did this that space there had to be rationed, but apparently no one was turned away!

Mythcons are splendid family gatherings, attracting people of all levels of interest. Papers sessions are just as likely to be chaired by an undergraduate enthusiast as by an emeritus professor. And children from age three upwards compete with the professors in such events as the fancy-dress competition, which has a strong Narnian flavour, and a version of golf based upon Tolkien's descriptions of how Dwarves use their battle-axes! Two young contributors who met through Mike Partridge's George MacDonald e-mail bulletin (and who were prize-winners in the fancy-dress competition) have promised to write-up an account of the Mythcon for that bulletin and/or for Mike's web site "The Golden Key," so check these out. Mike's e-mail addressin case you have mislaid it-is: partridge@dial.pipex.com.

His web-site address is:

The discussion on MacDonald was delightful. All the audience understood the nature of mythopoeia, so the panel were subjected to a barrage of penetrating questions, nearly every one of which was so good that it would have made an excellent subject for a conference by itself! These questions ranged over such fields as the extent and the temporal nature of MacDonald's Universalism; why, of his poetry, C.S. Lewis liked only the *Diary of an Old Soul*; the extent of his devotion to the principle of Fatherhood in view of apparently conflicting evidence from his writings; the pros and cons of his spontaneous preaching style; and his conception of the Trinity.

Larry Fink showed slides of the numerous photographs he has taken for his projected book, "George MacDonald: Images of his World," for which Rolland Hein is providing the text. It is astonishing how most of the places associated with MacDonald have changed very little since his time (the house he built in Bordighera is one of the few exceptions to this). Larry has a gift for capturing the essence of all these places and his Scottish photographs in particular are quite exceptionally beautiful. Some advance funding will be required before this book can be published therefore Larry is selling large, gallery-quality prints of a few of the photographs likely to be of most general interest. These were all displayed at Mythcon where they aroused intense admiration. Details are given opposite.

Paul Ford, one of the two Special Guests at the Mythcon, circulated copies of his "Index and Brief Analysis of the Contents of *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, by C.S. Lewis." Paul has given permission for the MacDonald Society to make this very useful eight-page publication available to members. It may be obtained from the Acting Editor of *Orts*, 9 Medway Drive, FOREST ROW RH 18 5NU. for three 2nd class stamps in the U.K. or two U.S. dollars (*dollar bills only please*), which will cover air-mail postage to the U.S.. The work is copyright, so anyone who wishes to copy all or part of it must obtain permission from Paul Ford.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM LARRY FINK'S "GEORGE MACDONALD: IMAGES OF HIS WORLD"

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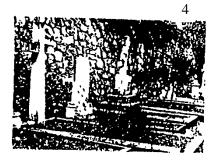
- 1. Bust: Brander Library; Huntly, Scotland
- 2. Birthplace, Duke Street; Huntly, Scotland
- 3. "The Farm," boyhood home; Huntly, Scotland
- 4. Huntly Castle; Huntly, Scotland
- 5. Gravesite: Boirdighera, Italy

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Proceeds defer production costs for the planned pictorial biography by Roland Hein and Larry Fink.

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Current Prospects for a Research Centre for the Seven in Britain

While there is little immediate prospect of anything developing in Britain as a research facility embracing the four core Inklings plus MacDonald, Chesterton and Dorothy L. Sayers in any way comparable with the Wade Center at Wheaton College, there has long been hope that if a centre were established devoted to one of these authors it might additionally function to assist the interaction of the societies devoted to the other authors. When Aidan Mackay's "Chesterton Study Centre" moved to the Centre for Faith and Culture at Westminster College, Oxford it seemed that this hope might be fulfilled. The Centre for Faith and Culture, (along with Aidan's Study Centre-now a Charitable Trust and renamed the G.K. Chesterton Institute-) has now relocated to another Christian college in Oxford, Plater College. The Centre has established links with newly established sister centres in America and Ireland and strengthened its links with the International Theological Institute in Austria. At the same time the commitment to promoting 'scholarly and popular interest in Chesterton's life and work, *and that of related thinkers'* has been reaffirmed, so we hope that planning for a Chesterton-MacDonald Conference can now go forward again.

Another projected venture for the creation of a study centre for one of the Seven is the proposed Tolkien Centre at Sarehole Mill, Birmingham: a building which powerfully influenced Tolkien in his boyhood. The project is only in its earliest stages at present, but local residents are keen and negotiations have begun with Birmingham City Council. Information is available from the Tolkien Society website:

http://www.tolkiensociety.org/ or from The Tolkien Society, 30 Span Meadow, Shawbirch, TELFORD, TF5 ONE.

STATEMENT FROM THE SOCIETY'S CHAIRMAN

As this current issue of *Orts* is the last before the 1998 A.G.M., and as we still await the Charity Commission's response to recent developments within the Society, our Chairman, the Civil-Service barrister Richard Lines, has issued the following statement:

Members may have been surprised by the statement that appeared on the front page of *Orts* number 47 that 'the Society is experiencing a take-over attempt' which 'is being engineered by 'interests who wish to create a situation where the Society's work is reduced to popularising only one aspect of MacDonald's writings. The statement was the personal reading of the current view of the situation by the Acting Editor of *Orts* and not the official view of the Committee.

As members will know, the 1997 *North Wind* was edited as a special North American edition by Andrew Gutteridge, who teaches English Literature at a small college in Western Canada, as Guest Editor at the invitation of the Committee. This appointment was made before I became Chairman of the Society and was for one year only. Nevertheless, my predecessor as Chairman

(acting without the knowledge and authority of the Committee) purported to offer the editorship to Mr Gutteridge for a further *two* years despite a provision in the Society's constitution for the election of officers (including the Hon. Editor) at the Annual General Meeting.

In the climate of expectations that had been created, the Committee decided in January to appoint Mr Gutteridge as Guest Editor for a further year. I wrote to him conveying the Committee's offer and I drew attention to the Society's status as a registered charity in English law and to its objects. I also asked for some personal details so that we could profile him in *Orts*. No reply was received to this or to my subsequent letter and I was actually 'warned off' by the former Chairman of the Society when I attempted to reach Mr Gutteridge by telephone. He has, however, since indicated to the Secretary his acceptance of the post, although he has failed to give me the assurance I requested that he will maintain *North Wind*'s high scholarly standards and he has not supplied any personal details. The Web-Site Editor is similarly uncommunicative. Concurrently, a concerted effort has been made by some Committee members to expel John Docherty from the Committee. John Docherty has, of course, done an excellent job as Editor of *North Wind* and in the last two years he has stepped into the breach left by Tim Braithwaite's absence in the Far East and has produced several lively editions of *Orts*. My refusal to accept the expulsion motion (which failed in any event) has been upheld by the Charity Commission.

Whether or not John Docherty is right to describe all this as 'a take over attempt' I leave to members to judge, but it is clear that there are deep divisions in the Committee about the appropriate editor for *North Wind*. It is also clear that 'if a house be divided against itself that house cannot stand.' It must be pointed out again that the Society is a literary charity whose aim is the education of the general public in the life and works of George MacDonald. Its objects do not include evangelising or 'bringing people to God' through MacDonald's books. Membership of the Society is open to all who are genuinely interested in MacDonald's writing, whether or not they have religious beliefs, Christian or otherwise.

I ask all those members who are concerned with the future direction of the Society and who are able to come to attend our Annual General Meeting.

TWO IMPORTANT NEW BOOKS

Two important books related to MacDonald have been published this summer: Rolland Hein's long-awaited study *Christian Mythmakers* and the first *Occasional Publication* by the MacDonald Society, *Huntly: A Scottish Town in Former Days*.

Rolland Hein's book is published by Cornerstone Press, Chicago at \$13.95. He examines some of the principal mythopoeic works of John Bunyan, George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and four modem American authors. Hein's Introduction, along with Clyde Kilby's Forward, is the most authoritative statement of the legitimacy and importance of Christian mythopoeia yet to appear. This introductory matter, together with the masterly development of these ideas in the body of the text, will be indispensable for everyone

who desires to affirm the value of the best Christian mythopoeic writing—from students who need to convince sceptical examiners to enthusiasts who wish to introduce the works of these authors to their Christian friends. Moreover, MacDonald enthusiasts unfamiliar with some of the authors examined will find the book a useful and concise introduction to the mythopoeic aspects of the works of these authors.

Hein is prepared to spell out the Christian allegories which, in MacDonald's style of mythopoeia, underpin the mythic elements. For example, he defines the character North Wind as portraying 'the divinely appointed presence of adversity in life.' MacDonald's allegories are concerned with the most profound principles of existence, but no previous critic has dared do define them so explicitly for fear of breaking the enchantment of the stories. MacDonald's contemporaries, with their (in most cases) much more solid Christian background, could subconsciously absorb the allegoric aspect of his mythopoeia. Hein is concerned that the majority of modern readers, by contrast, are likely to miss the allegories completely unless they are spelt out.

Hein's account of MacDonald's *Lilith* incorporates the first critical fruits of his prolonged work editing the early drafts of the story (now published in two volumes by Johannesens). Examples of his insights here are his recognition that Mara, '[n]ot unlike North Wind, . . controls all events that may generate sorrow'; that Lilith's central delusion is 'her misconception of freedom'; and that the worm associated with Lilith's purgation is 'the essential human (See Mark 9:48; Heb. 12:29; Ps. 22:6.)' which 'crawls from her into the fire, is purged, and, re-entering Lilith, affords her a vision of her two [opposite] selves.' This last insight reveals the connection with the snake which the Old Man of the Fire liberates for Tangle in "The Golden Key," and, of course, with the worms which the raven liberates near the beginning of *Lilith*. Some elements of Hein's exegesis of MacDonald's other stories, however, are difficult to reconcile with MacDonald's text. This is particularly the case with his exploration of "The Golden Key." A detailed review of the MacDonald section of the book may appear in *North Wind*.

Huntly: A Scottish Town in Former Days is available from the Membership Secretary of the MacDonald Society: Vivienne Forrest, 7 Shamrock House, 153 Chase Side, London N14 5HE. The price is £5.95 (inclusive of postage within the U.K.). Post and packing for Europe and for surface mail world-wide is £1.40. Payment to Vivienne must be in sterling as the Society does not have an overseas bank account, but North American members should soon be able to obtain the book direct from Johannesens.

This book is in three parts: an eighteen page introduction by Dr David Robb of Dundee University, the leading authority on MacDonald's Scottish novels; a seventy page account by George Gray describing Huntly and its inhabitants during the time of MacDonald's boyhood; and a twenty two page account of an earlier episode in the history of the town by the Revd. Robert Troup, M.A..

George Gray's very informative and readable study is alluded to in several places in David Robb's *George MacDonald* because of the way it fills out and explores the background to the picture of Huntly given in MacDonald's novels. Robb has now provided a comprehensive

introduction to Gray's booklet. The account of Huntly in the seventeenth century is included principally because it was written by a member of the Troup family, who were closely associated with the MacDonalds.

Everyone who enjoys MacDonald's Huntly novels will be delighted by this attractively produced book, which cannot but enrich their understanding of these novels. A detailed review should appear in *North Wind*.

MACDONALD'S WANDERING JEW: TORTURED AGAIN by Richard Reis

In *Orts* 45, JD and WW pointed out that a paragraph in Martin Gardner's collection of essays *The Night is Large* (1996 p.529) blundered sadly in its treatment of the material about the Wandering Jew in George MacDonald's *Thomas Wingfold Curate* (Chs. LXXVII-LXXIX and XCV). Alas, I had something to do with this!

For the reader unfamiliar with the legend of the Wandering Jew, I'd better tell something about it. Scholars trace the story to Matthew 16: 27-28, where Jesus is quoted as saying: 'There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.' That is, Jesus presumably expected that his Second Coming would be not long after his crucifixion, within the lifetimes of some of his listeners. That was apparently also a hope and conviction of Christians during the first century A.D., but it didn't happen. If indeed He spoke as Matthew asserts, Gardner concludes (citing Albert Schweitzer) that 'Jesus was mistaken.' It is supposedly to 'save' this text that a folktale grew up about a man who had been condemned by Jesus to live on until the Second Coming, whenever that might be. According to this legend, Jesus was carrying his cross through Jerusalem on His way to Calvary, and wanted to rest on the property of a Jewish citizen who was loyal to the Judaic authorities, and who therefore considered Jesus a heretical rebel against Established Authority. So the man ordered Jesus to leave, without even a moment's rest. Jesus replied, in the legend, something like this: 'Very well, I go; but you shall stay until I return. That is, the indignant proprietor is condemned to live until the Second Coming, which, (by the time the legend began) meant a longevity exceeding Methuselah's. Thus the biblical text is 'saved.' It is shown by scholars of the subject that the legend got its start shortly after 1000 A.D. when the Second Coming was again expected by many Christians because of the date's round number. Gabriel's horn didn't blow then either. That the Jew is also condemned to restless wandering is not explained by any biblical text, but was apparently present in the legend from the beginning.

Now here is where Richard Reis comes in. During the 1950s I was studying for my Ph.D. at Brown University and Prof. George K. Anderson was one of my mentors. I took George's splendid Chaucer course, and he was my Advisor for my Master's Thesis on MacDonald's fantasies (1957). Later I decided to do my Ph.D. dissertation on all of MacDonald's fiction, which involved reading everything he wrote, including the tediously executed but conceptually interesting 'realistic' novel Thomas Wingfold, Curate. I knew that Anderson was then working on

a book, published in 1965 (Brown UP, second printing 1970) as *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*. Naturally, when I encountered MacDonald's treatment of the subject, I told George about it, loaned him my copy of the Wingfold story, and indicated the chapters in which the legend appears. He had never heard of this source, and my telling him about it enabled him to write that he was citing 'a novel which has hither to been totally neglected' [in prior treatments of the legend] (p.285 of the 1970 printing). When George's book appeared, I glanced at it briefly in my academic vanity, to see whether my help had been acknowledged. It hadn't. Disappointed, I didn't even read what he had written about MacDonald's contribution to the legend. (I may note here that MacDonald's source must have come after about 1600 A.D. Anderson traces to that date a German pamphlet in which the name Ahasuerus first appears, and the wanderer's being a shoemaker is first noted; MacDonald's version displays both these features.)

That's where things stood for me until I read the *Orts* review mentioned above. I bought a copy of Gardner's book and read his chapter (pp. 525-32) entitled "The Wandering Jew and the Second Coming." Sure enough, Gardner had blundered. In his one-paragraph synopsis of the MacDonald treatment, he tells us that Wingfold himself is the Wandering Jew. Not so: the material consists of excerpts from a manuscript by the deceased brother of Joseph Polwarth, Wingfold's dwarfed, asthmatic mentor. Joseph reads some of his brother Robert's strange, supposedly autobiographical tale to Wingfold and others. Gardner also half-wrongly states that there is, in the MacDonald treatment, 'a surprisingly happy ending: Jesus appears, forgives the Wanderer, and leads him off to Paradise to reunite with the woman who died for him' (p. 529). As JD and WW note, this doesn't really happen: Robert Polwarth *imagines* that it happens. I wondered where Gardner got these ideas, and noted that Anderson's book is among his references.

Good heavens! Was George Anderson the source of Gardner's errors? Was I in part responsible for indicating to George only those chapters of the Wingfold story which contained the Wandering Jew material, so that George didn't read the whole novel but only those chapters? Is that why he consequently made errors later repeated by Gardner? *Mea culpa*? So I got a copy of Anderson's volume, to see whether that's where Gardner's mistakes came from.

As so often happens in scholarship, things turned out to be not quite that simple. I'm quite sure that Gardner would never have heard of MacDonald's contribution to the legend if it were not for Anderson, that Anderson would never have heard of it were it not for me, and that Gardner read only Anderson's commentary, not the novel itself. But Anderson does *not* make Gardner's mistake of attributing the Wandering Jew's 'autobiography' to Wingfold: he correctly ascribes it to Robert Polwarth. Further, Anderson accurately describes Wingfold's character and that of the woman with whom the curate is half-consciously in love. (This material is contained within the given chapters, so it's still likely that Anderson had read only those chapters.) Therefore I must conclude that Gardner didn't even read *Anderson* carefully, much less read the novel itself.

There are nevertheless a couple of oddities in Anderson's remarks too. For one thing, he never mentions the fact that Joseph Polwarth is a deformed dwarf. That information doesn't happen to appear in the Wandering Jew chapters because it is well established much earlier in the novel. Presumably, then, Anderson didn't read any of the novel except the chapters to which I had called his attention. Stranger yet is that Anderson identifies the writer of the Wandering Jew episodes as Ahasuerus and Joseph as Ahasuerus's brother. If that were so, then Joseph also would be nearly two thousand years old, as is not the case! What Anderson misses is that Joseph Polwarth earlier states that his now-deceased brother was 'mad.' This implies that Robert only imagines, in his insanity, that he is Ahasuerus writing an autobiography. And I think we should take Joseph Polwarth's word for this, as he is the Wise Man of the novel. Furthermore, Anderson, like Gardner, asserts that the Wandering Jew material in *Thomas Wingfold*, *Curate* has a 'happy ending.' In Ch. XCV the Jong-suffering wanderer meets Jesus, receives the saviour's forgiveness, and goes to heaven. There he will meet and be reunited with the woman who had followed him into a volcanic crater, had walked on the surface for a while as the wanderer did, but then had fallen through and been incinerated. Again the mad writer of the text is imagining the escape of Ahasuerus from the curse which he has brought upon himself. (One wonders, incidentally, what sin Robert Polwarth, as distinct from the Wandering Jew, feels guilty of, but MacDonald never tells us.) Indeed, if Robert had died into another life, reunited with his dead beloved, who would have done this writing about it?

'Into another life.' Here we have another sense in which both Anderson and the less careful Gardner partially missed the point. *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* is about a young Anglican curate who is asked by an atheist, George Bascombe, whether he actually believes what he sermonises about every Sunday. He is taken aback by the question, and in honesty admits that he isn't quite sure. Wingfold had gone into the ministry as a respectable profession for a gentleman, without thinking much about it. He receives a further shock when Joseph Polwarth catches him reading from the pulpit a sermon by the seventeenth century divine Jeremy Taylor, as if it were his own. (In fact, Wingfold was passing off as his own a collection of sermons left to him by an uncle who plagiarised and who is now plagiarised in tum.) Embarrassed and doubting not only his calling but his own integrity, poor Wingfold goes through guilty agonies, but finds solace and Good Advice from Joseph Polwarth: Meanwhile Wingfold is gradually falling love with a young sceptical woman, Helen Lingard, who is a cousin of Bascombe's.

Soon the plot thickens when Helen's half-brother Leopold Lingard appears at her bedroom window in a state of shock, having fled from the scene where he found the stabbed-to-death corpse of a frivolous girl whom he had loved, but who had jilted him to marry another. It turns out that Leopold had murdered the girl when he was in a drug-crazed condition but, guilt ridden, he doesn't excuse himself for his crime. Instead he tells Helen his story and begs her to shelter him from the police who he imagines are on his trail. Helen, who loves her brother, duly shelters him, but is torn by the guilty feeling that she should turn him in, or at least urge Leopold to turn himself in. Here I'll omit some of the plot-complications and note only that Leopold gets

tuberculosis and dies from a combination of that disease and guilt, hoping for a posthumous new life in which he can expunge his sin.

And it is just here that the relevance of the Wandering Jew material comes in. Robert Polwarth's Ahasuerus suffers from guilt too, but learns (as Leopold does) that God will forgive truly penitent sinners and give them a second chance in a redemptive afterlife, even though *this* life may not yet have made redemption possible. For God must be just as well as merciful, and also must keep His word. We sinners must, and do, suffer in this life; but we may hope for a second chance if we truly repent. Equally, in other MacDonald works, people born or raised with physical or mental handicaps ripples (like Joseph Polwarth), imbeciles, the insane (like Robert Polwarth), and heathens who had never in this life heard or understood the Christian message-such unfortunates are mercifully given a second chance in an afterlife which may not be a permanent heaven or hell, but only an afterlife. (See pp.32-41 of my book *George MacDonald's Fiction*, 1988 reprinting, originally published in 1972 as *George MacDonald*, for a fuller discussion of MacDonald's theology.)

The Wandering Jew material in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* is highly functional in that novel's full context, rather than being just an arbitrary excursion from realism into fantasy, and rather than ending in mere gratuitous optimism. It helps Joseph Polwarth to persuade Wingfold and Helen Lingard that Jesus's words are truthful, that Leopold Lingard will expunge in the next life the stain on his soul, that Joseph's mad brother will in his afterlife be able to move towards forgiveness unhaunted by insanity, and that Joseph himself, with his similarly deformed niece, will some day die into an afterlife free of deformities. In this functional didactic respect the novel's fantasy material is like that in MacDonald's *Adela Cathcart*, an earlier 'realistic' novel, where interpolated fairy tales and fantasies are therapeutic in curing the title character of her physical/spiritual malaise.

In conclusion, I offer this essay not only as a corrective to Anderson's mistakes or even Gardner's worse ones, but also to illustrate the perils of scholarship. Both George K. Anderson's massive study and Martin Gardner's less ambitious one cover an immense topic rather well, on the whole; George MacDonald's contribution to that topic is relatively minor. One should not blame Gardner or Anderson too sternly for their misreadings (or only partial readings) considering the immense amount of ground they were trying to cover. Indeed, for all I know, I may myself have missed something here. If so it wouldn't be for the first time!

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