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The George MacDonald Society

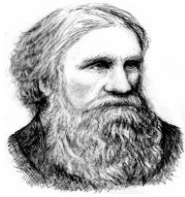
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Orts

The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 49, Winter 1998

North Wind No. 17 for 1998

David Robb has been able to make contact with the editorial board responsible for bringing out the 1998 *North Wind* and has been informed that it should be published early in 1999. We are sorry for the delay.

1998 A.G.M.

The following Committee Members were nominated and appointed:

Chairman:	Richard Lines
Journal Editor:	David Robb-Dept. of English, Univ. of Dundee, DD1 4HN
Secretary:	Deidre Hayward, Cruister, SANDWICK, Shetland Isles, ZE2 9HN
Treasurer/Membership Secretary:	Vivienne Forrest, 8a, Ramsey Street, MONTROSE, DD10 8BS
Other Committee Members:	Katherine Macdonald Geoffrey Straw William Webb.

It was agreed that John Docherty continue as Acting *Orts* Editor and that the Society's web-site be incorporated with the "Wingfold" web-site run by Mike Partridge:
http://ds.dial.pipex.cpm/partridge/md_index.htm. Mike has worked closely with the Society for several years, supplying us with complete transcripts of all the correspondence to his MacDonald e-mail site, placing long items which we have supplied on his web page, and so on. His site was singled out for particular commendation in the recent article on web-sites in the journal *VII*.

No seconded nomination was put forward for the post of Vice Chairman/Meetings Secretary nor for that of N. American Representative, so these two posts are vacant at present. In accordance with the Constitution of the Society all posts should be filled at an AGM, but the Committee are empowered to appoint acting officers to fill posts in emergencies and this will be done at the January 1998 Committee Meeting.

After two very difficult years for the Society, it now has a Committee where all the members are committed to observing the Constitution of the Society and encouraging the study of, and dissemination of information upon, all aspects of MacDonald's life work. Following the formal business of the Meeting a presentation was made to Freda Levson, who has been obliged to retire because of increasing deafness. Freda was one of the founder members of the Society and as

Committee Contact played a crucial role in holding the Society together and making it more widely known in its early years. An account of Freda's work will appear in a subsequent issue.

The meeting concluded with a very interesting and well-presented talk on the social work of Octavia Hill by Robert Whelan of the Institute of Economic Affairs.

From the Editor of *North Wind*

At the Society's AGM in October I was honoured with an invitation to take over the editorship of *North Wind*, starting with the issue for 1999. In the preceding weeks, when this possibility had been raised with me, I had hesitated to agree for reasons which had everything to do with my own current professional commitments, which are already considerable. Nevertheless, the opportunity to take on this interesting and responsible role was an attractive one so, encouraged by the sympathetic persuasiveness of Richard Lines and others, I agreed to it. I'd like to take this early opportunity, therefore, to explain a little of what I think my approach will be.

I know of no other journal wholly devoted to serious discussion of George MacDonald, and the opportunity clearly exists to make *North Wind* better known than it is, and to further establish it as an important outlet for important academic work on him. There is a good foundation on which to build, for all previous editors have given something unique and valuable to it, making it an important (arguably, the most important) reason why members join, and stay in, the Society. This is true both of individual and institutional members. As *North Wind* has progressed through the hands of different editors, readers will have naturally come to expect from it greater and greater degrees of professionalism. This gives a certain logic to the step I now propose to take.

I propose to systematically subject each proposed contribution to the journal to a process of peer review. What this means is that I, as editor, will arrange for each submission to be read and commented on by a professional academic. The judgement and advice of these readers will be paramount in deciding whether or not a submission should be accepted and what, if any, alterations should be suggested to the author before a final version is printed. The editor (myself) then becomes primarily an intermediary between an essay-writer and the chosen reader. Writer and reader-reviewer would not communicate directly with each other, so that judgements and advice can be given without fear or favour. This has several advantages over the traditional approach of having a periodical shaped by, in many instances, a single editor. A journal organised in the way I propose is produced by a more collaborative process. It is obviously less subject to the whims and blind-spots of one editor (not that this has ever been the case with *North Wind* of course). It is a process, too, which by itself will raise the status of *North Wind* still higher in the academic community. And to do that is no longer simply a matter of adding to our self-esteem in the Society: being published in peer-reviewed journals has become something of a necessity, in recent years, for British academic researchers in particular and they are less likely to devote time and energy to writing which will not be published under those conditions. If, however, we can create a peer-reviewed outlet for work on MacDonald, we shall not only help to ensure high standards in the submissions but also make *North Wind* a more desirable outlet for some of the great energy currently being expended in academic writing and publishing.

I want to stress, however, that I would not want to turn *North Wind* into a forbiddingly academic preserve, of interest only to a minority of the Society's members. It may be that, sometimes, quite challenging and difficult essays will appear. However, my aim will be to produce a journal which, taken all in all, is felt to be interesting, readable and valuable by all the Society's members. A tension between professional academics and 'common readers' is, inevitably, a feature of a society such as this and is one of the circumstances which a journal editor has to keep in mind. I do not believe, however, that readability and academic importance are inevitably at odds, and I hope that, in the longer run, members will feel that *North Wind* caters for all in the Society, as well as being the Society's major offering to the world at large in pursuance of its primary aim of advancing 'the education of the general public in the life and works of George MacDonald' (to quote the Constitution). Contributions by non-academics will, therefore, be welcome; they will simply be subjected to the same process of reading, commenting and (finally) judging as all the others. The same goes for any submissions from members of the advisory board which I am creating and, indeed, for anything which I myself might care to offer.

Something else which I want to make clear, at this stage, is that my aim will be to reflect the variety of approaches to MacDonald which might be taken. I am not looking for submissions representative of only one emphasis, be it literary, religious, philosophical, theological, or whatever. Any serious academic approach to MacDonald is welcome: It should be one of the purposes of the journal to reveal the astonishing range of interest which MacDonald arouses. This was brought home to me yesterday when a friend with whom I was discussing the great man suddenly said 'Of course, MacDonald was essentially a theologian. It's just that he happened to sometimes communicate his theological ideas in poetry or prose fiction.' This took me a little aback, I will admit, because my own approach to MacDonald has always been to see him as a Victorian poet and novelist who was wedded to some interesting and complicated ideas about God. (In fact, my own starting-point has been MacDonald the *Scottish* writer, though I've long accepted that to most of his readers, worldwide, his Scottishness is not central to their thinking about him.) What is clear is that MacDonald means different things to different people. To some, he is a Victorian Sage; to others, he is an innovative theologian; to others again, he is a living factor in their day-to-day religious belief; to yet others he is a writer of classics of fantasy and children's stories; to me he is (in part, anyway) someone to try to square with Scottish literary traditions. I have no intention of privileging any of these attitudes in the editing of the journal: whatever members receive as a result of my editorship will be the outcome of chance, and of the process of reading and selecting which I have described above.

I am still engaged in putting together the Advisory Board of those to whom, in the main, I will turn for comment and advice. So I shall not list here the names of those who have agreed so far to be part of it. The list will be printed in each issue of *North Wind*. Suffice it to say that those who have so far agreed include many names which will be very familiar to members from their reading round MacDonald. I should like to take this early opportunity, however, of thanking the men and women who have agreed to serve, and who have been invariably kind and helpful in the encouragement they have given. They have already been of very real help to me in launching this phase of *North Wind*.

David S Robb

Contributions are invited for consideration for inclusion in issue no. 18 (1999) of *North Wind*. They should be presented in accordance with the guidelines indicated in the latest edition of the *MHRA Style Book*, and should observe the spelling usage of Chambers English Dictionary. Submissions should be sent not only on hard copy but also, wherever possible, on disk. They should be sent, as soon as possible, to:

Dr David Robb,
Editor *North Wind*,
Department of English,
University of Dundee,
Nethergate, Dundee Scotland,
DD1 4HN.

Future Events

Due to circumstances in no way related to the Society—a double-booking in one case and a change of location of the centre with whom we are co-operating in the other—both the *Lost Princess* Workshop and the MacDonald-Chesterton Symposium had to be postponed. The reorganization of the latter will take some time and it is now provisionally planned for 2000, possibly in Ireland or Connecticut instead of England. Deirdre Hayward, our Secretary, would like to hear from potential contributors. The *Lost Princess* Workshop will take place in the spring in New Hampshire; I understand that only a few places remain. We are always delighted to hear from groups who would like to work on a joint project with us. We are happy to consider proposals at any level, from an international conference to a talk about MacDonald to a local association such as a group of the Women's Institute.

Full Size Reproductions of Edward Hughes' Paintings



Edward Hughes, nephew of Arthur Hughes, the Pre-Raphaelite painter and illustrator of many of MacDonald's books, was engaged to Mary MacDonald and appears in several group portraits of the MacDonalds. Although not as famous a painter as his uncle, who painted the portrait of him reproduced in *Orts* 47, some of his paintings have become very popular indeed. In part this is probably due to the powerful impression which his *Midsummer's Eve* made when exhibited at the Victorian fairy Painting exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1997. Large colour prints of this painting, more or less the same size as the original, are not published by Ikon. The distributors are King & McGaw of Newhaven, E. Sussex and New York. In the same series is *Night with her Train of Stars*, which had already achieved sufficient popularity some ten years ago to be reproduced as a mass-market Christmas card. We can only reproduce them very poorly indeed here, but you may be assured they are of excellent quality. The first is available in 80 by 60 cm, and 40 by 30 cm sizes codes 682 0325 and 642 0325 the second in the 80 by 60 cm size only, code 682 0327. We have obtained a stock of the 30 by 40cm. *Midsummer's Eve* which we can post in tubes to U.K. members for £4.50. This is an appreciable saving on the usual retail price. They would make excellent Christmas presents. If we receive five or more firm orders from UK members for either of the large prints then we could supply them at £10 each, including p&p.

News From the "Wingfold" E-Mail List

The list is now fully automated courtesy of Glen Stewart at Associate.com. This is really generous of him since, although this is a specifically Christian server, he imposes no restrictions whatsoever, thus allowing MacDonald to speak for himself as it were.

The subscription details are as follows:

1. Send any message to wingfold-subscribe@associate.com
2. Once again reply to the CONFIRM message that you get back, to really subscribe.

You will then receive mailing list messages at 5pm EST and subsequently depending upon the activity of the list.

There is also a digest version available:

1. Send any message to wingfold-digest-subscribe@associate.com
2. Once again reply to the CONFIRM message that you get back, to really subscribe

You will then receive mailing list messages at 5pm EST and subsequently depending upon the activity of the list.

The main activity on the list at present is a progressing discussion on *Adela Cathcart* which is generating some very spirited contributions particularly concerning "The Light Princess."

The European Inklings Archive

We informed members when the archive of the Inklings Gesellschaft—the largest 'augmented Inklings' collection outside Wheaton College—was transferred to the Free University of Eichstätt. Full information about the collection can now be obtained from the librarian, Dr Hemam Holzbauer, Universitätsallee 1, D 85072 Eichstätt; Tel. (0049) 8421 931331; Fax. 8421 931791; e-mail: ub-direktion@Ku-eichstaett.de

A Relevant Quotation

We came across this quotation the other day. It is a translation. It seems highly relevant to the arguments repeatedly put forward in favour of the simplified rewrites of MacDonald's books.

A person has said: 'There are so many people who have to work all day long. If these people sit down in the evening to read difficult books they do not get on very well. For such as these there ought to be versions which are quite easy to read.' To this the only correct answer is: Why should one wish to prevent these people from applying even the little time at their disposal to reading such books as are purposely written with regard to spiritual realities? Why should they occupy the little time they have in reading texts which may be more convenient, but which trivialize the matter? It is just because these books do not put the soul in the right attitude that they drag down into the trivial that which should lead away from it.

Huntly: A Scottish Town in Former Days.

Reviews of this book, all very favourable, are now beginning to appear. The reviewer in *Leopard*, for example, concludes her review of what she calls 'this fascinating little book' by remarking that: 'the George MacDonald Society, dedicated to the appreciation of Huntly's most famous literary son, is to be congratulated for republishing these two interesting documents, and at an accessible price.' We had hoped to be able to make the price even more accessible for members, but the very high cost of the 1997 *North Wind* almost bankrupted the Society without recruiting more than a handful of extra members, so we cannot offer a discount on the cost of this occasional publication. But because of help from Prof. Butter's charitable trust we are able to sell it at cost price. At £5.95 post free, or \$10 in N. America, it is excellent value for money. As stated in the last *Orts*, copies are available from Vivienne Forrest and from the Johannesens.

Unfinished by George Appleton.

This book was published not long before Bishop Appleton died. He was one of the best-loved and most widely respected figures in the Church of England, who reached out to thousands through his world-wide ministry in Britain, Burma, Australia and finally as Archbishop in Jerusalem. But it is through his writings, particularly those on prayer, that he continues to influence many today. In his seminal essay "Learning to Pray", he writes of some half dozen people, from Lady Julian to the present, who had a particularly profound influence upon him. After a brief outline of MacDonald's life, he describes the influence of his writings:

My interest in MacDonald began when I was given a well-worn copy of his *Unspoken Sermons*. I managed to secure all three volumes and also a copy of *Miracles of our Lord*, and learnt much about prayer, and trust in God. I was grateful for C.S. Lewis's *George MacDonald Anthology*, in which he declared that his conversion to Christianity was humanly due to the posthumous influence of MacDonald. His series of short, pithy quotations, mainly from the *Unspoken Sermons*, stimulated my heart and mind.

George MacDonald was a friend of John Ruskin, Lewis Carroll, Charles Kingsley, F.D. Maurice, and many others. . . . It will be a great happiness to meet George MacDonald in eternity, if I get there as well.

Water Babies and Waterless Babies

MacDonald's mythopoeia was never understood by contemporary professional critics. The most perceptive contemporary criticisms of *Phantastes* appear in the fiction of his fellow writers in F.D. Maurice's circle. For example, the first chapter of Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* is a brilliant critical parody of the first part of *Phantastes*.

Kingsley appears particularly concerned at the way MacDonald has revived the Romantics' 'Nature and the Imagination' debate yet has scant respect for Nature, repeatedly choosing the miraculous when a natural example would have made the point more vividly. He also seems astonished and dismayed that MacDonald, as an admirer of Maurice, could ignore the pressing Christian social concerns of the day in a work of obviously revolutionary intent. In *The Water Babies* he rejects all MacDonald's sophisticated irony in favour of passionate simplicity. Anodos is a rich man in his castle, with water plumbed into his bedroom-Tom the sweep's boy 'never washed himself, for there was no water up the court where he lived'. Nevertheless we find both heroes washing at a spring in a flowery meadow immediately after a miraculous transformation. The transformation is no less miraculous in Tom's case in that it has been accomplished simply by a short walk from the black colliery town to the beautiful limestone country nearby. Both Tom and Anodos have just encountered a highly unconventional and very down-to-earth fairy. Tom moves around Harthover Hall, not along allegorical passageways and underground 'paths,' like Anodos in the palace but through equally confining yet all-too-real chimneys. By accident he comes upon Ellie's room. In place of the pagan carving of an artist attempting to bring to life a marble statue which Anodos sees on the wall of the grotto, there is a painting of Christ with the little children. And whereas Anodos scrapes off a coating of moss to reveal the lady for whom he lusts, Tom is shocked at the contrast between Ellie's beauty and his own appearance in a mirror and vainly attempts to scrape off the soot which coats him. When he has to flee across the moor, although he is in headlong flight, his perception of the landscape and the wildlife is infinitely richer than that of Anodos making his leisurely way through the forest.

The contrast between Tom and Anodos is perhaps most striking where both, in the heat of the day, come to a rocky scarp which they must descend. When Tom has eventually descended and comes to Grimes' mother's house, he is so weary he can scarcely drag himself to her door (as everyone who knows that particular crag will understand). Anodos comes to the

dwellings of his various mother-figures tired and hungry, but he does not know what real weariness is. Tom is delirious from his efforts in the hot sun—Anodos' delirium in the grotto at the foot of the crag is apparently self-induced by a psychedelic drug. And the psyche which Tom releases when he comes to the stream in the wish to wash himself is a vastly more positive thing than the marble lady whom Anodos causes to escape and flee from him.

MacDonald unobtrusively acknowledged the accuracy of Kingsley's criticism in "The Golden Key." The journey of Mossy and Tangle through the forest is described in strikingly similar words to those which Anodos uses to describe the forest through which he journeys, but their response to the wild creatures is utterly different from Anodos' deplorable egoism which invoked Kingsley criticism. Then, at the end of the story, MacDonald makes another gesture of respect to Kingsley by drawing upon the reunion of Tom and Ellie at the end of *The Water Babies* to describe the reunion of Mossy and Tangle.

MacDonald again acknowledges his debt to Kingsley in a more or less overt fashion in *At the Back of the North Wind*, where his description of the sinking ocean liner and of Diamond's encounter with the statue-like form of North Wind at the North Pole draw heavily upon similar incidents in *The Water Babies*. (Kingsley, however, did not invent the archetypal image of a gigantic motionless figure in the polar wastes, such a figure appears, for example, at the end of Poe's "Narrative of A. Gordon Pym." But MacDonald's image is clearly derived from Kingsley's).

In *Lilith*, by contrast, MacDonald's allusions to *The Water Babies* are critical satire in the form of ironic inversion-parody. Kingsley himself ironically parodies unimaginative Victorian moral education when he names the 'purely loving' aspect of the great wise-woman figure of his book, Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby, and her 'teaching-through-suffering-and-sorrow' aspect, Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid. MacDonald creates two very similar characters, but gives them the strikingly simple names of Lona and Mara. Kingsley's mock-mechanistic explanation for the contrasting behaviour of these two ladies is stylistically unsuccessful, seriously undennining the mood he attempts to create. MacDonald's unobtrusive indication of the opposite backgrounds of Lona and Mara, by contrast, possess a brilliant inevitability. As daughter of the prelapsarian Adam and his first wife Lilith, Lona must inevitably personify unfallen Love, while Mara, as daughter of the fallen Adam and Eve, must equally inevitably personify healing Sorrow and Care. Equally profound is the way MacDonald handles the consequences of his inversion of the environment of the children cared for by the two ladies. The waterless state of his Little Ones becomes one of the most important metaphors in *Lilith*, whereas, from nearly all important aspects, Kingsley's Water Babies could just as well be land babies.



Lona particularly devotes her attention to the youngest of the Little Ones, just as Kingsley's Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby does to the youngest Water Babies in this illustration by Sir. Joseph Noel Paton.

The brilliant analytical criticism of each other's fiction by MacDonald and Kingsley (and the very similar criticism of each-other's fiction by MacDonald and Lewis Carroll and MacDonald and John Ruskin) is at the opposite pole from the banal criticism of contemporary professional critics, where the most memorable piece of criticism of *Phantastes* occurs where it is associated with the contents of 'a second-hand symbol shop'—as if symbols would have any meaning at all if they were not 'second-hand'!

An alternative to *Orts* for N. American Members

In *Orts* 46 the possibility was mentioned of an alternative publication to *Orts*. Unfortunately the proposal was vetoed at the time, but it is now possible to explore its feasibility. We have therefore approached Barbara Amell to see if it would be possible, for those members who desire it, to provide her fanzine *Wingfold* plus a short news-sheet in place of *Orts* for those members who would prefer this. Members who wished to do so could, for a higher subscription, receive both *Orts* and *Wingfold*, and members who already take both publications could also pay a joint subscription. If this is acceptable to Barbara, we will start the scheme after the publication of *Orts* 50 in the new year.

To Conclude: WE WISH ALL OUR READERS A JOYOUS CHRISTMAS SEASON!

Registered Charity number 1024021.

Address for contributions: 9, Medway Drive, FOREST ROW RH18 5NU.

Address for back numbers: 61, Longdales Rd. LINCOLN LN2 2LJ. (Unconnected with Johannesen's sales, which should be paid for with separate cheques.)