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***The Heart of George MacDonald.* Ed. Rolland Hein.
Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1994. (distributed in U.K. by S.T.L.)
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K. M.

To browse through an anthology, especially one compiled by such an acknowledged authority as Professor Rolland Hein, gives fresh insights and kindles the desire to read more. This collection of George MacDonald's "most important fiction, essays, sermons, drama, poetry, letters" sets out "to sample the best of his writing from each of these genres, with a view to conveying . . . his genuine holiness" and his "infectious" wisdom.

C. S. Lewis's anthology was similarly "designed not to revive MacDonald's literary reputation but to spread his religious teaching." However, the two anthologies differ markedly. Lewis gives us short passages, rather like radio's "Thought for the Day" and indeed numbering 365. These convey the essence of MacDonald's spirit but not the flavour of any individual work. From the many volumes of MacDonald's writings, Professor Hein has now brought together a selection of much longer extracts.

The title of the book is aptly chosen to illustrate MacDonald's conviction that faith is not just a matter of reason and the intellect. For him, Christianity is enshrined not in doctrine but in the living Christ, and the way to God is through love, the heart and the imagination. The anthology starts with the most personal writing: eight of his many letters. It goes on through fantasies, poetry, novels and drama to the more analytical, explicit sermons, which [end of page 54] merge into two extracts from his essays on the imagination. There is both a biographical and a bibliographic summary, and each section is prefaced by the editor's explanatory notes.

This is an admirable scheme, but its execution leads to a problem of balance. Most of the extracts are five or six pages long, but the 'Fantasies' section consists of the whole of *The Princess and Curdie* (23-188), and "The Golden Key" (189-213). Lewis found only nine "detachable" extracts in what he termed MacDonald's "great works"—these two plus *The Princess and the Goblin*, *Phantastes*, *The Wise Woman* and *Lilith*. Professor Hein shares this understandable reluctance to amputate any part of the mythopoeic works; but it is disconcerting to find one third of the book occupied by a single story. There is no reference to, let

alone quotation from, the two specifically adult fantasies; yet Bill Raeper was not alone in considering *Lilith* to be ‘MacDonald’s masterpiece.’

Again, the section “Poetry” is taken solely from the seven-line, day-by-day meditations of *A Book of Strife*. This results in a lack of variety. Some of MacDonald’s other poetry may “tend to be obscure and syntactically difficult” (though not more so than much modern verse), but some of it illustrates with child-like simplicity his awareness of the immanence of God in nature, whether on the hills behind his father’s house or in “angel snowdrops”—not great poetry, but another aspect of his religious feeling.

MacDonald’s novels do not have the immediate impact of his fantasies, though Professor Hein notes that they are in demand, in America, if not in Britain. They present a daunting quantity and variety of material but he has dealt with it by keeping firmly to his brief. He has chosen short passages from four novels to illustrate facets of MacDonald’s thoughts on “the relation between Christian theology and human behaviour.”

The introductory note to the “Drama” section mentions *Within and Without*, and also MacDonald’s later unsuccessful attempt to write a prose-play: “If I Had a Father.” The text is, however, devoted to a reprint, after seventy years, of the play so often performed by the MacDonald family in the 1870’s and 1880’s: Louisa MacDonald’s version of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress, Pt. II*. It is interesting to see how ingeniously she has cut and adapted the original to fit the limitations of the cast and to emphasise their outlook. The reprint includes the music she chose, and in one case composed, to accompany the production.

The last section of the anthology takes the most significant passages from fourteen of the *Unspoken Sermons*, from all three series, and gives them [55] to us in an easily readable form. In them MacDonald strives to express and interpret his deepest beliefs. C. S. Lewis wrote that his “own debt to this book [sic] is almost as great as any one man can owe to another.”

Finally, in the two essays on the imagination, we find the justification for the whole of MacDonald’s work. This anthology should bring many new readers under his spell. [56]