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The George MacDonald Society

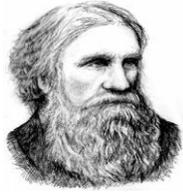
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Orts

The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 54, October 1999

1999 Annual General Meeting

Plans for this Meeting have now been finalised. It will be held in Dundee on October 19th at 18.30. Please phone David Robb 01382 456916 for details of the venue. Light refreshments will be provided and there will be an opportunity for members to meet informally. The Meeting will close with a talk exploring the popularity of MacDonald's character Thomas Wingfold.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

The new MacDonald Society Christmas Card is now available. It is designed by William Webb and printed in red and black on fine-quality white card. The reduced—size, black and white illustration below does not do it justice. The cards are available from William Webb, whose address is in *Orts* 53, or from our Membership Secretary Vivienne Forrest at 30p each; £1.20 for five or £2.20 for 10. (add 20p. p&p for orders of under 5 cards). In N. America they are available from Emily Tobias at \$2 for 5 or \$7 for 20. The wording inside is "Christmas Greetings". Vivienne's and Emily's addresses are on the back cover of this *Orts*.

Christmas Meditation
He who by a mother's love
Made the wandering world his own
Every year comes from above,
Comes the parted to atone,
Binding Earth to the Father's throne.
George Macdonald

Some of the old cards are still available as described in *Orts* 53.

GORDON 2000

THE HIGHLAND HOMECOMING—A THREE-DAY CELEBRATION OF SCOTTISH IDENTITY

This 3-day event at HUNTLY from August 3rd-5th is going to be one of the major events of the Millennium in Scotland. The selection of highlights on the left indicates that it will attract a wide range of people, so it is vitally important that the MacDonald Society is represented by a well-designed stand. Opportunities for publicity on this scale are rare!

Highlights From The Programme of Events

Friday 4th August
Ceremonial March to Huntly Castle
Opening Ceremony attended by the Marquis of Huntly
Lecture on the Gordon Highlanders
Golf Tournament
Battle Re-enactment with Bydand Forever
Music Recitals and Plays
Ceilidh
Dinner at Haddo House
Saturday 5th August
Visit to Aboyne Highland Games
Bennachie Hill Climb
'Castles from the Air' Helicopter Tours
Gordon Highlanders Reunion
Lecture on the Gordon Clan
Haddo House Fiddlers Rally
Cocktail Party at Gordon Highlanders Museum
Tarran Ball
Lifestyle 2000 Expo
Street Party
Son et Lumière at Huntly Castle
Sunday 6th August
Living History Pageant
Highland Dancing Competition
Old Stars Soccer Match
Massed Pipe Bands from Scotland and Overseas
World Record Gay Gordons Attempt
A Guid Scots Night
Beating the Retreat Torchlit Procession
Fireballs, Fireworks and Farewell

But we will not be able to participate without the help of volunteers.

CAN YOU SPARE A DAY TO HELP MAN OUR STAND?

If so please contact Vivienne Forrest (address on back cover) as soon as possible.

In addition to the stand, the Society hopes to organise a programme of guided walks for visitors who are already aware of MacDonald.

A lavishly illustrated brochure, with a booking form for some of the main events, is now available from the organisers: Huntly Ltd, School Ave. HUNTLY AB54 4SE, Tel 44 (0)1466 799178.

Further details of this event, and of the **BEDFORD 2000** event should appear in the next *Orts*.

THE MACDONALD-CHESTERTON CONFERENCE AT PLATER COLLEGE, OXFORD

The general verdict on this Conference was that it was a great success: so much so that the Society has been invited back for another whenever it wishes! A great part of the success was because we had gathered together experienced speakers who are experts in their fields and who could make their topics exciting for every one of the wide spectrum of people who attended. The speakers expressed strikingly differing views, reflecting the present dynamic state of MacDonald research, and each paper generated lively but friendly discussion. Unfortunately it will not be possible to publish summaries of the discussions, as is often done, but the papers will be published in the *Chesterton Review* or *North Wind*.

As is usual with such conferences, many new friends were made and old acquaintanceships renewed. Passionate discussions went on until late into the night because most people had taken advantage of the cheap and comfortable accommodation and stayed for more than one day. This meant that there was also a very good attendance at each of the *Looking-Glass/Lilith* walks. These too seemed to be greatly enjoyed by all the participants and, despite torrential rain on both occasions, no one dropped out!

Plater College is situated in the quiet, leafy, rural enclave between Headington and Oxford, making it an excellent conference venue. Aidan Mackay himself was present to show participants around the Chesterton Archive associated with the Centre for Faith and Culture which Stratford Caldecott administers, and more than one person arranged on the spot to return to explore it more thoroughly.

The unavoidable late change to the date of the Conference unfortunately caused it to clash with an annual gathering of the Chesterton Society in Sussex, so less Chestertonians were able to attend than we had hoped. But, as well as MacDonald Society members and their friends and relatives, other participants came from near (e.g. through the Oxford C.S. Lewis Society) and far (e.g. from the Inklings Gesellschaft in Germany).

Dorothy L. Sayers and Charles Williams

In the Autumn 1999 issue of the *Newsletter* of the Charles Williams Society, Barbara Reynolds has an article describing in detail the background to the letters from Dorothy Sayers to Charles Williams newly published in *The Letters of Dorothy Sayers Vol. 3*; Cambridge: Carole Green; 1999; £25. Barbara Reynolds's article is the best summary to date of one of the most important series of events for Christianity in Britain in the twentieth century, as may be gathered from her first paragraph:

Charles Williams entered the life of Dorothy L. Sayers at three critical moments. On each occasion he changed the direction of her creative activity. The results were momentous. The first was her religious drama for Canterbury Cathedral, *The Zeal of Thy House*, which itself had momentous consequences; the second was her translation and interpretation of Dante which has reached over a million readers; the third was her religious drama for Lichfield Cathedral, *The Just Vengeance*, which she once told me was the best thing she had ever done.

(The Membership Secretary of the Charles Williams Society is Mrs. Lepel Komicka, 15 King's Ave, Ealing, London, W5 2SJ. They are currently without a newsletter editor.)

Editorial: *McDonaldization Revisited*

McDonaldization Revisited is the title of a new book by M Alfino, J.S. Caputo and R. Wynard (eds) published by Praeger, Westport and London, 1998 £15.95. It is a sequel to George Ritzer's highly successful book *The McDonaldization of Society*, published in 1993.



The spelling of the name indicates that, sadly, it is not George MacDonald who is referred to in these books. But should not the ultimate aim of the George MacDonald Society be the MacDonaldization of society? Not, of course, in the sense of converting the world into a vast MacDonald fan-club, but of promoting MacDonald's mythopoeia as one of the most powerful of all defences against the debasement of human values and human consciousness inherent in the philosophy of Consumerism. (This debasement is splendidly encapsulated in the photograph on the left, which accompanied the review of the book *MacDonaldization Revisited* published in *Resurgence* No.196 for Sept/Oct).

MacDonald was inspired by the Revd. F.D. Maurice, who realised that political action is ineffectual in such situations and that what is needed is the raising of popular consciousness. Maurice realised that this can only be done, as Blake expressed it, by minute particulars. But genuinely raising the consciousness of a few people can inspire them to inspire others. With the reprinting of the Oxford edition of the *Princess* books and the new Penguin edition of MacDonald's shorter fairy tales, there has never been a better time for this. Anyone who has ever watched an intelligent child reading one of these stories knows their tremendously

powerful influence for good. At the Oxford Conference, Marion Burling was speaking of the potential offered by local library story-telling sessions and the like:—**ways exist for all of us to work to see that MacDonald's stories reach some of the people for whom he intended them.**

J.R.R. Tolkien gave us one of the most penetrating and succinct assessments of consumerism:

Frightful evil can *and does* arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others—*speedily and according to the benefactor's own plans.* (my italics).

These plans, as Ritzer demonstrates in his book, are directed to efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. The West has, almost literally, sold its birthright for a mess of pottage (c.f. Gen. 25, 29-34 and He.12, 12-17). Moreover, as Ritzer shows, the same 'rational systems' approach, taking no account of the individual human being, is now being applied in fields as diverse as health-care and education.

John Docherty

Bjorn Sundmark. *Alice in the Oral-Literary Continuum.* Lund U.P., 1999.

The most important aspect of this new study of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books is the way Sundmark demonstrates not only how Alice herself gains the ability to move freely in the realm of the primary imagination (Mr. Raven's 'region of the seven dimensions' in *Lilith*), but also how she gradually learns how to awaken this ability in others. The close association between Carroll and MacDonald was grounded in their awareness of the urgency of this need (see editorial above). Sundmark's principal direct allusions to MacDonald are on pages 28-29. She recognises that Ruskin's "The King of the Golden River" 'is clearly child oriented' and suggests that with *Phantastes* 'the process has come full circle' since that work is 'wholly intended for an adult audience.' Yet she contradicts herself on this point a few paragraphs later (see below) and she does not indicate what she thinks of as the beginning of the process. It cannot be the traditional, orally transmitted, fairy tales, since they are intended for all ages. Presumably she is thinking of works of the German Romantics, such as Tieck's *Phantastus*, which is an adult work. Yet her book has virtually no direct references to the German Romantics.

Sundmark provides a somewhat fanciful synopsis of *Phantastes*, where Anodos does not find his shadow until he climbs down the great pit! But she recognises that in *Wonderland*: Carroll clearly takes up several of [MacDonald's] cues, for example the choice of narrative voice (directed to both child and adult), the colloquial and sometimes sentimental style, and the parodic and sometimes frightening aspects of the books. Alluding to Maria Nikolajeva's *The Magic Code*, Stockholm, 1988, she notes that Carroll has . . . had a considerable *indirect* influence (in the form of quotations and allusions) on the totality of children's literature, but the great names of English fantasy literature, such as Edith Nesbit, J.R.R. Tolkien, Kenneth Grahame and C.S. Lewis, have written in the vein of George MacDonald rather than that of Carroll.

Family Membership of the MacDonald Society

A surprisingly small percentage of our members are registered in the category of "Family Members". Yet many members must live in households where other people are interested in

MacDonald. It would greatly assist the Society if the membership in these cases was recorded as "Family Membership" and we were informed of the actual number of people interested. The reason for this is that a true figure for family members should more than double the recorded membership of the Society, and—other things being equal—the larger a society is the more influence it can wield. The difference between the subscription for Ordinary Membership and for Family Membership is not large, so it should not be a burden upon many members. With the high cost of production of the last two issues of *North Wind*, the little extra income which would accrue to the Society would undeniably be helpful. But obtaining a more accurate record of our membership is the really important thing.

Carlyle's comments on mythopoeia

MacDonald wrote very little about his techniques of writing mythopoeia. The only place where he writes directly and at some length is in his essay "The Fantastic Imagination" of 1893. But very much can be gained indirectly from his extensive writings on the poetic imagination in *England's Antiphon* and elsewhere, and from his essay "The Imagination: Its Functions and its Culture".

At the present time, a disproportionate amount of emphasis is placed upon "The Fantastic Imagination", to the neglect of these other writings. But "The Fantastic Imagination" was written in 1893, soon after the first draft of *Lilith*, where MacDonald creates an allegory of his life-long struggle to din some understanding into spiritual 'dwarfs.' It is evident that this stage in his life he had abandoned the hope that many readers would grasp his myths. The later drafts of *Lilith* are rather more hopeful, but in the early 1890s it seems that the best he felt he could expect was that 'a true man' would be stimulated to create his *own* myths out of his stories—'whether I meant them or not,' as he says: He realised that if he succeeded in stimulating readers to use their imagination, and not merely their fancy, then this was at least far better than them merely extracting an allegory—even if that allegory happened to be the particular one out of which MacDonald had created his profound myth!

One of the best essays illustrating how to read mythopoeia is one of the very first:—Carlyle's on Goethe's *Fairy Tale* of the green Snake and the beautiful Lily. Carlyle achieves his purpose by employing two pseudonyms. 'D.T.' is enraptured with the tale but far too prolix and—although sometimes cautious—usually far too prone to reduce it to allegory. 'O.Y.' appreciates the true worth of the tale, yet repeatedly warns us of the crucial limitations inherent in D.T.'s approach, invaluable though D.T.'s unbridled enthusiasm is as a first fumbling approximation to a truth which is really inexpressible in ordinary nouns and only partially expressible in subtle metaphors. With D.T.'s interpretations, no one is likely to give up studying the story in despair of ever comprehending it. With O.Y.'s cautions, the reader is given confidence not to reject his or her own intuitions about the story where they clash with D.T.'s—as they often will—, yet, at the same time, he or she is brought to realise that, as with all Goethe's best work, any interpretation must be but partial and the story is ultimately incommensurable.

Carlyle's essay is nine pages in length. But a few very brief extracts may give readers something of its flavour and encourage them to seek it out, and, of course, to read *Märchen aller Märchen* (the 'Tale of Tales') in Carlyle's splendid translation.

D.T .. " . . . So much, however, I will stake my whole money-capital and literary

character upon: that here is a wonderful Emblem Of Universal History set forth; ... what men have been and done, what they are to be and do, is in this Tale of Tales, poetico-prophetically typified, in such a style of grandeur and celestial brilliancy and life as the Western imagination has not elsewhere reached . . . —Here surely is good wine with a big bush! . . . Were I bound, under legal penalties, to give the [snake] a name, I should say, Thought rather than another. But what if our Snake, and so much else that works here beside it, were neither a *quality*, nor a *reality*, nor a *state*, nor an *action*, in any kind: none of these things purely and alone, but something intermediate and partaking of them all!" [Yet after these cautious remarks D.T. can go on and declaim] "Can any mortal head (not a wigblock) doubt that the Giant of this Tale means Superstition? That the Fenymen has something to do with the Priesthood; his Hut with the Church? Again might it not be presumed that the River were Time; and that it flowed (as Time does) between two worlds? Call the world, or country on this side, where the fair Lily dwells, the world of Supernaturalism, the country on that side, Naturalism . . . To get a free and solid communication established over this same River of Time, so that the Natural and Supernatural may stand in friendliest neighbourhood and union, forms the grand action of this Phantasmagoric Poem."

O.Y. ". . . much exists, under our very noses, which has no 'name,' and can get none; . . . the 'River of Time' and so forth may be one thing, or more than one, or none . . . I . . . To the simpler sort of readers we shall also extend . . . a petition. It is to fancy themselves, for the time being, delivered altogether from D.T.'s company; and to read this *Märchen* as if it were there only for its own sake, , , , If . . . on looking back, some spasm of 'the malady of thought' begin afflicting them, let [D.T.'s] Notes be then enquired of, but not till then, and then also with distrust."

One Member's Impressions of the Oxford Conference

On a sunny September day I escaped from the trivialities of urban living for the leafy peace of Plater College, on a pilgrimage to find George MacDonald in the world of imaginative literature. My guides down the corridors of literature opened doors one by one with their kindly enthusiasm and expertise: at once scholarly, original and yet accessible to an ordinary MacDonald fan.

Father Wild drew from his own deep well of thought to portray Chesterton the mystic who was eager to warn us of the evil things which besiege us from inside—as in the *Princess and the Goblin*. These goblins inside would be traced through modern psychology, but it is only when their evil is defined that colour can come back to the world—a truce is misery.

Chesterton's St. Francis was further explored by David Jasper, who emphasised the clarity and immediacy of Chesterton's dispensing with all background detail and achieving a sacramental contact with God through an absolute seeing of Him, as Turner achieves in his later paintings.

Stephen Prickett led us through *Phantastes* and *Lilith* and the European influences on MacDonald and I have a list of authors—Coleridge, Goethe, etc. I must explore. David Robb gave me an introduction to MacDonald's novels of boyhood that I had never read and Colin Manlove's sincere enjoyment of the connections between Chesterton and MacDonald was an inspiration.

Thanks to the reasonable conference fee I was able to buy a few otherwise unobtainable books (my daughter is eager to perform Chesterton's "Magic" at her drama club) and went home happy at having been able to talk about things near to my heart in a friendly atmosphere—could

it please be repeated soon, perhaps with MacDonald and Coleridge?

Marion Burling

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E-mail enquiry service:

We have found that we need to upgrade our computer for this, but hope to be online very soon.

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Manuscripts 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.

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