

Poor Doubting Christian: An Exploration of Salvation, Love, and Eternity in MacDonald's *Wingfold* Trilogy

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To prove life endless is not a matter of the first importance.
(*Thomas Wingfold, Curate* 382)

The man rooted in God knows that true life cannot be without Him, because God, love, and eternity are one. When man is with God, it becomes self-evident that life is eternal. To him, “life without eternity” is the oxymoron.

Throughout Christian history, many people have been so afflicted as to imagine God had forsaken them, and many wondered if the eternal life were theirs. The aim of the present paper is to illuminate George MacDonald's theology on this issue by examining his trilogy: *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*, *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, and *There and Back* (hereafter *TWC*, *PFS* and *TB*). In the process, I will also argue that MacDonald read John D. D. Hart's *Trodden Down Strength by the God of Strength, or, Mrs. Drake Revived* (hereafter *Drake Revived*) and Thomas Hooker's *Poor Doubting Christian Drawne unto Christ* (hereafter *Doubting Christian*). These books are concerned with a Joan Drake who despaired of salvation, and whose situation is very similar to Mrs. Wylder's in *There and Back*. I will also discuss MacDonald's interpretation of Coleridge's “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” suggested in *There and Back*, and MacDonald's version of the legend of “The Wandering Jew” in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is, as Harold Bloom points out, “in the tradition of the stories of Cain and of the Wandering Jew,”¹ and MacDonald's belief in redemption, life and eternity is well suggested in these passages concerning “The Ancient Mariner” and “The Wandering Jew.”

1. God Means to Purify Souls through Affliction, Not to Forsake

In his interpretation of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and in his own version of “The Wandering Jew,” MacDonald suggests that the misunderstanding that God means to forsake people through affliction comes from a false imagination. This idea is also implicit in some episodes involving Minister Drake in *Paul Faber, Surgeon* and Leopold in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* where they come to find God's light through affliction, and where their

arguments seem to resemble Joan Drake's as shown by Hart and Hooker. These cases will be examined, and MacDonald's theology on sin and trials compared with Hart's and Hooker's.

1. Editorial note Dale Nelson, in a note to be published in *C.S.L.*, the journal of the New York C.S. Lewis Society, points out that the mood of the Wandering Jew chapters in *Thomas Wingfold* is very similar to that of Coleridge's prose draft "The Wanderings of Cain." [1]

1.1. MacDonald's Interpretation of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

MacDonald entitles the long chapter 22 in *There and Back*, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." In this chapter he describes how Richard, an honest boy who mends books at a library of a rich man, recites the poem to his friend Barbara. The narration shows that the essence of the poem concerns redemption. "A man must know something of repentance before he can understand "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (*TB* 122). As Richard recites, Barbara gives her interpretation of the poem. She feels that the ancient mariner "was cruel to a bird he did not know" and was sorry for what he had done afterwards, while the rest of the crew "were cruel to a man they did know!" (*TB* 128). She also says that the crew accused the mariner of killing the albatross "not because they loved the beautiful creature, but because it was unlucky to kill him!" (*TB* 124). As for the reason why the mariner is won by the decaying woman figure, "Life-in-Death," while the rest of the crew are won by "Death," Barbara thinks it is because the sin of the crew is worse than that of the mariner (*TB* 128). She guesses that the mariner will not be condemned but rather led through his suffering. When she asks what "the Night-Mare *Life-in-Death*" (*TB* 126) means, Richard just says, "I don't know. I can't quite get at it," and the narrator continues: "How should he? Richard was too close to the awful phantom to know that this was her portrait (*TB* 126). Here, MacDonald implies that a Life-in-Death can be redeemed.

A similar image appears in chapter 78 of *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*. There it is the Shadow that looks like Death—but is not really Death. This Shadow needs to be examined in order to throw light on MacDonald's concept of Life-in-Death and its hidden meaning.

1.2. MacDonald's Version of "The Wandering Jew" in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*

Wingfold's friend and mentor Joseph Polwarth introduces his brother's

manuscript. His brother Robert was possessed with the idea that he was the wandering Jew himself, and wrote his autobiographical confessions (*TWC* 385-404).

Before the manuscript is shown, Wingfold, Polwarth, and their friend Drew discuss “Immortality.” Polwarth argues that “to prove life endless is not a matter of the *first* importance” (*TWC* 382). He suggests that life unworthy of having should not be made endless and to Drew’s suggestion “that the immortality itself should be worth possessing” (*TWC* 382) he responds that the primary “question then would be whether it could not be made such” (*TWC* 383). He goes on to say that “the essential inherent worthiness of a life as life” consists in God, and “that the man should round and complete himself by taking into himself his origin; by going back and in his own will adopting that origin, rooting therein afresh in the exercise of his own freedom and in all the energy of his own self-roused will” (*TWC* 383).

It is in the context of giving light to this argument that Polwarth presents his brother’s manuscript. Robert writes that he “had a vision of Death” (*TWC* 391). He tells the Death-like shade that he is not afraid of it, because he fears nothing but he loves the best, by which he means “the eyes of the Lord Jesus” (*TWC* 392). Then the shade says, “Little knowest thou what I am, seeing the very thing thou sayest I am not [...]” (*TWC* 392). It goes on: “I am Shadow [...], life hideth from me and turneth **[2]** away [...]. I am the Shadow of the Almighty [...], I am not Nothing [...], I am but the shadow of Nothing [...]” (*TWC* 392).²

The Shadow continues: “I am what thou thinkest of when thou sayest *Death* [...] but I am not Death” (*TWC* 392). This image seems to correspond to the concept of the Life-in-Death in MacDonald’s interpretation of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” To be won by the Life-in-death—to go to the Shadow of the Almighty—also seems very like what Joan Drake experienced. This may remind us of: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it” (Mark 8,35). But even when won by Life in Death the ancient mariner is “cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” (2 Cor. 4, 9-10).

A man has to cast away the untrue life, that is the life without God, and to die in Christ, so that he may start a true life in Him. Not knowing this truth, the Wandering Jew/Robert took the shadow of Nothing for eternal Life in Death. The truth will be revealed to him toward the end of his “autobiography,” which will be discussed below.

1.3. MacDonald's Theology and Hart's and Hooker's Books Concerning Joan Drake

According to *Drake Revived*, Joan Drake, who lived in seventeenth century England, became possessed with the idea that she had committed the “unpardonable sinne against the holy Ghost” (Hart 41) and that she was a reprobate to whom salvation was totally denied. She shut herself indoors, bedridden from time to time, and her families, friends and several divines tried to comfort her and persuade her that God’s mercy was offered to her. Hart and Hooker are among those who stayed close to her and kept on supporting her over the years. Shortly before her death she finally received faith and peace from heaven, saying that God had revealed His Son to her at last.

Four years after her death, Hooker wrote *Doubting Christian* (1629), in which he did not reveal the name of Drake or others. Instead, he represented Drake as a poor doubting Christian, and showed her objections and his answers concerning faith and salvation. Then, in 1647, Hart wrote *Drake Revived*, in which he revealed the names of Drake, Hooker and others, and wrote about the course of events in a documentary style, in which Drake’s assertions about her despair and Minister John Dod’s and Hooker’s arguments are shown. Hart also included his own deep insights on the issue.

Thomas Hooker was born in 1586 at Markfield, Leicestershire, England. “A clergyman, he was ordered to appear before the court of high commission for nonconformist preaching in England and fled (1630) to Holland. In 1633, he immigrated to Massachusetts, where he was pastor at Newtown (now Cambridge)”

2. Editorial note The nature of this shadow, flitting from Robert’s side to become “a shadow upon the belt of Orion” (392) and then back again, is made clearer where MacDonald uses the same image in the “B” draft of *Lilith*, probably written soon after *There and Back* was published. The “shadow upon the belt of Orion” is the Orion nebula in the short sword stuck into this belt, as this constellation is depicted in traditional star maps. MacDonald alludes to “the appalling description of this nebula as seen by De Quincey.” Mr Fane, the protagonist saw something “like it in the clear cloudless heaven” that seemed “to surpass what had before seemed unsurpassable in horror, namely this description of the said nebula” (103). Given Drew’s state of existential dread when he comes to speak with Wingfold and Polwarth, it is clearly this dread that is represented by the Shadow that comes to Robert. It does not trouble Polwarth, who thinks clearly, but for anyone who does not it can “surpass what had before seemed unsurpassable in horror.” [3]

(Nichols para. 4). Then he and his flock founded Hartford, Connecticut in 1636.

As for his life before leaving England, R. T. Kendall writes:

In 1618 he was made rector of St George's in Esher, Surrey.

There were two events in Hooker's life that seem to have affected him profoundly, laying the foundations for his well-known "preparationist" ministry. The first was the nature of his own conversion. [...] Hooker underwent a long, agonizing process, crying out, "While I suffer thy terrors, O Lord, I am distracted!" (Kendall 125-26)

The second event was "the role he played in the extraordinary conversion of Mrs. Joan Drake (d.1625), wife of Francis Drake" (Kendall 126). Concerning this event, William C. Nichols writes that around 1620 Hooker "was received into the home of the patron of the church, Francis Drake, having been recommended by John Dod to aid Drake's wife, Mrs. Joan Drake, who was both spiritually and emotionally distressed" (Nichols para. 7). Joan Drake was afflicted with the belief that she had "committed the unpardonable sin and that she was among the number of the reprobate, incapable of changing her appointed state" (Kendall 126).

In *Doubting Christian*, Hooker makes his points to the doubting soul. Though "the devil will let [sinners] see nothing but sin," to their desperation (Hooker 4), the truth is that God's mercy is above all sins and rebellions (Hooker 21). One must not rely on one's "performances, but look beyond all duties to God in Christ" (Hooker 10-11); one cannot "first have faith and then go to [God's] promise, but must first go to the promise for the power of that faith" (Hooker 68) and then "expect all from the promise, even power to come to it" (Hooker 106), so that "the promise carries us, and all in us" (Hooker 106). In other words, one must "let [one's] faith go first to Christ, and see what that can do" (Hooker 107). Then one is shown the glory of God to one's "everlasting peace and endless comfort" (Hooker 109).

As for Hart, we understand from his book *Drake Revived* that he heard about her case, made acquaintance with her, and stayed close to her, becoming a true friend in trying to help her. In *Drake Revived*, Hart writes that she asked him to "make this use hereof hereafter unto all in [her] Case" (Hart 145). According to Hart, first Divine Dod and others and later Hooker, came over and tried to convince her that she could be saved. At times, she seemed to be persuaded by the ministers to some extent, but then she would go back to the former melancholy state. However, on her death-bed she suddenly gave an out-cry of "uncouth language (in shew a rapture of another world)" (Hart 139), and said that the Angels were there for her and that her friends' prayers for her were fruitful.

Afterwards she explained that God heard her prayer and that He “revealed Christ unto [her]” (Hart 146).

Towards the end of the book, Hart shows his own view: “[W]here there is sinne, there must and will bee smarting punishments, though it be forgiven (Hart 171); [T]he more beloved, usually the soundlier beaten.” Therefore, “corrections being a sign of love, not of reprobation (as the Devill perswades) that the Saints should not be discouraged though storme-beaten in their journey homewards” (Hart 172-73); “God mines none by afflictions, but purges, purifies, cleanses, whitens, enlightens and fits us thereby to bee vessels capacious of so much the more glory; out of the ruines of the flesh, erecting, framing and building up that glorious structure of the new creature” (Hart 178). Hart concludes his book by advising readers to take “the experimental counsell of this good woman, to keep close unto God in the use of meanes” for “[t]he [4] vision is for an appointed time” and it will come “as it did unto this good woman after ten years expectation” (Hart 192).

In *Doubting Christian*, Hooker writes that it is a sin to condemn oneself with false imagination: “it is as truly a sin, though of a lesser size, to reject mercy when God offers it as to kill a man, which God has forbidden” (Hooker 52). In *Drake Revived*, Hart explains that “he [Satan] fastned this temptation upon her [...]: That she had sinned that great unpardonable sinne against the holy Ghost; and therefore, that it was in vaine for her, either to use any meanes for salvation, or hope for it; and therefore, that it were fruitlesse and in vaine for her to heare the word, read, pray and the like [...].” (Hart 41-42). The above “unpardonable sinne against the holy Ghost” refers to the Biblical passage: “And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven” (Luke 12:10).

Concerning the above passage, MacDonald argues: “the men of whom this was spoken were men who resisted the truth with some amount of perception that it was the truth” (*Unspoken Sermons*—hereafter *US*—, 60). He goes on:

I think they refused the truth, knowing that it was true—not carried away, as I have said, by wild passion, but by cold self-love, and envy, and avarice, and ambition; not merely doing wrong knowingly, but setting their whole natures knowingly against the light Of this nature must the sin against the Holy Ghost surely be. (*US* 61)

He asserts, by referring to John 3,19, that this is the sin not of act but of condition:

“This is the condemnation,” (not the sins that men have committed, but the condition of mind in which they choose to remain,) “that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” In this sin against the Holy Ghost, I see no single act alone, although it must find expression in many acts, but a wilful condition of mind [...]. (US 61)

MacDonald’s idea that sin lies in a condition of mind is also suggested in his 1889 sermon, “The Story of Zacchaeus”: “It is not the sin that I have done, it is the sin that I am. No man was ever yet condemned for the sins that he has done, he is condemned because he will not leave them” (*George MacDonald in the Pulpit*—hereafter *GMP*—, 298). As for salvation from the sinful condition of mind, he writes: “The full forgiveness is, as I have said, when a man feels that God is forgiving him; and this cannot be while he opposes himself to the very essence of God’s will” (US 60). He also says: “What is salvation? To be delivered from everything mean, low, despicable, selfish, cringing, fearing in my whole nature, that I may stand humble yet bold and free before the Universe of God, because God knows me, and I know God” (*GMP* 297).

In *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, the Nonconformist Minister, Drake, finds himself unfaithful, and he imagines that God has forsaken him, just as Joan Drake imagined. He feels resentments towards God and is covetous of money:

He could behave, he said to himself, neither as a gentleman nor a Christian, for lack of money; and, worst of all, he could not get rid of a sense of wrong—of rebellious heavings of heart, of resentments, of doubts that came thick upon him—not of the existence of God, nor of His goodness towards men in general, but of His kindness to himself (*PFS* 136) [5]

Minister Drake feels guilty for not being able to trust God, and he feels that “the Lord hath forsaken” him, and “wrestling with fear and doubt,” (*PFS* 138) he wishes he could trust God. Then he suddenly inherits a large amount of money. Instead of rejoicing, he gets into believing that God “has cast [him] off” because he did not wait “patiently, but grumbl[ed] in [his] heart at His dealings with [him]” and that “He has given [him his] own way with such a vengeance” (*PFS* 141).

Then finally, through prayer, Minister Drake becomes free from the bondage of his covetousness: “O my God! how shall I live in the world with a hundred thousand pounds instead of my Father in heaven!” (*PFS* 143). He goes on saying that “the light of His countenance” is “the all in all to [him]” and that he would rather give up the large fortune than not be able to pray, but he adds,

“—if only He would give me enough to pay my debts and not have to beg of other people” (*PFS* 143). Then after a moment, he gives up all his covetousness: “No, no, Lord! Forgive me. I will not think of conditions. Thy will be done! Take the money and let me be a debtor and a beggar if Thou wilt, only let me pray to Thee; and do Thou make it up to my creditors” (*PFS* 143). Hearing this, Thomas Wingfold, who was there with Drake, feels “Here was victory!” (*PFS* 143).

Through this episode, MacDonald suggests the importance of trusting God as all in all. He shares this idea with Hooker who writes:

Do not only look and see what you have, but consider that the greatest part of your glory is in the glory of Christ; the greatest part of your wisdom is in the wisdom of Christ; the greatest part of your liberty is in the liberty of Christ, and your riches in the riches of Christ. And know that, whatever is in Christ, you have it all as your own. (Hooker 90)

In *Doubting Christian*, the poor Christian laments: “I have a heart that cannot break and mourn for dishonoring God, and for offending Him in so many ways” (Hooker 8). To this lamentation, Hooker answers that God shows mercy “not because you can please Him, but because mercy pleases Him” (Hooker 8). In *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*, Leopold makes a similar remark: “I can’t feel that I have wronged God” (*TWC* 307). However, Leopold’s feelings are explained further by MacDonald than are the doubting Christian’s by Hooker. Leopold continues: “I only feel what I have done to Emmeline. If I said to God, *Pardon me*, and he said to me, *I do pardon you*, I should feel just the same. What could that do to set anything right that I have set wrong?” (*TWC* 307). To this, Polwarth answers that God is capable of setting anything right, and goes on: “How could he say that he took our sins upon him if he could not make amends for them to those they had hurt?” (*TWC* 308). “Is there not the might of love, and all eternity for it to work in, to set things right?” (*TWC* 309). His advice makes Leopold turn to God and pray. Here, MacDonald develops his unique idea that God is capable of making amends for our sins to those they have hurt.

In *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*, Magistrate Hooker is made to believe, by Leopold’s cousin George Bascombe and his sister Helen Lingard, that Leopold had become, due to “violent brain-fever, brought on by a horrible drug,” “the prey of a fixed idea”—“the hard deposit from a heated imagination”—“that he [was] a murderer” (*TWC* 349). George and Helen wanted to hide Leopold’s crime, but he was willing to turn himself in. Therefore they had set up the pretended occasion of confession. Not believing that he is a real murderer, magistrate Hooker kindly offers his hand after Leopold’s confession, which

greatly relieves Leopold, though just for a while. The uselessness [6] of inappropriate counsel is also voiced by Hart: “[U]nseasonable comforts are and prove but like raine falling upon hard stones, which runs off as fast as it comes, making no impressions” (Hart 181). Hart also warns readers that “wee must not then bring like Jobs friends (who mistook his case) the Law for the Gospel” (Hart 183), for “[i]t is the work of the Holy Ghost [...] to raise up, encourage, and convince us in a despairing estate” (Hart 184). Then Hart asserts that we must let discouraged souls “learn to wait and depend upon God” and that “though they may wait long,” “God will comfort them according to all the dayes they have beene afflicted, and the years wherein they have seene evill” (Hart 188-9).

The consolation Hooker writes of in *Doubting Christian* is not a riddance of unpleasant earthly conditions but a reception of peace in adversity. Referring to David’s case in the Old Testament he writes: “He had a world of consolations that would have given a man liberty in prison, honor in shame and disgrace, and comfort in time of distress” (Hooker 73). MacDonald seems to agree with Hooker’s profound idea of true consolation, for he has Polwarth say to Leopold: “I do not mean it [God’s forgiveness] would take away your suffering; but it would make you able to bear it. It would be fresh life in you” (*TWC* 307).

Wingfold tells Helen that it is necessary for Leopold to do his duty as set out by God: “The only way to save your brother is to strengthen him to do his duty, whatever that may be” (*TWC* 311). After praying as advised by Polwarth, Leopold says that God heard him and that He reminded him of his duty to turn himself in so that another man may not be accused of his crime, and he also exclaims that it is the only living hour he has had since he committed murder (*TWC* 312). As things turn out, however, he faces death before turning himself in. He lies peacefully on his deathbed saying, “God is with me” (*TWC* 465). With the above remark of Wingfold’s (*TWC* 311), MacDonald suggests the importance of trying to do one’s duty given by God, but he never means to imply that one is saved because of one’s performance. He says in his 1887 sermon “Duty-Nothing”:

[T]here is no beginning of salvation until a man begins to obey the Lord Christ or to obey the Father who has told him plainly something in his heart that he has got to do. Do not mistake me; when we have done it all we are unprofitable servants. [...] Do all your duty, everything possible, and then think nothing of it; forget it (*GMP* 239-42)

MacDonald's idea here on duty was already voiced in Hooker's *Doubling Christian*. Hooker not only encourages one to "look towards God in the use of [the] means which He has appointed for attaining that good which His power will work for you" and to "[o]bserve His providence, and do what God requires" (Hooker 97), but also warns not to "[r]est [...] in [one's] own performances, but look beyond all duties to God in Christ" (Hooker 10-11) because "he who seeks the Savior in his duties and rests not in self-performances, this man brings the Savior, Christ, into his soul" (Hooker 11). Leopold responds in accordance with Hooker's belief when he tries his best to do his duty and finds his comfort in feeling God's presence with him, not from his own performance.

MacDonald emphasizes the importance of seeking a direct one-to-one relationship with God. His belief is that one receives true comfort from God only through such a relationship. This belief is well reflected in Leopold's case. Helen is [7] unable to comfort him because she tries to hinder him from facing God and tries to encourage him to excuse his deed by accepting her judgment, or magistrate Hooker's pretended judgment. As Wingfold says, Leopold needs to act upon his own conscience instead of hers or others, and as Polwarth advises, he needs to go to God personally. In *Doubling Christian*, Thomas Hooker emphasizes the importance of first going to God, as MacDonald does. However, Hooker does not warn readers of the danger of seeking forgiveness for oneself, or for someone whom one tries to comfort, from another person instead of from God. MacDonald was aware of this danger and makes the point clearly in Leopold's case.

2. God, Love, and Eternity are One

2.1. Mrs. Wylder in *There and Back* and Joan Drake's Case

Mrs. Wylder in *There and Back* is in a similar situation to the real person, Joan Drake, described in *Drake Revived*, and their characteristics resemble each other. Joan Drake's home was a "manor house" (Kendall 127). She "was married against her will (a great over-fight in Parents) which first bred in her the foundation of those stormes and tempests" (Hart 9). She is described as being "tender-hearted, free and bountifull" and "the freest alive from all hypocrisie" [...] "but if opposed," "stout, stern and inflexible [...]" (Hart 7). Such temper was nourished because her parents were too indulgent to her in her youth. It "occasioned so much sorrow unto her in her riper years, receiving then no correction at all" (Hart 6). Likewise, in the story, Mrs. Wylder's husband is "lord of the manor, and chief land-owner" (*TB* 98), but "a man she had not

learned to respect” (TB 293), and therefore she hates him. “Born to be a strong woman, she was a slave to her impulses, and, one of the weakest of her kind, went into a rage at the least show of opposition” (TB 106). However, she is neither a cold-blooded nor a hypocritical person and “would occasionally do a right generous thing” (TB 106).

Mrs. Wylder does not believe she could be saved and desperately shows her rage against God. “Had she had a suspicion that she was an eternal creature, poor as well as miserable, [...] she might have allowed some room for God to show himself right. But she was ignorant of herself as any savage” (TB 112). She suffers from “exhaustion—absolute prostration, mental and nervous” (TB 243). Then she falls ill because of “[h]er passion over the death of her son; her constant and prolonged contention with her husband; her protest against him whom she called the Almighty; the public consequence of the same; these, and the reaction from all these” (TB 245). In the process of the healing of her soul, her mental and physical conditions fluctuate as her “old habit resume[s] its force in the return of physical and psychical health,” causing a “tug of war” (TB 247).

Similarly, Joan Drake thinks that there is no way she could be saved because “she had sinned that great unpardonable sinne against the holy Ghost” (Hart 41). She shows “distemper” and “stoutnesse and stiffenesse of Spirit” (Hart 65), and “the indisposition and melancholy temper of her body was such as bindered much the work [to save her], shee therewith being averse unto Physick” (Hart 65). Her spiritual condition changed according to her mental condition just as in Mrs. Wylder’s case. When she seemed to be in a much better spiritual condition, “Satan taking advantage of her melancholy temper, wrought her much woe thereby, making her thus over- **[8]** charge and accuse her selfe, and endeavoring to have brought her back againe unto her former errors”(Hart 66-67).

Mrs Wylder had had twin sons. She loved one and hated the other just because the latter was her husband’s favourite. Out of passion, she would quarrel dreadfully with her favourite son (TB 115). Then he died and she “nearly went mad” and came to hate God (TB 93). Her agony made her sick, and, lying’ in the tender care of her daughter Barbara, her soul went through the process of awakening (TB 245-46). MacDonald continues:

The loss of all that the world counts *first things* is a thousandfold repaid in the mere waking to higher need. It proves the presence of the divine in the lower good, that its loss is so potent [...]. [W]hat is the love of child, or mother, or dog,

but the love of God, shining through another being—which is a being just because [H]e shines through it (*TB* 246)

MacDonald explains further that “[t]he next point in her eternal growth would be to love the God who made the child she loved, and whose love shone upon her through the child” (*TB* 246). Later in the story, she was able to be reconciled with her survived son as her “[m]other hood, strong in her, though hitherto, as regarded the boy, poisoned by her strife with her husband, moved and woke at the sight of her natural place occupied by her daughter” (*TB* 335). (The above idea, that in loving a creature, one comes to love God who made it, is also suggested in the passage concerning “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” in the story.)

2.2. Love and Faith Suggested in MacDonald’s Interpretation of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

In *There and Back*, when Richard’s recitation comes to the part where the mariner blesses the water-snakes and the albatross falls from his neck, Barbara rejoices and says,

The man’s love is awake, and he will be sorrier and sorrier for what he did! Instead of saying, “The wrigglesome, slimy things!” he blesses them; and because he is going to be a friend to the other creatures in the house, and live on good terms with them, the body he had killed tumbles from his neck; the bad deed is gone down into the depth of the great sea. (*TB* 130)

Barbara thinks that it was the mariner’s awakened love toward fellow creatures that made the albatross (his “bad deed”) fall off from him. Previously Richard had “thought it was the new-born love of beauty that freed the mariner; he did not see that it was the love of life, the new-born sympathy with life” (*TB* 121). Barbara goes on referring to the consequences of the awakening of the mariner’s love: “and he is able to say his prayers again; —no, not that exactly; it must be something better than saying prayers now!” [...] “It must be something I think I don’t know yet!” (*TB* 130). She finds out what that “something” is when Richard quotes the mariner’s last words:

He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small,
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (*TB* 135-36) [9]

Barbara cries out, “The love of everything is the garden-bed out of which grow the roses of prayer!” (*TB* 136). When Richard asks why one should pray, she retorts: “To love all the creatures and not have a word to say to the God that made them for loving them beforehand—is that reasonable? [...] A thing is nothing without what things it! A gift is nothing without what gives it!” (*TB* 136).

2.3 Love and Eternity Suggested in MacDonald’s “The Wandering Jew”

In MacDonald’s version of “The Wandering Jew,” Robert Polwarth imagines himself, as the Wandering Jew, coming to find hope in loving a devoted woman who thinks he is not forsaken by God. His love for her, however, is self-centered and mingled with self-pride: “So I took to me even the free grace of love as my merit unto pride, and laid it not to the great gift of God and the tenderness of the heart of my beloved” (*TWC* 401). Then he slips into the realization that “she will grow unlovely, and wrinkled, and dark of hue [...] and she shall be as the unsightly figure of Death with a skin drawn over his unseemly bones [...]” (*TWC* 402). Then he comes to care “neither for life nor death” for his “heart was withered to the roots by the thought of the decay of her whom [he] had loved” (*TWC* 403).

Then the woman who was all pure love for him, gets burnt to ashes in a fiery pool. He rails at the devils below, but afterwards can say: “And what I had then said in despair, I said yet again in thankfulness. “O Age! O Decay!” I cried, “what canst thou now do to destroy the image of her which I bear nested in my heart of hearts?” (*TWC* 404). He comes to have “a mighty hope” that he “should stand forgiven in the eyes of Christ and that He would grant him “to look again, but in peace” upon his beloved woman (*TWC* 404). The image of the fire that burned the wandering Jew’s woman to cinder, may relate to the image of the “consuming fire” that MacDonald argues in his *Unspoken Sermons*. Referring to Hebrews 12,29: “Our God is a consuming fire,” MacDonald asserts:

Nothing is inexorable but love. [...] For love loves unto purity. [...] Where loveliness is incomplete, and love cannot love its fill of loving, it spends itself to make more lovely, that it may love more; it strives for perfection, even that itself may be perfected—not in itself; but in the object. (*US* 18)

The fire that consumed the wandering Jew’s woman, who seemed to be his only source of happiness, did not really destroy her or his hope. Its purpose was to purify them, getting rid of everything but love, for love is the only worthy thing.

Robert's "autobiography" ends with the following words, which seem to answer the question discussed earlier in the story by Polwarth and Drew: whether eternity could not be made worth possessing (382-83): "O mighty Love, who can tell to what heights of perfection thou mayest yet rise in the bosom of the meanest who followeth the Crucified" (*TWC* 404).

What MacDonald suggests in Robert Polwarth's narrative is that it is not by human power that people may rise up to attain the life worthy of living. Christ's love accomplishes it in a perfect way regardless of people's sinfulness and weakness. When a person notices this truth, he does not want to prolong his own way of living anymore and starts to follow Christ's way. He ceases to ask whether his life is eternal or not, and comes to see beyond what seems fearful to earthly eyes—outwardly decaying youth or decaying life—, and finds true life in Christ. Then the man knows [10] that, in oneness with Christ, His eternity is already shared with him. For to "see one divine fact is to stand face to face with essential eternal life" (*US* 19).

4. Conclusion

It appears that MacDonald pondered upon Joan Drake's case discussed in Thomas Hooker's *Doubting Christian* and John D. D. Hart's *Drake-Revived* and sympathized with their arguments. MacDonald tried to illustrate the ideas shown in these books in his trilogy, especially in respect of Minister Drake, Mrs. Wylder, and Leopold. It can also be surmised that the names of MacDonald's characters, Magistrate Hooker and Minister Drake, come from the real names, Thomas Hooker and Joan Drake.

Though Hooker emphasizes the importance of going to God in *Doubting Christian*, he does not warn his readers against seeking his assurance—instead of God's—that God's mercy is offered to them or to "poor doubting" Christians. MacDonald, on the contrary, makes it very clear that it is fruitless to seek comfort from human judgment, or to attempt to comfort anyone by human judgment. He also presents his interesting belief, found neither in Hooker's nor in Hart's theology, that God is capable of making amends for our sins to those we have hurt.

MacDonald shares with Hooker and Hart his belief that God sends trials and suffering in order to purify the souls of people, not to destroy them. This belief is the foundation of MacDonald's interpretation of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and of his own version of "The Wandering Jew." In MacDonald's mind, the mariner's suffering from Life-in-Death is not a penalty, but the way offered by God to fill his heart with His love, which enables him

to love his fellow creatures and then to love their creator and to pray to Him. Similarly, the Wandering Jew withstands the Shadow who is Life in Death, and comes to realize that his love for the woman consumed by fire outlives and is purified by his experience of her death. After everything unworthy has been consumed, what remains is the only inexorable: love.

Through suffering, we are led to a one-to-one relationship with God, to see that He is love, and then to will the will of God. In oneness with Him, His love and eternity are shared with us, for God, love, and eternity are one; God's love, the consuming fire, keeps on burning us until we are perfected. —This is the redemption and salvation MacDonald suggests in his trilogy: *Thomas Wingfold*, *Curate*, *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, and *There and Back*.

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