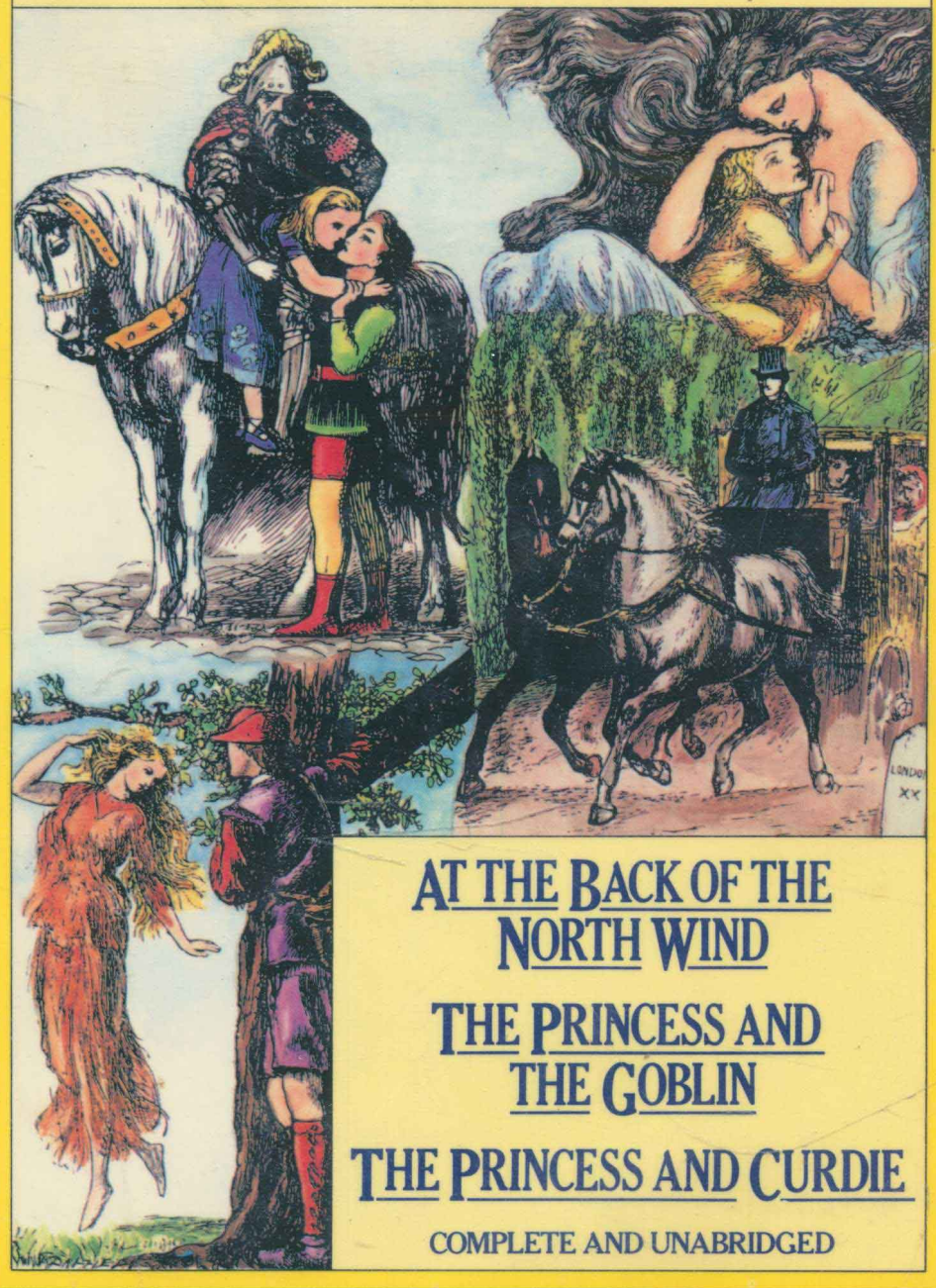
GEORGE MACDONALD



AT THE BACK OF THE NORTH WIND

THE PRINCESS AND THE GOBLIN

THE PRINCESS AND CURDIE

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

At the Back of the North Wind

The Princess and the Goblin

The Princess and Curdie

George MacDonald

George MacDonald

George MacDonald, poet and novelist, was born in 1824 in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, and was educated in Aberdeen and later in London. He spent a few years as a Congregational Minister until his health prevented him from continuing and he turned to writing full time. He was happily married and had eleven children; Lewis Carroll and other literary figures of the time were among his friends.

George MacDonald wrote over fifty books and collections of poems, most of which dealt with the mystical and philosophical and are now hardly remembered although two of his tales for adults, *Phantastes* and *Lilith* are still well known.

He is principally remembered for his children's books; the most famous of which are included in this volume. *The Light Princess and Other Stories* was published in 1867 in *Dealings with Fairies*; *At the Back of the North Wind* and *The Princess and the Goblin* first appeared in the magazine 'Good Words for the Young' of which MacDonald was the sole editor for a time, and were then published in 1870 and 1871 respectively. *The Princess and Curdie* did not appear in book form until 1882.

George MacDonald died in 1905.

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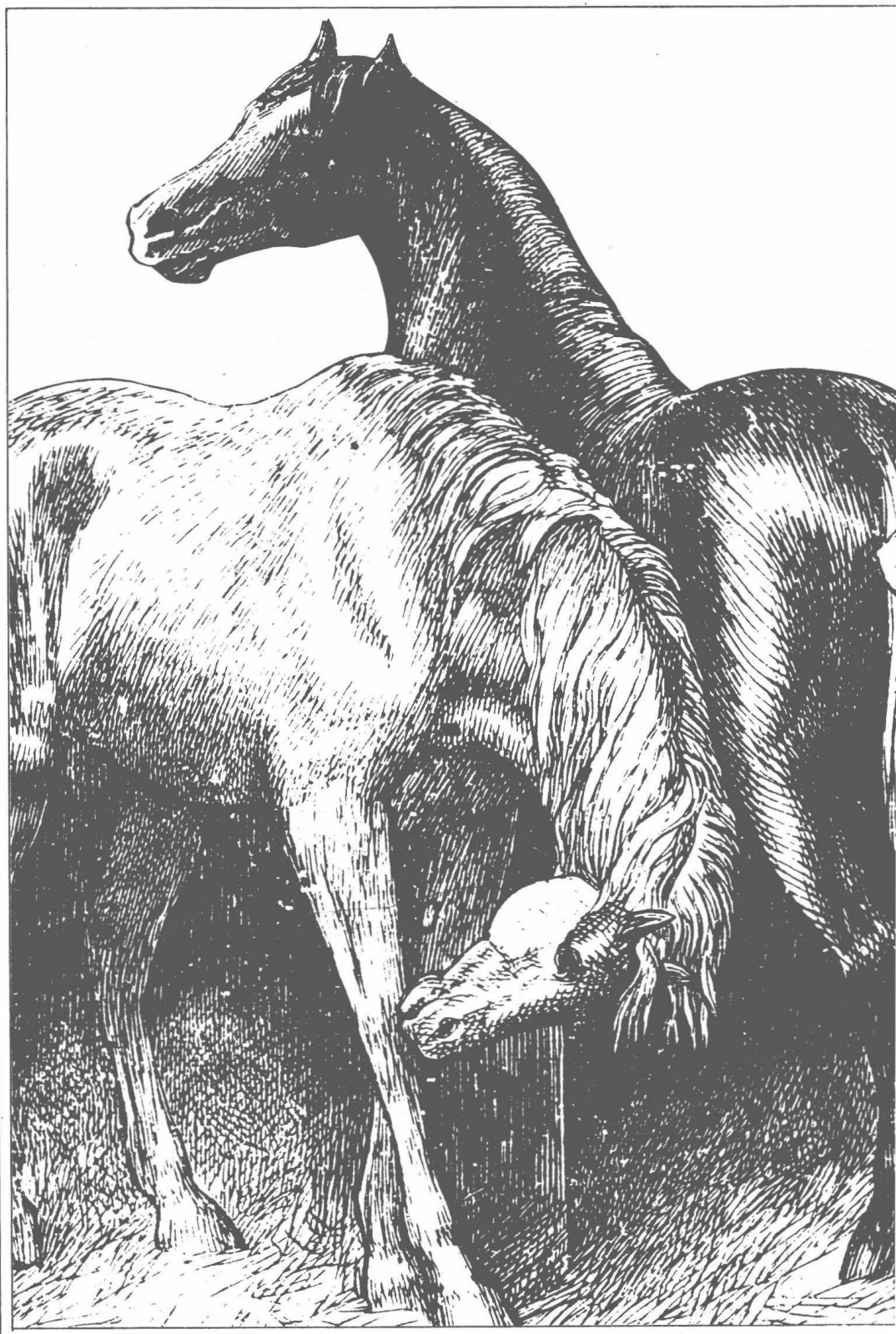

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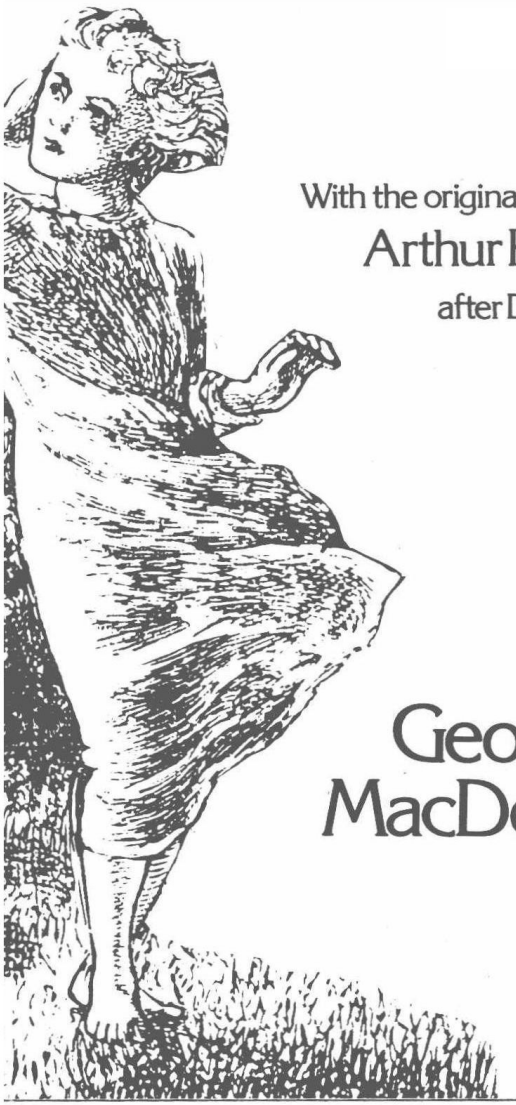

With the original illustrations by
Arthur Hughes
after Dalziel

George MacDonald

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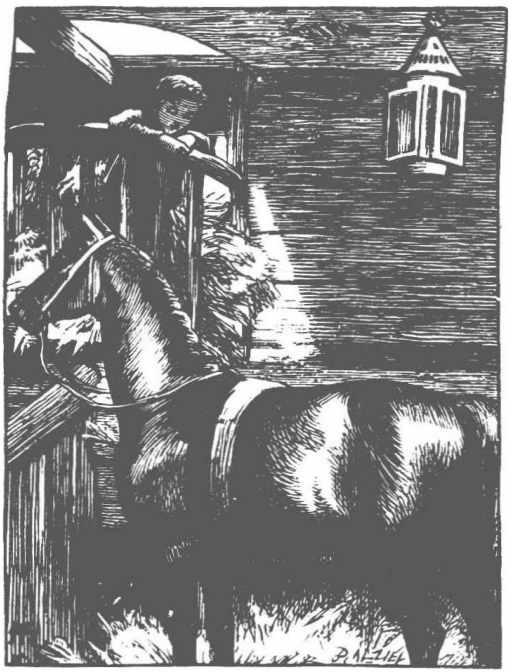
I The Hay-Loft

I have been asked to tell you about the back of the North Wind. An old Greek writer mentions a people who lived there, and were so comfortable that they could not bear it any longer, and drowned themselves. My story is not the same as his. I do not think Herodotus had got the right account of the place. I am going to tell you how it fared with a boy who went there.

He lived in a low room over a coach-house; and that was not by any means at the back of the North Wind, as his mother very well knew. For one side of the room was built only of boards, and the boards were so old that you might run a penknife through into the north wind. And then let them settle between them which was the sharper! I know that when you pulled it out again the wind would be after it like a cat after a mouse, and you would know soon enough you were *not* at the back of the North Wind. Still, this room was not very cold, except when the north wind blew stronger than usual: the room I have to do with now was always cold, except in summer, when the sun took the matter into his own hands. Indeed, I am not sure whether I ought to call it a room at all; for it was just a loft where they kept hay and straw and oats for the horses. And when little Diamond—— but stop: I must tell you that his father, who was a coachman, had named him after a favourite horse, and his mother had had no objection:– when little Diamond then lay there in bed, he could hear the horses under him munching away in the dark, or moving sleepily in their dreams. For Diamond's father had built him a bed in the loft with boards all round it, because they had so little room in their own end over the coach-house; and Diamond's father put old Diamond in the stall under the bed, because he was a quiet horse, and did not go to sleep standing, but lay down like a reasonable creature. But, although he was a surprisingly reasonable



creature, yet, when young Diamond woke in the middle of the night, and felt the bed shaking in the blasts of the north wind, he could not help wondering whether, if the wind should blow the house down, and he were to fall through into the manger, old Diamond mightn't eat him up before he knew him in his night-gown. And although old Diamond was very quiet all night long, yet when he woke he got up like an earthquake, and then young Diamond knew what o'clock it was, or at least what was to be done next, ~~which~~ was – to go to sleep again as fast as he could.

There was hay at his feet and hay at his head, piled up in great trusses to the very roof. Indeed it was sometimes only through a little lane with several turnings, which looked as if it had been sawn out for him, that the could reach his bed at all. For the stock of hay was, of course, always in a state of slow ebb or of sudden flow. Sometimes the whole space of the loft, with the little panes in the roof for the stars to look in, would lie open before his open eyes as he lay in bed; sometimes a yellow wall of sweet-smelling fibres closed up his view at the distance of half a yard. Sometimes, when his mother had undressed him in her room, and told him to trot away to bed by himself, he would creep into

the heart of the hay, and lie there thinking how cold it was outside in the wind, and how warm it was inside there in his bed, and how he could go to it when he pleased, only he wouldn't just yet; he would get a little colder first. And ever as he grew colder, his bed would grow warmer, till at last he would scramble out of the hay, shoot like an arrow into his bed, cover himself up, and snuggle down, thinking what a happy boy he was. He had not the least idea that the wind got in at a chink in the wall, and blew about him all night. For the back of his bed was only of boards an inch thick, and on the other side of them was the north wind.

Now, as I have already said, these boards were soft and crumbly. To be sure, they were tarred on the outside, yet in many places they were more like tinder than timber. Hence it happened that the soft part having worn away from about it, little Diamond found one night, after he lay down, that a knot had come out of one of them, and that the wind was blowing in upon him in a cold and rather imperious fashion. Now he had no fancy for leaving things wrong that might be set right; so he jumped out of bed again, got a little strike of hay, twisted it up, folded it in the middle, and, having thus made it into a cork, stuck it into the hole in the wall. But the wind began to blow loud and angrily, and, as Diamond was falling asleep, out blew his cork and hit him on the nose, just hard enough to wake him up quite, and let him hear the wind whistling shrill in the hole. He searched for his hay-cork, found it, stuck it in harder, and was just dropping off once more, when, pop! with an angry whistle behind it, the cork struck him again, this time on the cheek. Up he rose once more, made a fresh stopple of hay, and corked the hole severely. But he was hardly down again before – pop! it came on his forehead. He gave it up, drew the clothes above his head, and was soon fast asleep.

Although the next day was very stormy, Diamond forgot all about the hole, for he was busy making a cave by the side of his mother's fire with a broken chair, a three-legged stool, and a blanket, and then sitting in it. His mother, however, discovered it, and pasted a bit of brown paper over it, so that, when Diamond had snuggled down the next night, he had no occasion to think of it.

Presently, however, he lifted his head and listened. Who could that be talking to him? The wind was rising again, and getting very loud, and full of rushes and whistles. He was sure some one was talking – and

very near him too it was. But he was not frightened, for he had not yet learned how to be; so he sat up and hearkened. At last the voice, which, though quite gentle, sounded a little angry, appeared to come from the back of the bed. He crept nearer to it, and laid his ear against the wall. Then he heard nothing but the wind, which sounded very loud indeed. The moment, however, that he moved his head from the wall, he heard the voice again, close to his ear. He felt about with his hand, and came upon the piece of paper his mother had pasted over the hole. Against this he laid his ear, and then he heard the voice quite distinctly. There was, in fact, a little corner of the paper loose, and through that, as from a mouth in the wall, the voice came.

'What do you mean, little boy, closing up my window?'

'What window?' asked Diamond.

'You stuffed hay into it three times last night. I had to blow it out again three times.'

'You can't mean this little hole! It isn't a window; it's a hole in my bed.'

'I did not say it was *a* window: I said it was *my* window.'

'But it can't be a window, because windows are holes to see out of.'

'Well, that's just what I made this window for.'

'But you are outside: you can't want a window.'

'You are quite mistaken. Windows are to see out of, you say. Well, I'm in my house, and I want windows to see out of it.'

'But you've made a window into my bed.'

'Well, your mother has got three windows into my dancing-room, and you have three into my garret.'

'But I heard father say, when my mother wanted him to make a window through the wall, that it was against the law, for it would look into Mr. Dyves's garden.'

The voice laughed.

'The law would have some trouble to catch me!' it said.

'But if it's not right, you know,' said Diamond, 'that's no matter. You shouldn't do it.'

'I am so tall I am above *that* law,' said the voice.

'You must have a tall house, then,' said Diamond.

'Yes; a tall house: the clouds are inside it.'

'Dear me!' said Diamond, and thought a minute. 'I think, then, you can hardly expect me to keep a window in my bed for you. Why

don't you make a window into Mr. Dyves's bed?'

'Nobody makes a window into an ash-pit,' said the voice, rather sadly. 'I like to see nice things out of my windows.'

'But he must have a nicer bed than I have, though mine is *very* nice – so nice that I couldn't wish a better.'

'It's not the bed I care about: it's what is in it. – But you just open that window.'

'Well, mother says I shouldn't be disobliging; but it's rather hard. You see the north wind will blow right in my face if I do.'

'I am the North Wind.'

'O-o-oh!' said Diamond, thoughtfully. 'Then will you promise not to blow on my face if I open your window?'

'I can't promise that.'

'But you'll give me the toothache. Mother's got it already.'

'But what's to become of me without a window?'

'I'm sure I don't know. All I say is, it will be worse for me than for you.'

'No; it will not. You shall not be the worse for it – I promise you that. You will be much the better for it. Just you believe what I say, and do as I tell you.'

'Well, I *can* pull the clothes over my head,' said Diamond, and feeling with his little sharp nails, he got hold of the open edge of the paper and tore it off at once.

In came a long whistling spear of cold, and struck his little naked chest. He scrambled and tumbled in under the bed-clothes, and covered himself up: there was no paper now between him and the voice, and he felt a little – not frightened exactly – I told you he had not learned that yet – but rather queer; for what a strange person this North Wind must be that lived in the great house – 'called Out-of-Doors, I suppose,' thought Diamond – and made windows into people's beds! But the voice began again; and he could hear it quite plainly, even with his head under the bed clothes. It was a still more gentle voice now, although six times as large and loud as it had been, and he thought it sounded a little like his mother's.

'What is your name little boy?' it asked.

'Diamond,' answered Diamond, under the bed-clothes.

'What a funny name!'

'It's a very nice name,' returned its owner.