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**A Book of Strife in the Form of  
The Diary of an Old Soul**

George MacDonald

# Imprint

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A BOOK OF STRIFE IN THE FORM OF  
THE DIARY OF AN OLD SOUL

by George MacDonald

Published in 1880.

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## DEDICATION

Sweet friends, receive my offering. You will find Against  
each worded page a white page set:— This is the mirror of  
each friendly mind Reflecting that. In this book we are met.  
Make it, dear hearts, of worth to you indeed:— Let your  
white page be ground, my print be seed, Growing to golden  
ears, that faith and hope shall feed. YOUR OLD SOUL



## THE DIARY OF AN OLD SOUL.

### JANUARY.

1. LORD, what I once had done with youthful might, Had I been from the first true to the truth, Grant me, now old, to do—with better sight, And humbler heart, if not the brain of youth; So wilt thou, in thy gentleness and ruth, Lead back thy old soul, by the path of pain, Round to his best—young eyes and heart and brain. 2. A dim aurora rises in my east, Beyond the line of jagged questions hoar, As if the head of our intombed High Priest Began to glow behind the unopened door: Sure the gold wings will soon rise from the gray!— They rise not. Up I rise, press on the more, To meet the slow coming of the Master's day. 3. Sometimes I wake, and, lo! I have forgot, And drifted out upon an ebbing sea! My soul that was at rest now resteth not, For I am with myself and not with thee; Truth seems a blind moon in a glaring morn, Where nothing is but sick-heart vanity: Oh, thou who knowest! save thy child forlorn. 4. Death, like high faith, levelling, lifteth all. When I awake, my daughter and my son, Grown sister and brother, in my arms shall fall, Tenfold my girl and boy. Sure every one Of all the brood to the old wings will run. Whole-hearted is my worship of the man From whom my earthly history began. 5. Thy fishes breathe but where thy waters roll; Thy birds fly but within thy airy sea; My soul breathes only in thy infinite soul; I breathe, I think, I love, I live but thee. Oh breathe, oh think,—O Love, live into me; Unworthy is my life till all divine, Till thou see in me only what is thine. 6. Then shall I breathe in sweetest sharing, then Think in harmonious consort with my kin; Then shall I love well all my father's men, Feel one with theirs the life my heart within. Oh brothers! sisters holy! hearts divine! Then I

shall be all yours, and nothing mine— To every human heart  
a mother-twin. 7. I see a child before an empty house, Knock-  
ing and knocking at the closed door; He wakes dull echoes—  
but nor man nor mouse, If he stood knocking there for ever-  
more.— A mother angel, see! folding each wing, Soft-  
walking, crosses straight the empty floor, And opens to the  
obstinate praying thing. 8. Were there but some deep, holy  
spell, whereby Always I should remember thee—some mode  
Of feeling the pure heat-throb momentarily Of the spirit-fire  
still uttering this I!— Lord, see thou to it, take thou remem-  
brance' load: Only when I bethink me can I cry; Remember  
thou, and prick me with love's goad. 9. If to myself—"God  
sometimes interferes"— I said, my faith at once would be  
struck blind. I see him all in all, the lifing mind, Or nowhere  
in the vacant miles and years. A love he is that watches and  
that hears, Or but a mist fumed up from minds of men,  
Whose fear and hope reach out beyond their ken. 10. When I  
no more can stir my soul to move, And life is but the ashes of  
a fire; When I can but remember that my heart Once used to  
live and love, long and aspire,— Oh, be thou then the first,  
the one thou art; Be thou the calling, before all answering  
love, And in me wake hope, fear, boundless desire. 11. I  
thought that I had lost thee; but, behold! Thou comest to me  
from the horizon low, Across the fields outspread of green  
and gold— Fair carpet for thy feet to come and go. Whence I  
know not, or how to me thou art come!— Not less my spirit  
with calm bliss doth glow, Meeting thee only thus, in nature  
vague and dumb. 12. Doubt swells and surges, with swelling  
doubt behind! My soul in storm is but a tattered sail, Stream-  
ing its ribbons on the torrent gale; In calm, 'tis but a limp and  
flapping thing: Oh! swell it with thy breath; make it a  
wing,— To sweep through thee the ocean, with thee the wind  
Nor rest until in thee its haven it shall find. 13. The idle flap-  
ping of the sail is doubt; Faith swells it full to breast the  
breasting seas. Bold, conscience, fast, and rule the ruling  
helm; Hell's freezing north no tempest can send out, But it  
shall toss thee homeward to thy leas; Boisterous wave-crest  
never shall o'erwhelm Thy sea-float bark as safe as field-  
borne rooted elm. 14. Sometimes, hard-trying, it seems I can-

not pray— For doubt, and pain, and anger, and all strife. Yet  
 some poor half-fledged prayer-bird from the nest May fall,  
 flit, fly, perch—crouch in the bowery breast Of the large, na-  
 tion-healing tree of life;— Moveless there sit through all the  
 burning day, And on my heart at night a fresh leaf cooling  
 lay. 15. My harvest withers. Health, my means to live— All  
 things seem rushing straight into the dark. But the dark still  
 is God. I would not give The smallest silver-piece to turn the  
 rush Backward or sideways. Am I not a spark Of him who is  
 the light?—Fair hope doth flush My east.—Divine success—  
 Oh, hush and hark! 16. Thy will be done. I yield up every-  
 thing. "The life is more than meat"—then more than health;  
 "The body more than raiment"—then than wealth; The hairs I  
 made not, thou art numbering. Thou art my life—I the brook,  
 thou the spring. Because thine eyes are open, I can see; Be-  
 cause thou art thyself, 'tis therefore I am me. 17. No sickness  
 can come near to blast my health; My life depends not upon  
 any meat; My bread comes not from any human tilth; No  
 wings will grow upon my changeless wealth; Wrong cannot  
 touch it, violence or deceit; Thou art my life, my health, my  
 bank, my barn— And from all other gods thou plain dost  
 warn. 18. Care thou for mine whom I must leave behind;  
 Care that they know who 'tis for them takes care; Thy present  
 patience help them still to bear; Lord, keep them clearing,  
 growing, heart and mind; In one thy oneness us together  
 bind; Last earthly prayer with which to thee I cling— Grant  
 that, save love, we owe not anything. 19. 'Tis well, for unem-  
 bodied thought a live, True house to build—of stubble,  
 wood, nor hay; So, like bees round the flower by which they  
 thrive, My thoughts are busy with the informing truth, And  
 as I build, I feed, and grow in youth— Hoping to stand fresh,  
 clean, and strong, and gay, When up the east comes dawning  
 His great day. 20. Thy will is truth—'tis therefore fate, the  
 strong. Would that my will did sweep full swing with thine!  
 Then harmony with every spheric song, And conscious pow-  
 er, would give sureness divine. Who thinks to thread thy  
 great laws' onward throng, Is as a fly that creeps his foolish  
 way Athwart an engine's wheels in smooth resistless play. 21.  
 Thou in my heart hast planted, gardener divine, A scion of

the tree of life: it grows; But not in every wind or weather it blows; The leaves fall sometimes from the baby tree, And the life-power seems melting into pine; Yet still the sap keeps struggling to the shine, And the unseen root clings cramplike unto thee. 22. Do thou, my God, my spirit's weather control; And as I do not gloom though the day be dun, Let me not gloom when earth-born vapours roll Across the infinite zenith of my soul. Should sudden brain-frost through the heart's summer run, Cold, weary, joyless, waste of air and sun, Thou art my south, my summer-wind, my all, my one. 23. O Life, why dost thou close me up in death? O Health, why make me inhabit heaviness?— I ask, yet know: the sum of this distress, Pang-haunted body, sore-dismayed mind, Is but the egg that rounds the winged faith; When that its path into the air shall find, My heart will follow, high above cold, rain, and wind. 24. I can no more than lift my weary eyes; Therefore I lift my weary eyes—no more. But my eyes pull my heart, and that, before 'Tis well awake, knocks where the conscience lies; Conscience runs quick to the spirit's hidden door: Straightway, from every sky-ward window, cries Up to the Father's listening ears arise. 25. Not in my fancy now I search to find thee; Not in its loftiest forms would shape or bind thee; I cry to one whom I can never know, Filling me with an infinite overflow; Not to a shape that dwells within my heart, Clothed in perfections love and truth assigned thee, But to the God thou knowest that thou art. 26. Not, Lord, because I have done well or ill; Not that my mind looks up to thee clear-eyed; Not that it struggles in fast cerements tied; Not that I need thee daily sorer still; Not that I wretched, wander from thy will; Not now for any cause to thee I cry, But this, that thou art thou, and here am I. 27. Yestereve, Death came, and knocked at my thin door. I from my window looked: the thing I saw, The shape uncouth, I had not seen before. I was disturbed—with fear, in sooth, not awe; Whereof ashamed, I instantly did rouse My will to seek thee—only to fear the more: Alas! I could not find thee in the house. 28. I was like Peter when he began to sink. To thee a new prayer therefore I have got— That, when Death comes in earnest to my door, Thou wouldst thyself go, when the latch doth clink, And lead

him to my room, up to my cot; Then hold thy child's hand,  
hold and leave him not, Till Death has done with him for ev-  
ermore. 29. Till Death has done with him?—Ah, leave me  
then! And Death has done with me, oh, nevermore! He  
comes—and goes—to leave me in thy arms, Nearer thy heart,  
oh, nearer than before! To lay thy child, naked, new-born  
again Of mother earth, crept free through many harms, Upon  
thy bosom—still to the very core. 30. Come to me, Lord: I will  
not speculate how, Nor think at which door I would have  
thee appear, Nor put off calling till my floors be swept, But  
cry, "Come, Lord, come any way, come now." Doors, win-  
dows, I throw wide; my head I bow, And sit like some one  
who so long has slept That he knows nothing till his life draw  
near. 31. O Lord, I have been talking to the people; Thought's  
wheels have round me whirled a fiery zone, And the recoil of  
my words' airy ripple My heart unheedful has puffed up and  
blown. Therefore I cast myself before thee prone: Lay cool  
hands on my burning brain, and press From my weak heart  
the swelling emptiness.



## FEBRUARY.

1. I TO myself have neither power nor worth, Patience nor love, nor anything right good; My soul is a poor land, plenteous in dearth— Here blades of grass, there a small herb for food— A nothing that would be something if it could; But if obedience, Lord, in me do grow, I shall one day be better than I know. 2. The worst power of an evil mood is this— It makes the bastard self seem in the right, Self, self the end, the goal of human bliss. But if the Christ-self in us be the might Of saving God, why should I spend my force With a dark thing to reason of the light— Not push it rough aside, and hold obedient course? 3. Back still it comes to this: there was a man Who said, "I am the truth, the life, the way:"— Shall I pass on, or shall I stop and hear?— "Come to the Father but by me none can:" What then is this?— am I not also one Of those who live in fatherless dismay? I stand, I look, I listen, I draw near. 4. My Lord, I find that nothing else will do, But follow where thou goest, sit at thy feet, And where I have thee not, still run to meet. Roses are scentless, hopeless are the morns, Rest is but weakness, laughter crackling thorns, If thou, the Truth, do not make them the true: Thou art my life, O Christ, and nothing else will do. 5. Thou art here—in heaven, I know, but not from here— Although thy separate self do not appear; If I could part the light from out the day, There I should have thee! But thou art too near: How find thee walking, when thou art the way? Oh, present Christ! make my eyes keen as stings, To see thee at their heart, the glory even of things. 6. That thou art nowhere to be found, agree Wise men, whose eyes are but for surfaces; Men with eyes opened by the second birth, To whom the seen, husk of the unseen is, Descry thee soul of everything on earth. Who know thy ends, thy means and motions see: Eyes made for glory soon discover thee. 7. Thou near then, I draw nearer— to thy feet, And sitting in thy shadow, look out on the shine; Ready at thy first word to leave my seat— Not thee: thou goest too. From every clod Into thy footprint flows the indwelling wine; And in my daily bread, keen-eyed I greet Its

being's heart, the very body of God. 8. Thou wilt interpret life to me, and men, Art, nature, yea, my own soul's mysteries—Bringing, truth out, clear-joyous, to my ken, Fair as the morn trampling the dull night. Then The lone hill-side shall hear exultant cries; The joyous see me joy, the weeping weep; The watching smile, as Death breathes on me his cold sleep. 9. I search my heart—I search, and find no faith. Hidden He may be in its many folds— I see him not revealed in all the world Duty's firm shape thins to a misty wraith. No good seems likely. To and fro I am hurled. I have no stay. Only obedience holds:— I haste, I rise, I do the thing he saith. 10. Thou wouldst not have thy man crushed back to clay; It must be, God, thou hast a strength to give To him that fain would do what thou dost say; Else how shall any soul repentant live, Old griefs and new fears hurrying on dismay? Let pain be what thou wilt, kind and degree, Only in pain calm thou my heart with thee. 11. I will not shift my ground like Moab's king, But from this spot whereon I stand, I pray— From this same barren rock to thee I say, "Lord, in my commonness, in this very thing That haunts my soul with folly—through the clay Of this my pitcher, see the lamp's dim flake; And hear the blow that would the pitcher break." 12. Be thou the well by which I lie and rest; Be thou my tree of life, my garden ground; Be thou my home, my fire, my chamber blest, My book of wisdom, loved of all the best; Oh, be my friend, each day still newer found, As the eternal days and nights go round! Nay, nay—thou art my God, in whom all loves are bound! 13. Two things at once, thou know'st I cannot think. When busy with the work thou givest me, I cannot consciously think then of thee. Then why, when next thou lookest o'er the brink Of my horizon, should my spirit shrink, Reproached and fearful, nor to greet thee run? Can I be two when I am only one. 14. My soul must unawares have sunk awry. Some care, poor eagerness, ambition of work, Some old offence that unforgiving did lurk, Or some self-gratulation, soft and sly— Something not thy sweet will, not the good part, While the home-guard looked out, stirred up the old murk, And so I gloomed away from thee, my Heart. 15. Therefore I make provision, ere I begin To do the thing thou

givest me to do, Praying,—Lord, wake me oftener, lest I sin.  
Amidst my work, open thine eyes on me, That I may wake  
and laugh, and know and see Then with healed heart afresh  
catch up the clue, And singing drop into my work anew. 16.  
If I should slow diverge, and listless stray Into some thought,  
feeling, or dream unright, O Watcher, my backsliding soul af-  
fray; Let me not perish of the ghastly blight. Be thou, O Life  
eternal, in me light; Then merest approach of selfish or im-  
pure Shall start me up alive, awake, secure. 17. Lord, I have  
fallen again—a human clod! Selfish I was, and heedless to of-  
fend; Stood on my rights. Thy own child would not send  
Away his shreds of nothing for the whole God! Wretched, to  
thee who savest, low I bend: Give me the power to let my  
rag-rights go In the great wind that from thy gulf doth blow.  
18. Keep me from wrath, let it seem ever so right: My wrath  
will never work thy righteousness. Up, up the hill, to the  
whiter than snow-shine, Help me to climb, and dwell in par-  
don's light. I must be pure as thou, or ever less Than thy de-  
sign of me—therefore incline My heart to take men's wrongs  
as thou tak'st mine. 19. Lord, in thy spirit's hurricane, I pray,  
Strip my soul naked—dress it then thy way. Change for me  
all my rags to cloth of gold. Who would not poverty for rich-  
es yield? A hovel sell to buy a treasure-field? Who would a  
mess of porridge careful hold Against the universe's birth-  
right old? 20. Help me to yield my will, in labour even, Nor  
toil on toil, greedy of doing, heap— Fretting I cannot more  
than me is given; That with the finest clay my wheel runs  
slow, Nor lets the lovely thing the shapely grow; That  
memory what thought gives it cannot keep, And nightly  
rimes ere morn like cistus-petals go. 21. 'Tis—shall thy will be  
done for me?—or mine, And I be made a thing not after  
thine— My own, and dear in paltriest details? Shall I be born  
of God, or of mere man? Be made like Christ, or on some oth-  
er plan?— I let all run:—set thou and trim my sails; Home  
then my course, let blow whatever gales. 22. With thee on  
board, each sailor is a king Nor I mere captain of my vessel  
then, But heir of earth and heaven, eternal child; Daring all  
truth, nor fearing anything; Mighty in love, the servant of all  
men; Resenting nothing, taking rage and blare Into the God-

like silence of a loving care. 23. I cannot see, my God, a reason why From morn to night I go not gladsome free; For, if thou art what my soul thinketh thee, There is no burden but should lightly lie, No duty but a joy at heart must be: Love's perfect will can be nor sore nor small, For God is light—in him no darkness is at all. 24. 'Tis something thus to think, and half to trust— But, ah! my very heart, God-born, should lie Spread to the light, clean, clear of mire and rust, And like a sponge drink the divine sunbeams. What resolution then, strong, swift, and high! What pure devotion, or to live or die! And in my sleep, what true, what perfect dreams! 25. There is a misty twilight of the soul, A sickly eclipse, low brooding o'er a man, When the poor brain is as an empty bowl, And the thought-spirit, weariful and wan, Turning from that which yet it loves the best, Sinks moveless, with life-poverty opprest:— Watch then, O Lord, thy feebly glimmering coal. 26. I cannot think; in me is but a void; I have felt much, and want to feel no more; My soul is hungry for some poorer fare— Some earthly nectar, gold not unalloyed:— The little child that's happy to the core, Will leave his mother's lap, run down the stair, Play with the servants—is his mother annoyed? 27. I would not have it so. Weary and worn, Why not to thee run straight, and be at rest? Motherward, with toy new, or garment torn, The child that late forsook her changeless breast, Runs to home's heart, the heaven that's heavenliest: In joy or sorrow, feebleness or might, Peace or commotion, be thou, Father, my delight. 28. The thing I would say, still comes forth with doubt And difference:—is it that thou shap'st my ends? Or is it only the necessity Of stubborn words, that shift sluggish about, Warping my thought as it the sentence bends?— Have thou a part in it, O Lord, and I Shall say a truth, if not the thing I try. 29. Gather my broken fragments to a whole, As these four quarters make a shining day. Into thy basket, for my golden bowl, Take up the things that I have cast away In vice or indolence or unwise play. Let mine be a merry, all-receiving heart, But make it a whole, with light in every part.



