

**SIR GIBBIE; IN THREE  
VOLUMES; VOL. I**

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Sir Gibbie; In Three Volumes; Vol. I by George Mac Donald

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**GEORGE MAC DONALD**

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# SIR GIBBIE.

BY

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# SIR GIBBIE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE EARRING.

“COME oot o’ the gutter, ye nickum!” cried, in harsh, half-masculine voice, a woman standing on the curbatone of a short, narrow, dirty lane, at right angles to an important thoroughfare, itself none of the widest or cleanest. She was dressed in dark petticoat and print wrapper. One of her shoes was down at the heel, and discovered a great hole in her stocking. Had her black hair been brushed and displayed, it would have revealed a thready glitter of grey, but all that was now visible of it was only two or three untidy tresses that dropped from under a cap of black net and

green ribbons, which looked as if she had slept in it. Her face must have been handsome when it was young and fresh ; but it was now beginning to look tattooed, though whether the colour was from without or from within, it would have been hard to determine. Her black eyes looked resolute, almost fierce, above her straight, well-formed nose. Yet evidently circumstance clave fast to her. She had never risen above it, and was now plainly subjected to it.

About thirty yards from her, on the farther side of the main street, and just opposite the mouth of the lane, a child, apparently about six, but in reality about eight, was down on his knees raking with both hands in the grey dirt of the kennel. At the woman's cry, he lifted his head, ceased his search, raised himself, but without getting up, and looked at her. They were notable eyes out of which he looked—of such a deep blue were they, and having such long lashes ; but more notable far from their expression, the nature of which, although a certain witchery of confidence was at once discoverable, was not to be determined without the help of the whole face, whose diffused meaning seemed in them to

deepen almost to speech. Whatever was at the heart of that expression, it was something that enticed question and might want investigation. The face as well as the eyes was lovely—not very clean, and not too regular for hope of a fine development, but chiefly remarkable from a general effect of something I can only call *luminosity*. The hair, which stuck out from his head in every direction, like a round fur cap, would have been of the red-gold kind, had it not been sunburned into a sort of human hay. An odd creature altogether the child appeared, as, shaking the gutter-drops from his little dirty hands, he gazed from his bare knees on the curbstone at the woman of rebuke. It was but for a moment. The next he was down, raking in the gutter again.

The woman looked angry, and took a step forward; but the sound of a sharp imperative little bell behind her, made her turn at once, and re-enter the shop from which she had just issued, following a man whose pushing the door wider had set the bell ringing. Above the door was a small board, nearly square, upon which was painted in lead-colour on a black ground the



words, "Licensed to sell beer, spirits, and tobacco to be drunk on the premises." There was no other sign. "Them 'at likes my whusky 'ill no aye be speerin' my name," said Mistress Croale. As the day went on she would have more and more customers, and in the evening on to midnight, her parlour would be well filled. Then she would be always at hand, and the spring of the bell would be turned aside from the impact of the opening door. Now the bell was needful to recall her from house affairs.

"The likin' 'at cratur's his for clean dirt! He's been at it this hale half-hour!" she murmured to herself as she poured from a black bottle into a pewter measure a gill of whisky for the pale-faced toper who stood on the other side of the counter; far gone in consumption, he could not get through the forenoon without his *morning*. "I wad like," she went on, as she replaced the bottle without having spoken a word to her customer, whose departure was now announced with the same boisterous alacrity as his arrival by the shrill-toned bell—"I wad like, for's father's sake, honest man! to thraw Gibbie's lug. That likin' for dirt I canna fathom nor bide."

Meantime the boy's attention seemed entirely absorbed in the gutter. Whatever vehicle passed before him, whatever footsteps behind, he never lifted his head, but went creeping slowly on his knees along the curb still searching down the flow of the sluggish, nearly motionless current.

It was a grey morning towards the close of autumn. The days began and ended with a fog, but often between, as golden a sunshine glorified the streets of the grey city as any that ripened purple grapes. To-day the mist had lasted longer than usual—had risen instead of dispersing; but now it was thinning, and at length, like a slow blossoming of the sky-flower, the sun came melting through the cloud. Between the gables of two houses, a ray fell upon the pavement and the gutter. It lay there a very type of purity, so pure that, rest where it might, it destroyed every shadow of defilement that sought to mingle with it. Suddenly the boy made a dart upon all fours, and pounced like a creature of prey upon something in the kennel. He had found what he had been looking for so long. He sprang to his feet and bounded with it into the sun, rubbing it as he ran upon what he

had for trousers, of which there was nothing below the knees but a few streamers, and nothing above the knees but the body of the garment, which had been—I will not say made for, but last worn by a boy three times his size. His feet, of course, were bare as well as his knees and legs. But though they were dirty, red, and rough, they were nicely shaped little legs, and the feet were dainty.

The sunbeams he sought came down through the smoky air like a Jacob's ladder, and he stood at the foot of it like a little prodigal angel that wanted to go home again, but feared it was too much inclined for him to manage the ascent in the present condition of his wings. But all he did want was to see in the light of heaven what the gutter had yielded him. He held up his *find* in the radiance and regarded it admiringly. It was a little earring of amethyst-coloured glass, and in the sun looked lovely. The boy was in an ecstasy over it. He rubbed it on his sleeve, sucked it to clear it from the last of the gutter, and held it up once more in the sun, where, for a few blissful moments, he contemplated it speechless. He then caused