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Spring 3-15-2024

**The Light Princess and The Golden Key, by George MacDonald.  
Reviewed by Janet Brennan Croft.**

Janet Brennan Croft

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**Recommended Citation**

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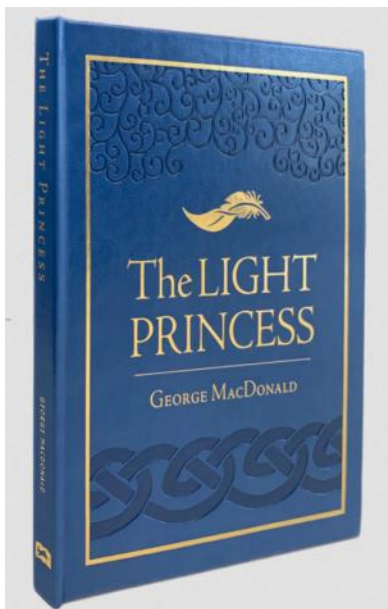
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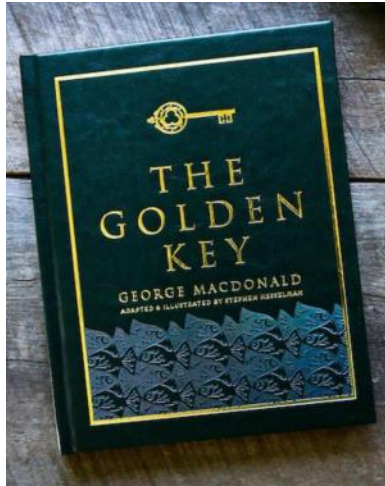
*The Light Princess*. George MacDonald. [1864]. Illustrated and with an Artist's Statement by Ned Bustard. Rabbit Room Press, 2019. 106pp. \$16.00. and *The Golden Key*. George MacDonald. [1867]. Graphic novel adaptation by Steven Hesselman. Rabbit Room Press, 2022. 119pp. \$20.00. Reviewed by Janet Brennan Croft.

The Rabbit Room is a Christian-centered endeavor that, among other activities, puts on the Hutchmoot conferences, produces podcasts and theatre, and runs a press. Based in Nashville, they take their name from the back room at the Eagle and Child, the Oxford pub where the Inklings met, and emphasize community, creativity, and imagination. They are the publishers of Diana Pavlac Glyer's recent title *The Major and the Missionary*, collecting the correspondence of Warren Lewis and Blanche Biggs.

These two volumes seem to be the start of a series of attractively bound children's books; there is one more title in a similar binding, *The Lost Tales of Sir Galahad*, but it's contemporary, not a classic. MacDonald was, of course, an important influence on the Inklings, Lewis famously saying that MacDonald's *Phantastes* "baptized my imagination," but Tolkien finding himself so annoyed in later life that he wrote *Smith of Wootton Major* as "an anti-G.M tract." (For more on MacDonald's significance, see my 2017 review of a different edition of *The Golden Key*.)

*The Light Princess* is bound in light blue faux leather stamped in dark blue and gold. The text is unabridged. The Foreword, Afterword, and Artist's Statement seem aimed at a young adult audience, a bit older than the actual story's audience, but not by much. The linocut illustrations are charming, if thematically perhaps a bit heavy for a story about a princess lacking gravity, and often include clever references to MacDonald's other works. The story itself is a delight to return to after many years away; I'd forgotten about





the description of love as “a beehive of honey and stings” or MacDonald’s wish that princesses might get to experience being lost in the woods and having a bit of fun

while finding their fortune, just like princes. If there is one drawback to the production of this book, it’s that the paper is thin, so that the illustrations show through the back of the preceding page. Because the book itself is also bit thin, it needs some care in the initial opening and easing of the spine.

*The Golden Key* is bound in dark green faux leather stamped in gold, black, and an appropriately iridescent metallic ink for the repeating fish pattern. This is a graphic novel adaptation, and printed on heavier and glossier stock than *The Light Princess*. The text is lightly abridged, leaving out a phrase here and there. I can’t say the style of illustration is to my particular taste, but the faces are expressively drawn, and there is great variety in the page layouts. For me, the artist’s semi-realistic style and completely literal interpretation of the text in the illustrations (and the fact that Mossy wears a modern shirt and tie in the later parts of the story!) jolt me right out of the numinosity of the tale; the Ruth Sanderson scratchboard illustrations are my favorites so far.

These editions would look handsome on a home bookshelf, though they may not stand up to public library wear and tear. Taste in illustration is subjective, and it may be that either one of these might be the one to capture a young reader’s imagination and stock their mental imagery for these stories from the very first reading. I still find myself long-

ing for proper critical editions with annotations and footnotes, though.

Croft, Janet Brennan. “[Review of] George MacDonald, *The Golden Key: A Victorian Fairy Tale*.” *Mythprint*, vol. 54, no. 1, #380, 2017, pp. 7-8. [https://dc.swosu.edu/mythprint/vol54/iss1/1/MacDonald, George and Ruth Sanderson, illustrator. \*The Golden Key\*. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2016.](https://dc.swosu.edu/mythprint/vol54/iss1/1/MacDonald,GeorgeandRuthSanderson,illustrator.TheGoldenKey)

