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Abstract

Sees MacDonald's writing as a dialectic about "the conflict between what is and what seems to be."
Shows how the patterns and characters of his novels reflect his theology, especially as shown in *The Golden Key*.

Additional Keywords

Christianity in literature; MacDonald, George—Theology; MacDonald, George. "The Golden Key"

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Awakening in Fairyland

The Journey of a Soul in George MacDonald's *The Golden Key*

MARY RISO

For we are not yet, we are only becoming.
— George MacDonald

Religious truth cannot be wholly perceived by the senses. Hence, its communication often requires the use of the imagination. George MacDonald sought to bring to tangible awareness the existence of God and of the soul. He further sought to enrich the soul with clarity and power, making it much more than a shadow in a world of very real temptations and sufferings. MacDonald's dialect hinged upon the brilliance and lucidity of his imagination; he is at his best and most convincing in such works of fantasy as *Phantasies*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Princess and Curdie*, *The Golden Key*, and *The Wise Woman*. It is not his intention to explore ideas as if there were more than one possible explanation of reality. The goal of his dialectic is to bring into focus concepts which for him are already sharply outlined: the inseparability of man from God, the pervasion of the world by the supernatural, and the fact that everything in a seemingly chaotic world makes sense in accordance with a divine pattern. Thus dialectic, which implies opposition brought to resolution is, a highly appropriate term for the writing of George MacDonald for there is a basic conflict which he painstakingly works to expose and resolve: the conflict between what is and what seems to be.

Two words may best describe George MacDonald's emphasis in responding to the religious dialectic of his time: obedience and love. In response to an abstract understanding of God based on the powers of the intellect, obedience leads to action. MacDonald based his theology on the New Testament and more particularly on the Gospels, regarding the commands of Jesus as requiring immediate action. Most of his adult novels follow a similar pattern: the scene is nineteenth century rural Scotland (this may change to London if the hero leaves his native land to pursue a career in teaching or writing). The characters are as follows: the Scot of the lower classes who is nonetheless a true lady or gentleman with solid values and a deep understanding of the nature of God which he or she shares in simplicity, honesty and, most powerfully, in his or her actions. There is also often a protagonist who faces many temptations and often strays from the path to God, but who eventually returns to his humble roots, to his spiritual home, and usually to earthly riches as well. Finally, there is a third character who represents the "world" in some respect and who stands in opposition to the Scottish lad or

lass: the cool, sophisticated, wealthy, educated lord or lady who is quick to enjoy an intellectual discussion and as quick to deny God on rational grounds.

To MacDonald's credit, although his adult fiction cannot compare to that of many of his contemporaries, the dialogues contained therein are brilliant, almost Socratic in style, and his prose as a whole contains so many gems of wisdom that one is well advised to read every word for fear of missing one of them. In each of the situations in which he finds himself, the hero of these stories must answer the question: "What must I do?" And if a relationship with Jesus of the Gospels exists, the answer usually comes quickly. Knowledge and understanding are not stressed as the key to life. Instead, they are regarded as the fruits of simplicity and obedience. In an age which boasted huge steps in man's understanding of himself and control over his environment MacDonald emphasized obedience over systematic theology. It is as if MacDonald was doing battle with what he perceived to be idols of science and self through his dialectic.

This theme is equally characteristic of his works of fantasy. It is in fact more easily embodied in stories about children where obedience, perseverance, patience, good deeds and the like are perfect goals for Victorian children. Here we find MacDonald very much in tune with his time for his fictional children are often presented with tasks or situations where they must learn these virtues and receive both earthly and spiritual rewards as a result.

The second word which exemplifies MacDonald's dialectic is *love*, modeled in God's love for his creation. The author's emphasis on an all-inclusive and imminent love was no doubt in response to his own hypercalvinistic background in which God seemed utterly unreachable and transcendent, the sovereign Lord and judge who predestined some to salvation and others to damnation. MacDonald sought to emphasize that love was the essence of God's character. This does not mean that for MacDonald God and love were the same thing; it is abundantly clear from his sermons and fiction that God is a very real and living person. But His compassion, kindness, and generosity were subjects rarely preached on in the churches of MacDonald's experience; he was responding to the rather rigid belief system which he saw around him and with which he struggled in his youth, attempting to define his own very individual faith. MacDonald expected great things of God, but he also put a high value on God's

creation. While maintaining the complete dependence of man upon God, MacDonald respected man's intuitive, God-given ability to recognize good and evil, and he believed in the intelligent use of free will.

He often uses the image of a woman who is at the same time very old and very beautiful and whose chief qualities are wisdom and love. This is true in *The Golden Key*, *The Wise Woman*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Princess and Curdie*, and many others. In *At the Back of the North Wind* the North Wind is such a woman. Apparently MacDonald found it easier to express the so-called "feminine" characteristics of love, compassion, and tenderness in the image of God as Mother. This, too, was an image not commonly found in Victorian churches, and yet it is an image with which MacDonald was obviously very comfortable. It was his intention to make God as accessible as a loving mother to a child, as natural as the wind, and as desirable a person as Heaven is a place. He used the best of his imagination to portray that which cannot be seen.

To use anything other than the Bible in the understanding and communication of God was surely frowned upon by the Dissenting Church of Scotland, the Congregationalist Church to which MacDonald belonged, and MacDonald's own father, who thought his son impractical and rather unorthodox — such things were acceptable in a poet (which was MacDonald's highest aspiration), but not in a preacher and theologian. However, George MacDonald continued to pave his own unique way; in so doing, he truly became a man with no religious home in this world.

His life was very much like the lives of the heroes in his novels. Born in Scotland in 1824, he struggled in his youth to find a God he could believe in, a God who provided for the salvation of all. Once he discovered this God by reading the Bible, he trusted His nature implicitly in the face of all questions and trials. He also felt the pull of two callings: to be a writer and a preacher: as he continued to write he attended the Congregationalist seminary in London. He received a calling shortly thereafter, but was asked to leave due to what were considered to be unorthodox views concerning purgatory; MacDonald considered the existence of purgatory to be a possibility, and he dealt with the doctrine most extensively in his fantasy novel *Lilith* written years later. MacDonald's views on purgatory are in keeping with his general perspective on life after death: we continue to learn and to grow after we pass through the thin curtain of death. MacDonald's belief in the profound connection between this life and the next was what influenced his stress on our actions in this life (what we are is what we will become) as well as his view that the natural and supernatural worlds are constantly overlapping. It is not uncommon to find ghosts and spirits wandering through his novels and it is this view which is law in fairyland - the unseen can be seen, the impossible becomes possible.

MacDonald's beliefs in this area were aptly suited for

the world of Victorian literature; his novels, in fact, have the style of Gothic romances. This was also the beginning of a Golden Age in children's fantasy stories. His own, however, were at odds with both the Anglican and Dissenting Churches; although MacDonald sought another pastorate he was never called to one again for a variety of reasons. He did, however, continue to preach independently as interim and guest preacher innumerable times, especially as his fame grew as a writer. George MacDonald was truly a wanderer in this world. It is ironic that although he was widely published and had recommendations from some of the greatest literary minds of his day, he was also not chosen for a professorship at Edinburgh when he applied. It seems that with all of his talents he could not settle into a regular job. His only real home was with his wife Louisa and their eleven children. They struggled financially all their lives and relied entirely on MacDonald's income from books, lectures (his lecture tour in America was an enormous success) and preaching engagements which flowed irregularly through the years. The family moved frequently, but eventually settled in Italy.

MacDonald was not a great novelist, but he was a great writer of fantasy. He was not a great theologian, but he was a great preacher. He was not a great philosopher, but he was a great thinker. He had wisdom, vision, and faith which, empowered by a free and gifted imagination, made him a man of unusual talent. His writings have been strongly influential over the years: C.S. Lewis, for example, claimed that his own imagination was baptized by MacDonald's fantasy novel *Phantasies*.

"A confused Mass of thoughts, tumbling over one another in the Dark: when the Fancy was yet in its first work, moving the Sleeping Images of Things Towards the Light" — these words of John Dryden are descriptive of what George MacDonald tried to accomplish in his literature. He hoped to play a part in moving the Sleeping Images of Things Towards the Light.

What are these images, why are they asleep, and how does fancy assist in the awakening? The images are glimpses or ideas of spiritual realities and they are sleeping because our senses are dulled by life in a world which devalues what cannot be seen. "Fairyland is a place of perception where the marvelous lies hidden in the mundane." (Raepier 319). If life is a journey from sleeping to waking in which one becomes increasingly aware of certain hidden realities, then a fairy story mirrors the sleeping soul of the reader on three levels. First, it reflects the fact that life, at its best, is indeed a journey of growing awareness, both of the world without and the world within. Second, as part of the awakening process, the author uses dreamlike images and symbols to allow invisible realities to emerge from darkness to light. Sleep is a state without conscious awareness. Through dreams, images, both beautiful and ugly, are introduced and in waking we understand conscious reality better through the integration of these symbols. Finally, since it is a prerequisite of

fairly tales to have a happy ending it may awaken a new perspective on suffering as the reader sees the arrival at the journey's end to be worth whatever it cost to get there.

The Golden Key was written in 1867, at the zenith of the Victorian era. This was a time of great activity and forward movement for MacDonald's Britain. spiritually, however, the nation was bewildered and searching. Orthodox religion is not an area which would normally be treated as peripheral to Victorian society. If anything might be considered central to the lives of the Victorians, especially as compared to the open bitterness and even amusement over organized religion elicited by the tragedy of World War I, it is Christianity. The churches were full and there was hardly a corner of the earth untouched by the faith of England. However, the nineteenth century was a time of questions and discoveries. Human beings began to focus on this world and human potential. The Victorians became bewildered as to what role God should play in the midst of this and so either relegated him to the surface of life or sought other manifestations of spirituality.

A time existed when religion was central to the life-blood of the people. Life itself was something akin to a myth and little separation existed between the natural and the supernatural. People were not surprised to find strange things afoot and expected God to operate in mysterious and fantastic ways. Nor were they surprised at suffering which was regarded as a normal part of life. But the Age of Reason was the beginning of the end of this "magical" era and the Industrial Revolution crushed such belief for certain; the natural and the supernatural were entirely estranged.

Awakening has to do with the reintegration of these two elements. In *The Golden Key* two children carry a key through fairyland, searching for the door which it will open. As in "real" life, their journey is more than movement through space and time - it is a journey from confusion to clarity and from ignorance to knowledge. In MacDonald's own words, he did not write "for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five." In one of his sermons he said the following:

Why, then, do I come here to talk? Friends, if I can wake in any human heart just a little fluttering of life; if I can help any human soul to feel, if it were only for a moment, that there is an eternal world, and that this is a mere shadow of things; that there is an eternal world, a world of life, of truth; a world of duty, of hope, of infinite joy; if I can but make the clouds of this commonplace world, which you have made commonplace, and which is not commonplace in itself. If, I say, I can make the clouds just part the least bit, and give a glimpse of the blue sky, of the infinite realities of things, than I hold that it is worth doing. (*Getting* 163)

Surely the world for which he wrote was a world in need of awakening to more than the present and visible.

MacDonald begins the story of *The Golden Key* as fol-

lows:

There was a boy who used to sit in the twilight and listen to his great-aunt's stories. She told him that if he could reach the place where the end of the rainbow stands he would find there a golden key.

The name of the little boy in this story is Mossy — "Now Mossy was the name his companions had given him, because he had a favorite stone covered with moss, on which he used to sit whole days reading; and they said the moss had begun to grow upon him too!" (15). Prior to the onset of his journey beyond the periphery of his known world and into fairyland, this little boy is deeply asleep. Sitting on a rock and reading is not a bad thing. However, one clear and consistent theme in the writing of George MacDonald is that action is the key to life, faith, and maturity. His novels in particular are packed with criticism of those who say they believe in God and yet prefer to sit and read about him or hear a sermon about him than obey him. According to MacDonald, simple obedience causes one to awaken from complacency and self-righteousness to a living faith.

The Golden Key reflects the lives of those who, like Mossy, live on the borders of fairyland — a world not run by the laws of nature. Naturally, such a world is not necessarily appealing; indeed, it is understandably very frightening. It is only when Mossy sees the image of a rainbow and thinks of the key that he makes the choice to begin his journey.

It was a grand sight, burning away there in silence with its gorgeous, its lovely, its delicate colors, each distinct, all combining . . . He stood gazing at it till he forgot himself with delight — even forgot the key which he had come to seek. And as he stood it grew more wonderful still. For in each of the colors, which was as large as the column of a church, he could faintly see beautiful forms slowly ascending as if by the steps of a winding stair. (2-3)

In viewing the rainbow Mossy receives a glimpse of something greater than the key or even the rainbow itself. And as Mossy does, so does the reader. There are many such glimpses to be found in life, but rarely are they as clear and tangible as those found in a fairy tale. Fairyland is that world which coexists with the visible — the world of the spirit where the inner person seeks for meaning beyond the limited fulfillment he or she may find in the material world. The key is that which will allow these desires to be fulfilled; it is not the desires themselves. And the key may be used only in fairyland. As William Raepier has noted, "In [*The Golden Key*] MacDonald passes far beyond ordinary morality — he is offering a myth to live by. It is the reader's task to realize that myth within him or herself" (319).

The vision of the rainbow fades and Mossy falls asleep for the night at its base, awakening the next morning to find the golden key lying in the moss beside him. "Where was the lock to which the key belongs? It must be somewhere, for how could anybody be so silly as

to make a key for which there was no lock?" (4) — and Mossy sets out to find the lock for which the key was made.

At this point the second child, who will be Mossy's companion, is introduced to the story. Her name is Tangle because "she was neglected and left untidy" (5). Her name implies confusion as Moss implies stagnation — both, aspects of a soul asleep — and their journey will be one to both clarity and life. Tangle is enticed across the borders of fairyland by the fairies that live there. Once in the forest the first creature Tangle meets is a beautiful flying fish which, swimming through the air, guides her to the door of a cottage where she is greeted by a beautiful woman, with the words "Ah, you are come at last! I have been looking for you a long time" (7).

Tangle sits in the lap of the woman (the fish in the meantime having jumped straight into a pot of boiling water) and stares at her, overwhelmed by her beauty. MacDonald's description of her is exquisite:

She was tall and strong, with white arms and neck, and a delicate flush on her face. The child could not tell what was the color of her hair, but could not help thinking it had a tinge of dark green. She had not one ornament upon her, but she looked as if she had just put off quantities of diamonds and emeralds. Yet here she was in the simplest, poorest little cottage where she was evidently at home. She was dressed in shining green.

"How old are you, please," asked Tangle
"Thousands of years old," answered the lady.
"You don't look like it," said Tangle.

"Don't I? I think I do. Don't you see how beautiful I am?"

And her great blue eyes looked down on the little Tangle, as if all the stars in the sky were melted in them to make their brightness. (7-8)

Shortly afterwards, the lady is looking as if "the moon were melted in her eyes" and smiling "like the sun through a summer shower" (8-9).

Clearly the lady is an extension of nature, a healing and purifying element quickly forgotten in the industrial age and traditionally an environment for seeking spiritual reality. The green of her hair and dress reflect both nature and the supernatural, elements which are more easily integrated in fairyland than anywhere else. And that evening they eat the fish which guided Tangle through the forest. For "In Fairyland . . . the ambition of the animals is to be eaten by the people; for that is their highest end in that condition. But they are not therefore destroyed. Out of that pot comes something more than the dead fish, you will see" (11). And sure enough, from the pot emerges a little creature in human shape with white wings. In Fairyland the creatures know their goal precisely and long to fulfill it, only to be resurrected in a higher form, having died in service to others. In a sense, they have succeeded in opening the proper door with the proper key and are transported on new wings into new life beyond death. Mossy is guided to the cottage as well by such a fish, and

when the lady sees that he has got the golden key, she instructs him to look for the keyhole and to take Tangle with him. When Tangle cries that she does not want to leave the cottage of the beautiful lady, she received the following reply:

You must go with him Tangle. I am sorry to lose you, but it will be the best thing for you. Even the fishes, you see, have to go into the pot, and then out into the dark . . . No girl need be afraid to go with a youth who has the golden key . . . And, if you should lose each other as you go through the — the — I never can remember the name of the country — do not be afraid but go on and on. (16-17)

It seems odd that this woman, who is hundreds of years old and obviously a guide for the children and a source of great wisdom, does not know the name of the country which the children will make their goal. However, it is not uncommon for MacDonald, particularly when dealing with life beyond death, to place characters in positions of aid and service to others until they are ready to move on to paradise. Even there, life is a continuing journey toward growth in Christ. Thus, for MacDonald purgatory is not necessarily a place of suffering but of growth or waiting. It may be that this cottage of Tangle's "Grandmother" is a rather beautiful station in purgatory until she is ready to complete her journey.

Mossy and Tangle venture deeper into fairyland and after a long and difficult journey arrive in a valley and are amazed to find that the surface on which they stand is covered with shadows:

It was a sea of shadows. The mass was chiefly made up of the shadows of leaves innumerable, of all lovely and imaginative forms, waving to and fro, floating and quivering in the breath of a breeze whose motion was unfelt, whose sound was unheard. No forests clothed the mountainsides, no trees were anywhere to be seen, and yet the shadows of the leaves, branches, and stems of all various trees covered the valley as far as the eye could reach. Sometimes they seemed lovers that passed linked arm in arm, sometimes father and son, sometimes brothers in loving contest, sometimes sisters entwined in gracefulest community of complex form. About the middle of the plain they sat down to rest in the heart of a heap of shadows. After sitting for a while, each, looking up, saw the other in tears; they were longing after the country whence the shadows fell.

"We must find the country from which the shadows come," said Mossy.

"We must, dear Mossy," replied Tangle. "What if your golden key should be the key to it?" (18-19)

The children are discovering that something is worth seeking for. Until this point they had carried the key with the assumption that no key is made without a keyhole, although the location of the door and what lay beyond it remained a complete mystery to them. Now they have seen something which makes them hope that there may be a connection between the key and the elusive land from which the shadows come. However, just as this image

which inspires both desire and determination is presented to them, their path is crossed by suffering. They cross the plain of the shadows for a long, long time until "Mossy's hair was streaked with grey, and Tangle had got wrinkled on her forehead" (20). And then, in the darkness, the two children lose each other. Tangle calls for Mossy, but he has disappeared.

She threw herself down and wept in despair.

Suddenly she remembered that the beautiful lady had told them, if they lost each other in a country of which she could not remember the name, they were not to be afraid, but go straight on . . .

She rose from the ground and went on. (20-21)

The journey thus far has taken Mossy and Tangle most of their lives. They are children no longer and in their old age, when circumstances should, perhaps, become easier, a terrible loss is admitted into their lives and they must persevere alone. They continue, separately, to search for the country from which the shadows fall and they receive help in reaching their destination from three men — the old Man of the Sea, the Old Man of the Earth, and the Old Man of the Fire.

Thus three men play vital roles in the travels of the children and they represent various aspects of the nature of God, of life, and of George MacDonald's theology of death. The Old Man of the Sea is described as "an old man with long white hair down to his shoulders, leaning upon a stick with green buds . . ." (22) The Old Man of the Earth is "a youth of marvelous beauty" (25). And the Old Man of the Fire is a little child with "an awfulness of absolute repose on (his) face . . . and love in his large grey eyes . . ." (28-29). They are the key to a true understanding of this journey from sleeping to waking — whether through Fairyland for the children in our story, or through "real" life for the reader — for by their decreasing age they symbolize the infusion of life into the soul with growing maturity and knowledge. They also represent those parts of the creation — water, earth, and fire — which were believed by certain Greek philosophers to encompass the meaning of life. Although air is not symbolized by an old man, it may be embodied in the country from which the shadows come. However, as with the nature of God, no one of these aspects can stand alone.

The Old Man of the Sea is a guide to Tangle — he brings her closer to the land from which the shadows come by showing her the way to the Old Man of the Earth. He also brings her cleansing and refreshment:

No sooner was she undressed and lying in the bath, then she began to feel as if the water were sinking into her, and she were receiving all the good of sleep without undergoing its forgetfulness. And she grew happier and more hopeful than she had been since she lost Mossy. . . All the fatigue and aching of her long journey had vanished. She was as whole and strong and well as if she had slept for seven days. (24)

This is a time of rebirth for Tangle — of spiritual, emo-

tional, and physical renewal. Perhaps this is a resurrection for Tangle, either literal or spiritual, and the Old Man of the Sea is an image of God who guides, heals, and empowers, for the Old Man of the Sea is also the keeper of the fish who reappear consistently throughout the story. He watches over the fish as they grow in wisdom until they are ready to venture forth and serve others.

When Mossy meets the Old Man of the Sea, his experience is more explicitly that of death and rebirth:

"I have lived a good while, I believe," said Mossy sadly. "I'm not sure that I'm not old. I know my feet ache."

"Do they?" said the Old Man, as if he really meant to ask the question; and Mossy, who was still lying in the bath, watched his feet for a moment before he replied.

"No they do not," he answered. "Perhaps I am not old either."

"Get up and look at yourself in the water."

He rose and looked at himself in the water, and there was not a grey hair on his head or a wrinkle on his skin.

"You have tasted of death now," said the Old Man.

"Is it good?"

"It is good," said Mossy. "It is better than life."

"No," said the Old Man. "It is only more life." (31-32)

Tangle, in the meantime, has two more men to meet before she is reunited with Mossy:

Then the Old Man of the Earth stooped over the floor of the cave, raised a huge stone from it, and left it leaning.

It disclosed a great hole that went plumb down. "That is the way," he said. 22 1

"But there are no stairs."

"You must throw yourself in. There is no other way." (26-27)

The Old Man of the Earth shows Tangle the road to find the Old Man of the Fire who in turn will direct her to her final destination — the country from which the shadows come, or heaven. He knows that the only way for Tangle to move on is by taking this "leap of faith." He also knows that this leap will bring suffering for she leaps into water and emerges in the midst of a fierce heat. "The heat was terrible. She felt scorched to the bone, but it did not touch her strength. It grew hotter and hotter. She said, 'I can bear it no longer, yet she went on' (27). This encounter with intense heat, while painful, permits Tangle to continue her journey towards the Old Man of the Fire, and may be an image of purgatory if she has indeed already experienced physical death. It is also possible that it reflects the suffering which is an inevitable part of life, intensified by the heightening of the senses which comes with awakening from spiritual sleep, for Tangle has certainly become stronger and wiser through her encounters with the two old men.

Finally, Tangle enters a cool cave with a stream running into a basin of moss. She dips her face into the basin, and when she stands up has an extraordinary experience.

She had a marvelous sense that she was in the secret of the earth and all its ways. Everything she had seen, or

learned from books; all that her grandmother had said or sung to her; all the talk of the beasts, birds, and fishes; and all that happened to her on her journey with Mossy, and since then in the heart of the earth with the Old Man and the older Man—all was plain: she understood it all and saw that everything meant the same thing. . . . (27-28)

This knowledge and sense of wholeness to all things is surely the result of her travels, the years that have passed, the recent and intense suffering she had encountered, and the gifts and wisdom bestowed upon her by those she has met along the way. She has journeyed deeply into the core of the earth, into the core of life, and now the secrets of the earth and of life are becoming hers. She must now encounter the Old Man of the Fire, who, in his extreme youth and extreme wisdom, will direct her, finally, to the country the shadows fall from.

"Are you the oldest man of all?" Tangle at length, although filled with awe, ventured to ask.

"Yes, I am. I am very, very old. I am able to help you, I know. I can help everybody."

"Can you tell me the way to the country the shadows fall from?" she sobbed.

"Yes, I know the way quite well. I go there myself sometimes. But you could not go my way; you are not old enough. I will show you how you can go." (29)

And the Old Man of the Fire, surely a reflection of the purifying love, depth and timelessness of God, guides her to a serpent which she follows. This serpent may symbolize wisdom or knowledge. However, it may possibly represent Satan as an emissary of death for, according to MacDonald's theology, all things, both good and evil, are the servants of God.

The reunion of Mossy and Tangle occurs when Mossy, guided towards a vision of the rainbow by the Old Man of the Sea, finally uses his key for the first time. He comes upon a hole in a rock bordered by sapphires and his key turns in the hole. Within he finds a hall covered with shining stones at the center of which is a woman.

It was Tangle. Her hair had grown to her feet, and was rippled like the windless sea on broad sands. Her face was beautiful, like her grandmother's, and as still and peaceful as that of the Old Man of the Fire. Her form was tall and noble. Yet Mossy knew her at once.

"How beautiful you are, Tangle!" he said, in delight and astonishment.

"Am I?" she returned, "Oh, I have waited for you so long! But you, you are like the Old Man of the Sea. No. You are like the Old Man of the Earth. No, no. You are like the oldest man of all. You are like them all. And yet you are my own old Mossy!" . . . They told each other all their adventures, and were as happy as man and woman could be. For they were younger and better and stronger and wiser than they had ever been before. (34)

More prepared than ever, by the journey through death and to life again, for entry into paradise, they search once again for the country from which the shadows come. And soon Mossy sees a keyhole in a column among seven columns in the middle of the hall:

He took his key. It turned in the lock to the sounds of Aeolian music. A door opened upon slow hinges, and disclosed a winding stair within. The key vanished from his fingers. Tangle went up. Mossy followed. The door closed behind them. They climbed out of the earth; and, still climbing, rose above it. They were in the rainbow. Far abroad, over ocean and land, they could see through its transparent walls the earth beneath their feet. Stairs beside stairs wound up together, and beautiful beings of all ages climbed along with them.

They knew that they were going up to the country where the shadows fall.

And by this time I think they must have got there. (35)

"A confus'd Mass of thoughts, tumbling over one another in the Dark. . . ." may be compared to the shadows of meaning which we glimpse in life, and "the Fancy" represented by a fairy story such as *The Golden Key* may help to move us towards the country from which the shadows fall—towards the Light and true understanding of life, death, and suffering. Such a story may stir us to wakefulness that we may better perceive hidden realities. Like the journey of the two children in *The Golden Key*, life's journey is one of growth, joy, and suffering, and destination. We travel from confusion, stagnation, and shadows to clarity, life and solidity. We are called forth in our youth to venture beyond the borders of what is known into a world where much that is real is hidden and where suffering makes sense. George MacDonald held an unusual view of suffering in which age, fear, loss, disappointment, and pain of all kinds were not devastating to life, but necessary in order to become fully awake and to see more than shadows. He saw entry into the eternal as a natural continuation of this life, and this life as a classroom in which we learn how to find the key and then to use it.

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