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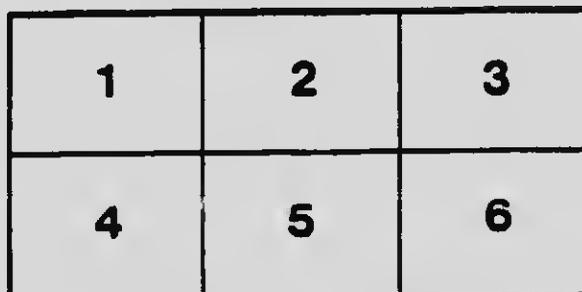
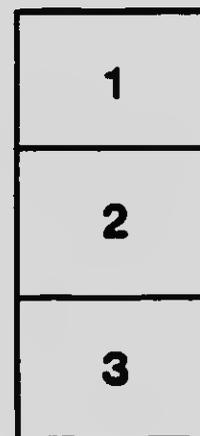
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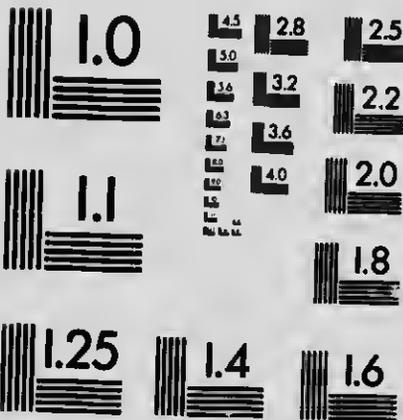
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TO
EDMUND WOOD
WITH THE GRATITUDE OF A LIFE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
"THE SOUL'S QUEST AND OTHER POEMS"
"ELTON HAZLEWOOD" "MY LATTICE AND OTHER POEMS"
"THE UNNAMED LAKE AND OTHER POEMS"
"POEMS OLD AND NEW"
"THE HYMN OF EMPIRE AND OTHER POEMS."

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand nine hundred and seven, by FREDERICK GEORGE SCOTT, at the office of the Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa.

[*Permission to act this play must be obtained from the author.*]

**THE KEY OF LIFE : A
MYSTERY - PLAY BY
FREDERICK GEORGE
SCOTT :**

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SCOTT, J. L.

✓

THE KEY OF LIFE

PROLOGUE

Dear fellow-pilgrims on life's toilsome road,
Who know this world is not man's last abode,
I pray you pause a moment on your way,
And learn the simple lessons of our play.
We have no wit to bring you, nothing rare,
In turn of speech or figure passing fair,
But simply that great message from the past,
That God's strong arms around His world are
cast,
And that man's life beneath, around, above,
Is compassed with the fullness of God's love.
This little play we call *The Key of Life*,
Because in Christ there is an end of strife,
And all the problems that perplex the mind,
In Him alone, can true solution find.
When Satan spreads his snares before our feet,
Christ, who once foiled him, is a sure retreat.
When sin has spoilt life's plan and symmetry,

THE KEY OF LIFE

Christ, through His death, can give us pardon
free ;

And when some grief has darkened all our sky,
Christ weeps with us for those who have to die.

There are no stars with light so far and dim,
That we can thither fly and hide from Him ;

No silence in the sunless depths of sea,

But in His presence lies continually,

No hidden regions in the utmost space,

Where God and man cannot meet face to face.

With reverence then, and with a lowly fear,

This simple tale of man's salvation hear,

'Twill give you guidance in perplexing hours ;

'Twill give you strength to fight the evil pow-
ers,

If Christ be helmsman in the soul's frail bark,

Fear not the sea however wild and dark.

THE KEY OF LIFE

SCENE I.

[It is night. The starry canopy of space stretches far away into the infinite distance. Beneath it on the shining top of one of Heav 's battlements, two angels stand, their hands clasped in the attitude of prayer, and their heads bowed in worship. A strong light falls on them from above, as an unseen angelic choir sings very softly. Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and Earth are full of Thy Glory : Glory be to Thee, O Lord most High. Amen.]

As the " Amen " dies off into silence, the Angels unclasp their hands, and draw nigh to the edge of the tower, and look down the dark abyss beneath them, where the sun and his attendant planets hang poised in space.]

THE KEY OF LIFE

First Angel.

Dear Brother, canst thou see,
Far down the gulfs of night,
That world to which so joyfully
Great Gabriel speeds his flight?
The shining of his wing,
Lights up the paths of space,
And all the baby planets sing
To see his radiant face.

Second Angel.

Yea, Brother, I can see
That world and know its name,
For it, by Heaven's high decree,
Now wins a glorious fame,
'Tis called by mortals Earth,
And there, since time began,
The Father willed, through Virgin birth,
His Son should be made man.
Great Gabriel wings his way
To a sweet maiden's shrine,
To tell her on this glorious day,—
She, wrapt in trance divine,—
That God has now decreed
She shall be favourèd,
And bear at length the Promised Seed
To bruise the serpent's head.

THE KEY OF LIFE

First Angel.

O Brother, such a theme
Sets all one's heart aglow ;
'Tis like the rapture of a dream
That God should love man so.
We know how wondrous fair
The throne of Heaven is,
The songs that thrill the golden air
In never ending bliss ;
And does the Eternal Son
In pity stoop so far
As to behold what things are done
On such a little star ?
See, Brother, now at last
Great Gabriel's feet alight
Upon that world where sin has cast
A darkness deep as night.

Second Angel.

Yea, Brother, more and more,
Thine eyes with joy shall see
The love that God the Son will pour
On frail humanity,
His brethren now they are,
For hark ! the songs of praise,
Re-echoing from star to star,
Fill all the bounds of space.

THE KEY OF LIFE

In Mary's Virgin heart
A fount of rapture springs,
She wills to bear a mother's part
Unto the King of Kings.
And now the Light of Light,
From Whom the worlds began,
Deigns with man's nature to unite
And be for ever man.

A weary way of life
His loving feet will tread,
And through the last most bitter strife
Go downward to the dead.
But He by death shall win
The captives held in chain,
And, from the broken bonds of sin,
Shall bring His own again.
Then up to Heaven on high
His brethren He will raise,
To dwell with Him beyond the sky
And join our hymns of praise ;
Hush, Brother, veil thine eyes,
Before this awful sight.
For now through all the throbbing skies
There dawns a wondrous light.

THE KEY OF LIFE

[The light deepens There is silence for a space. The Angels cover their faces with their hands and wait with bowed heads.

Then there is heard, but faintly, as from a great distance, the voice of the Angel Gabriel, giving his wonderful message to Blessed Mary.]

“ Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee : Blessed art thou among women.

Fear not, Mary : for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shall conceive and bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest : and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David : And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.”

[Then the voice of the Holy Virgin is heard in reply :]

“ Behold the handmaid of the Lord ;
Be it unto me according to thy word. ”

THE KEY OF LIFE

[As the light fades into darkness, an unseen choir sings the song of the Blessed Mary.]

“My soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit
hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For He hath regarded : the lowliness of His
hand-maiden.
For behold, from henceforth : all generations
shall call me blessed.
For He that is mighty hath magnified me : and
Holy is His Name.
And His mercy is on them that fear Him :
throughout all generations.
He hath shewed strength with His arm : He
hath scattered the proud in the imagination
of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat :
and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things :
and the rich He hath sent empty away.
He remembering His mercy hath holpen His
servant Israel : as He promised to our fore-
fathers, Abraham and His seed, for ever.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son : and to
the Holy Ghost ;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever
shall be : world without end. Amen.”

SCENE II.

[*It is the neighbourhood of Bethlehem. The sun has set and night is quickly coming; but a pale yellow light still lingers on the horizon. The road winds steeply up to the little town of Bethlehem, the dark outline of the wall and tower of which looms out against the sky. Two or three lights are seen from the houses. To the left of the road, stands a wayside inn built into the cliff, with an archway opening into that part of the cave which is used as a stable. There is a door to the inn, and a little window from which light issues. Laughter and singing are heard within. The night grows darker, snow begins to fall. St. Joseph enters with bundle on his back and lantern in his right hand. With his left hand he leads St. Mary. St. Joseph goes to the inn and knocks at the door. Laughter is heard within. It stops.*]

THE KEY OF LIFE

St. Joseph.

Goodman, goodman, open thy door,
Pilgrims are we cold and footsore ;
Our way is lost in the driving snow,
We have no otherwhere to go.

[Laughter within. St. Joseph knocks again.]

Goodman, goodman, open I pray,
Weary are we and long is the way,
The thick night gathers, the snow comes
[down,
And the hill is steep to the little town.]

[Laughter again. St. Joseph knocks once more, while St. Mary takes a seat on a stone by the door.]

St. Joseph.

“ Goodman, goodman, open thy door
Pity the hearts and the feet that are sore,
Open, I pray, and take us in
And evermore God's favour win.”

[The door opens and the host looks out.]

THE KEY OF LIFE

Host.

“ Who are ye that come so late,
And make such knocking at my gate ?
What bringeth you here in the cold and
snow ?
On to the city hasten and go. ”

St. Joseph.

“ O goodman, we are of David’s line,
And glorious the names of our fathers shine,
We are come to be taxed in David’s town,
But have no where to lay us down. ”

Host.

“ My house is full of the rich and great ;
No room for pilgrims of thine estate.
Go on, go on, in thy journey still,
To the little town on the top of the hill. ”

[*St. Joseph goes over and takes St. Mary
by the hand, and they kneel at the door
before the host.*]

St. Joseph.

“ O goodman, for the love of God,
Send us not back the way we trod.
This woman is so ill and weak
She scarce hath strength enough to speak.

THE KEY OF LIFE

“ The wind is howling far and near,
And her meek spirit quakes with fear :
Her shrinking steps and gentle moan
Certain would melt a heart of stone.

“ An awful sense is in the air
Of dark powers watching everywhere,
And down the mountains as we came,
We saw wild beasts with eyes of flame.

“ We are not clad in silk and rings,
We are no company for kings ;
If that the inn be crowded all,
Give us then shelter in a stall.

“ Our gentle brethren, ox and ass,
Will let the humble pilgrims pass ;
And all night long, their breathings deep
Will soothe us in our dreamless sleep. ”

Host.

“ No time have I, in this cold night,
To hearken to your sorry plight.
Rise up and to the stable go,
There find some shelter from the snow.”

THE KEY OF LIFE

[*Host turns to enter the inn. Rough servant appears.*]

“ Here, fellow, take these folk away,
Let them on straw their tired limbs lay.
Then quickly come, the hour is late,
Upon the others thou must wait.”

[*Host enters the inn, and closes the door hurriedly. St. Joseph and St. Mary rise from their knees.*]

Servant.

“ Good people, pity in my heart,
Has made the tears from my eyes start.
So weary are ye and footsore,
'Tis shame to turn you from the door.

“ May God, who doeth all things right,
Give you good rest and sleep to-night.
Upon sweet straw you tired limbs lay,
Until the white dawn brings the day.”

[*Servant takes lantern from St. Joseph and passes into the archway, followed by St. Joseph leading St. Mary. As the darkness gradually deepens, this hymn is sung by the unseen choir.*]

THE KEY OF LIFE

HYMN TO THE INFANT JESUS

O wondrous love of God,
That men will cast away,
O wondrous love of God,
Come to my heart and stay.

Cast out all trifling things,
False loves and toys of earth ;
Enter, great King of Kings,
In me once more have birth.

O little face of love,
Against thy mother's breast,
The starry hosts above
Are resting in thy rest.

O little hands of power,
O infant's panting breath—
Eternity's at flower
And life is born of death.

O little clinging mite,
Beneath thy mother's face,
Thy dreaming eyes have sight,
Beyond the bounds of space.

THE KEY OF LIFE

So fair and white thy throne,
O little tired one sleep ;
The legions are thine own,
That guard the starlit deep.

O wondrous love of God,
Cast not my love away ;
Enter my heart, my God,
Enter my heart and stay.

SCENE III.

[A plain near Bethlehem. Dark mountains are seen dimly in the distance. In the foreground is a little mound on which the shepherds are sitting, wrapped in long cloaks with staves in their hands. The night is dark and still, as after a storm; and the stars are now twinkling merrily in the sky. At the foot of the little hill, the sheep are sleeping quietly. The shepherds look up and, extending their arms, join in singing a hymn for their flocks.]

“ O Lord above the starry height,
Enthroned in splendour and in might,
Look downward through the veil of night,
 And guard our sheep.
Let not the wolf nor cunning fox
Disturb the slumber of our flocks,
And from rude rain and thunder shocks
 Them safely keep.

THE KEY OF LIFE

The night is cold,
But warm the fold,
And on the hill,
Beside its dam,
Each little lamb,
With sleep-sealed eyes,
So closely lies
All warm and still
'Neath starry skies.

Great God be near,
Keep them from fear,
Guard them from murrain, hurt and pain,
And give them, all the fruitful year,
Rich pasture in the watered plain."

*[As the hymn ceases, a bell in the distance
is heard softly tolling midnight.]*

First Shepherd.

"The storm is o'er, but black night reigns
On sea and mountain, hills and plains.
Now toilers on the treacherous deep
Watch the long billows without sleep.
Now lions in the desert prowl,
And in the dark wood hoots the owl.

THE KEY OF LIFE

Alas, my heart was once so glad,
But sorrow makes it worn and sad.
A wife, I had, whose love and care
Filled life with music everywhere.
But now she lies within the tomb,
And life is nought but toil and gloom. ”

[He turns away, hiding his face in his hands.]

Second Shepherd.

“ Ah Brother, sad thy grief and wild ;
But I have lost my only child.
No gloomy sepulchre shuts him in,
But Satan chains him by his sin.

“ His heart to me is dead and cold,
He has no pity for the old.
His feet go down Gehenna’s way,
No power from doom his steps can stay. ”

[He too turns away, hiding his face in his hands.]

Third Shepherd.

“ I, not by private grief distressed,
Mourn that our nation is oppressed,

THE KEY OF LIFE

That foreign tyrants with us dwell
As rulers of God's Israel.

"I mourn, because our foes are strong,
That right is worsted by the wrong,
That rapine, ruin, greed and lust
Have trampled Israel in the dust."

First Shepherd.

"Brothers, meseems our various woe
Doth from one source of evil flow.
Let us together kneel this night,
And ask high God to send us light."

[They kneel and pray, facing the East.]

"O Father of the land and sea,
Give us the light that is to be.

O Builder of the mountains wild,
Bring home again the erring child.

O Lord, who gave the wind his breath,
Fill with new life the house of death.

O King of Kings above the sky,
Give us some hope before we die,

THE KEY OF LIFE

Give us some Key amid our strife
That will unlock the gates of life. ”

[The scene grows darker. Suddenly a bright light shines in the sky, and an angel appears and sings :]

“ Fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you ; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

[Then the light bursts over the whole sky, and behold, it is full of angels, singing :

“ Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men.”

When the angels are gone away from them into Heaven and the shepherds are left in darkness, they rise as if the spell of the vision were still upon them.]

THE KEY OF LIFE

First Shepherd.

"Verily, a glorious sight
Hath burst upon our eyes this night.
My heart is full of hopes and fears,
That wring from it unwonted tears.

"Com . let us haste and find out them
That guard this Babe in Bethlehem ;
And at His feet our homage pay,
Who comes to usher in the day."

[They pass on to Bethlehem.]

SCENE IV.

Herod's Court.

[*A scene of barbaric splendour opens out disclosing a hall of vast proportions with rich pillars in rows on either side. Bright carpets cover the marble floor. At the back of the hall are two thrones, covered with cloth of gold. Slaves stand on either side of the thrones holding large fans of peacocks' feathers. To a slow music, a procession enters, of soldiers and pages followed by scribes, courtiers and lastly, the King and Queen. The soldiers and courtiers group themselves in a semi-circle at the back of the scene and do homage, as the King and Queen mount the thrones. Then the music ceases and the guests divide in groups conversing.*

Herod turns to the Queen, putting his hand to his head as though oppressed with weariness or anxiety.]

THE KEY OF LIFE

Herod.

"Lady, in horror all night long,
I heard a deep voice round my bed.
Methought it was the triumph song
Borne upward from my murdered dead.
"Herod," it cried, "thy doom is sealed.
The vengeance of the Lord draws nigh.
Behold, in Bethlehem is revealed,
The Shiloh of the prophecy !"

Queen.

"O Sire, it were an evil thing
To heed all mutterings of the brain.
Were I a man, and that a king,
I would life's cup of pleasure drain ;
And should dire fury, like a flood,
Burst from the angry heart of God,
I'd dye in God's own people's blood,
The strokes of His avenging rod."

Herod.

"Thrice nobly spoken, wife and Queen ;
Thy words disperse the cloud of gloom.
For what will be, like what has been,
Is written in the scroll of doom."

THE KEY OF LIFE

[*Enter the Three Wise Men
bearing gifts.*]

"But who are these that come from far,
Arrayed as pilgrims from the East?
Tell us, good people, what ye are,
And wherefore come ye to the feast."

Melchior.

"O Sire, we come from far-off lands,
The new-born King to greet.
We bring these presents in our hands
To lay them at His feet.
Long time the deep and mystic lore
Of ancient men we read,
Until to us the dark scrolls bore
The wisdom of the dead."

"We sought to find *The Key of Life*,
Why man has come to be,
What means the spirit's constant strife
To win Eternity.
Then as we fasted, prayed and sought,
With tireless, sleepless eyes,
The pitying constellations brought
A message from the skies."

THE KEY OF LIFE

“For, lo, a star, unseen before,
Moved through the trackless night.
We journeyed over sea and shore,
Led onward by its light.
And now we seek the infant King,
The mystic Light Divine,
Whose arm the victory will bring
To Israel’s chosen line.”

[Herod, in anger]

“What means this mummery, fellow, say?
Begone, thou uncouth clown,
Or death will have thee for his prey,
Before the sun goes down.”

*[Balthasar advances, holding up his hand
in warning.]*

“O Sire, beware, the sign was sure,
No mummery this, in truth.
The purposes of God endure,
For God is in His youth.”

*[The courtiers gather round about in inter-
est and alarm. Herod, turning to the
Scribe :]*

THE KEY OF LIFE

“O Scribe, has Israel ever heard
That such a King should come?
Have Israel’s prophets said the word,
Or are her sages dumb?”

*[Scribe unrolls a parchment scroll and
reads slowly:]*

“From Bethlehem, the prophets tell,
Shall come the King of Israel.”

*[Herod turns to the Queen and is evident-
ly alarmed. Consternation seizes the
guests, who discuss the matter, one with
another.]*

*Herod stands and addresses the Three
Wise Men.]*

“To Bethlehem haste and go;
And when ye find the King,
Bear me back word, that I may so
Prepare myself, and bring
My costliest treasures to His feet,
My sceptre and my crown,
And do such homage, as is meet,
To one from Heaven sent down.”

THE KEY OF LIFE

[The Wise Men make their reverence to the King and depart. Herod leads the Queen out past the guests who do obeisance.]

Herod.

"Come, Queen, be not cast down,
I still am Israel's Lord ;

[Whispering in her ear,]

This Child shall never wear the crown,
While Herod holds the sword."

SCENE V.

The Court of Death.

[Death, with the face of a skull and wearing a gold crown with sharp points, sits enthroned. He holds in one hand a scythe, in the other an hour-glass. At his feet crouch seven dusky forms in shadowy raiment, which are the Seven Deadly Sins. The scene, except where the light falls upon Death and the crouching figures, is absolutely dark. There is music of a slow dirge. It ceases, and the dark forms join in chanting, to a weird melody, the Hymn of the Seven Deadly Sins.]

“ King of the wind-blown mountains,
Lord of the lakes and streams,
Death, majestic and mighty,
Dream that awakes us from dreams,
Black is the frown on thy visage,
Piercing the fire of thine eye,
Thou girdest thyself with the tempest,
Thou spreadest thy wings on the sky.”

THE KEY OF LIFE

“ Cities, and lone habitations,
Peoples, and ships of the sea,
Cringing, and prone at thy footstool,
Offer their treasures to thee.
Monarchs, in pride of dominion,
Beggars, in rags from the street,
Bow down before thee as brothers,
Naked they crouch at thy feet.”

“ Speed us, great Death, on thine errands,
Cover with darkness the land,
Give us sweet sin for a poison,
Make us a sword in thine hand.
God and His Hosts shall be vanquished ;
Love shall be cast from His throne ;
Over the dark desolations,
Thou shalt be monarch alone.”

*[They rise and wave their lean, white
hands above their heads, making, at the
same time, a hissing sound as of serpents.
Then, as Death rises on his throne to
speak, they cry :]*

“ All hail, undying Death !
Whose black lips suck man’s breath,

THE KEY OF LIFE

Whose grip is on man's heart,
Whose sharp knife loves can part. "

Death.

"Children, born of hate and gloom,
Feeders of the hungry tomb,
Ere the day-star bring the day,
Speed upon your darksome way.

"Nothing pity, nothing spare,
Stab and poison everywhere,
Snare and capture, strip and bind,
Forge the fetters of the mind.

"If ye mark temptation's hour,
Nothing can withstand your power ;
When the soul begins to slip,
Get it quickly in your grip.

"When a soul has fallen in sin,
Pour a deeper poison in.
Tell it, God witholds His care ;
Blast it with a dumb despair.

"Scar and scratch the face of right,
Blind the eyes that look for light,
Shackle truth, set lying free,
So shall all things come to me."

THE KEY OF LIFE

[He holds up his right hand, and Pride comes and kneels before him. Death, holding his hand above him in blessing, says:]

"Pride go forth to crush in doom
Hearts wherein God has no room."

[Pride retires, and Covetousness kneels before Death.]

Death.

"Love of Gold, go forth to slay
Souls who God's love cast away."

[Covetousness retires, and Lust kneels before Death.]

Death.

"Lust, go forth to poison love,
Blind men's eyes to things above."

[Envy comes.]

Death.

"Envy, prick men like a thorn,
Make them curse that they were born."

THE KEY OF LIFE

[*Gluttony comes.*]

Death.

“Gluttony, be thou a mesh,
Snaring all the grosser flesh.”

[*Anger comes.*]

Death.

“Anger, go forth like a flood,
Drown the world in pain and blood.”

[*Sloth comes.*]

Death.

“Sloth, be thou a clogging slime,
Make men lose salvation’s time.”

[*Then Death extends his wide, black wings,
and chants exultingly :*]

“Now shall my dominions
Be the captive world.
Now my outstretched pinions,
Like a flag unfurled,
Mock in exultation
God upon His throne;
And of all creation
I am lord alone.”

THE KEY OF LIFE

“ Our God is Victor in the strife.
Behold for man the Key of Life.”

[Instantly a light falls round about and in it stands revealed the scene of the Nativity. From a manger at the back, rays of glory emerge. Behind the manger, stand two lighted candles. St. Mary and St. Joseph, the Shepherds and Wise Men kneel in front, while a row of adoring angels forms a background to the scene. Melchior, who kneels in the centre facing the manger, swings a censer of sweet incense. As they kneel, they all join in singing softly :]

“ O Word of God Incarnate,
O Light begot of Light,
To weakness comes all power,
To finite infinite.
We hail Thee, tender Saviour,
We hail Thee, mighty King;
All that we have, we bring Thee,
As love's own offering.
O, born of Virgin Mother,
Sweet Jesu, Prince of Peace,

THE KEY OF LIFE

Give us the strength to conquer.

Give us from sin release.

The thick night hovers o'er us,

Our foes advance for strife,

To us, O Key of David,

Throw wide the gates of life.

Amen. "

[As the last "Amen" is sung, darkness falls upon the scene, and the choir sings the Song of the aged Simeon, which he sang when he took the Lord's Christ into his arms in the temple.]

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in
peace : according to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen : thy Salvation,

Which thou hast prepared : before the face of
all people ;

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles : and to
be the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and
to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever
shall be : world without end. Amen. "

THE KEY OF LIFE

And, day by day, unchanging through the ages,
Though ears are deaf and eyes are blind

[with mist,

He, Who was worshipped by the Eastern Sages,
Is throned amongst us in the Eucharist.

Yea, that dear Christ, born of the spotless

[maiden,

In yearning love still cries to souls

[distressed—

“ All ye that labour and are heavy laden,
Come unto me and I will give you rest.”

FINIS.

