

LEWIS CARROLL

Interviews and Recollections

*Edited by*

Morton N. Cohen

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## The Friendship that Sparked *Alice's Adventures*\*

ALICE (LIDDELL) HARGREAVES<sup>1</sup>

Here they come; the two men carrying luncheon-baskets, with the three little girls in shady hats clinging to their hands. The man with the rather handsome, and very interesting face is Mr Dodgson, while the other one is Mr Duckworth, afterward Canon of Westminster, who gave his name to the 'Duck' in 'The Pool of Tears'. Ina, the tallest of the three girls, has brown hair, and very clean-cut features; Alice, the second, has almost black hair cut in a fringe across her forehead; while Edith arrests our attention by her bright auburn hair. Lorina Charlotte, the eldest sister, becomes the Lory in 'The Pool of Tears', while her initials make the name Elsie (L. C.) in the story of the three sisters who lived at the bottom of a well; Lacie, the second 'well' sister, is merely what would nowadays be called an anagram for Alice; Edith becomes Tertia in the dedicatory poem, the Eaglet in 'The Pool of Tears', and Tillie in 'The Three Sisters'. This last was because the other two sisters often called her Matilda, a nickname they had invented for her. Being now introduced, we can follow them down to Salter's, where the rowing boats are kept, and watch them choose a nice roomy boat, and plenty of comfortable cushions. Now Alice can tell us her story free from the many interruptions which would have been sure to come from the other two seventy years ago.

'Soon after we went to live in the old grey stone-built Deanery, there were two additions to the family in the shape of two tiny tabby kittens. One called Villikens, was given to my eldest brother Harry, but died at an early age of some poison. The other, Dinah, which was given to Ina, became the special pet, and lived to be immortalized in the *Alice*. Every day these kittens were bathed by us in imitation of our own upbringing. Dinah I was devoted to, but there were some other animals of which we were terrified. When my father went to Christ

\* From 'Alice's Recollections of Carrollian Days, as Told to her Son', *Cornhill Magazine*, 73 (July 1932), 1-12. A different version of this article appeared as 'The Lewis Carroll that Alice Recalls', *New York Times*, 81 (1 May 1932) section 5, pp. 7, 15.

Church, he had some carved lions (wooden representations of the Liddell crest) placed on top of each of the corner posts in the banisters going upstairs and along the gallery. When we went to bed we had to go along this gallery, and we always ran as hard as we could along it, because we *knew* that the lions got down from their pedestals and ran after us. And then the swans on the river when we went out with Mr Dodgson! But, even then, we were always much too happy little girls to be really frightened. We had some canaries, but there was never a white rabbit in the family. That was a pure invention of Mr Dodgson's . . .

'One Boxing Day [the pony I was riding] crossed its legs, and came down with me on the Abingdon Road. . . [As a consequence] was on my back for six weeks with a broken thigh. During all these weeks Mr Dodgson never came to see me. If he had, perhaps the world might have known some more of Alice's Adventures. As it is, I think many of my earlier adventures must be irretrievably lost to posterity, because Mr Dodgson told us many, many stories before the famous trip up the river to Godstow. No doubt he added some of the earlier adventures to make up the difference between *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice's Adventures Underground*,<sup>2</sup> which latter was nearly all told on that one afternoon. Much of *Through the Looking-Glass* is made up of them too, particularly the ones to do with chessmen, which are dated by the period when we were excitedly learning chess. But even then, I am afraid that many must have perished for ever in his waste-paper basket, for he used to illustrate the meaning of his stories on any piece of paper that he had handy.

'The stories that he illustrated in this way owed their existence to the fact that Mr Dodgson was one of the first amateur photographers, and took many photographs of us. He did not draw when telling stories on the river expedition. When the time of year made picnics impossible, we used to go to his room in the Old Library, leaving the Deanery by the back door, escorted by our nurse. When we got there, we used to sit on the big sofa on each side of him, while he told us stories, illustrating them by pencil or ink drawings as he went along. When we were thoroughly happy and amused at his stories, he used to pose us, and expose the plates before the right mood had passed. He seemed to have an endless store of these fantastical tales, which he made up as he told them, drawing busily on a large sheet of paper all the time. They were not always entirely new. Sometimes they were new versions of old stories: sometimes they started on the old basis, but grew into new tales owing to the frequent interruptions which opened up fresh and undreamed-of possibilities. In this way the stories, slowly enunciated in his quiet voice with its curious stutter, were perfected. Occasionally he pretended to fall asleep, to our great dismay. Sometimes he said 'That is all till next time', only to resume on being told that it was already next time. Being photographed was

therefore a joy to us and not a penance as it is to most children. We looked forward to the happy hours in the mathematical tutor's rooms.

'But much more exciting than being photographed was being allowed to go into the dark room, and watch him develop the large glass plates. What could be more thrilling than to see the negative gradually take shape, as he gently rocked it to and fro in the acid bath? Besides, the dark room was so mysterious, and we felt that any adventures might happen then! There were all the joys of preparation, anticipation, and realization, besides the feeling that we were assisting at some secret rite usually reserved for grown-ups! Then there was the additional excitement, after the plates were developed, of seeing what we looked like in a photograph. Looking at the photographs now, it is evident that Mr Dodgson was far in advance of his time in the art of photography and of posing his subjects.

'We never went to tea with him, nor did he come to tea with us. In any case, five-o'clock tea had not become an established practice in those days. He used sometimes to come to the Deanery on the afternoons when we had a half-holiday. . . . On the other hand, when we went on the river for the afternoon with Mr Dodgson, which happened at most four or five times every summer term, he always brought out with him a large basket full of cakes, and a kettle, which we used to boil under a haycock, if we could find one. On rarer occasions we went out for the whole day with him, and then we took a larger basket with luncheon – cold chicken and salad and all sorts of good things. One of our favourite whole-day excursions was to row down to Nuneham and picnic in the woods there, in one of the huts specially provided by Mr Harcourt for picnickers. On landing at Nuneham, our first duty was to choose the hut, and then to borrow plates, glasses, knives and forks from the cottages by the riverside. To us the hut might have been a Fairy King's palace, and the picnic a banquet in our honour. Sometimes we were told stories after luncheon that transported us into Fairyland. Sometimes we spent the afternoon wandering in the more material fairyland of the Nuneham woods until it was time to row back to Oxford in the long summer evening. On these occasions we did not get home until about seven o'clock.

'The party usually consisted of five – one of Mr Dodgson's men friends as well as himself and us three. His brother occasionally took an oar in the merry party, but our most usual fifth was Mr Duckworth, who sang well. On our way back we generally sang songs popular at the time, such as,

Star of the evening, beautiful star,  
and  
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
and  
Will you walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly,

all of which are parodied in the *Alice*.

'On one occasion two of Mr Dodgson's sisters joined the party, making seven of us, all in one boat. They seemed to us rather stout, and one might have expected that, with such a load in it, the boat would have been swamped. However, it was not the river that swamped us but the rain. It came on to pour so hard that we had to land at Iffley, and after trying to dry the Misses Dodgson at a fire, we drove home. This was a serious party, no stories nor singing: we were awed by the "old ladies", for though they can only have been in their twenties, they appeared dreadfully old to us.

'In the usual way, after we had chosen our boat with great care, we three children were stowed away in the stern, and Mr Dodgson took the stroke oar. A pair of sculls was always laid in the boat for us little girls to handle when being taught to row by our indulgent host. He succeeded in teaching us in the course of these excursions, and it proved an unending joy to us. When we had learned enough to manage the oars, we were allowed to take our turn at them, while the two men watched and instructed us. [The "Feather, feather" of the Old Sheep must have been a familiar injunction.]<sup>3</sup> I can remember what hard work it was rowing upstream from Nuneham, but this was nothing if we thought we were learning and getting on. It was a proud day when we could "feather our oars" properly. The verse at the beginning of the *Alice* describes our rowing. We thought it nearly as much fun as the stories. Sometimes (a treat of great importance in the eyes of the fortunate one) one of us was allowed to take the tiller ropes: and, if the course was a little devious, little blame was accorded to the small but inexperienced coxswain.

'Nearly all of *Alice's Adventures Underground* was told on that blazing summer afternoon with the heat haze shimmering over the meadows where the party landed to shelter for awhile in the shadow cast by the haycocks near Godstow. I think the stories he told us that afternoon must have been better than usual, because I have such a distinct recollection of the expedition, and also, on the next day I started to pester him to write down the story for me, which I had never done before. It was due to my "going on going on" and importunity that, after saying he would think about it, he eventually gave the hesitating promise which started him writing it down at all. This he referred to in a letter written in 1883 in which he writes of me as the "one without whose infant patronage I might possibly never have written at all". What a nuisance I must have made of myself! Still, I am glad I did it now; and so was Mr Dodgson afterwards. It does not do to think what pleasure would have been missed if his little bright-eyed favourite had not bothered him to put pen to paper. The result was that for several years, when he went away on vacation, he took the

little black book about with him, writing the manuscript in his own peculiar script, and drawing the illustrations. Finally the book was finished and given to me. But in the meantime, friends who had seen and heard bits of it while he was at work on it, were so thrilled that they persuaded him to publish it. I have been told, though I doubt its being true, that at first he thought that it should be published at the publisher's expense, but that the London publishers were reluctant to do so, and he therefore decided to publish it at his own expense. In any case, after Macmillans had agreed to publish it, there arose the question of the illustrations. At first he tried to do them himself, on the lines of those in the manuscript book, but he came to the conclusion that he could not do them well enough, as they had to be drawn on wood, and he did not know how. He eventually approached Mr (later Sir John) Tenniel. Fortunately, as I think most people will agree, the latter accepted. As a rule Tenniel used Mr Dodgson's drawings as the basis for his own illustrations and they held frequent consultations about them. One point which was not settled for a long time and until after many trials and consultations, was whether Alice in Wonderland should have her hair cut straight across her forehead as Alice Liddell had always worn it, or not. Finally, it was decided that Alice in Wonderland should have no facial resemblance to her prototype.

'Unfortunately my mother tore up all the letters that Mr Dodgson wrote to me when I was a small girl. I cannot remember what any of them were like, but it is an awful thought to contemplate what may have perished in the Deanery waste-paper basket. Mr Dodgson always wore black clergyman's clothes in Oxford, but, when he took us out on the river, he used to wear white flannel trousers. He also replaced his black top-hat by a hard white straw hat on these occasions, but of course retained his black boots, because in those days white tennis shoes had never been heard of. He always carried himself upright, almost more than upright, as if he had swallowed a poker.

'On the occasion of the marriage of King Edward and Queen Alexandra, the whole of Oxford was illuminated, and Mr Dodgson and his brother took me out to see the illuminations. The crowd in the street was very great, and I clung tightly on to the hand of the strong man on either side of me. The colleges were all lit up, and the High Street was a mass of illuminations of all sorts and kinds. One in particular took my fancy, in which the words "May they be happy" appeared in large letters of fire. My enthusiasm prompted Mr Dodgson to draw a caricature of it next day for me, in which underneath those words appeared two hands holding very formidable birches with the words "Certainly not". Even if the joke was not very good, the drawing pleased me enormously, and I wish I had it still!

Little did we dream then that this shy but almost brilliant logic tutor with a bent for telling fairy stories to little girls, and for taking photographs of elderly dons, would before so many years be known all over the civilized world, and that his fairy stories would be translated into almost every European language, into Chinese and Japanese, and some of them even into Arabic! But perhaps only a brilliant logician could have written *Alice in Wonderland!*'

That is my mother's story as it was written down in 1931, before she or I knew anything about Lewis Carroll Centenary Celebrations. 'That blazing afternoon' of story-telling, we know from Lewis Carroll's diary, was 4 July 1862, when 'Alice' herself was 10 years old. On this day, he notes, he 'made an expedition *up* the river to Godstow with the Liddells: we had tea on the bank there, and did not reach Christ Church till half-past eight.' And against this he afterwards added the note - 'on which occasion I told them the fairy-tale of Alice's Adventures Underground, which I undertook to write out for Alice.'

That was the birthday of the story: three years later he celebrated the day with a certain whimsical appropriateness, arranging that when the story came out as a book under its new name it should have the same birthday, for *Alice in Wonderland* was published on 4 July 1865. . . .

As Mr Dodgson says in one of his later letters to my mother, which she still has, she 'was through so many years, my ideal child friend. I have had scores of child friends since your time: but they have been quite a different thing.' Perhaps that is why they none of them inspired him to write another *Alice*.

#### NOTES

1. Alice Pleasance Liddell (1852-1934) married (1880) Reginald Gervis Hargreaves (1852-1926), of Cusfnells, Hampshire, JP. Her older sister was Lorina Charlotte, known as 'Ina' (1849-1930); she married (1874) William Baillie Skene (1838-1911), Fellow of All Souls, barrister, Student and Treasurer of Christ Church. The third daughter was Edith Mary (1854-76), who was engaged to be married when she died. Sir William Blake Richmond painted the trio as 'The Three Sisters' (see Anne Clark, *Lewis Carroll* [1979] p. 101), and Dodgson photographed them in various combinations (see *Letters*, facing pp. 92, 124, 509, 672; *Life and Letters*, pp. 94, 366; Gernsheim, plate 45; *Diaries*, facing pp. 311, 326). Caryl Liddell Hargreaves (1887-1955), Wing-Commander, Alice's third and youngest son, recorded these recollections.

2. As published, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is twice as long as the version that Dodgson originally wrote out for Alice, which was later published as *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*.

3. Bracketed material by Caryl Hargreaves.

