

The Real Lewis Carroll

A Talk given to the Lewis Carroll Society

April 2003

Let me begin by reading you the introductory blurb in one of the many editions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that find their way onto bookshelves and into the hands of unsuspecting members of the public around the world. This edition was published in the UK by Penguin Popular Classics series with an anonymous introduction (1994). It is characteristic of many such introductions written about the author.

Lewis Carroll is the pseudonym of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Born the eldest of eleven children, he showed an early aptitude for writing and edited his own magazines to entertain the family. He was educated at Rugby soon after the school had been re-organized under Dr. Arnold and then at Christ Church, Oxford. He became mathematical lecturer at the same college from 1855 until his retirement in 1881. He was ordained a clergyman in 1861, but held no benefice and rarely preached. He was a shy man who was handicapped by a stammer; his self-consciousness was lessened only in the presence of children, especially girls. Alice Liddell, second of the three young daughters of the Dean of Christ Church, was the greatest among these 'child friends.'

The text goes on to state that Queen Victoria was bemused rather than amused to receive one of Carroll's mathematical treatises! I hope you spotted the mistakes – there were several. Your knowledge and background in the world of children's literature provides you with a wider appreciation and understanding of the author. This gives you an advantage. The vast majority of people reading this would accept it without question. And the myths are perpetrated and perpetuated.

There are many such introductions in books. The same "biographical" comments often appear in newspaper and magazine articles about Lewis Carroll, and even in published "authoritative" biographies. For some years I have been concerned about the accuracy of statements made about Lewis Carroll. How can we determine the real character of Mr. Dodgson? I shall use his real name from now on. Should we read the published biographies in more detail? No, I don't think so. Should we try to find personal reminiscences that have been recorded and published about him? If there were people who actually knew him, surely they gave an accurate account of his personality. There are even dangers in this approach.

The example I have chosen is by Katharine Rivers, daughter of Dodgson's speech therapist, Henry Rivers of Tunbridge Wells. Dodgson noted in his diary in 1874:

Jan: 12. (M). "From Guildford to 'Knowles Bank, Tunbridge,' the party consist of Mr. and Mrs. Rivers, a Miss Hunt, and the children, Willy, Charlie, Ethel, and Katie (about 10, 8, 6, and 4). Took a walk with Rivers."

Little Willy later became an important doctor during the First World War and recently a major character in a novel written by Pat Barker about the horrors of the war, known as the Regeneration Trilogy; the last volume, *The Ghost Road*, winning the UK Booker Prize in 1995. Dodgson also appears as a character in this book. I wrote to Pat Barker asking her for the source of her information. She kindly replied and sent me details of Katharine Rivers' "Memories of Lewis Carroll" published in McMaster University Library Research News, Vol. 3, No. 4, dated January 1976. This is an extract from Katharine River's memories:

I shall always remember his beautiful twinkling eyes, full of love and laughter, as he told us wonderful stories... And how Lewis Carroll loved the country, the woods, and the hay, and wove into his magic stories the flowers and animals we saw there! Sitting with his back to a big tree-trunk, with one of us on his knee – sometimes one on each knee – he would tell us for hours, stories of the Pixies. And every time he came, he had fresh adventures to relate.

Lewis Carroll did not as a rule take much notice of, or care for, bigger boys. My brothers were rather upset. One of them said one day that I looked just like the *Alice* Cheshire Cat, smiling so broadly on his knee. And that remained my nickname for many, many years.

Sometimes our friend's face looked, when in repose, very sad and worn, and very different from the fun-lit face, with its charming eyes, that we saw when he was telling us those magic tales – tales which seem to have been woven right into the fabric of my life, and to have coloured it always with a tinge of *his* dreams.

Sounds very plausible. A note at the beginning of the booklet states that "Professor Cohen has remarked that Katharine's production seems genuine. Professor Donald Gray of Indiana University, another authority on Dodgson, feels that "Memories of Lewis Carroll," although sentimental, is interesting and authentic. He affirms that the Lewis Carroll depicted therein would be recognised by anyone acquainted with the author's character and habits." I suppose we should add "acquainted with the myths concerning his personality" for that is what we get. Katharine, by her own admission, was but a very small child when she first met Dodgson. We don't know when she typed up her memories of Lewis Carroll, but it appears to have been many years after the event when memories become hazy and incidents become embellished and altered. My doubts were raised when I read this section of her reminiscences:

Lewis Carroll was a very good croquet player, and often we children sat and watched him playing. On one of his visits, he told Father that he had invented a new 'mathematical' game of croquet, and that they had played it a lot at Oxford.... They played this game a great deal, and we loved watching it, as it

really was funny, and everyone laughed such a lot....

Our friend was very devoted to his seven sisters, and I remember how very sad and upset he was when, one day, a wire came for him, telling him of the illness of one of them. Father soon drove him to the station, four miles off; and after that we were sad, too, for, his sister dying the next day, he did not come back. Two or three of his sisters came to see us several times, but I, always shy with strangers unless I took to them at once, never got used to them.

Two points here: "Arithmetical Croquet" is played in the head – it's a mind-game – and, as you will have noted, none of Dodgson's sisters predeceased him! Once you come across inaccuracies, all the rest is suddenly suspect.

There are many such examples of child-friends in their old age dredging up memories that have become like "Chinese whispers" – far removed from the truth. And there are many myths that have grown up about the biographical details and character of Charles L. Dodgson. Some are pitifully inaccurate and most are downright lies. But what right do I have for trying to dispel them! I can say that I have studied this man for almost thirty years. I have read all the major biographies, so I'm well aware of what is written about him. But over the last ten years I've been closely editing Dodgson's personal and private journal, his diaries. This is primary source material, written in his own hand, and although it won't be the whole story, it's as close as you can get to the real man. You soon get a sense of what his principles were; what he believed in and what he practised. You discover how he reacted in certain situations. You have clear evidence of what he did, who he met, where he went, and, to some extent, what he wouldn't do, who he wouldn't meet, and where he wouldn't go. His likes and dislikes become apparent. His temperament is shown by his reaction to other people's views that he records. Another important primary source is his many surviving letters, but letters must be read with some care. Dodgson was a great teaser, and some biographers have fallen into the trap of taking literally what he said in jest. His serious letters to family and adult friends are a better source of character details.

Biographers, right from the first, his nephew, will want to tell a story that appeals to readers and encourages them to buy their book. The Edwardians of the early 20th century didn't want sexual revelations; the new Elizabethans can't do without them! Biographers tell us what we want to know, and if they don't have the evidence, they make it up. Most biographies are about speculation. And speculation creates myth.

Let me list, in my view, the ten most frequently used myths about Dodgson – in no particular order of merit or level of controversy:

1. He was shy and ill at ease in the company of adults
2. He only liked little girls; he did not like little boys

3. There was a major split with the Liddell family in 1863
4. His relationship with his illustrator, John Tenniel, was strained and terminated after the publication of *Through the Looking-Glass*
5. He visited Alice Liddell at Llandudno and this inspired him to write *Alice*
6. He was a mediocre mathematician
7. He was a bad stammerer, but lost his stammer in the company of children
8. He wanted to marry Alice Liddell
9. His relationship with children was unhealthy
10. He gave up photography as a result of scandalous gossip.

There are other more spurious and far-fetched accusations such as the following which I will ignore and treat with the contempt they deserve:

11. He was Jack the Ripper
12. He had an affair with Alice's mother
13. He didn't write *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* at all - Queen Victoria did!

If I am going to convince you that these statements about Dodgson are mythical and untrue, I will need to provide you with strong and compelling evidence. This I am able to do. I shall use the primary source of his diaries to support my arguments, and the research material I have uncovered in order to edit them thoroughly. It will be a major task because most of you will have read various biographies, so these ideas will already be accepted and adopted as true. But I don't mind the challenge. And, of course, it doesn't really matter if you disbelieve what I say. If I just unsettle a few of your views and opinions concerning the real character of Dodgson, I shall be content.

Let us start with his shyness and retiring nature. What do his diaries tell us about this flaw in his character?

1855: At the Wilcoxes.

Sep: 4. (Tu). "We had a thoroughly theatrical evening: commencing with the Charade 'Den-mark,' in which William, Freddy, Edward, Katie, Georgie, Caroline, Louisa, and I appeared: I took an old man part, with something of Mr. Trimmer's voice. The chief fault of the performance was its too great

length."

1856: At Croft National School.

Dec: 31. (W). "First exhibition of the Magic Lantern, the largest audience I ever had, about 80 children, and a large miscellaneous party besides of friends, servants etc. I expected the whole thing to last about an hour and a half, so as to be over soon after 3. As it turned out, it did not begin till 2, instead of half past one, and lasted till nearly half past 4. I divided it into 2 parts, of 24 and 23 pictures, with a rest of about half an hour between. I introduced 13 songs in the course of the performance, 6 for myself, and 7 for the children; and employed 7 different voices (Wright, Madame Celeste, Miss Snowberry and the organ boy from Miss P. Horton's entertainment, Mooney and Spooney, and Mr. Trimmer out of *Away with Melancholy*). As a whole I think it proved successful, though the first part was rather too long: several of the views may safely be omitted in the next performance."

1863: A typical day in London.

Sep: 30. (W). "Called with Mr. and Mrs. Munro at Mr. Rossetti's, and saw some very lovely pictures, most of them only half finished. He was most hospitable in his offers of the use of house and garden for picture-taking, and I arranged to take my camera there on Monday, have Tuesday for friends, and on Wednesday take him and his mother and sister. Thence Mr. and Mrs. Munro went on to Virginia Water, and I went, first to Solomon's, where I bought one of his pocket-barmeters, then to Moxon's to ask about the 'Index.' (700 are sold). Then to Pickering's, where I bought Lowell, Moultrie, and De Vere's 'Search after Proserpine.' Then I tried to find the MacDonalds' new house, in Earl's Place, Kensington, but failed, and so went on to Mr. Holman Hunt. I found him at work on the great picture he has been at for 6 or 7 years, an Egyptian girl carrying a wheat-sheaf, and surrounded by pigeons. His little nephew was in the room (the original of the 'King of Hearts,' a child dressed up as Henry VIII), and we soon adjourned to the garden for a game of croquet, as it was getting too dark to paint. I had to leave the game in the middle to get back and dress, to go with Mr. and Mrs. Munro to dine with a friend of theirs, a Mr. Watkin, a great railway director. The rest of the party were Mrs. Watkins, their daughter Harriet, a nice-looking child of 13 (looking 15 at least), and a Mr. Lingard. I arranged before we left that Mrs. Watkin should bring her daughter to be photographed tomorrow."

There are many, many other examples I could have taken from the diaries; his visit to meet Tennyson, his calling at the home of Millais, his trips to see other eminent Victorian celebrities, and so on. Dodgson was a socialite. He loved the company of others, and if they were important and famous, so much the better. He was a lioniser. He certainly wasn't shy or reclusive. He didn't lead a cloistered life at Christ Church. He frequently made trips to London and elsewhere to meet the celebrities of his day. Paradoxically, he didn't like being lionised himself. He went to amazing lengths to avoid those that wished to be acquainted with him merely because he was the author of the *Alice* books, and he developed various ways of dealing with autograph hunters – by typing third-person replies or getting his colleagues to write on his behalf. Around the world there are several letters purporting to be from

Charles L. Dodgson written in the hand of Robert E. Baynes, Edward F. Sampson, and others, to confound the celebrity hunter.

Many people attribute his supposed reclusive nature to his stammer. I prefer to call it a speech hesitation, because that's what it was. He hesitated over combinations of certain words — words that began with a hard consonant or contained a hard consonant — he didn't repeat words or sounds in the form of a stutter. We know this because he explains his difficulty in his diaries and in letters to Henry Rivers to whom he sought advice and guidance. The hesitation came mainly in reading, but occasionally in normal speech. Dodgson described the difficulty in this diary entry from 1862. He was at Putríey:

Aug. 31. (Sun): "Went to the new Church both morning and afternoon, and read service in the afternoon. I got through it all with great success, till I came to read out the first verse of the hymn before the sermon, where the two words 'strife strengthened,' coming together, were too much for me, and I had to leave the verse unfinished."

Extract from a letter to Henry Rivers dated 1 September 1873:

Could you give me a line here to say whether I could have a short time with you in London on Thursday? I could come at almost any hour you like to name. I should like to see whether you can give me any further help as to my difficulties with "p" in such combinations as "impossible," "them patience," "the power," "spake," which combinations have lately beaten me when trying to read in the presence of others, in spite of my feeling quite cool, and trying my best to do it "on rule." These failures have rather deferred the hope I had formed of being very soon able to help in Church again, for if I break down in reading to only one or two, I should be all the worse, I fear, for the presence of a congregation.

Dodgson's hesitation occurred, in the main, when he was reading — far less so in ordinary speech where he consciously chose the words he used to communicate. For many who knew him the hesitation was slight and endearing, and although Dodgson did everything he could to control it, the effect of this speech problem did not hinder him in society or in his work. Sometimes he is recorded as using the hesitation to great effect when telling a story. We get some hint of how it might have been used when we read, for example, *Through the Looking-Glass*:

"It's long," said the Knight, "but it's very, *very* beautiful. Everybody that hears me sing it — either it brings *tears* into their eyes, or else —"

"Or else what?" said Alice, for the Knight had made a sudden pause.

"Or else it doesn't, you know..."

John Alexander Stewart, senior student at Christ Church, described Dodgson's speech hesitation as

follows: "Dodgson's stammer was a good deal under control and could be used defensively (to gain time), or rhetorically to enhance the effect of a story, when the point was near."

And just a quick comment about the hesitation disappearing in front of children. This extract comes from *For My Grandchildren, Some Reminiscences of Her Royal Highness Princess Alice* (1966):

Lewis Carroll was especially kind to Charlie and me, though when I was only five I offended him once when, at a children's party at Hatfield, he was telling us a story. He was a stammerer and being unable to follow what he was saying I suddenly asked in a loud voice, "Why does he waggle his mouth like that?" I was hastily removed by the lady-in-waiting. Afterwards he wrote that he "liked Charlie but thought Alice would turn out badly."

We need to be cautious with the reminiscences of a five-year-old written over 80 years after the event. Nevertheless, his speech hesitation happened when telling a story to a large group of children. He sometimes had an audience of 50 or more when at Hatfield House, high-society children, which must have been quite a strain. On this occasion, it was noticed, by a precocious princess.

Dodgson, as an ordained deacon preached on many occasions – frequently when he first became ordained in 1861. He never proceeded to full priest's orders although he noted from time to time in his diaries that he was still "reading for ordination" well after taking deacon's orders. There follows a gap of several years during which he preached infrequently before he took to it up again with more regularity. In the latter years of his life he was preaching to huge congregations at the University Church of St. Mary's in Oxford. What he avoided was "taking" the service in which, for the most part, he would be required to read from the *Book of Common Prayer*. Understandably, he was very concerned that any hesitation he made in his reading of the order of service, especially in prayers, would affect the concentration and devotions of the congregation, and this would be entirely counter-productive and very embarrassing. For example, in a letter to his cousin, James Hume Dodgson, dated 8 September 1884, he explains his reason for turning down the offer of reading the funeral service for his Uncle Hassard:

My dear Hume,

I could not well explain to you in my telegram, and had not the opportunity of doing so when we met, my reason for not undertaking, as you wished, to read the service. If I could have trusted myself to command my feelings and my voice, I should much have wished to read the service over the remains of my dear old uncle, whom I can never think of without the deepest affection and gratitude for his life-long kindness: but I did not feel I could safely do so. Otherwise, you may be sure I would have attempted it.

And here is another extract from the diaries – this is dated 1896 towards the end of his life:

Dec: 6. (Sun). "Preached at St. Mary's, at the evening service. One of our Chaplains, the Rev. Sydney Baker, is curate in charge, and had asked for my help. It was indeed a privilege to be thankful for – but a formidable task: I had fancied there would be only a small audience, and the church was *full*, as well as the West Gallery, and the North one partly filled as well. I took as text Mark IX, 24, and the sermon lasted about 18 minutes."

To summarise on this point, Dodgson had a speech hesitation that manifested itself when he was reading out loud, far less so in normal conversation. When speaking, he was able to control the hesitation and even use it to effect. This problem did not prevent him from being a successful preacher, but he was much more cautious when asked to read a lesson or the service in church. Speaking extempore was not a major difficulty unless he was making a speech to a large audience, such as at Convocation in University debates, where the occasion gave added stress, particularly if he had not prepared what he was going to say in advance. The hesitation was part of his character. It certainly did not disappear entirely in the presence of children, or in well-known company of friends and colleagues, but was probably lessened as a result of the familiarity of those around him. Do-do-Dodgson it wasn't!

Dodgson once wrote: "I am fond of children (except boys)." Writers and biographers have long seized upon this statement as meaning that he had a strong dislike for boy-children. The comment was written in a letter to the twelve year old Kathleen Eschwege and was probably part of his characteristic teasing. There can be no doubt that Carroll had a preference for girls, but boys were also his friends; he met them, enjoyed their company, wrote to them, sent them gifts, inscribed copies of his books to them, and photographed them. Not all boys he met appealed to him. The same is true of girls. He looked for a particular spark in children – those that understood his "teasing" and appreciated his sense of humour. He liked intellectual children. He was also attracted by physical beauty in both boys and girls. On 6 March 1856, he wrote: "Made friends with little Harry Liddell, (whom I first spoke to down at the boats last week): he is certainly the handsomest boy I ever saw." And on 18 September 1857 he commented on Lord Tennyson's sons: "I saw also the two children, Hallam and Lionel, 5 and 3 years old, the most beautiful boys of their age I ever saw."

In a letter to a married friend, Mrs. Marianne Richards, dated 23 November 1881, he explains his preference for girls in a manner that is both well reasoned and sensible: "Your boy is no doubt as much to you as your girl: but I'm sure you won't mind *my* being candid enough to say that *I* cannot even *pretend* to feel as much interest in boys as in girls. It is, to a certain extent, human nature." Dodgson was drawn, naturally, to girls rather than boys. However, this did not preclude him from admiring boys that were both well behaved and handsome. In December 1857 he made a trip to Twyford School in Hampshire to visit some old colleagues from Christ Church who were teaching there. He wrote: "Collins had over to his rooms after tea Jimmy and Harry Liddell as before, and two other boys, Malet and Manning, the former a remarkably nice-looking and gentlemanly boy." The following year at Ripon he noted the charming and good-looking children of Robert Bickersteth, Bishop of Ripon. He recorded on 14 January 1858: "Dined at the Palace, with a party from the

Residence, the children all appeared in the course of the evening. I especially admire the eldest boy, Robin. His thoughtful and intellectual face make him look some years older than he is. The youngest boy is also a beauty, the others are not so remarkable." Some years later he photographed both these Bickersteth boys.

There are many other examples of boys that caught Dodgson's eye whom he mentioned in his diaries. By way of example, the following selected extracts will suffice: "Spent the evening with the Simpsons, where I saw two younger children, Frances, about 6 years old, and a beautiful little boy (Percy) about 2" (2 July 1865); "Had a chat on the beach with a Mr. Stopford, from Witley, who has five children, the eldest, Mabel, a pretty little "blonde" of 7, and the next, George, one of the prettiest boys I have seen" (25 September 1875); "The children are very charming, and soon got over all shyness. I specially admire Willie, a glorious boy of 2" (the son of his brother, Wilfred, recorded on 23 July 1878); "The Murdoch party walked up in the evening (including Mr. Murdoch and the boy - a very pretty boy of about 8)" (12 August 1880); and "The very picturesque little boy, Arthur, was also there" (29 March 1888). I suppose we must be fair in saying that Dodgson disliked the rough and tumble of boys, and those that interested him were the quieter more thoughtful boys from literary and educated circles in the upper and middle classes of society. For example, he took to the son of Coventry Patmore, not because of his name "Piffy" (Francis Epiphanius), but because he was: "a very bright little creature, who taught me how to fold paper pistols."

In March 1863, a long list of girl's names appeared in Dodgson's diary under the heading "Photographed or to be photographed." There were 107 names including six Constances, seven Ediths, and fourteen Marys. There was no similar list of boy's names. This might suggest that Dodgson's intention was to take photographs only of girls, but this would be far from the truth. Dodgson took many photographs of boys, and to support this fact, I made a list of boys known to have sat for his camera at various times throughout Dodgson's photographic career, and this list contains 90 names. Some of these boys were photographed several times. Most of these boys were under the age of 10 when photographed. Two are nude studies taken when the boys were less than two years old. It is not a comprehensive list; other photographs of boys were taken including family groups, pictures of choristers at Christ Church, and some school photographs showing whole classes of boys and cricket teams. However, it does make the point that boys played an important part in Dodgson's photographic opus, and helps to lay the myth that he only liked little girls.

The problem we have in understanding Dodgson's true feelings is that he often deceived us with his unrevealing dry sense of humour. Statements in letters, even to adults, are frequently tinged with irony. We need to be wary when we read blunt sentences such as: "Boys are not in my line: I think they are a mistake: girls are less objectionable" (letter to George Bell dated 19 February 1882). If we take this literally, then we have fallen into his trap. The same tactic is used in a letter to Edith Blakemore (dated 31 March 1890): "Sometimes they {children} are a real *terror* to me – especially boys: little girls I can now and then get on with, when they're few enough." Dodgson goes on to explain that an Oxford friend suggested bringing his son to pay a visit. Dodgson wrote: "He thought I

doted on *all* children. But I'm *not* omnivorous! – like a pig. I pick and choose..." And pick and choose he did – both with boys and girls.

So now we move on to the supposed irrevocable split with the Liddell family in 1863. To a large extent, this myth is based on a missing page from the diary. There has been much speculation about what might have been written on this page. We will probably never know for certain, but thanks to the person who probably cut out the page, we have some idea. Whoever it was, who cut this and possibly some other pages, kept a brief note of the main concerns. This note, amazingly, survived within the Dodgson Family Archive and surfaced some years ago when Shirley Corke was making a catalogue of the collection at Guildford. The catalogue was compiled in 1989 and contains this reference: "Notes (on a page torn from a small notebook) entitled 'Cut pages in Diary,' and relating to Vol. 8, p. 72; Vol. 8, p. 92; Vol. 11, p. 110. In each case there is a description of subject-matter, very short in the 1st and last cases, longer in the second." And it is this second case that is the missing page in question, except it is p. 91 not p. 92. The page covers the remaining entry for 27 June, and whatever was written for 28 and 29 June 1863. The brief note said: "L. C. learns from Mrs. Liddell that he is supposed to be using the children as a means of paying court to the governess. He is also supposed by some to be courting Ina." Dodgson cross-referenced this entry with the rumour about the governess, Miss Prickett, which had occurred on 17 May 1857 (which was not removed). Nothing whatsoever about a supposed proposal of marriage to Alice Liddell, or by proxy to her parents. Nothing about Alice Liddell at all. The concern is for the governess and Lorina "Ina" Liddell, the latter now in her fourteenth year, protecting their honour and reputation. Of course, the rumours were totally false and had no basis in truth. In the entry that Dodgson referenced, he wrote in 1857:

May 17. (Sun). "Took Harry Liddell to chapel, and afterwards walked back with the children to the Deanery. I find to my great surprise that my notice of them is construed by some men into attentions to the governess, Miss Prickett. I had a long talk with Joyce {Francis Hayward Joyce – tutor at Christ Church} about it in the evening, and though for my own part I should give little importance to the existence of so groundless a rumour, it would be inconsiderate to the governess to give any further occasion for remarks of the sort. For this reason I shall avoid taking any public notice of the children in future, unless any occasion should arise when such an interpretation is impossible. (See June 27, 1863)."

Dodgson took no further notice of the children, but only for ten days. Now, with a repeat of the rumour, and the additional slur that he was courting Lorina, he had to be more resolute in his action. However, circumstances came to his aid. The Liddells left for Llandudno on 30 June for the summer vacation, not returning until mid-October when the autumn term began. Dodgson spent the summer away from Oxford and returned on Wednesday 14 October. Matriculation took place on Friday 16 October, signalling the commencement of college duties. On this day, Dodgson noted that he met the Liddells – probably his first opportunity. However, there is some agreement reached between him and the Liddell family that he should restrain his association for the term, in order to scotch the rumours that had circulated at the end of the summer term. The next mention is on 5 December when

Dodgson wrote about the Christ Church theatricals: "Mrs. Liddell and the children were there, but I held aloof from them, as I have done all this term." Now, how do we interpret this "holding aloof from them"? Is it a disgruntled reaction on the part of Dodgson? Is he still smarting from some supposed row with the Liddells? It certainly doesn't have to be interpreted in this way. It can just as easily be an aloofness by mutual agreement, a strategy to dispel the rumours, a sufficient time span during which contact was restricted to convince the rumour-mongers that they were wrong. Was there any lasting antagonism between the two implicated parties? No -- because this is what Dodgson wrote just a few days later:

Dec: 19. (Sat). "...At 5 went over to the Deanery, where I staid till 8, making a sort of dinner at their tea. The nominal object of my going was to play croquêt, but it never came to that, music, talk, etc. occupying the whole of a *very* pleasant evening. The Dean was away: Mrs. Liddell was with us part of the time. It is nearly six months (June 25th) since I have seen anything of them, to speak of. I mark this day with a white stone."

This doesn't sound anything like the major split with the Liddell family that has been suggested. Yes -- there was less contact with the children as they grew older and became interested in other things. This, to me, is quite natural. There are other meetings with the children. Dodgson recorded this entry for 12 May 1864:

May 12. (Th). "During these last few days I have applied in vain for leave to take the children on the river, i.e. Alice, Edith, and Rhoda: but Mrs. Liddell will not let *any* come in future - rather superfluous caution."

Note that Dodgson doesn't include Lorina in the trio of sisters; she is clearly too old at this stage for such an expedition. The "superfluous caution" may still result from the aim to overcome unwelcome rumours. It does not have to mean that Mrs. Liddell lost her trust in Dodgson as some people have suggested. Dodgson is now of the opinion that such activities can now begin again without danger of jeopardising the reputation of the younger children. If there had been a total breakdown of relationships between Dodgson and the Liddells, he would not be making this suggestion of another river-trip.

What other evidence do we have that counters the suggestion of a total breakdown? Dodgson's work on the manuscript of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* is compelling evidence that the relationship was not over. This massive undertaking continued until November 1864 at which point Dodgson gave the manuscript to Alice, inscribed to a "Dear child, in memory of a summer day." There followed a string of presentation copies to all members of the Liddell family for the rest of Dodgson's life, often with warm and sincere inscriptions (I have over 30 copies listed in my "presentation" computer database). Take, for example, Dodgson's inscription in a copy of the facsimile of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* presented to Mrs. Liddell: "To Her, whose children's smiles fed the narrator's fancy and were his rich reward: from the Author. Xmas. 1886." Many of these copies were in special bindings; this one, for

example, was bound in expensive purple morocco (now darkened with age).

Dodgson photographed Alice and Lorina Liddell again in his studio on 25 June 1870. The images show two serious-looking young ladies, but the fact that they co-operated in the photographs indicates no rift between them. There are letters between Dodgson and all members of the Liddell family that continued for many years.

Taking all the evidence together, of which I have been forced to sample pieces rather than cover everything due to the constraints of time, I can find no major and lasting rift with the Liddells. Where does the idea that Dodgson wanted to marry Alice Liddell come from? Goodness only knows! It is most uncharacteristic of a man who made a binding commitment to his college to remain unmarried. In his diaries, and in letters to friends, he indicated on several occasions that he had no intention to marry.

1857 (aged 25)

July 31. (F). "Walked to Stapleton in the afternoon with my father. We discussed the subject of insurances, on which I came to these conclusions. 1. Insurance is not "tanti" for me who remains unmarried for life..."

Dodgson was a student of Christ Church and a senior member of his college. This entailed two important commitments; to take holy orders and refrain from marriage. In the former, he proceeded to deacon's orders although he never went as far as being ordained a priest. He consulted the Dean on this matter, and it was decided that, as his role was mainly secular (as mathematical lecturer) the requirement to become priest was not necessary and his studentship would not be forfeited. Marriage would mean leaving the security and comfortable nature of Christ Church; he would need to find a new profession – only a pastoral role in the Church seemed a possibility. Dodgson knew that he had disadvantages when it came to ministering to a parish, not least his speech hesitation, but also a sense of unworthiness that dogged him for many years. He also liked the pleasures of cultural life – art galleries, the theatre, trips to London, pantomimes, light musical entertainment, magic shows, end-of-pier extravaganzas, and visits to the seaside with friends; not the activities of a parish priest.

So where did the myth that Dodgson wanted to marry Alice Liddell come from? Alexander Taylor suggested that Dodgson was in love with Alice and contemplated marriage (*The White Knight*, pp. 152, 198). Anne Clark carried this further and concluded that Dodgson did want to marry Alice (*Lewis Carroll: A Biography*, pp. 142-144). Morton Cohen is more cautious when he reported the alleged marriage proposal (*Lewis Carroll, A Biography*, pp. 100-101). Although at one time supporting the idea, he has since modified his views. Langford Reed went out on a limb and said that Dodgson was in love with Ellen Terry, but produced no evidence to substantiate his claim. Newspaper reports indicated that he was in love with Violet Liddell, Alice's sister, but newspaper reports are invariably wrong. Marriage came there none. Dodgson never discussed marriage in his letters to friends and he made no

such feelings known in his diaries. There simply is no evidence to support the notion that he wanted to marry Alice, or anyone else if it comes to that.

Now, a few words about Dodgson's unhealthy attitude towards children. This seems to be one of the most prevalent myths that dominate our present age, an age which looks askance at any relationship between adults and children. We live in a suspicious and untrusting world. For people who work with children, such as child-minders and teachers, life can be fraught with dangers. In the Victorian age, life and attitudes were very different. If a man took a group of young children, all unrelated to him, on a boat-trip that lasted all afternoon, no-one would mind in the slightest. If a man took an unaccompanied young lady aged 17 to 25 on a similar boat-trip, he would cause untold damage to that lady's reputation and marriage prospects. Today, the reverse is true. Take a group of unrelated children on an excursion, and the man would be pilloried and suspected of child abuse. A man with a young lady enjoying an afternoon's boating would not turn a hair. Standards in society are fickle. Where does Dodgson's over-riding passion for children come from? Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, in his biography *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll* (1898), devotes two chapters to "Child Friends" and talks about his uncle's fondness for children. Inadvertently, he may have over-emphasised Dodgson's special interest in young girls describing this as a "very important and distinct side of his nature." He goes on to explain the causes for this "beautiful side of Lewis Carroll's character" as being two-sided; the children's strong attraction to him and his appeal as a teacher to their unspoiled minds as material for him to work on. He also talks of Dodgson's interest in the physical beauty of children and his fascination in their intellectual development. Such innocent ideas are now very misunderstood and often misinterpreted. Within a few years other biographers had taken up the suggestions made by Collingwood, but the emphasis had changed. A. M. E. Goldschmidt in his "Alice in Wonderland Psychoanalyzed" (1933) talks of his "abnormal instinct" for child-friends. He says: "It is difficult to hold that his interest in children was inspired by a love of childhood in general." He reports that Dodgson detested little boys to an extent that he had an aversion amounting to terror. Well, we know where that comes from!

More recently, we have been hearing about Dodgson's relationship with older women – to some extent, a foil against the accusations of having too great an interest in children. I suppose in the future, we will hear about his strong relationship with men – he did, after all, live almost exclusively in a society of men at Christ Church. The Common Room was the home of these bachelors, and Dodgson, as curator for nine years, became almost their surrogate mother, looking after their daily needs and comforts. But let me not put ideas into the minds of up and coming biographers and journalists! Dodgson enjoyed female company too much to want to spend all his time within the confines of the walls around his college. But who were these women that Dodgson showed interest in. Many appear to be widows, often young widows with children. Dodgson gravitated towards such families, with a paternal instinct and desire to help the mother bring up the fatherless offspring. What evidence do I have for saying this? Well, let me give you some examples: Mrs. Sophia Balfour with two daughters, Mrs. Letitia Barry with five children, Mrs. Sophia Drury with three daughters, Mrs. Mary Harington with two daughters, Mrs. Eliza Heaphy with eleven children, Mrs. Louisa Miller with

two daughters, Mrs. Elizabeth Ottley with sixteen children (although some died in infancy), Mrs. Frances Smith with three children, and the Duchess of Albany with two children. Add to this a number of older widows, such as Mrs. Mary Bayne, who were often used as confidantes and advisers. Add to this a number of spinsters who acted in a similar role such as Miss Catharine Lloyd and Miss Caroline Erskine. We must not forget a number of Oxford ladies with whom Dodgson maintained a close friendship such as Mrs. Bessie Hatch and Mrs. Amy Price. And finally add a few married women who seem to have been much attracted to Dodgson for "whatever reason" such as Mrs. Constance Burch. We must remember that Dodgson also numbered actresses and artists as friends such as the Terrys and the Lewises, the Cootes, the Bowmans, Mrs. Edith Shute, Mrs. Sophie Anderson, among others. There can be no doubt that Dodgson was happier and more comfortable in the company of women – of any age.

At this point, I thought it might be useful to share with you a few statistics. To quote Dodgson himself:

"If you want to inspire confidence, *give plenty of statistics* – it does not matter that they should be accurate, or even intelligible, so long as there is enough of them."

Three Months in a Curatorship, 1886.

For many years I have collected factual data concerning Dodgson. Some of this data now forms a series of computer databases that, with modern technology, allows sophisticated statistical information to be organised and analysed. With the "child-centred" view of Dodgson that prevails in books, newspapers, journals and television programmes, I thought it might be interesting to see how this view fits the data I have assembled. I should add that my information has been collected, in the main, from primary sources rather than published books. In particular, the ages of Dodgson's friends come from his own diary entries and national census data. Information about presentation copies of his books comes from the actual books now in private and public collections. Details of his photographs come from his own albums and original prints.

The first question I asked myself concerned Dodgson's generosity with his published books. We know from diary entries that when a new book was published, he usually went to London and, at the offices of his publisher, Macmillan and Company, he sat and inscribed many copies to be sent to friends. I wondered what the age-profile was for these gifts. I investigated the presentation copies of three books published through his literary career; his first major book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, then *The Hunting of the Snark* which has more general appeal to all ages, and finally one of his last important publications, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, as the basis for the statistical analysis.

In my database of presentation copies I have information on over 1,700 books that Dodgson gave to his family and friends. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was the first book he gave away in any quantity. He kept a record of the people to whom he gave copies of the first published edition (1866) in a list in

his diary. Subsequently, many other copies were given away. My database lists 163 presentation copies, and this analysis is based on these inscribed books. I have not included copies that were given to hospitals and other institutions. In some cases it has been impossible to discover the age of the recipient.

Age Range (in years)	Number of Books	Percentage
0 – 10	46	28
11 – 20	32	19
21 – 30	14	8
31 – 40	22	13
41 – 50	14	8
over 50	7	4
unknown age	28	17

This data supports the view that Dodgson mainly gave *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to children (28% under 10; 47% under 20), which is not surprising since it is a book principally written for children. However, the age-profile of the recipients is probably wider than might have been expected. Of the 28 people of unknown age who received copies, nine were stage-children who were presented with a copy as a memento of their performance in Henry Savile Clarke's production of *Alice in Wonderland*. Out of the 163 presentation copies, 21% were given to males and 79% to females.

For *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876) I have 106 presentation copies listed. This is a reasonable sample upon which to base the following statistical analysis. In the case of this book, we know that Dodgson planned to give many presentation copies away. We know that he had copies prepared by his binder in various coloured cloth-bindings such as green, blue, red, and white, for just this purpose.

Age Range (in years)	Number of Books	Percentage
0 - 10	25	24
11 - 20	33	31
21 - 30	10	9.5

31- 40	9	8.5
41- 50	11	10
51 - 60	8	7.5
61 - 70	1	1
over 70	0	0
unknown age	9	8.5

This table indicates that "teenagers" were the most frequent recipient of Dodgson's epic nonsense poem (31% of the sample). Again, the age-profile is wide.

For *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* I have collected information on 130 known presentation copies. Again, this is only a sample of the total number of copies that Dodgson must have given away. I have not included copies given to "Mechanics' Institutes" and other charitable organisations.

Age Range (in years)	Number of Books	Percentage
0 - 10	0	0
11 - 20	9	7
21- 30	16	13
31- 40	20	15
41- 50	29	23
51 - 60	20	15
61 - 70	12	9
over 70	8	6
unknown age	16	12

Of course, most people know that *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, although filled with delicious nonsense, fairies, and fantasy, is not really a book for children. Clearly, Dodgson knew this too, and most of his recipients of presentation copies could be described as being rather "old" – certainly not young people or children. The majority of the presentation copies went to married women. Out of the 130 presentation copies, 12% were given to males and 88% to females.

Another question arises about Dodgson's photography. Many people, and even most biographers, suggest that children were his principal subject for photography. From a reconstructed register of around 3,000 photographs (the most accurate figure we have to date), I offer this age-profile of his sitters. In *Lewis Carroll, Photographer* (Princeton University Press, 2002), which I co-wrote with Roger Taylor, I estimated the proportion of photographs in his output as follows:

Photographs of Children 50%

Photographs of Adults and Families 30%

Photographs of the Dodgson Extended Family 6%

Topographical Photographs 4%

Other Photographs 10%

The "other photographs" consist of assisted self-portraits, still life images, skeletons, drawings, works of art, sculptures, and some images best described as "miscellaneous" (for example, a photograph of the Dodgson family doll named "Tim").

In order to arrive at a useful age-profile, I confined myself to portraits of sitters who posed for Dodgson's camera alone. The total number is 1,112, which is just over a third of Dodgson's photographic opus. It would be impossible, and rather pointless, to find an average age for a group photograph. All non-portraits are also eliminated in this survey. Since the Princeton book was published, a number of people have sent me additional information on Dodgson's photographs. These, I hope, will be included in perhaps a second edition. In this survey, I am using the most up-to-date version of my "Register of all known photographs by Dodgson." I state this because some cautious observer may try to check this data against the information already published, and they will, of course, be disappointed to find discrepancies, however minor.

Age (in years)	Number of sitters
1 - 5	95
6 - 10	324

11 - 15	153
16 - 20	59
21 - 25	47
26 - 30	41
31 - 35	45
36 - 40	27
41 - 45	32
46 - 50	34
51 - 55	28
56 - 60	16
61 - 65	8
66 - 70	10
71 - 75	6
76 - 80	0
over 80	3
unknown age	170
self-portrait	14

From this data we see that the age-profile is wide; 32% are under 10 years of age and 24% are between the ages of 10 and 19.

This information is accurate at the time of preparing this paper. However, the computer databases are dynamic insofar as new information comes to my attention all the time. I am sure that the figures will change in, say, a year's time, but I am confident that the overall results are likely to remain fairly constant given the size of the samples.

You will have gathered by now that I haven't been able to deal with all the myths that I mentioned at the beginning of this talk – time has run out on me – perhaps another time. On the relationship

between Tenniel and Dodgson, a new book entitled *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators: Collaborations and Correspondence 1865-1898* has just been published by Cornell University Press in which Morton Cohen and I tackle this subject in some depth. To summarise, the evidence suggests a warm and lasting friendship between Dodgson and Tenniel for many decades. I have written on the subject of Dodgson's photography, especially Dodgson's real reasons for giving up his hobby in 1880. You will find further details in my edition of *Lewis Carroll's Diaries, Volume 7*, recently published.

Allow me to finish by giving you an analysis of some of the early biographies from "whence cometh" many of the myths. I have great respect for many biographers and a high regard for a few. But some just didn't do their homework. Dodgson himself must take some of the blame. His rigorous attempts to protect his privacy and to shun all forms of publicity made successive generations suspect that he had something to hide – some dark secret that if revealed would tarnish his reputation for ever – some dreadful error of judgement that would cause society to shun him – or some awful characteristic that would repel even the most broad-minded of souls. He had a public name but not a public face. After his death, the custodians of his literary estate did little to release the truth. They followed the social sensitivities of the late Victorian and early Edwardian age – the private life of Lewis Carroll was not for public consumption. His literary legacy fared badly – many of his papers and personal effects were destroyed in the name of haste and expediency, but other motives were in play. Highly important documents were removed from the scope of future research – his 24 volume letter register containing summaries of all correspondence received and sent since 1860, his complete photographic catalogue of all pictures taken from 1856 to 1880, the drafts and proofs of many publications, and parts of his thirteen volume diary. So biographers are bereft of key primary source material. But to indulge in highly spurious speculation is not the way forward. This is what some of them have said:

Isa Bowman, *The Story of Lewis Carroll* (1899)

extreme shyness (pp. 12, 17); for the last years of his life he was almost a recluse from society (p. 56); "children are three-fourths of my life" (p. 60)

Belle Moses, *Lewis Carroll in Wonderland and at Home* (1910)

love for girls, detest of boys (p. 29); Queen Victoria gets mathematical treatise (p. 95); shyness was very noticeable (p. 247)

Langford Reed, *The Life of Lewis Carroll* (1932)

dual personality suggested (pp. 10, 38, 126-129); paid several visits to Llandudno (p. 42); 1865 Alice withdrawn by Dodgson because *he* was dissatisfied with the printing (p. 43); he was absent-minded (p. 64); half a child in heart (p. 93)

Virginia Woolf, *Lewis Carroll* (1939)

arrested childhood; passed through the world so lightly that he left no print; melted so passively into Oxford that he is invisible

Florence Becker Lennon, *Lewis Carroll* (1947)

split-personality, dualism, Dodgson/Carroll split (pp. 88, 264); barrier to holy orders was his love of the theatre (p. 103); failure to achieve a satisfactory adult love-relationship (p. 178); his love life was confined to these spiritualized relationships with little girls – plus insomnia (p. 188); suggests that Collingwood's remark of a shadow of some disappointment in Dodgson's life was due to a frustrated love affair with a grown woman (p. 189); his close association with children was both cause and effect of his prolonged youth (p. 189); Max Trelle has suggested that Carroll was actually in love with the real Alice...and proposed honourable marriage to her directly or through her parents (p. 192); dislike for boys (pp. 208-210)

Alexander Taylor, *The White Knight* (1952)

he was a normal, though peculiarly retiring and secretive individual (preface); he was in love with Alice Liddell (preface, pp. 32-33); had rooms in the Old Library where he wrote AAU (p. 46); Mary Hilton Badcock was recommended to Tenniel as a model for Alice (p. 64); Dodgson may have wanted to marry Alice Liddell (pp. 152-153, 198); suppressed desire for a happy married life (p. 191); child-friends were legion, almost always little girls (p. 196)

Phyllis Greenacre, *Swift and Carroll* (1955)

possibly left-handed (p. 124); a man who seemed never to love another woman, but to live as a child, still in the magic garden, devoted only to little girls (pp. 134, 214); he was interested largely in photographing prominent people and little girls (p. 144); the popular legend that Carroll was a great mathematician seems to have been sadly untrue (p. 160); loathed little boys (p. 169); illustrators of his books found him difficult to work with (p. 169).

I leave you to make up your own mind about the more modern biographies. But be warned – the truth is not always out there.

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