Alice: The Little Girl at 150

What's Not to Love?

"I hid in fairy tales and read them daily like a prayer-book. Any book was closer than a person." —Anne Sexton

The world's fascination with Alice has grown so over the years that she's not only translated into countless languages (174, I think I remember seeing), but puts her author in a league only with Shakespeare and the Bible for frequency of references in English. When it comes to the literature of little girls, the Alice books are in a class of their own, transcending gender.

That can't be said for either books by females drawing from their own experience (whether in diary, memoir or fictional form) or most other books about little girls by males, many of which seem either prurient themselves, about coming of age sexually, or, like *Lolita*, at least deal with prurience as part of the theme. Although such can't be said of derivative works that draw on images of Alice conjured in the dreamer's mind, there' none of that in the Alice books. The wonder is not gender-specific, and neither is the basic strangeness of the paradoxical world.

Occasional questions have been raised about the appropriateness of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's relationship with Alice Liddell, inspiration for the Alice books, the first of which came out 150 years ago. Such questions have been fueled by his amateur photography of her and other young girls, a few even in the altogether. Today, posting these would get him in a lot of hot water. There was also a supposedly hush-hush break with the family that no one seems to have penetrated the exact details of, something that Alice's mother found made further visit unsuitable.

Some have speculated that he might have confessed being smitten, in love with Alice or one of her sisters, with the hope of marrying at some point. What possibilities don't play through such minds without sticking or even It might have been the photographs. As innocent as they were generally regarded at the time, in the infancy of photography, no different in principle than photos of bare-checked babies, a parent's attitude towards them can change—or the girls' attitudes.

Did his passions turn prurient in some expressed or hidden way? We have no way of knowing, his diaries having apparently been burned by siblings after his death, none of whom ever gave interviews. Even then, would a passing fantasy in the privacy of a diary qualify for defining him? Who can tell you what not even the man himself might know? "Who is me?" he (&/or Alice) asks.*"Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle."*

Did his heart flutter for a time & spirit lift from a bright young girl's presence, in the golden age of her shared innocence—anticipated, actual & remembered? In that sense, you could say he was aroused, or excited, though, despite the ambiguous language, this does not necessarily imply in a prurient way. Who knows where that exact line is?

A fractal edge, for sure, and for that reason, not to be toyed with, nor taken for granted as one thing when it might all too easily also turn into another. Propriety calls for some kind of relationships to be regarded with special respect, from "a proper distance." A teacher, like a parent, may be considered bound by profession standards at once to love and to do so in a non-amorous, non-sexual way, for example.

The chemistry of relationship is largely a mystery, especially from the psychological side. In a class of a dozen or two, the teacher seeks on the one hand *to treat all equally* and on the other, *to treat each individually*. The specific content & texture of communication will vary at every scale, as it does between any two people or from group to group dealing with the same material. The heart respond with warmth, compassion, a sense of collaboration (as well as other emotions, not always positive) from time to time without necessarily crossing any line.

Such things can be entirely a matter of the heart and spirit (I have no better word for it), not the desires. For a teacher to *fall in love,* however, that's a different story. Even the possibility gives a reasonable basis for pause, falling back on the proprieties. If Dodgson wavered in this, and if so how much, we don't know. We do know he took extra pains for his privacy from then on, as well as to make sure there were no misunderstandings about his motives. I imagine that, if these were questioned, he'd have answered "No, that is not what I meant at all."

He was a bit of a strange bird, by all accounts. Otherwise, why would we be talking of him 150 years later? Not every bird comes up with Alice & her

friends, or Jabberwocky, the voyage of the snark, etc. He was smart enough, besides, to know he might be misunderstood, nevertheless, he appreciated friendships with those in that magical period of childhood, with whom he did not talk down, but with. His writing, prompted by the enjoyment of sharing stories with the Liddell girls, made it possible for to extend that sharing, that friendship to that child of wonder in all open to it.

In an 1883 letter to Alice's mother, he refers to Alice's persistence in urging him to write his stories down, calling her "one, without whose infant patronage I might possibly never have written at all." Eleven letters to Alice herself have survived, including one “expressing a wistful nostalgia for the old days and inviting her to tea anytime,” according to an article in *The Daily Times*.

The theme of nostalgia for the passing of those glorious days of childhood summer is already present from the beginning, in the original story-telling experience in a boat on the 4th of July (1862), as well as in the encouragement to write the stories down. He already feels what a magical, wonderful time—that day, yes, but also childhood imagination itself, so full of wonder, is what he revels in.

The book, originally titled *Alice’s Adventures Underground,* can be considered Dodgson’s attempt to craft a vessel able to transport a sense of that magical time, that summer day so emblematic of childhood itself. He illustrated his second draft with a dark-haired Alice who looked like the little girl he gave it too, inscribed “A Christmas Gift to a Dear Child, in Memory of a Summer Day.”

I suspect he was already thinking of “little Alice of long ago—remembering her own child life and the happy summer days,” not just his nostalgia, but his awareness of hers, feeling ahead to when she, too, would be looking back.

If she and her sisters were his muse for a time, they were not alone, nor would remain so, any more than they would stay at that stage of life. Did he think he could hold onto that innocent, bright beauty any more than they could? I doubt it, and doubt that he had fallen in love, or imagined living happily every after, except in the realm of the tale.

Even if he did briefly imagine marrying a Liddell daughter when of age, we shouldn't be too quick to judge. There have been successful May-December marriages so the idea can't be ruled out entirely, even some notable ones of teachers with former students. It seems extreme to presume all of these somehow "wrong." I think of the famous Durants, who made monumental histories of philosophy & civilization together, into mutual old age. It would be crazy to have condemned, or prevented such a relationship over a difference so soon disappearing.

A suitable interval does seem in order first, as was the case with the Durants, even though we don't always require that of other adults who may share in the teacher's kind of limelight, e.g., performers of all sorts, executives, sports figures, artists, etc. Nevertheless, the teacher's role, like the clergy's or doctor's, calls for some extra restraints, and not at all an erotically romantic one with minors.

If a teacher, fresh from college, falls head over heels for a 9th grader, for example, there's no way that's appropriately acted on, or revealed, least of all to the 9th grader. On the other hand, if they meet again ten years later, any relationship would be between adults. It's a little more complicated when the relationship at the time is between adults, as between a faculty member and graduate student or department head & new hire.

The ethical restrictions placed on clergy, psychiatrists, and the like, as well as in many employment situations, don't depend on age of the adult parties. The conflict comes from the nature of the relationships, the asymmetry of one kind compared to the mutuality of the other. The basis for trust is easily compromised when the supposed counselor has a personal stake in the feelings &/or job future of the client, for example.

The question of age doesn't necessarily enter into it—and yet it can, even in a reverse way. The teacher can be younger and the student older, for example, showing how easily the issue can get "a little more complicated." We have no basis for assuming the person in the "senior" position (teacher, supervisor, etc.) is the one actually driving any unofficial agenda. Seniority of age & experience also come into play, as well as will, exercise of power (the power to seduce, for example), and degree of impulse control.

Where adults are involved, it's as likely as not the student or junior employee who's the one smitten, and making the moves, expressing extra-curricular interest, doing the seducing. We expect the person in the senior position to retain responsibility even so. Such goes with the territory. It's part of the job. Period. At least for the duration of the professional relationship. After that, well, who can say without the specifics?

Who is so morally rigid in the definition of propriety, for example, as to paint all situations with the same broad brush, or put them all under the same blanket, without regard to the actual facts & dynamics? Some uncertainty, including the possibility of a variety of hurts & sorrows, goes with the territory, dances of ardor, passion, love, crush, flirt, quadrille, companionship, etc.—i.e., every engaged relationship. We should expect no different from our hypothetical situations involving adults, who choose to date, court, cuddle, etc. with often fuller lives for the doing, as well as friendship, pleasure, sometimes bliss, along with the aggravation.

In any case, none of this actually applies to our friend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, alias Lewis Carroll—*Lewis* from playing with translations of *Lutwidge* & *Carroll* indirectly from *Charles*. He'd tried a variety of other pen names, starting with "B.B." but his verse publisher wanted better, so Dodgson gave him choices, and Lewis Carroll was the one selected.

Of course it is a remarkable thing to make up stories and poem like those made for Alice, but not just for Alice. Their boat ride and visits had been the inspiration that produced the outpouring. And his wish to give her a beautiful Christmas gift the next. But the pouring kept on, and the book that came out, re-titled *Alice in Wonderland*, had many additions and changes. It was not just for (or about) Alice Liddell any more.

Nor did Alice Liddell remain the girl Alice Liddell for long. Soon she was a young woman (he photographed her at 18), then Mrs. Hargreaves, a mother, a grandmother, a widow, passing away in her 80's in 1934, having sold the manuscript after her husband's death a few years earlier. Dodgson had died 40 years before, having left voluminous diaries, even a register of the 85,000+ letters he'd written, many with the same enthusiasm that went into his poems & stories, as well as games & mathematics.

He was an Oxford math don, as well as a deacon—though no one denied he was quirky. He stammered, & stuttered; some things were quite jerky. It

was a time when the innocence of children was widely celebrated by artists whose interest were classical, not prurient. “The naked children in their play fields ran, smiting the wind with splendor and with speed,” an England-educated poet of India (Aurobindo) would write decades later.

Others, like Julia Cameron, also seem to have photographed the Liddell sisters, with at least one nude allegedly of older sister Lorina at one time falsely attributed to Dodgson. Alice herself seems to have received affectionate letters from some other notable correspondents, not prompted by her association with the book, including Prince Leopold, a son of Queen Victoria, wishing her well on her wedding, having reportedly once had some thoughts in that direction himself.

One may assume, she had some engaging character and personality, although not as an ingenue or seductress, and she herself expressed tiredness at being considered in the role of “Alice” decades later. Nevertheless, they seemed to have remained cordial friends and the family maintained a bookcase with all the Alice books, letters, and the like.

Alice wads no Lolita, and neither Lewis Carroll nor Dodgson Humbert Humbert. I had a friend in college who rhapsodized about Nabokov’s craftsmanship & artistry, which I came to understand as a graduate student approaching 30 in a seminar on the modern novel. I devoured everything in English, including *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and to my mind greatest of all, *Ada*, in which the lushness of his evocative prose brings the summer bloom from childhood to sensuality alive on the page most intensely.

The writers are dealing with different periods, and doing so in countless different ways. If Nabokov explores that power of pubescence, adolescent love, and young adulthood, he also explores older ages with characters both wise & foolish, meticulous & deluded. From the beginning of Lolita, we already know, as the character does himself, that Humbert is guilty. He has no excuse, and no escape from the disillusionment, although immersion in the texture of the book will, within that context, show how & why—including the reversal of power, where it’s her power over him that drives the plot, as his erodes over her, if it ever existed at all.

The book is not only about him, despite flowing through him as narrator, but also about its title character, who plays him like a fiddle, while she can. Not that we need to take Humbert’s version of the irresistible little vixen at

face value, nor cut him any slack for being so vulnerable. As far as I'm aware, no one knowledgeable has ever raised issues about Nabakov having any personal obsession with "nymphets." Perhaps the solid partnership with his wife Vera and his scholarly expertise in butterflies, protected him.

Dodgson had his scholarly field, too, the highly asexual mathematics. But he also was dealing with a very different age of life, and used very different techniques to do so. Did he "like little girls"? You bet. What's not to like? Did he love them? What's not to love? Did he find in them, as whole persons rich in imagination, rare companion of his most fanciful spirit? No question, and with many beneficiaries since.

Dodgson gave up photography in 1880. It was a hobby, not a profession or vocation. He expected photographs to be returned to the families or burned when he was gone. Instead, many of the diaries and other papers were burned, just the things that might have brought him to life in more dimensions, maybe even clarifying his own take on such issues— in which the relatives presumably considered not seemly for public discussion.

In their absence, we shouldn't apply our current standards to a different cultural context, but must say that, if he at times preferred the company of little girls to most others, that may well reflect the matter of his good taste and amicable spirit! He was certainly no pedophile. In our topsy turvy world, Dodson could be considered an anti-pedophile, his "alignment" raising question sonly for being 180 degrees in the opposite direction.

The last thing in the world one can imagine him wanting is for his special child friends to be in any way defiled, exploited, or commoditized. It was the joyous purity of their spirit, reflected in the blossoming beauty of their forms, that he loved, after all, an extremely different thing than making one's own desires more important than the well-being of the one cared for as a creative, imaginative friend, who also happens to bring to the party the glorious innocence of such a wonderful stage of becoming—no longer just child, not yet woman, seeing the crazy world with such fresh eyes, such a good heart, such an ideal inspiration.

Her childhood will not last, he knows, so they may both look back on those glorious summer days with nostalgia, with friendship, with appreciation. There is nothing there to taint them.There is, however, a related issue that deserves a post-script, if only to show how clear Dodgson's spirit was. That

is the issue of worship in the sense of devotion, something so easily on the edge of obsession.

Out of curiosity about the original Alice, and also over the questions about propriety, I googled, and came across at least one site specifically devoted to the topic of Dodgson's appreciation of little girls. There was nothing prurient on the site, and the author's conclusions were, for the most part, almost identical to mine. I'm not citing or including the link, however, because there was something just a little off-putting in the degree of attention to the topic, little girls, by a man, shifting the focus from appreciation to devotion.

As wonderful as little girl can be, little princesses worthy of a commensurate respect, I don't think it is in anyone's interest to make too much of their specialness either. Boys are special, too. So are dogs, cats, birds. and people at every stage of life. Appreciate the little girls for all they can are & can be, even worship them with the love of a devotee once in awhile, but not as an over-riding focus, or it starts to feel creepy, if only to the young princesses. Things should be kept in perspective, even if that's in flux, like those in Lewis Carroll's fun-house.

And in the final analysis, neither the Alice books, nor the body of work as a whole, shows Dodgson as a worshipper obsessed with girlhood per se, like a moth to their flame. Alice is not even particularly gender specific, as much as a creature of the "childhood imagination" Lewis Carroll tapped into, serving from within, not idolizing from without.

PS:

Literary criticism is one thing, fliterary literature another. The first may be called serious, employing the mental faculties to analyze and understand something not itself necessarily (or primarily) of the intellect. The second is primarily playful, employing mind, feeling and perception to provoke enjoyment, perspective & understanding. Nabakov's *Pale Fire* offers a great spook of the first; Dodgson's imaginary excursions examples of the second.

A related distinction might be drawn between "lyrical cliticism" & "cliterary lyricism," where the first may be called essentially serious, a core devotion to femaleness musically celebrated, whereas the second is essentially

musical, devotion to the lyrical, drawing on female imagery as part of the content. The distinction is more subtle, perhaps, though I'd say Dodgson dwelled on neither, at least in his writing, whereas Nabokov achieved occasional brilliance in the second.

The distinction may be easily blurred with Nabokov, however, by his use of Humbert Humbert as narrator with an obsessive focus quite different from that of his creator. There is no such character or theme in Dodgson, nor anything salty or salacious, even in the occasional nude photograph. If there is anything erotic in either Alice or his amateur photography, it is not from the treatment, but in what a viewer brings to the image. The character of Alice is so wonderfully rendered she may be considered analogous to a stem cell capable to differentiating into many different kinds, according to the artist doing the drawing. In Dodgson's hands, she is pure imagination. Even her body is such a figment, hardly real at all.

In *Lolita* & *Ada*, Nabakov is a prose sensualist, squeezing exquisite pleasures from the lyrical craft of his textured sentences. In a key way, these aren't contemporary versions of the Alice books, a matter of center-of-gravity or the essence of their implicit points of view. Although drawn so well, she seems to take on a life of her own, Lolita is rendered & seen only though the psyche of the male narrator. (Ada, too, through Van.) Despite having such title characters as their main objects (or subjects) of focus, in other words, neither book is presented as from *their* point of view. It's Humbert's feelings we're offered from inside, not Lolita's.

By contrast, Alice's experience provides the center of gravity in her books. It's her feelings, thoughts and wonderings we're offered. It's *from her points of view* we see the crazy mixed up worlds encountered. It's *with her, through her,* that readers go to Wonderland & through the looking-glass. When the world encountered is herself, it's as much or more a puzzlement as the rest, but hardly a fetish to dwell on.

This difference is major indeed, but not the only significant one. IT i snot just who the title character is seen through, male or female, but the nature of the character's focus. Humbert's focus becomes sexual, for example. Even if ostensibly told through Lolita's eyes, the focus could have been her sexuality, as if felt by her. Nothing of the kind happens with Alice, however.

Her focus is reflected in the the titles themselves—not her per se, but her *adventures*. Dodgson avoids the character-worship Nabokov's narrators offer their objects of affection, even when it's primarily their own experience (i.e., adventures) that are presented. Alice herself isn't the primary object of attention, but the world through her eyes, the adventures she (& her readers through her) experience.

Ironically, she has become the object of attention for countless fans, and even devotees of all stripes & persuasions—from the 10-year-old girl who sees Alice in her own mirror to the daydreaming adolescent; erotic role-player to nostalgic elder reminded of the those crazy, lazy summer days of childhood wonder long ago.

Persons bring elements of their own focus to the Alice they imagine, often without much reference to the original stories, let alone the original Alice. You can see why she'd have some ambivalence about being put in that role through her life, mixed blessing, though I suspect on balance positive, something Alice Pleasance Liddell Hargreaves treasured through her life. The wonderful Christmas gift itself, the manuscript inscribe dot her, she sold only as a widow late in life, though appeared with it at certain public events during the centenary of Lewis Carroll's birth.

Too much can be made of this Alice, as well as too little. Indeed, the Liddell girls all seem quite delightful. Lorna was 13, Alice 10, & Edith 8 the July 4 day they went with the two young "Reverends," Dodgson & Duckworth, for a boating adventure on the river Isis, from Folly Bridge in Oxford all the way to Godstow, during which Alice asked the Reverend Dodgson if he knew any stories….

Who knows where those stories would have gone, or stayed, had he not started telling them that day? In that sense, she is the inspiration, although other girls Dodgson knew became part of the character. Nevertheless, initially, anticipating a wonderful Christmas to her gave impetus to the writing down, during which the stories continued to develop. Other friends and family encouraged him to keep going, however, so that the version published in 1865 was by then twice the size of the one given to Alice. *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* came out in 1871.

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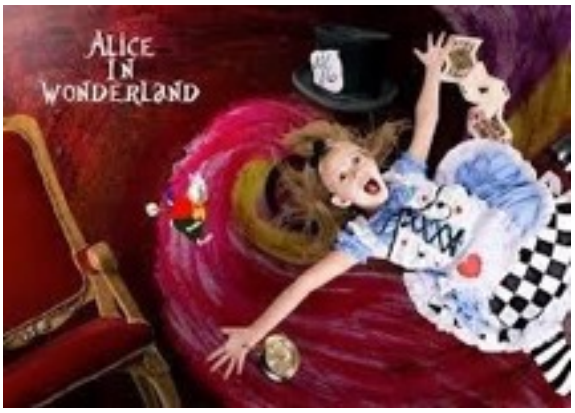
The version he gave her had his own drawings. The first published edition was almost immediately withdrawn because the professional illustrator objected to the quality of the printing. It was re-issued in a better quality in the fall of that same year (though apparently dated 1866).

[Alice as Queen of May]

[Alice as Little Beggar-girl, a ragamuffin]

Alice at various ages....


ALICE
IN
WONDERLAND


ALICE IN
WONDERLAND

RANDOM WEB EXCERPTS (from Googling)

Dodgson was devoted to games as croquet, backgammon, billiards and chess, enjoyed conjuring and card tricks and invented many mathematical and word puzzles, games, ciphers and aids to memory. He was very interested in new inventions and invented many things himself, for example a tool for writing in the dark.

Dodgson read and possessed lots of books. He had a diary that consisted of 13 volumes. If he had a particularly lucky day he wrote 'I mark this day with a white stone'.

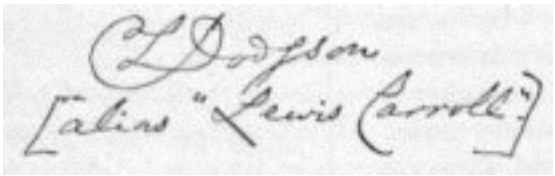
He also liked writing letters, especially humorous letters to his child-friends. From January 1861 until his death in 1898 he kept a register of all the letters that he wrote. It consisted of 24 volumes and contains 98,721 letters!

Dodgson was very interested in photography; he took it up when it was still in its infancy (1856) and was one of the best amateur photographers of his time. He ceased photographing in 1880.

In his life Dodsgon wrote many mathematical books, but also books for children. He even wrote mathematical books…for little children! His most important work was 'Euclid and his modern rivals' (1879).
Some other work of his hand: 'A syllabus of plane algebraical geometry' (1860); 'Guide to the mathematical student; elementary treatise on determinants' (1867); 'Curiosa mathematica' (1888); 'Symbolic logic' (1896).

For children he wrote 'Phantasmagoria and other poems' (1869); 'The hunting of the snark' (1876); 'Rhyme? and reason?' (1883); 'A tangled tale' (1885); 'Sylvie and Bruno' (1889); 'Sylvie and Bruno concluded' (1889).

The Alice books made Dodgson the most quoted author, Shakespeare and the Bible excepted.



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Alice Pleasance Liddell

In Carroll's original (1862-1864) manuscript for the story, Alice's Adventures Underground, which he personally illustrated, Alice was not the little blonde girl in a pinafore we have come to know from subsequent illustrations. Instead, she was originally a winsome, dark haired child, whose likeness had been patterned after ten year old Alice Liddell, the child of a church colleague, for whom the Alice stories had been originally created.

Dodgson first told the story during a pleasant summer outing with friends. Reverend Dodgson, along with a Christ Church colleague, Robinson Duckworth, and the three young daughters of the Dean of Christ Church at Oxford, (Alice, Lorina, and Edith Liddell), in a rowing boat hired from Salter's boatyard, near Folly Bridgehad all set out on a lazy, two hour rowing trip down the river Isis to Godstow, that July 4th in 1862.

Dodgson entertained his fellow passengers with a story he created on the spur of the moment for 10 year old Alice. Alice and her sisters were enchanted with the tale, and Alice later pleaded with Carroll to commit the story to paper, which he did, but he did not complete it until the following February.

The first manuscript, which was called Alice's Adventures under Ground is thought to have probably been destroyed in 1864 when, on November 26th 1864, Dodgson presented Alice Liddell with a more elaborate hand-printed second version which included 37 of his own illustrations as a Christmas present. The manuscript, entitled "Alice's Adventures Underground" was presented to Alice Liddell, inscribed as "A Christmas Gift to a Dear Child, in Memory of a Summer Day".

Reverend Dodgson later showed the tale to his family and his friend George Macdonald, who urged him to publish it. He subsequently revised and expanded the tale to almost twice its length and this third version was published by Macmillan and Co. in London, on July 4th, 1865. Sir John Tenniel was the artist who agreed to illustrate the revised and expanded text which was now called Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

The edition of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland which was published in July was subsequently withdrawn. The illustrator was displeased at the poor quality of printing, which did not do justice to his illustrations. All but about 15 copies were successfully recalled and presumed destroyed. A new edition was published in November (but dated 1866).

Preferring anonymity for this whimsical work, since he had a professional reputation for producing more serious tomes, Dodgson chose to use the nom de plume or "pen name" of Lewis Carroll on his work

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Wikipedia:

Origin of *Alice in Wonderland*

Edith Liddell (William Blake Richmond, ca 1864).

On 4 July 1862, in a rowing boat travelling on the Isis from Folly Bridge, Oxford to Godstow for a picnic outing, 10-year-old Alice asked Charles Dodgson (who wrote under the pen name Lewis Carroll) to entertain her and her sisters, Edith (aged 8) and Lorina (13), with a story. As the Reverend Robinson Duckworth rowed the boat, Dodgson regaled the girls with fantastic stories of a girl, named Alice, and her adventures after she fell into a rabbit-hole. The story was not unlike those Dodgson had spun for the sisters before, but this time Liddell asked Mr. Dodgson to write it down for her. He promised to do so but did not get around to the task for some months. He eventually presented her with the manuscript of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* in November 1864.

In the meantime, Dodgson had decided to rewrite the story as a possible commercial venture. Probably with a view to canvassing his opinion, Dodgson sent the manuscript of *Under Ground* to a friend, the author George MacDonald, in the spring of 1863.[8] The MacDonald children read the story and loved it, and this response probably persuaded Dodgson to seek a publisher. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, with illustrations by John Tenniel, was published in 1865, under the name Lewis Carroll. A second book about the character Alice, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, followed in 1871. In 1886, a facsimile of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, the original manuscript that Dodgson had given Liddell, was published.

Relationship with Lewis Carroll:

Liddell dressed up as a beggar-maid. Photo by Lewis Carroll (1858).

The relationship between Liddell and Dodgson has been the source of much controversy. Many biographers have supposed that Dodgson had a paedophilic attraction to the girl. The evidence for any given interpretation is small.

Dodgson met the Liddell family in 1855; he first befriended Harry, the older brother, and later took both Harry and Ina on several boating trips and picnics to the scenic areas around Oxford. Later, when Harry went to school, Alice and her younger sister Edith joined the party. Dodgson entertained the children by telling them fantastic stories to while away the time. He also used them as subjects for his hobby, photography. It has often been stated that Alice was clearly his favorite subject in these years, but there is very little evidence to suggest that this is so; Dodgson's diaries from 18 April 1858 to 8 May 1862 are missing.

"Cut pages in diary"

The relationship between the Liddells and Dodgson suffered a sudden break in June 1863. There was no record of why the rift occurred, since the Liddells never openly spoke of it, and the single page in Dodgson's diary recording 27–29 June 1863 (which seems to cover the period in which it began) was missing; it has been speculated by

biographers such as Morton N. Cohen that Dodgson may have wanted to marry the 11-year-old Alice Liddell, and that this was the cause of the unexplained break with the family in June 1863. It was long suspected that her mother became uncomfortable with the idea of a grown man befriending her 11-year-old daughter.

In 1996, Karoline Leach found what became known as the "Cut pages in diary" document[10]—a note allegedly written by Charles Dodgson's niece, Violet Dodgson, summarising the missing page from 27–29 June 1863, apparently written before she (or her sister Menella) removed the page. The note reads: *"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 soon to be courting Ina"*

This might imply that the break between Dodgson and the Liddell family was caused by concern over alleged gossip linking Dodgson to the family governess and to ”Ina,” Alice’s older sister, Lorina. In her biography *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll,* Jenny Woolf suggests that the problem was caused by *Lorina* becoming too attached to *Dodgson* and not the other way around. Woolf then uses this theory to explain why "Menella [would] *remove the page itself, yet keep a note of what was on it.*" The note, she submits, is a "censored version" of what really happened, intended to prevent Lorina from being offended or humiliated at having her feelings for Dodgson made public.

It is uncertain who wrote the note. Leach has said that the handwriting on the front of the document most closely resembles that of either Menella or Violet Dodgson, Dodgson's nieces. However, Morton N. Cohen says in an article published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 2003[12] that in the 1960s, Dodgson's great-nephew Philip Dodgson Jacques told him that Jacques had written the note himself based on conversations he remembered with Dodgson's nieces. Cohen's article offered no evidence to support this, however, and known samples of Jacques' handwriting do not seem to resemble the writing of the note.

After this incident, Dodgson avoided the Liddell home for six months but eventually returned for a visit in December 1863. However, the former closeness does not seem to have been re-established, and the friendship gradually faded away, possibly because Dodgson was in opposition to Dean Liddell over college politics. Other explanations involving romantic entanglements and broken hearts have also been put forward, but while there is some evidence to suggest these as possibilities, nothing definite is known. John Ruskin states in his autobiography *Praeterita* that after the rift between Dodgson and the Liddells, the sisters pursued a similar relationship with him.

Comparison with fictional Alice

The extent to which Dodgson's *Alice* may be or could be identified with Liddell is controversial. The two Alices are clearly not identical, and though it was long assumed that the fictional Alice was based very heavily on Liddell, recent research has contradicted this assumption. Dodgson himself claimed in later years that his Alice was entirely imaginary and not based upon any real child at all.

Alice from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

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There are at least three direct links to Liddell in the two books. First, he set them on 4 May (Liddell's birthday) and 4 November (her "half-birthday"), and in *Through the Looking-Glass* the fictional Alice declares that her age is "seven and a half exactly", the same as Liddell on that date. Second, he dedicated them "to Alice Pleasance Liddell". Third, there is an acrostic poem at the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*. Reading downward, taking the first letter of each line, spells out Liddell's full name. The poem has no title in *Through the Looking-Glass*, but is usually referred to by its first line,

"A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky."

A boat beneath a sunny sky,
Lingering onward dreamily
In an evening of July--

Children three that nestle near,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Pleased a simple tale to hear--

Long has paled that sunny sky:
Echoes fade and memories die.
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie,
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die:

Ever drifting down the stream--
Lingering in the golden gleam--
Life, what is it but a dream?

In addition, all of those who participated in the Thames boating expedition where the story was originally told (Carroll, the Reverend Duckworth and the three Liddell sisters) appear in the chapter "A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale" – but only if Alice Liddell is represented by Alice herself.

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