

# THE CORNHILL MAGAZINE

JULY  
1932

EDITED BY  
LEONARD HUXLEY

## LEWIS CARROLL CENTENARY

*With a portrait of herself  
in her eightieth year*

“ALICE”

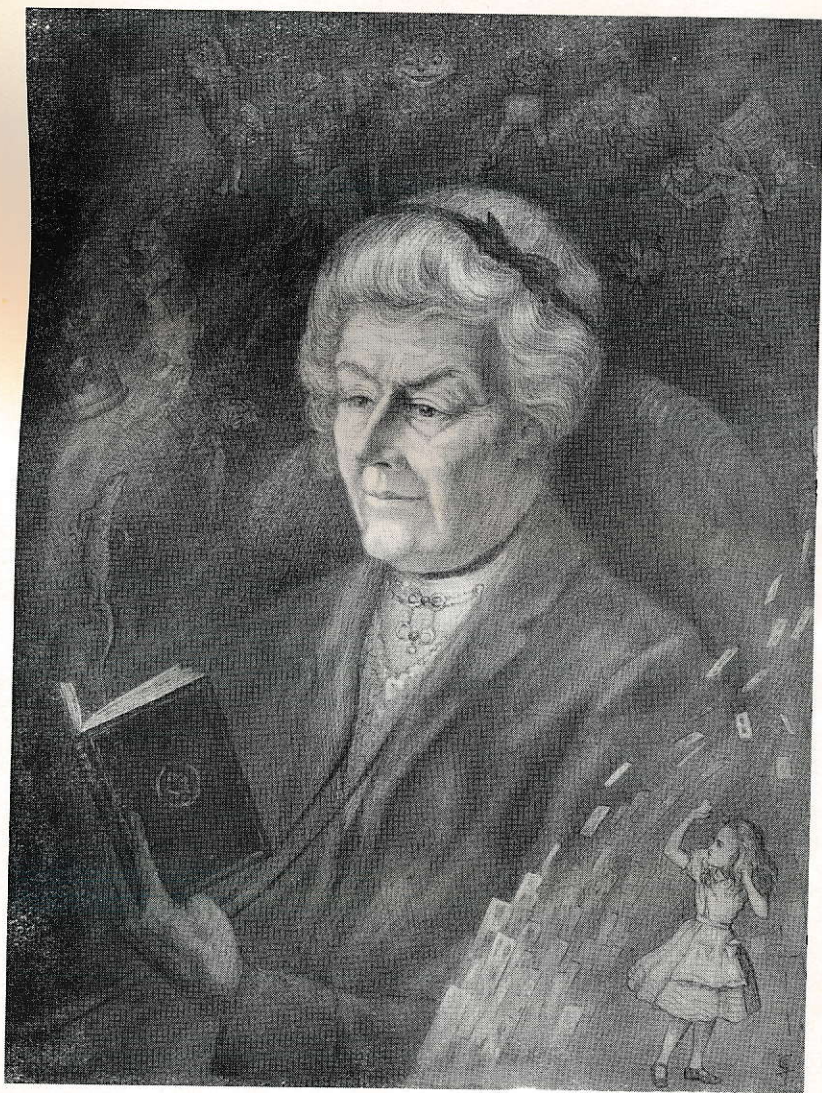
*here recalls her child-  
friendship with Lewis  
Carroll and the telling  
of the Wonderland story*

*For the rest of the Contents  
see inside*

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*From a drawing by Cecil G. Trew*

ALICE  
IN HER EIGHTIETH YEAR



THE  
CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

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*ALICE'S RECOLLECTIONS OF CARROLLIAN DAYS.*

*AS TOLD TO HER SON, CARYL HARGREAVES.*

THIS article is the result of a game. Some years ago, before the sale of the manuscript which made my mother's identity more generally known, we were playing one of the many guessing games in a country house. I was one of the guessers, and the required answer, as it happened, was Alice in Wonderland. I thought I had spotted the right answer, and, to make sure, asked whether she had ever existed as a real person. I was told that she had never really lived: that she was mythical. It struck me as being so unusual, to say the least of it, that anybody should become mythical while still alive and still under eighty (for her eightieth birthday only fell on May 4, 1932), that I then and there determined to try and get my mother to put down some notes on her early life and recollections of Lewis Carroll. I never succeeded in getting her to do it herself, but what follows my sketch of her childhood at Oxford is her own story in her own words.

Alice Liddell was born on May 4, 1852, in the house next door to Westminster Abbey, occupied by her father as Headmaster of Westminster School. She was accordingly christened in Westminster Abbey (and incidentally married there. I have often wondered how many people have been both christened and married in the Abbey!), but she has no recollections of their life at Westminster, as when she was about four years old her father was made Dean of Christ Church, and the family moved to Oxford.

While on the subject let me give a few facts about the Liddell family in order to correct some misapprehensions which came to light in the press at the time of the Centenary. The Dean and Mrs. Liddell had, besides three sons, the following five daughters: (1) Lorina, always called Ina, who married Mr. Skene of Pitlour, and died in 1930; (2) Alice; (3) Edith, who was engaged to Aubrey Harcourt of Nuneham, but died, before she was married, in 1876; (4) Rhoda, still alive; (5) Violet, who died in 1927.

Soon after they went to Oxford, the three little girls were put in charge of Miss Prickett, whom they called 'Pricks.' Her father had some position at Pembroke College, and lived in Floyd's



Row, near Folly Bridge, just behind Christ Church. She was not the highly educated governess of the present day, but she brought up the Liddell children successfully according to the ideas of those days, and, that done, married Mr. Foster. She died proprietress of the Mitre Hotel, Oxford. On one occasion when Oxford was very full, my grandfather persuaded Mrs. Foster to turn out of her own rooms in the hotel in order to provide accommodation for Lord Rosebery. The latter, who knew all the Liddell family well, said to the Dean that he was surprised to find the rooms of the proprietress of the Mitre Hotel full of photographs of the Liddells, and wondered how she had got them! Like everyone else, 'Pricks' had her likes and dislikes, and Alice was not one of her favourites: Ina the eldest, the imperious Prima of the poem, was. In addition to being taught by her, the girls had masters for French, German, and Italian, and mistresses for music. When much older, they went to the School of Art for drawing. This school was later taken over by Mr. Ruskin, who taught my mother to sketch. On one occasion he was telling her she had done a drawing very badly. 'I'm sorry,' said Alice. 'Don't be sorry, Alice, but don't do it again,' was Mr. Ruskin's reply. Such were the gentler arts which produced the generation of the sixties and seventies, but my mother also had some more practical instruction, such as cooking lessons. Then there were dancing lessons, and they became proficient at the Quadrille which was considered essential in those days. What they would have done if they had been asked to dance a Lobster Quadrille, I don't know!

Let us now go into Christ Church by Tom Gate. On the other side of the quadrangle we see three little girls, all dressed exactly alike in white cotton dresses, white openwork socks and black shoes, walking with their nurse along the gravel path which led from the Deanery to the Hall archway. A stone parapet and pavement has long since replaced the gravel path which in those days ran along the top of a grass bank. If we follow them, we shall find that they are going to the buildings called the Old Library which have since been pulled down to make way for Meadow Buildings—(what an awful thought!). Arrived there they go up the staircase which leads to Mr. Dodgson's rooms. These looked out over the old Broad Walk, which was very different from what it now is. The present Broad Walk did not exist, and the way down to the river and to the boats was alongside the Till Mill stream, an evil-smelling and altogether undesirable approach to the river, though at the time when the new Broad Walk was made, leading straight from Meadow Buildings to the river, many protests were raised. But, if you can wait, in a minute I shall be able to introduce you to the party.



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, afterwards 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 my special pet, and lived to be immortalised in the *Alice*.<sup>1</sup> 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 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.

‘We were all very fond of games, and our favourite card

<sup>1</sup> The kittens obviously owed their names to the contemporary song, 'Villikens and his Dinah.'



games were Pope Joan, and Beggar my Neighbour, followed later by Whist. About the time when the *Alice* was told, we used to spend a good many happy hours in the Deanery garden trying to play croquet. Chess came later. The deanery is a fair-sized house, one side of which looks out into Tom Quad, while the other looks on to a garden which is also overlooked by the Christ Church Library. It was very modern for those days in that it had a big bath, but with the un-modern limitation that only cold water was laid on! So the young ladies had a cold bath every morning! It was in this house, built by Cardinal Wolsey, but adapted to the comforts of the day, that we spent the happy years of childhood.

'We used always to go out for about an hour's walk before luncheon at one o'clock. Sometimes we went out towards Bagley Wood, sometimes round Christ Church meadow, sometimes towards North Oxford, which was then open fields. In the North, near where the Parks are now, there was a little dell, long since filled up and built over, full of nettles and tangled undergrowth, which was one of the most exciting places in the world to us then. It was a great thrill to run down one side and up the other. Another special pleasure was to be allowed to take Rover out for a walk. Rover was a retriever belonging to a well-known Oxford tailor, called Randall, who lived in a house built on arches over the Isis, which he christened Grandpont. He was quite an art connoisseur and his only daughter later married Sir John Stainer. On these occasions we usually went to the Happy Valley, half-way between Hinksey and Bagley Wood, passing, on the way along the path near the Waterworks, the kennels where Faulkner, the head cook at Christ Church, used to keep greyhounds for coursing. We never went out for walks with other children, but we enjoyed our wanders in the country, for it was a strict rule that, as long as we were inside the College precincts, we were not allowed to run or make a noise.

'But my great joy was to go out riding with my father. As soon as we had a pony, he used to take one of us out with him every morning. The first pony we ever had was one given to my eldest brother Harry, called Tommy. Harry was away at school most of the time, and in any case did not care much about riding, so we always kept his pony exercised for him. I began to ride soon after we went to Oxford. We were taught up and down a path running at an angle to the Broad Walk (the triangular piece of grass between the two paths being called the Dean's Ham) by Bultitude [what a perfect name for the Dean of Christ Church's coachman! C.H.]. With my father we used to ride on Port Meadow, or to go to Abingdon through Radley, and there were the most lovely rides through Wytham Woods. We were never



allowed to hunt, although, when we were older, we were allowed to ride to the meet with Mr. Cox, Bodley's librarian, when he was going hunting; but when hounds moved off, we had to go home. The Dean never rode with us to the meet. When Tommy got too old, my father bought a bigger pony for us. One Boxing Day this pony crossed its legs, and came down with me on the Abingdon road. My father had to leave me by the side of the road while he went off to get help. While he was gone, some strangers, out for an excursion, passed, and were kind enough to send me back to Oxford in their wagonette, lying on a feather bed, borrowed from a near-by farm. The bottom of the wagonette was not quite long enough when the door was shut, and this caused me great pain, so perhaps I was not as grateful as I should have been, for, when I got home and Bultitude was carrying me indoors, I said to him, "You won't let them hurt me any more, will you?" at which, as he told my mother afterwards, he "nearly let Miss Alice drop." As it was, I 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*, 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 expeditions. When the time of year made picnics impossible, we used to go to his rooms 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

<sup>1</sup> So there could be a keen personal appreciation of the field patterned in squares, the sidelong troubles of the White Knight and his twisted ingenuity for getting round any emergency, the breathless rush of the Red Queen from one side of the board to the other, and the final queening of the carefully shepherd little Pawn.



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 adventure might happen there! There were all the joys of preparation, anticipation, and realisation, 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. At the time when we first went to Oxford, my parents, having had luncheon at one o'clock, did not have another meal until dinner, which they took at 6.30 p.m. Not long afterwards, when the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, used to dine at the Deanery fairly often during his time as an undergraduate at Christ Church, the hour for dinner was changed to seven o'clock to suit him, and it never reverted to the earlier hour. In those days, instead of five-o'clock tea, coffee and tea were served after dinner in the drawing-room. It was not until we were nearly grown up that afternoon tea was started, and then only as a treat. When the weather was too bad to go out, we used to say, "Now then, it's a rainy day, let's have some tea." 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.] 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 pub-

<sup>1</sup> The first stanza runs :—

'All in the golden afternoon  
Full leisurely we glide ;  
For both our oars, with little skill,  
By little arms are plied,  
While little hands make vain pretence  
Our wanderings to guide.'



lish 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 streets 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 civilised world, and that his fairy stories would be translated into almost every European language, into Chinese and Japanese, and some of



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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 July 4, 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 July 4, 1865.

In view of the correspondence which the Centenary has caused, I am going to add some stories, which my mother has told me at various times. They had not happened in the days when the three little girls were walking round Tom Quad, and one of them was inspiring the best book of its kind ever written. 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*.

His interest in children was centred exclusively in girls up to about the age of twelve: after that age he never took much further interest in them. He took no interest whatever in their brothers at any age. This is rather amusingly illustrated by the following story. Soon after the eldest Hargreaves child was born, Mr. Dodgson wrote to my mother, and asked if he might have a copy bound and sent to 'your little daughter, who no doubt is called Alice.' When she wrote and said that she had no daughter, and asked if he would be godfather to her eldest son, he never answered, and took no further notice. Whether, if my mother had had a daughter, he would have taken any interest, we shall never know, as she only had three sons.

But at any rate he took a great deal of interest in the three



Liddell girls, and wove such a wonderful story round one of them that I suppose it is natural that children, who know the book well, should expect to see something unusual when they are told that they are going to see the original Alice. At any rate two did. One, a godchild, with whose parents she had been to tea, said to his mother afterwards, in a tone of great disappointment, 'But she hadn't got a long neck, mummy!' Another small child, after talking to her for some time about the book, crept on to her knees, and, his brown eyes wide open, brought the party down to earth by saying: 'And did you *really* go down the rabbit hole?'

The last two stories show the innate tact of two of our greatest modern diplomatists.

The first one happened while my mother was still quite a girl.

One afternoon my grandmother, as she was rather tired and did not want to walk upstairs, thinking she was quite safe from intrusion at that particular hour, had sent for my mother to try on an unfinished dress in the drawing-room at the Deanery. But she had forgotten one person, who came to see her when he liked and not when fashion decreed that people should call. The fitting ceremony was well under way, and my mother was standing in the middle of the room while my grandmother stuck pins into appropriate places, when the butler flung open the door, and announced 'His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.' While the Prince was rounding the corner, and before he appeared round the end of the door, my mother, expedited by her mother, had fled out of the other door to her room. The Prince (afterwards King Edward VII) did not refer to Alice in any way, and Mrs. Liddell congratulated herself on not being found out. But this was only due to the Prince's innate tact (he was only about twenty). He knew that if he mentioned it at the beginning of his visit, his hostess would feel uncomfortable all the time. He therefore waited till he was saying good-bye, and then added, with a little extra twinkle in his eye, 'Tell Alice I saw her!'

The other one was much later in life, and happened when I was there. Mr. Choate, the American Ambassador in London at the time, was staying with a great friend of my mother's near us in the country, and expressed a wish to meet 'Alice.' She invited him to come when he liked, and he came over to tea. When he arrived and was introduced to her, he said, 'Madam, I am very pleased to meet the most famous woman in America.'

Let me finish with a verse of Mr. Dodgson's. These are the lines



with which he finishes his introductory poem to *Through the Looking Glass*. They illustrate admirably his ingenuity of mind. After all, how could the world know that my mother was also christened 'Pleasance' after a great-aunt and godmother, who lived to be 103? Mr. Dodgson of course knew, and, in the last line he wraps up his double meaning in such a way that the sentiment would be echoed in its obvious sense by all lovers of wonderland, without their ever dreaming that another meaning was possible. On the other hand, everybody will realise the pathos of the verse, which runs:

'And though the shadow of a sigh  
 May tremble through the story,  
 For 'happy summer days' gone by,  
 And vanished summer glory . . .  
 It shall not touch with breath of bale  
 The pleasance of our fairy tale.'