LEWIS CARROLL AND HIS ARTISTS AND ENGRAVERS

An Essay by HAROLD HARTLEY

In 1865, when the imperishable tale of *Alice in Wonderland* charmed its readers for the first time, English book illustration, as distinguished from book decoration, was in its golden period, a happy and versatile adventurer; and among its best friends were Lewis Carroll and his heroine. 'What is the use of a book', thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'

It was the survival of the child in Dodgson that invaded Wonderland as Carroll, and invested so much time and money in illustrative drawings and engraved prints. Dodgson was thirty-three in 1865, and not at all well-to-do; so he was often alarmed by the costs of Carroll's fondness for illustrations. His chosen artist, John Tenniel, forty-five years old, went into Wonderland as Alice's companion, and his forty-two drawings had rare good luck, for they were engraved on wood by two artists who enjoyed and retained their inimitable wit and spirit. I refer to the Dalziel brothers. The author and his tale, the illustrator and his engravers, worked together in precisely the right way, so the woodcuts looked as necessary to Alice as Alice and her adventures were to them. Happily, too, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, the art of loyal illustration was equally good, thanks to Tenniel and the same engravers.

In some books, you will remember, the text is almost an unnecessary appendage to the illustrations; and there are other books, perhaps more numerous, in which the illustrations are intrusive and annoying, because they distract a reader's attention by introducing alien and

unsympathetic ideas. What Carroll needed, and he got it as a rule, was a perfect marriage between his own work and the engraved pictures.

As Tenniel had a style of his own, exceedingly vital and distinctive, he might have become assertive as Tenniel, and thus apart from Carroll's Wonderland. As he suffered no such mishap, we have no more desire to separate his drawings from Carroll's genius than we have to separate Alice's adventures from Tenniel's right companionship. Every picture grows out of the story as if by magic; and when one considers the humanity in the animals that Carroll created with his pen and that Tenniel charmed into portraiture, one is inclined to think that here, in these illustrated animals, are the real missing links. It has been said, indeed, that most persons could find their own selves if they looked for them in Tenniel's Alician humour. No statesman of the 1860's, and no soldier, achieved a fame equal to the White Rabbit's; and then, as now, symptoms of the March Hare abounded everywhere, and among all classes. Carroll, Alice, and Tenniel became political in one book, *The Westminster Alice*, by Sir F. Carruthers Gould, whose delightful humour was enjoyed by the bantered statesmen, and also by Archbishop Temple, though he appeared as the Ugly Duchess.

In his drawing of this incomparable lady Tenniel found his model in a painting by a very Old Master, Quentin Matsys, whose portrait of Margaret Duchess of Carinthia and Tyrol was copied with scarcely any exaggeration. Margaret was regarded for a long time as perhaps the ugliest woman in all the world; she is the heroine of Herr Feuchtwanger's romance *The Ugly Duchess*. I cannot say where Tenniel saw the portrait by Matsys, but I am very glad that he did see it. Margaret is at her best in Wonderland.

Then there is the influence of Carroll on *Punch*. It is clearly shown in this Exhibition, for one Exhibit comprises all the pictorial parodies which *Punch* has published on Carroll's works, nearly all from the Alice books. The first did not appear till 1872, when *Alice in Wonderland* was seven years old, and *Through the Looking Glass* about twelve months. After this nothing came from *Punch* till 1880, when one Carrollian drawing was printed; to be followed a dozen years later by one more.

After 1892 Alice and Punch were of frequent service to each other, and among the artists who made designs were Tenniel, Lindley Sambourne, G. T. Reed, Harry Furniss, A. W. Lloyd, Bernard Partridge, Raven Hill, and F. H. Townsend.

Let us try to be quite fair when we think of Tenniel in relation to the rest of Carroll's artists. He was the best of them all, no doubt, but the others had not equal opportunities. He gained his great success from Carroll's most enjoyable achievements. That is why he renewed his youth in middle age, with a right enthusiasm that went gaily into improved work. The other artists were handicapped by Carroll himself, and yet we think of them all with pleasure. If we think of *The Three Sunsets*, for example, we remember and appreciate the dainty illustrations by Miss Gertrude Thomson.

As for Harry Furniss, the two books which he illustrated, *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893), contained so much Dodgson that they were only in parts Lewis Carroll's; and it happened also, during the long preparation of these works, that the dual author was very ill at ease. Indeed, Dodgson and Carroll wrote innumerable letters to Furniss, often together, and very often apart from each other. Furniss threatened to strike more

than once; but much that Carroll said was good art-editing. You will find an amusing account of the collaboration in Furniss's *Confessions as a Caricaturist*. Did Tenniel have similar experiences? Now and then, maybe, but he did not say so in print.

According to Furniss, 'Tenniel had refused point-blank to illustrate another story for Carroll—who was, Tenniel told me, "impossible"—and Carroll evidently was not satisfied with other artists he had tried, as he wrote me: "I have a considerable mass of chaotic materials for a story, but have never had the heart to go to work to construct the story as a whole, owing to its seeming so hopeless that I should ever find a suitable artist. Now that *you* are found . . ." That was in 1885, and we worked together for seven years. Tenniel and other artists declared I would not work with Carroll for seven weeks! I accepted the challenge, but I, for that purpose, adopted quite a new method.

'. . . To Carroll I was not Hy. F., but some one else, as *he* was some one else. I was wilful and erratic, bordering on insanity. We therefore got on splendidly.'

The detailing advice that came from Carroll to his artists was certainly overdone, and even Tenniel, at last, may have rebelled against it. Not that he said so to Carroll. Indeed, when invited to illustrate another book, he answered diplomatically: 'It is a curious fact that with *Through the Looking-Glass* the faculty for making drawings for book illustration departed from me, and, notwithstanding all sorts of tempting inducements, I have done nothing in that direction since.'

It is often forgotten that Carroll paid for the publication of his books. Artists received their commissions from him and he paid their fees. For the use of forty-two drawings

in *Alice in Wonderland* Tenniel charged £148, and his fee cannot have been less for *Through the Looking-Glass*, as he made fifty drawings for it, not forty-two. The brothers Dalziel, for engraving these two sets of illustrations, earned £203 16*s*. Remember, too, that the sale price of the books was only six shillings. Could any author have shown more literally that he viewed illustrations as necessary to the success of his own work?

Furniss related that after he had been paid very well, he was offered by Carroll a share of the profits. Carroll added: 'I am grateful; and I feel sure that if *pictures* could sell a book *Sylvie and Bruno* would sell like wildfire.'

To the last of his illustrators, E. Gertrude Thomson, Carroll wrote: 'I want you to do my fairy drawings from *life*. They would be very pretty, no doubt, done out of your head, but they will be ten times as valuable if done from life. Mr. Furniss drew the pictures of *Sylvie* from life. Mr. Tenniel is the only artist, who has drawn for me, who resolutely refused to use a model, and declared he no more needed one than I should need a multiplication-table to work a mathematical problem!'

Through the Looking-Glass had originally thirteen chapters, and Tenniel was expected to enliven the thirteenth with a wasp caught in a wig. So he wrote to Carroll and said: 'Don't think me brutal, but I am bound to say that the wasp chapter doesn't interest me in the least, and I can't see my way to a picture. If you want to shorten the book, I can't help thinking—with all submission—that *there* is your opportunity.'

It is worth noting that Carroll, when thinking of an illustrator for *Through the Looking-Glass*, offered the work to Sir Noël Paton, whose drawings of children he liked exceedingly. Paton to his credit refused the task, adding,

'*Tenniel is the man.*' I often wonder why Carroll never thought of Lindley Sambourne, who illustrated Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies*, and a great admirer of Carroll's genius.

Arthur B. Frost, whose sixty-five drawing for *Rhyme? and Reason?* were engraved by Joseph Swain, in 1883, was a very clever American artist; and he collaborated again in Carroll's *Tangled Tale*, published at 4*s.* 6*d.*, like *The Hunting of the Snark*, which dates from 1876. Carroll was in love with The Snark, and reprinted its Eight Fits in *Rhyme? and Reason?* Henry Holiday's nine illustrations, perfectly cut by Swain, have retained their successful appeal through fifty-six years. I was able to buy from Holiday himself the original designs, including one he did of The Snark which was not engraved for the book. Carroll described the portrait as a beautiful beast, but he had 'made The Snark strictly unimaginable, and wished him to remain so!'

One lesson that we learn from Carroll and his illustrations belongs to the leisurely times in which they lived. Carroll was never in a hurry, so his draughtsmen and engravers could confer and collaborate; that is why they obtained elusive and memorable qualities that photographic processes cannot achieve. Tenniel knew that he owed a great deal to the two Dalziels, and Swain was appreciated at the proper value by Furniss, Frost, Holiday, and Gertrude Thomson. Yet, somehow, anyhow, the engravers' names were omitted in the Bibliography published in S. D. Collingwood's *Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll.*

There is a quiet greyness in well-printed woodcuts that keeps good illustrations from dominating over the text; also it accords admirably with the qualities of drawing that English wood-engravers, between 1855 and 1885, had to

translate into cuts. Joseph Swain not only interpreted the work of many artists, he taught some of them how to draw on wood blocks; and he knew how to be patient with difficult authors like Carroll, who had no technical knowledge of wood-engraving, and whose minute suggestions were often peculiar. For instance: 'Draw a line from the north-west corner to the south-east corner and reduce by one-fifteenth.'

The Dalziel brothers have not yet been placed securely in their rightful high position, either as craftsmen of the first rank or as leaders in the art of book illustration. To their enterprise we owe a good many works which are now regarded as classics. Their relations with Lewis Carroll appear to have been unaccompanied by any hitch. My son has a letter that he wrote to them on Dec. 5, 1871. In it he says:

'Mr. Dodgson encloses to Messrs. Dalziel a cheque for £203 16*s*., in payment of their account, and takes the opportunity of thanking them for the great pains which have evidently been bestowed on the pictures. He thinks them quite admirable and (so far as he is a judge) first-rate specimens of the art of wood-engraving.'

When art work in our country is truly English, it is often depreciated for a long time by those fashions in wayward styles that come to England from abroad. The best book illustration of Carroll's lifetime has remained finely English, unlike the great many phases of modernism which have been copied from foreign artists by our English habit of self-depreciation. By good luck, English humour and caricature have been only a little influenced by imported 'isms', and there is little in Carroll and his illustrators that is dated by mere fashion. 'Could you cut off those high shoulders from her [Sylvie's] sleeves?' he wrote

to Furniss. 'Why should we pay any deference to a hideous fashion that will be extinct a year hence? Next to the unapproachable ugliness of "crinoline", I think these high-shouldered sleeves are the worst things invented for ladies in our time. Imagine how horrified they would be if one of their daughters were *really* shaped like that!'

Whatever the survival of the child in a man of genius may be, whether an Alice or a Peter Pan, it should oppose vogues and be dateless.