

"LEWIS CARROLL."

BORN, 1833; DIED, 1898.

"If I have written anything to add to those stories of innocent and healthy amusement that are laid up in books for the children I love so well, it is surely something I may hope to look back upon without shame and sorrow (as how much of life must then be recalled!) when my turn comes to walk through the valley of shadows."

These words were written in 1876 by Lewis Carroll in "An Easter Greeting to Every Child that loves Alice." And now his turn has come. Truly, he had no cause to feel anything but satisfaction. The world can show few writers who from first to last have used their talents so joyously, diligently, and to such kindly purpose as Lewis Carroll.

Lewis Carroll's best period lasted, roughly, from his thirtieth to his forty-fifth year. He began *Alice's Adventures Underground* in July, 1862; he finished converting it into *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (abbreviated in the nursery to *Alice in Wonderland*) in 1865; he published *Phantasmagoria*, which contained "Hiawatha's Photographing," in 1869; he finished *Through the Looking-Glass* in 1871, and *The Hunting of the Snark* in 1876. After that came a decline. His wit was as keen, his brain as masterfully intricate, as ever; but simplicity left him. Indeed, he never again quite caught the simplicity of his first book. *Alice in Wonderland* is an outpouring of inspired nonsense which flowed forth without hindrance and without perceptible impulse. But in *Through the Looking-Glass* we now and then hear the pump at work. The quality of the nonsense is no whit the worse; but simplicity is endangered. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, for example, there is the White Queen's exposition of living backwards, and the theory advanced by Tweedledum and Tweedledee that Alice and themselves had no existence apart from the Red King's dream—a perilous approach to metaphysics. Moreover, *Through the Looking-Glass* is a game of chess, which is the sheer superfluity of cleverness. But *Through the Looking-Glass* is only a shade less admirable than its companion. Has it not the White Knight and the two Queens, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Humpty Dumpty, and the Walrus and the Carpenter? Has it not also the following passage, which has always seemed to us the perfect example of the higher foolishness?—

"'Crawling at your feet,' said the Gnat . . . 'you may observe a bread-and-butter fly. Its wings are thin slices of bread and butter, its body is a crust, and its head is a lump of sugar.'

'And what does it live on?'

'Weak tea with cream in it.'

A new difficulty came into Alice's head.

'Supposing it couldn't find any?' she suggested.

'Then it would die, of course.'

'But that must happen very often,' Alice remarked thoughtfully.

'It always happens.'"

We may, indeed, feel quite certain of the longevity of the Alice books. They belong to no one period, but to all. They touch nothing actual but human nature, and human nature is continuous and unchanging. Alice is a matter-of-fact, simple-minded

child, and the world is full of Alices, and always will be. Hence the assured popularity of her history. Again, in the manner there is no sense of antiquity, although some thirty years have rolled by, each bringing its modification to literary style. Lewis Carroll wrote as plainly and luminously as he could; and we read and read and can think of no emendation whatever. The words are the best words in the best order. Of hardly any other humorist can it be said that in no instance do we ever wish his manner of narration altered. But Lewis Carroll was a merciless critic of himself and a tireless elaborator of his work, and he sent nothing forth until it was perfect.

By his art *Wonderland* is made not less conceivable than *Fairy Land*. It is almost impossible to believe that there is not somewhere such a region, where dwell forever the Cheshire Cat and the Mock Turtle, the Gryphon and Humpty Dumpty, the Red Knight and the Duchess. They have each and all an individuality; and they are at once so mad and so reasonable: as real and recognisable as the people in Dickens. Partly it is Lewis Carroll's favourite trick of finding fun in pedantic literalness that persuades us. Again, the illusion is assisted by the abruptness with which the stories open. *Alice in Wonderland* has no preamble, there is no laboured description, we are in *Wonderland* in a moment, before there is time to think about the pinch of salt with which to season the exaggeration. These are the first words: "Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do," and then, on the third page, Alice has followed the white rabbit down the burrow. Again, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, the beginning is immediate: "One thing was certain, that the white kitten had had nothing to do with it—it was the black kitten's fault entirely," and so on.

Alice in Wonderland has been translated into at least three European languages—French, German and Italian—but without much success. Each country has its own humour and cares little for borrowing. In the title, at any rate, the German version bears the palm for conciseness: *Alice's Abenteuer im Wonderland*. The French and Italian are almost forbidding: *Aventures d'Alice au Pays des Merveilles* and *L'Avventura d'Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie*. The two Alice books together were converted to stage purposes some few years ago by Mr. Savile-Clarke, and the little play had an auspicious career both in London and the provinces. Lewis Carroll took the keenest interest in this dramatic version—the stage, indeed, was among his hobbies—and when the company was at Brighton he journeyed thither and played fairy god-father (his favourite rôle in life) to some of the little performers. At that time a discussion was going forward in the papers concerning the proposed movement to make it illegal for children of less than ten years of age to appear on the stage, and Lewis Carroll, in a letter to the *St. James's Gazette*, referring especially to a meeting of ladies in favour of the movement, contributed to it. The views of a man so fond of children and so passionately

zealous for their happiness are peculiarly interesting. Here are extracts from his letter, which was entirely opposed to the projected measure:

"I spent yesterday afternoon at Brighton, where for five hours I enjoyed the society of three exceedingly happy and healthy little girls, aged twelve, ten, and seven. We paid three visits to the houses of friends; we spent a long time on the pier, where we . . . invested pennies in every mechanical device which invited such contributions and promised anything worth having, for body or mind, in return; we even made an excited raid on headquarters, like Shylock with three attendant Portias, to demand the 'pound of flesh'—in the form of a box of chocolate-drops—which a dyspeptic machine had refused to render. I think that anyone who could have seen the vigour of life in those three children—the intensity with which they enjoyed everything, great or small, that came in their way—who could have watched the younger two running races on the Pier, or have heard the fervent exclamation of the eldest at the end of the afternoon, 'We have enjoyed ourselves!'—would have agreed with me that here, at least, there was no excessive 'physical strain,' nor any imminent danger of 'fatal results'! . . . A drama, written by Mr. Savile-Clarke is now being played at Brighton; and in this (it is called 'Alice in Wonderland') all three children have been engaged. . . . They had been acting every night this week, and twice on the day before I met them, the second performance lasting till half-past ten at night, after which they got up at seven next morning to bathe! That such (apparently) severe work should co-exist with blooming health and buoyant spirits seems at first sight a paradox; but I appeal to anyone who has ever worked *con amore* at any subject whatever to support me in the assertion that, when you really love the subject you are working at, the 'physical strain' is absolutely nil; it is only when working 'against the grain' that any strain is felt; and I believe the apparent paradox is to be explained by the fact that a taste for acting is one of the strongest passions of human nature, that stage-children show it nearly from infancy, and that, instead of being, as these good ladies imagine, miserable drudges who ought to be celebrated in a new 'Cry of the Children,' they simply rejoice in their work, 'even as a giant rejoiceth to run his course.'"

From one who could write and believe:

"Ah, happy he who owns that tenderest joy,
The heart love of a child!"—

these are striking words.

With *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876), which, although to most persons it seems more fitted to adult intellects, was dedicated by the author to a child, and frequently presented by him to children, Lewis Carroll's best period came to an end. Of this classic of comic verse it is hard to speak. No one has ever had a dream less coherent, less satisfying. Indeed, it may be said of Lewis Carroll that, above all men, he had the art of dreaming with a pen. His great colleague as a nonsense maker—Edward Lear—could be foolish enough, but always with direction and with responsibility. Lewis Carroll, as does the mind when asleep, took the line of least resistance. From *The Hunting of the Snark* illustrations have been excavated, by leader writers and politicians, for every kind of purpose; but the meaning of the complete work eludes us, and will elude. Because there is none. It is simply fooling, the best fooling on record. Why, indeed,

seek a meaning in a poem, when the preface to it can contain such a passage as this, in explanation of the line :

"Then the bowsprit got mixed with the rudder sometimes"?

"The Bellman, who was almost morbidly sensitive about appearances, used to have the bowsprit unshipped once or twice a week to be revarnished, and it more than once happened, when the time came for replacing it, that no one on board could remember which end of the ship it belonged to. They knew it was not of the slightest use to appeal to the Bellman about it—he would only refer to his Naval Code, and read out in pathetic tones Admiralty Instructions which none of them had ever been able to understand—so it generally ended in its being fastened on, anyhow, across the rudder. The helmsman used to stand by with tears in his eyes; he knew it was all wrong, but, alas! Rule 42 of the Code, 'No one shall speak to the Man at the Helm,' had been completed by the Bellman himself with the words, 'and the Man at the Helm shall speak to no one.' So remonstrance was impossible, and no steering could be done till the next varnishing day. During these bewildering intervals the ship usually sailed backwards."

The resemblance in one of the illustrations to Dr. Kenealy, the Claimant's advocate, led some people at first to seek for a parable of the Tichborne Case. Others have said that the Snark is popularity—"a boojum you see." But the story that the poem grew out of that line—

"For the Snark was a boojum you see"—

which one "day flashed into the author's brain, is the best explanation of all. In workmanship, *The Hunting of the Snark* is a miracle of dexterity.

After *The Hunting of the Snark* came a lull. Then there appeared, in 1883, *Rhyme? and Reason?* practically a reprint of *Phantasmagoria* and the *Snark*; *A Tangled Tale* (1885), a mixture of mathematical problems humorously enunciated, which were printed first in the *Monthly Packet*; *The Game of Logic* (1886), *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889), and, later, its second part, a whimsical medley comprising a story of modern life, a little exquisite nonsense—for example :

"He thought he saw a Banker's Clerk
Descending from the 'bus:
He looked again, and found it was
A Hippopotamus.
'If this should stay to dine,' he said,
'There won't be much for us'—"

and much theology. *Sylvie and Bruno*, which grew from a little story contributed to *Aunt Judy* by Lewis Carroll in 1868, was received with some disappointment, owing to the habit that readers have of demanding a favourite author to cut all his wares from the same piece. The theology was resented, not because it was not good—many of the passages are indeed beautiful and dictated by rare wisdom—but because it was considered to be out of place. Lewis Carroll, however, had grown to be of another opinion, and the two *Sylvie and Bruno* volumes were his favourites among his work. In the same Easter greeting from which we have quoted at the head of this article he wrote (in 1876) :

"I do not believe God means us to divide life into two halves—to wear a grave face on

Sunday, and to think it out of place to even so much as mention Him on a week-day. Do you think He cares to see only kneeling figures, and to hear only tones of prayer, and that He does not also love to see the lambs leaping in the sunlight, and to hear the merry voices of the children as they roll among the hay? Surely their innocent laughter is as sweet in His ears as the grandest anthem that ever rolled up from the 'dim religious light' of some solemn cathedral?"

Lastly came, in 1896, the first part of *Symbolic Logic*, in which the young student is offered quite the most fascinating series of sorites ever propounded, where it is proved beyond all question, among other things, that "No Hedgehog takes in the *Times*."

Lewis Carroll has had many imitators—some quite shameless, and none worthy to stand beside him. They were, of course, doomed to failure, since they had neither his temperament nor his motive. Lewis Carroll, whose attitude to children was more devotion than mere affection, approaching even to adoration, was not a professional author: he was a kindly playmate of little people, and he wrote *Alice in Wonderland* to give pleasure to two friends, the little daughters of Dean Liddell, one of whom—the original Alice—is now Mrs. Hargreaves. It was published that others might share that pleasure. Of not many of the diligent writers who have attempted to reap in the same field can it be said that their stories proceeded from a similar impulse. Indeed, the failure of the many imitations of *Alice* is another proof that good work must come from within, must be born of the author's own individuality. There has been, and can be, but one Lewis Carroll. To borrow his formulæ is not to reconstruct himself.

Lewis Carroll in private life was the Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, of whom we have hitherto said nothing, in accordance with his wish that his two characters should be kept apart. One proof of this desire is to be found in the letter which he wrote when, in 1888, Mr. R. H. Caine, the editor of a collection of humorous verse, asked him for permission to include certain of Lewis Carroll's pieces in that volume. Mr. Caine received this reply :

"Mr. C. L. Dodgson begs to say, in reply to Mr. Caine's letter received this morning, that he had never put his name to any such pieces as are named by Mr. Caine. His published writings are exclusively mathematical, and would not be suitable for such a volume as Mr. Caine proposes to edit."

Against this rebuff might be placed the following letter to a child (written in 1875) wherein the gulf existing between the two personalities is at once emphasised and removed; but it must be remembered that Mr. Dodgson would do for a child what he would not do for anyone else :

"My dear Magdalen,—I want to explain to you why I did not call yesterday. I was sorry to miss you, but you see I had so many conversations on the way. I tried to explain to the people in the street that I was going to see you, but they wouldn't listen; they said they were in a hurry, which was rude. At last I met a wheelbarrow that I thought would attend to me, but I couldn't make out what was in it. I saw some features at first. Then I looked through a telescope and found it was a coun-

tenance; then I looked through a microscope and found it was a face! I thought it was rather like me, so I fetched a large looking-glass to make sure, and then to my great joy I found it was Me. We shook hands, and were just beginning to talk when Myself came up and joined us, and we had quite a pleasant conversation. I said, 'Do you remember when we all met at Sandown?' And Myself said, 'It was very jolly there; there was a child called Magdalen,' and Me said, 'I used to like her a little. Not much, you know—only a little.' Then it was time for us to go to the train—and who do you think came to the station to see us off? You would never guess so I must tell you. They were two very dear friends of mine, who happened to be here just now, and beg to be allowed to sign this letter as your affectionate friends, LEWIS CARROLL and C. L. DODGSON."

Mr. Dodgson was born in 1833, the son of a well-known Churchman, Archdeacon Dodgson. He proceeded to Christ Church, Oxford, and in 1854 graduated with a first class in mathematics. In 1861 he was elected Senior student of his college, and in the same year became Mathematical Lecturer, a post he held until 1881. In 1861 he also took orders. His mathematical works were numerous and valuable, although his championship of Euclid against more modern systems of geometry is held by many to be fantastic. Mr. Dodgson had many of the eccentricities which so often accompany proficiency in his particular science, and many good stories are told of him at Oxford. He was a very watchful guardian of Oxford's honour, and used occasionally to put forth a whimsical pamphlet, in which some phase of the university's well-being was examined. These productions were always witty and marvellously ingenious. Mr. Dodgson was shy and reserved, a resolute celibate, a man of few friends but fit, and the patron saint of children. Incidentally we might mention that he liked them all to be familiar with Lewis Carroll's writings. His hobbies, after mathematics, which he looked upon both as work and play, were photography and the stage. His photographs of children must be well-nigh countless. Mr. Dodgson—as sage, as wit, and as saint—will be mourned by those that knew him, as Lewis Carroll will be mourned by readers all the world over.

"LEWIS CARROLL" AT OXFORD.

My earliest sight of "Lewis Carroll" was when, as a freshman, raw and abashed, I had once the honour of sitting opposite him at dinner. With all a boy's nervousness at dining for the first time at a college "high table," in utter ignorance of the allusions which filled the talk, and tortured by a desire to escape to more congenial society, I found huge consolation in the fact that now I was regarding with my own eyes a god of my childhood. To one fresh from a very different place, and not yet habituated to the real Oxford, he seemed the living embodiment of the old Oxford of a boy's fancy. I desired to attend his lectures till I found that he was a mathematician. Dreary people in his own college, when questioned concerning their great man, confessed to having lived in