

LEWIS CARROLL

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

AND

Through the Looking-Glass

and What Alice Found There

THE CENTENARY EDITION

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

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PENGUIN BOOKS

"ALICE" ON THE STAGE

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"Look here; here's all this Judy's clothes falling to pieces again." Such were the pensive words of Mr. Thomas Codlin; and they may fitly serve as a motto for a writer who has set himself the unusual task of passing in review a set of puppets that are virtually his own—the stage embodiments of his own dream-children.

Not that the play itself is in any sense mine. The arrangements, in dramatic form, of a story written without the slightest idea that it would be so adapted, was a task that demanded powers denied to me, but possessed in an eminent degree, so far as I can judge, by Mr. Savile Clarke. I do not feel myself qualified to criticise his play as a play; nor shall I venture on any criticism of the players as players.

What is it, then, I have set myself to do? And what possible claim have I to be heard? My answer must be that as the writer of the two stories thus adapted, and the originator (as I believe for at least I have not conscientiously borrowed them) of the "airy nothings" for which Mr. Savile Clarke has so skilfully provided, if not a name, at least, a "local habitation," I may without boastfulness claim to have a special knowledge of what it was I meant them to be, and so a special understanding of how far that intention has been realised. And I fancied there might be some readers of *The Theatre* who would be interested in sharing that knowledge and that understanding.

Many a day had we rowed together on that quiet stream—the three little maidens and I—and many a fairy tale had been extemporised for their benefit—whether it were at times when the narrator was "i' the vein," and fancies unsought came crowding thick upon him, or at times when the jaded Muse was goaded into action, and plodded meekly on, more because she had to say something than that she had something to say—yet none of these many tales got written down: they lived and

died, like summer midges, each in its own golden afternoon until there came a day when, as it chanced, one of my little listeners petitioned that the tale might be written out for her. That was many a year ago, but I distinctly remember, now as I write, how, in a desperate attempt to strike out some new line of fairy-love, I had sent my heroine straight down a rabbit-hole, to begin with, without the least idea what was to happen afterwards. And so, to please a child I loved (I don't remember any other motive), I printed in manuscript, and illustrated with my own crude designs—designs that rebelled against every law of Anatomy or Art (for I had never had a lesson in drawing)—the book which I have just had published in facsimile. In writing it out I added many fresh ideas, which seemed to grow of themselves upon the original stock; and many more added themselves when, years afterwards, I wrote it all over again for publication: but (this may interest some readers of "Alice" to know) every such idea and nearly every word of the dialogue, *came of itself*. Sometimes an idea comes at night, when I have had to get up and strike a light to note it down—sometimes when out on a lonely winter walk, when I have had to stop, and with half-frozen fingers jot down a few words which should keep the new-born idea from perishing—but whenever or however it comes, it *comes of itself*. I cannot set invention going like a clock, by any voluntary winding up: nor do I believe that any original writing (and what other writing is worth preserving?) was ever so produced. If you sit down, uninspired and uninspired, and *tell yourself to write for so many hours*, you will merely produce (at least I am sure I should merely produce) some of that article which fills so far as I can judge two-thirds of most magazines—most easy to write most weary to read—men call it "padding," and it is to my mind one of the most detestable things in modern literature. "Alice" and the "Looking-Glass" are made up almost wholly of bits and scraps, single ideas which came of themselves. Poor they may have been; but at least they were the best I had to offer: and I can desire no higher praise to be written of me than the words of a Poet, written of a Poet,

"He gave the people of his best:

The worst he kept, the best he gave."

I have wandered from my subject, I know: yet grant me another minute to relate a little incident of my own experience. I was walking on a hillside, alone, one bright summer day, when suddenly there came into my head one line of verse—one solitary line—"For the Snark was a Boojum, you see." I knew not what it meant, then: I know not what it means now; but I wrote it down: and, some time afterwards, the rest of the stanza occurred to me, that being its last line: and so by degrees, at odd moments during the next year or two, the rest of the poem pieced itself together, that being its last stanza. And since then, periodically I have received courteous letters from strangers, begging to know whether "The Hunting of the Snark" is an allegory, or contains some hidden moral, or is a political satire: and for all such questions I have but one answer, "I don't know!" And now I return to my text, and will wander no more.

Stand forth, then, from the shadowy past, "Alice," the child of my dreams. Full many a year has slipped away, since that "golden afternoon" that gave thee birth, but I can call it up almost as clearly as if it were yesterday—the cloudless blue above, the watery mirror below, the boat drifting idly on its way, the tinkle of the drops that fell from the oars, as they waved so sleepily to and fro, and (the one bright gleam of life in all the slumberous scene) the three eager faces, hungry for news of fairy-land, and who would not be said "nay" to: from whose lips "Tell us a story, please," had all the stern immutability of Fate!

What wert thou, dream-Alice, in thy foster-father's eyes? How shall he picture thee? Loving, first, loving and gentle: loving as a dog (forget the prosaic simile, but I know no earthly love so pure and perfect), and gentle as a fawn: then courteous—courteous to all, high or low, grand or grotesque, King or Caterpillar, even as though she were herself a King's daughter, and her clothing of wrought gold: then trustful, ready to accept the wildest impossibilities with all that utter trust that only dreamers know; and lastly, curious—wildly curious, and with the eager enjoyment of Life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when Sin and Sorrow are but names—empty words signifying nothing!

And the White Rabbit, what of him? Was he framed on the "Alice" lines, or meant as a contrast? As a contrast, distinctly. For her "youth,"

"audacity," "vigour," and "swift-directness-of-purpose," read "elderly," "timid," "feeble," and "nervously-shilly-shallying," and you will get something of what I meant him to be. I think the White Rabbit should wear spectacles. I am sure his voice should quaver, and his knees quiver and his whole air suggest a total inability to say "Bo" to a goose!

But I cannot hope to be allowed, even by the courteous Editor of *The Theatre*, half the space I should need (even if my reader's patience would hold out) to discuss each of my puppets one by one. Let me cull from the two books a Royal Trio—the Queen of Hearts, the Red Queen, and the White Queen. It was certainly hard on my Muse, to expect her to sing of three Queens, within such brief compass, and yet to give to each her own individuality. Each, of course, had to preserve, through all her eccentricities, a certain queenly dignity. That was essential. And for distinguishing traits, I pictured to myself the Queen of Hearts as a sort of embodiment of ungovernable passion—a blind and aimless Fury. The Red Queen I pictured as a Fury, but of another type; her passion must be cold and calm: she must be formal and strict, yet not unkindly; pedantic to the tenth degree, the concentrated essence of all governesses! Lastly, the White Queen seemed, to my dreaming fancy, gentle, stupid, fat and pale; helpless as an infant, and with a slow, maudering, bewildered air about her just-suggesting imbecility, but never quite passing into it; that would be, I think, fatal to any comic effect she might otherwise produce. There is a character strangely like her in Wilkie Collins' novel "No Name": by two different converging paths we have somehow reached the same ideal, and Mrs. Wragg and the White Queen might have been twin-sisters.

As it is no part of my present purpose to find fault with any of those who have striven so zealously to make this "dream-play" a waking success, I shall but name two or three who seemed to me specially successful in realising the characters of the story.

None, I think, was better realised than the two undertaken by Mr. Sydney Harcourt, "the Hatter" and "Tweedledum." To see him enact the Hatter was a weird and uncanny thing, as though some grotesque monster, seen last night in a dream, should walk into the room in broad daylight, and quietly say "Good morning!" I need not try to describe what I meant the Hatter to be, since, so far as I can now remember, it

was exactly what Mr. Harcourt has made him: and I may say nearly the same of Tweedledum: but the Hatter surprised me most—perhaps only because it came first in the play.

There were others who realised my ideas nearly as well; but I am not attempting a complete review: I will conclude with a few words about the two children who played "Alice" and "the Dormouse."

Of Miss Phoebe Carlo's performance it would be difficult to speak too highly. As a mere effort of memory, it was surely a marvellous feat for so young a child, to learn no less than two hundred and fifteen speeches—nearly three times as many as Beatrice in "Much Ado About Nothing." But what I admired most, as realising most nearly my ideal heroine, was her perfect assumption of the high spirits, and readiness to enjoy everything, of a child out for a holiday. I doubt if any grown actress, however experienced, could have worn this air so perfectly; we look before and after, and sigh for what is not; a child never does *this*: and it is only a child that can utter from her heart the words poor Margaret Fuller Ossoli so longed to make her own, "I am all happy now!"

And last (I may for once omit the time honoured addition "not least," for surely no tinier maiden ever yet achieved so genuine a theatrical success?) comes our dainty Dormouse. "Dainty" is the only epithet that seems to me exactly to suit her: with her beaming baby-face, the delicious crispness of her speech, and the perfect realism with which she makes herself the embodied essence of Sleep, she is surely the daintiest Dormouse that ever yet told us "I sleep when I breathe!" With the first words of that her opening speech, a sudden silence falls upon the house (at least it has been so every time I have been there), and the baby tones sound strangely clear in the stillness. And yet I doubt if the charm is due only to the incisive clearness of her articulation; to me there was an even greater charm in the utter self-abandonment and conscientious thoroughness of her acting. If Dorothy ever adopts a motto, it ought to be "thorough." I hope the time may soon come when she will have a better part than "Dormouse" to play—when some enterprising manager will revive the "Midsummer Night's Dream" and do his obvious duty to the public by securing Miss Dorothy d'Alcourt as "Puck"!

"ALICE" ON THE STAGE

It would be well indeed for our churches if some of the clergy could take a lesson in enunciation from this little child; and better still, for "our noble selves," if we would lay to heart some things that she could teach us, and would learn by her example to realise, rather more than we do, the spirit of a maxim I once came across in an old book, "Whosoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."