

INA IN WONDERLAND

by Karoline Leach

This article first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* May 3 1996 and concerns Leach's now well-publicised discovery of the "cut pages in diary" document.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, known to the world as Lewis Carroll, died on January 14 1898 at the age of sixty-five. For almost 100 years now his life has been the subject of speculation and controversy, which shows no sign of dying away. The broad facts are well enough known. He studied at Christ Church, Oxford and later taught mathematics there. He wrote Alice's Adventures in Wonderland for the three daughters of Henry Liddell, Dean of the College. Their names - Ina, Alice and Edith - are almost legend, the golden afternoon on the river that gave rise to the story immortalised in Dodgson's own verse. He never married. He liked the company of female children. But beyond this much is unknown, contradictory and curious. Was his love for girl children a suppressed sexual passion? Or was it as innocent as he always maintained? What happened to the four volumes of his diary 'lost' after his death? Who cut certain pages from the remaining volumes? And why?

While researching a screenplay for a film, quite by chance I came across a small piece of paper tucked away among a mass of Dodgson family records in the archive at Guildford.

About five inches by three, torn rather inaccurately from what appears to be an account book, at first glance it hardly looked sensational or revelatory. And yet written on this tatty scrap was, apparently, an answer to one of the most haunting of literary mysteries - the cause of Lewis Carroll's break with the family of Alice Liddell in the summer of 1863.

This event, supposedly a turning-point in his life, has always been shrouded in silence and secrecy. The scruffy little bit of scribble-pad that has lain in the public record unnoticed for seventeen years contains the only surviving account of what actually occurred during those few vital days in late June.

Pneumonia killed Lewis Carroll suddenly and unexpectedly in the January of 1898. He left behind a mass of papers that it fell to his family to sort out. A vast amount they consigned immediately to the fireplace. One notable exception to this was his diary, which ran to thirteen volumes and covered the years from 1855 until his death. It is known to have survived intact and to have been taken into the care of the Dodgson family, where it remained until 1969.

Some time between 1898 and 1932 four volumes 'disappeared'. According to the family they were kept in a shoe-box in a cellar and were accidentally lost when someone moved house.

In 1969, the nine surviving volumes were given over to the British Museum, but not before they had been carefully and delicately pruned. Someone, no-one knows who or when, cut out four, possibly five pages from the various volumes, some of the ragged ends remaining testimony to the mutilation. One of these pages contains the vital dates, June 27-29 1863, which cover an important period of change in his relations with the Liddell family.

It is nearly twelve months since the legendary day when he first told the Alice story. The book is still in preparation and his friendship with Alice and her sisters is central to his life. His diary records 'continuous' meetings with them, river-trips, and visits to their home at the Deanery. On June 25 there is a big expedition on the river involving the three girls, the Dean and Mrs Liddell, Dodgson and two other young men. It is apparently

a happy day. On June 27, Dodgson records writing to Mrs Liddell, 'urging her either to send the children to be photographed...' The sentence remains unfinished, because it comes at the end of a page and the following page is missing, cut out by an unknown hand. The word 'either' has also been crossed out, in a different ink, in a rather hopeless attempt to disguise the omission.

The record begins again on June 30. Dodgson notes that the Liddells are leaving for their summer holiday. they are not mentioned again until December 5, when he records meeting Mrs Liddell and the children at some theatricals, 'but I held aloof from them, as I have done all this term'. Obviously the missing page recorded some kind of crisis in his relationship with Alice's family. Before he is seeing the children all the time; afterwards he makes no mention of them for nearly six months and then records merely that he is keeping his distance. It is the beginning of the end of his friendship with Alice and her sisters. No-one has ever known what lay behind this change. The Liddell family has shed no light on it; neither have the Dodgsons. that it was a sensitive, possibly scandalous issue seems implicit in the jagged stump where page 91 ought to be.

For the past twenty years it has been assumed almost beyond question that this crisis concerned the nature of Dodgson's relationship with Alice Liddell. It is taken for granted that he was in some sense in love with her, that she was his irreplaceable muse, the love of his life. The 'lost page' has been assumed to contain details of some indiscretion that made his feelings apparent to her outraged parents. In his recent biography (reviewed in TLS, November 1995) Morton Cohen goes even further and suggests that on one of those late June days Dodgson went so far as to propose marriage to his eleven-year-old innamorata, thus precipitating the displeasure of the Dean and incurring a ban on further contact with the family. Despite such certitude, there has never been much evidence to actually support this hypothesis, and now the fragment in the Guildford Muniment Room suggests that in at least one particular it may be untrue.

The paper is written on two sides in several different hands. It has obviously been referred to and updated by the Dodgsons over a period of some twenty years at least. One side is full of biographical notes about the Liddell daughters and Alice's descendants. the other is headed 'Cut Pages in Diary' and contains summaries of the contents of three pages, two from Volume Eight and one from Volume Eleven. The second summary from Volume Eight is of the missing page. June 27-29, 1863. It 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 [unreadable] to be courting Ina'.

The handwriting appears to be that of Violet Dodgson, who was co-guardian of the diaries with her sister Menella from the early 1940s to the late 1960s. The unreadable portion may possibly say 'by some'. That this summary is not a guess about an already missing page is indicated by the fact that the first of the pages listed is still in the diary. In other words the notes were made *before* the pages were removed. Violet must have gone through the diary noting the pages to be cut and summarising their most important contents. Later she changed her mind about one and allowed it to remain. The above, then, is the only known account of what happened between June 27 and 29, 1863. What does it mean?

We can assume that as a result of Dodgson's letter to Mrs Liddell on June 27 she either wrote to him or asked him to the Deanery. In either case she told him there were rumours circulating about him and 'the governess' and 'Ina'. As a result he was either told to stay away, or they agreed that it would be safest for him to do so for a while. No mention of Alice, nothing to suggest the business had anything to do with her at all.

The governess was Miss Prickett, an unprepossessing female employed by the Liddells to educate their daughters. There had been vague gossip circulating about her and Dodgson back in 1857. He recorded it himself in his diary at the time, (May 17) with some astonishment, adding that he wasn't bothered by 'so groundless a rumour'. the governess we can probably dismiss as old news, unlikely to trouble the proud Mrs Liddell. The significant individual is 'Ina'.

Ina was Alice's older sister, Lorina Charlotte Liddell. In June 1863 she was fourteen years old and highly developed for her age; a young woman, not a child. By that summer she had already been allowed into Dodgson's company for a good deal longer than Victorian convention would have considered proper. He was young, handsome and unmarried. She was tall and strikingly attractive. Girls were legally marriageable at twelve. By thirteen she would have been considered to have left her childhood behind. Yet this bright, 'imperious' creature was still accompanying her younger sisters on long unchaperoned river trips with the thirty-one-year-old Mr Dodgson throughout her fourteenth summer and beyond.

She is mentioned in his journal at this time in ways that set her apart from Alice or Edith and may be significant. On August 6 1862 Dodgson observes that Ina will probably not be allowed to go out with him and her sisters for much longer, noting that the day's excursion was 'her fourteenth time'. It is Ina who invites him to visit at her grandparents' house in April 1863, Ina again who writes and asks him to come and help out at a charity bazaar where she and her sisters are running a stall. On April 17 1863 Dodgson comments on her precocious development (she is growing 'so tall'), and notes for the first time that Mrs Liddell has insisted on a chaperone. Is this a sign that the mother was becoming suspicious of the exact nature of the relationship between this man and her daughter? Did she watch them together a few weeks later, during the happy outing of June 25, and draw her own conclusions? Is this why, two or three days afterwards, she warned him off?

The paper in the Dodgson archive means that we must recognise how much of Dodgson's life remains a mystery, and that a great deal of the current biographical 'truth' is no more than supposition dignified by repetition. Is this true of his relationship with Alice Liddell? Has the fact that her name is immortalised in his two works of genius beguiled us into believing that she was far more important to him than she really was? In truth, was he 'courting' her older sister on those 'golden afternoons' on the Isis? Are there other possibilities not yet explored?

Why, for example, was he allowed such latitude with these girls in the first place? Why, having offended the family in June, is he welcomed back quite happily in late December? Why did Mrs Liddell forbid her husband's biographer to mention Dodgson's name? Dodgson's relationship with the Liddell family is crucial, curious and - this newly discovered paper emphasises - little understood. With the centenary of his death approaching it is perhaps time to start looking for answers to these questions.

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