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(出版者 / Publisher)

法政大学経済学部学会

(雑誌名 / Journal or Publication Title)

経済志林 / 経済志林

(巻 / Volume)

78

(号 / Number)

3

(開始ページ / Start Page)

181

(終了ページ / End Page)

188

(発行年 / Year)

2011-02-25

(URL)

<https://doi.org/10.15002/00007091>

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by Clare IMHOLTZ

Abstract

Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and the novelist Henry Kingsley enjoyed what appears to have been a warm friendship, but the one “fact” that all Carrollians think they know about Henry Kingsley—the anecdote related by Collingwood in *The Life and Letter of Lewis Carroll* purporting that Kingsley encouraged the publication of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*—is probably not true, as there is no evidence to support it. Dodgson met Kingsley in 1864 on the Isle of Wight, and later presented him with inscribed copies of *Alice*, the French and German translations, *Phantasmagoria*, and most likely, *Through the Looking Glass*. Kingsley wrote to Dodgson and to Dodgson’s publisher (and his own personal friend), Alexander Macmillan, with generous praise of Dodgson’s books. Most of what we know about the Kingsley-Dodgson friendship comes from these letters and from two Dodgson diary entries. Further, it seems that Dodgson loaned Kingsley £100 when the latter’s literary and personal fortunes were in decline in the early 1870s. The debt was partially repaid, probably from Kingsley’s small estate, after his death from cancer of the trachea and tongue at age 46 in 1876.

Henry Kingsley has long been believed by Carrollians to have played a significant role in promoting the publication of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. According to Canon Robinson Duckworth, Dodgson’s

companion on the Thames expedition upon which the original *Alice* story was told, Kingsley saw the hand-lettered manuscript of *Alice's Adventures under Ground* lying on a table at the Deanery at Christ Church, snatched it up, and upon perusing it, told Mrs. Liddell she should persuade Dodgson to publish it.¹ But facts call this pleasant little vignette into question. The ms. was not presented to Alice Liddell until November 26, 1864, by which date Dodgson had been working for more than a year to expand the story and have it published, as Derek Hudson and others have noted.² Nor does there seem to be any evidence that Kingsley and the Liddells were friends, or that he would have likely visited the Deanery at all.

Henry James rather unkindly wrote that "Henry Kingsley may be fairly described as a reduced copy of his brother,"³ Charles Kingsley, a leading clergyman, social reformer, and author of popular novels such as *The Water Babies and Westward Ho*. Charles Kingsley was by far the more famous brother, the more admired brother, and the better novelist, but it was Henry, not Charles, who had the excellent distinction of being Charles Dodgson's friend.

Dodgson and Kingsley met on August 9, 1864, on the Isle of Wight. Having been informed the day before that Kingsley was on the Isle, Dodgson wrote in his diary: "As I know a friend of Henry Kingsley's (Tyrwhitt of Ch. Ch.), I thought I would try the experiment of calling on him at the Needles Hotel. I was received in most friendly fashion by him and his very pretty bride (married three weeks ago). They called at the hotel in the afternoon to see photographs."⁴ (Dodgson was staying at the Belle Vue Hotel.)

Another diary entry, July 7, 1865, indicates their continuing friendship and suggests its warmth: "Down to Reading, I travelled with a Mr. Crofts, wife and two little girls. Having accidentally found out that he was an old friend of Henry Kingsley's, I soon made friends with the party...."

Kingsley and his new wife set up house in Wargrave, about 28 miles from

Oxford, and were visited there at least once by Dodgson. An undated letter from Kingsley to his dear friend Alexander Macmillan states that Dodgson had visited him not long before and later sent him a copy of *Alice*: “What a charming book you have published for Dodgson. He was staying with us the other day, and has sent us a copy. I have written to him praising it highly.”⁵ Kingsley’s early biographer S.M. Ellis supplies an approximate date for this letter: “Autumn 1865.” Presumably, this was an 1866 *Alice*, which was actually published in November 1865. Dodgson does not mention a trip to Wargrave in his diaries.

Kingsley also wrote directly to Dodgson about *AAIW*, a letter which unfortunately we have only in part: “Many thanks for your charming little book. My real opinion of it may be gathered from this fact, that I received it in bed in the morning, and in spite of threats and persuasions, in bed I stayed until I had read every word of it. I could pay you no higher compliment in half a dozen pages, than confessing that I could not stop reading your book till I had finished it. The fancy of the whole thing is delicious, it is like gathering cowslips in springtime... Your versification is a gift I envy you very much.”⁶

William Scheuerle, another biographer, provides a bit more: “after praising Dodgson’s conception of the Queen of Hearts, Kingsley continues with an obvious reference to Sarah and Mrs. Haselwood [his wife and her mother]: ‘I know two women at least who would be quite as dictatorial and as unreasonable if they happened to be Queen of Hearts and Spades...’”⁷ Obviously, the young marriage was not without problems. This letter is also undated.

Kingsley mentions *AAIW* in another letter to Macmillan *circa* 1868, retrospectively disparaging *The Scotsman*’s review: “The literary ability of *The Scotsman* I really cannot rank high with regard to works of fiction and fancy: who could trust a paper which said the letter-press of *Alice’s Adventures* was pointless balderdash!!”⁸

Kingsley certainly had received an 1866 *AAIW* presentation copy. Perhaps he also had possessed, however briefly, an 1865 *Alice*, but this is unlikely as it had been recalled in the summer of 1865. Other known presentations from Dodgson to Kingsley include French and German *AAIW*s and *Phantasmagoria*, all of which were inscribed “with the Author’s kind regards.”⁹ (As shall be seen below, a *Through the Looking-Glass* presentation is also quite likely, although this copy is not known to have survived.)

On January 19, 1869, Alexander Macmillan relayed Kingsley’s opinion of the newly published *Phantasmagoria* to Dodgson, “Phantasmagoria has not been noticed yet. Henry Kingsley was praising it immensely yesterday.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, there is little other documentation as to how the friendship proceeded during the late 1860s into the 1870s, a period during which Kingsley was churning out novel after novel, each less well-written and less successful than its predecessor, and falling deeper and deeper into debt, constantly importuning friends and relatives for loans, and apparently finding solace in drink.

However, Dodgson noted in his diary for January 13, 1872, that he called on Kingsley, who was then living in London (perhaps to present him with a copy of *Through the Looking-Glass*, which had recently been published), but he was out. In yet another undated letter, Kingsley wrote to Dodgson praising *TTLG*: “I can say with a clear head and conscience that your new book is the finest thing we have had since *Martin Chuzzlewit*...I can only say in comparing the new *Alice* with the old, ‘this is more excellent song than the other.’ It is perfectly splendid, but you have, doubtless, heard that from other quarters. I lunch with Macmillan habitually, and he was in a terrible pickle about not having printed enough copies the other day.”¹¹ The phrase, “with a clear head and conscience,” raises the question of whether Kingsley was in the recipient’s debt, so it is not surprising to find that Dodgson’s bank account shows a payment of £100 to “Kingsley” on January 25, 1872.¹² It also raises the question of whether Kingsley was

inebriated when he had last seen Dodgson.

Their friendship is attested not only in these letters and presentation copies but also by the jocular references to Dodgson and his works in some of Kingsley's books. William Tinsley, who published several of Kingsley's novels, even suggested that Kingsley and Dodgson collaborated: "I had a notion, from something I saw in my office one day when Kingsley was there, that he and the author of 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Through a Looking Glass' now and then worked together, for Henry Kingsley had a capital sense of fun and true humour; but I may have been wrong."¹³ He certainly was wrong. It is believed, though, that Kingsley's *The Boy in Grey*, a story with a strong fantasy element, was at least partially inspired by *Alice*, to which it includes some jumbled references.¹⁴

Much more charming and witty is Kingsley's humorous exegesis of "The Walrus and the Carpenter" in Chapter 16 of *Valentin*:

It pleases you English to amuse yourselves with the logic of M. Louis Carroll. I think that his logic is all wrong from beginning to end. How, then, I beg of you, could *la petite* Mees Alice have seen the noble poem of Jabberwocky (German, I regret to say) *reversed* when she got *through* the glass? I say that M. Louis Carroll is all wrong, and that Mees Alice would have seen Jabberwocky just as it was printed. I am, for my own part, no casuist, like M. Louis Carroll; but I will defy his casuistry here. Again, I beg of M. Louis Carroll to explain to me why he dared publish a poem so wicked as that of "The Walrus and the Carpenter." While the Latin nations have been living on the purest sentiment, the Teutonic nations have been going from one grossness to another. The wicked ballads of M. Louis Carroll are worthy of the *Fliegende Blätter* of Munich. M. Louis Carroll fancies that his political allusions can escape the microscopical eye of a Frenchman. Not at all. That ballad of "The Walrus and the Carpenter" has a political signification. The walrus is the Emperor of Germany (Monsieur

Tenniel, a Frenchman surely from his genius, has made him very like); the carpenter is the Prince Frederick Charles— all German princes (may Heaven confound them!) learn trades; about the old oyster, who refused to go out walking with the walrus and the carpenter, I am puzzled. It could not have been the French Emperor, because he did go out walking—that is to say, he mounted to horse, and took that little oyster his son with him. Also M. Thiers followed the walrus and the carpenter. I rather think that the oldest oyster is the Comte de Chambord; but I am not sure. Humpty Dumpty, who nearly smiles the top of his head off, is evidently the late emperor; and the allusion to “All the king’s horses and all the king’s men,” is at least premature, not to say indiscreet. I do not, as a thinking Frenchman, believe that the Comte de Chambord will give the slightest assistance in putting Louis Napoleon on this throne again. Yet this political satirist, this M. Louis Carroll, hints that such an effort will be made, and made shortly. The English do not understand politics at all; and it would be much better if M. Louis Carroll would attend to his duties as a professor, instead of irritating a very high-spirited nation as the French by political poems like that of “Humpty Dumpty.” The *fish* are the English, that is patent. Look at the shameless political intention of this passage, when the French ask the English to stop supplying arms to the Germans :

“The little fish’s answer was,
‘We cannot do it, sir, because—’”

That is bad enough ; but there is worse behind. With regard to your great public satirist, M. Louis Carroll, I say that he is all wrong. Look how he writes about Gambetta’s appeal to Lord Granville :

“But he was very proud and stiff;
He said ‘I’ll go and wake them if—’”

Exactly the thing he did not do, because his coronet was at stake. He never dared to rouse the latent republicanism of England and of Europe about his ears. Hear your M. Louis Carroll again, with the Alabama claims hanging over his own shoulders :

“And when I found the door was shut,
I tried to turn the handle, but—”
That door is shut for ever to you English ...¹⁵

We have tried to turn the handle a bit on the Kingsley-Dodgson friendship, but now the door must shut. Kingsley came to a sad end, dying of cancer of the trachea and tongue on May 24, 1876, at Cuckfield, in Sussex, at the age of 46. His obituary in *The Sussex Daily News* called him, “a fair, frank, hearty man, pleasant to look upon, always kind, cheery, helpful, and hopeful...he had a boy’s pure, fresh, generous heart.” *The Spectator*, often a stern critic of his novels, said that while Kingsley was “only one of the ‘might-have-beens,’ the... ‘might-have-been’ in him was so very good, that we are unwilling to let him pass away as one of the crowd, unnoticed and unregarded.”¹⁶

The £100 that Dodgson evidently lent to Kingsley was apparently partially repaid, as there is a credit in Dodgson’s accounts of £37 9s 6d from “Kingsley” on November 21, 1876. It may have been repaid by Kingsley’s wife Sarah from the small legacy he had left her (from an inheritance from his mother in 1873). The legacy was apparently exhausted around this time, which would explain the reduced amount; in fact, Sarah made a public appeal for support on November 7th. It is possible that George Kingsley, Henry’s only surviving brother, made this payment to Dodgson, but if so, why would he not have repaid the entire amount? We shall probably never know.

**An earlier version of this article was published in *The Daresbury Chronicle*, Vol. 5, March 2010.

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- 1 Stuart Dodgson Collingwood. *The Lewis Carroll Picture Book*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899, p. 360.
 - 2 Derek Hudson. *Lewis Carroll*, London: Constable, 1954, p. 133.
 - 3 Henry James. *Notes and Reviews*, Cambridge, Mass: Dunster House, 1921, p. 59.
 - 4 Edward Wakeling (ed.). *Lewis Carroll's Diaries*, 10 vols., The Lewis Carroll Society, 1993–2009, for all quotations from Dodgson's diaries.
 - 5 S. M. Ellis. *Henry Kingsley, 1830-1876, Toward a Vindication*, London: Grant Richards 1931, p. 138.
 - 6 Morton Cohen. *Letters of Lewis Carroll*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 80n.
 - 7 William H. Scheuerle. *The Neglected Brother: A Study of Henry Kingsley*, Florida State University Press, 1971, p. 96. I have also relied on this book for biographical facts about Kingsley.
 - 8 Ellis, pp. 75–76. The *Scotsman* review (December 22, 1866) stated, “Nor is the story unreadable, but it is dull. There is no flow of animal spirits in its fur, which is forced and over-ingenious.”
 - 9 Edward Wakeling, personal correspondence, February 2010.
 - 10 Macmillan Papers, Ms. 55389. British Library.
 - 11 Ellis, p. 98.
 - 12 Jenny Woolf. *Lewis Carroll in his Own Account*, Jabberwock Press, 2005.
 - 13 William Tinsley. *Random Recollections of an Old Publisher*, London: Simkin Marshall, 1900, II, p. 284.
 - 14 Henry Kingsley. *The Boy in Grey*, Strahan and Co., 1871.
 - 15 Henry Kingsley. *Valentin: A French Boy's Story of Sedan*, 2 vols. Tinsley Brothers, 1872, pp.93-95. Chapter XVI was first published in Routledge's *Every Boy's Annual* in 1870.
 - 16 These obituaries are quoted in Scheuerle, p. 166.