



## The Draftsman and the Don

*What I tell you three times is true.*

—THE BELLMAN

### I Should Prefer Mr. Tenniel

When Lewis Carroll inquired, in 1863, if Tenniel would consider illustrating a children's book for him, the artist was at the top of two professions. His elevation to cartoonist-in-chief at *Punch* had followed closely upon the issuing of a deluxe edition of *Lalla Rookh* with sixty-nine of his designs. Although the *Times's* glorification of this work as "the greatest illustrative achievement of a single hand" may have been a bit overblown, Tenniel's was a respected name.

Carroll, a little-known Oxford tutor with some small publication experience, had a manuscript entitled "Alice's Adventures Under Ground," which he had begun to illustrate with his own drawings. In a letter in late 1863 he asked *Punch* writer Tom Taylor to see if the famed cartoonist would be open to drawing "a dozen wood-cuts" for him, acknowledging, "Of all artists on wood I should prefer Mr. Tenniel."<sup>1</sup>

This was no lightly considered choice. Carroll had been a *Punch* reader since his teens, and his small collection of cuttings, taken from 1856 to 1862 for the purpose of convincing the Christ Church Common Room to keep a special volume of extracts from *Punch*, shows a preponderance of drawings by Tenniel. Of the seven books containing Tenniel's illustrations in Carroll's library, the three that were published before 1863 may well have been acquired before his letter to Taylor.<sup>2</sup>

On 5 April 1864, Tenniel, who had asked to see Carroll's manuscript before deciding, gave his consent. As reported by Carroll's friend Robinson Duckworth, Tenniel declared that he "would feel it a pleasure to illustrate so delightful a story."<sup>3</sup>

The two seemed designed to work together. While Tenniel was Carroll's

senior by twelve years and more urbane than the author, their similarities far outweighed their differences. Of the same social class, politically conservative, single (one a bachelor and the other a childless widower), they were matched in their honesty, their scrupulousness in their creative work (about which they tolerated no compromise), and in the things that they both loved: absurdity, incongruity, visual surprises (they would both experiment with mirror writing), animals, old ballads, Shakespeare, medievalism, magic-lantern shows, word games, circuses, Christmas pantomimes, blackface minstrel shows, and most forms of Victorian theater and entertainment.<sup>4</sup> Most importantly, they delighted in children. Coming, both, from large families, each had shared his boyhood home with eight younger siblings. Later, as “Uncle Dodgson” and “Uncle John,” they would show many kindnesses to the children of family and friends.

### The Problematic Bits

One well-bred prejudice that they both held would work to their disadvantage. This was their abhorrence of personal publicity. They were gentlemen—unostentatious, jealous of their privacy, and ready to protect the privacy of a friend. Carroll’s hatred of publicity and of the “whole tribe of autograph hunters and of celebrity hunters” is well known; and Tenniel, when declining to give an interview to *Cassell’s Saturday Journal* in 1891, stated his “decided and positive objection—personally and on principle—to being ‘interviewed.’” Eight years later he would inform one applicant that he had no “*reminiscences* whatever of either Lewis Carroll—or in connection with ‘Alice’ to give.” This uncommunicativeness could backfire. One would-be biographer who had gone directly to Carroll for data felt so rebuffed that he later retaliated with a vengeful obituary of the writer in the *Daily Chronicle*. But despite the reticence of their subjects, biographies and studies will appear, and where there is a void any allegations that are offered are eagerly taken up. In this case, practically all the testimony regarding the Carroll-Tenniel relationship comes from one who was seventeen and living in Ireland when *Looking-Glass* was published, and who later harbored considerable animus toward both men. He was, furthermore, an inveterate self-publicist.<sup>5</sup>

The striking thing about all of artist Harry Furniss’s alleged quotations from Tenniel is how closely they express his own feelings toward Carroll. Their almost nine-year association over the *Sylvie and Bruno* books had often been strained, and Carroll was driven, on more than one occasion, to write sarcastically to Furniss. In his *Strand Magazine* article of 1908, Furniss reiterated his earlier claim that Tenniel had described Carroll to him as “Impossible,” adding, “Tenniel could not tolerate ‘that conceited old Don’ any more.” Even setting aside the fact that Furniss was no confidant of Tenniel—who would not, in any case, have disparaged a friend, and who is not

known to have referred to Carroll as a don—is it likely that he would have spoken of someone twelve years younger than himself as “that conceited old Don”? But Furniss, who was Carroll’s junior by twenty-two years, speaks in the same article of “Dodgson the Don” and in his memoirs complained that Carroll was “in some respects a typical Oxford Don,” treating “grown-up men of the world as if they were children.”<sup>6</sup>

Accounts of Tenniel’s work with Carroll rely heavily on the following observation in Stuart Dodgson Collingwood’s biography of the writer: “Mr. Dodgson was no easy man to work with; no detail was too small for his exact criticism. ‘Don’t give Alice so much crinoline,’ he would write, or ‘The White Knight must not have whiskers, he must not be made to look old’—such were the directions he was constantly giving.” Did Collingwood, born in the year that Tenniel began working on *Looking-Glass*, get this information from copies of Carroll’s letters, or had it been told to him by one of his correspondents? Carroll himself informed Macmillan in 1896, “I don’t keep *copies* of my letters, but only *précis* of them in a Register.” Perhaps this was not always so, as Collingwood reportedly told an interviewer that Carroll “kept copies of many of the letters he dispatched.” Tenniel kept no letters at all and would not in any case have given out such information. We note that Collingwood, who usually introduces his informants with such phrases as “The following account is from the pen of” or “some reminiscences . . . have been kindly sent me by,” makes no mention of any correspondence with Tenniel. Unlike Furniss, whose helpfulness seems to have impressed the young biographer, it is probable that Tenniel sent him nothing more than the photographic portrait of himself, very dignified in frock coat, that appears on page 128 of Collingwood’s book. The statement itself doesn’t agree with the facts. The abandonment of Alice’s puffed horsehair crinoline (shown in the first *Looking-Glass* proofs) for a party skirt with overskirts was a change in concept rather than style (the revised skirt is almost as bouffant); and from preliminary to final, Tenniel’s drawings of the White Knight show no “whiskers”—whiskers in Victorian times meaning a growth of hair on the sides of the face. On the other hand, Carroll had forewarned Furniss regarding Sylvie’s costume, “I hate the crinoline fashion,” and had complained of Furniss’s portrayal of two male characters that one appeared far too old and that he did not like the other’s hair.<sup>7</sup> In any case the Collingwood statement, even if true, would not in itself affirm that there had been a contentious relationship between the two men. It only seems to do so when quoted in support of that allegation.

These questions dealt with, there is sufficient material directly traceable to Carroll and Tenniel to reconstruct their thirty-four-year association. From their letters, Carroll’s diary entries, and the recollections of others, it appears to have been satisfactory in every way. They coordinated closely on all aspects of the work, Carroll benefiting from Tenniel’s long experience with authors,

publishers, and engravers, and they adjusted amicably to one another's wishes. After Tenniel, for reasons having nothing to do with Carroll, curtailed his illustrating of books, they remained friends and associates until the end of Carroll's life.

### The Working Arrangement

At first Carroll, whose amateur drawings showed some talent for the grotesque, had planned to publish his children's book with his own illustrations. To that end in July 1863 he brought a trial drawing on wood to be engraved by a Mr. Jewitt, who had agreed to "improving on it a little"—probably with respect to some faulty anatomy pointed out to Carroll several days before by the sculptor Thomas Woolner. By December Carroll concluded that the result "would not be satisfactory after all."<sup>8</sup>

In his letter to Taylor, Carroll had proposed sending Tenniel his manuscript "to look over, not that he should at all follow my pictures, but simply to give him an idea of the sort of thing I want." Tenniel would have seen the manuscript before giving Carroll his consent on 5 April 1864. As Carroll did not complete his pictures until September of that year, the manuscript Tenniel saw would have been only partially illustrated. This may account for the two main compositional parallels between his pictures and Carroll's—the scenes that Carroll identified as "Splash" and "Cucumber Frame"—falling in the first third of the book. Of course, Carroll may have brought his fully illustrated manuscript with him when they met again on 12 October, the day on which they agreed to "about thirty-four pictures." In any case, the correlation between the subjects themselves (about 75 percent) is certainly not remarkable for so densely illustrated a book.<sup>9</sup>

As shown in his letters to writers Tupper and Cholmondeley-Pennell and to publishers George Bentley and the Dalziels, it had been Tenniel's practice to select subjects from the texts and to determine the treatment, sizes, and placement of his cuts. His letter to Carroll on 8 March 1865 shows that the same method applied here:

Dear Mr. Dodgson,

I cannot see your objection to the page as at present arranged, but if you think it would be better to place the picture further on in the text, do it by all means. The "two Footmen" picture is certainly too large to head a chapter. Could you manage to let me have the text of "A Mad Tea-party" for a day or two? There is much more in it than my copy contains. The subjects I have selected from it are—The Hatter asking the riddle; which will do equally well for any other question that he may ask: and can go anywhere:—and—the March Hare and the Hatter, putting the Dormouse into the tea-pot.

We now want an intermediate one, but I don't think "Twinkle twinkle" will do, as it comes close upon the first subject, ie, in *my copy*.

In great haste—

Yours very sincerely,

J. Tenniel

P.S. I am very glad you like the new pictures.

From Carroll's correspondence with later illustrators this seems, in fact, to have been the standard way of choosing subjects.<sup>10</sup> Surely it was the most sensible way, as the artist was the one to best visualize where he might make a good picture.

Of course there had to be mutual consent and accommodation. Carroll prevailed on "Twinkle twinkle," which appears as the second illustration in "A Mad Tea-Party." And in the second book, it was at Carroll's request that the chessboard landscape was recut to remove the figure of Alice.<sup>11</sup>

The tasks were split logically between them. Tenniel supplied sketches for Carroll's approval; he engaged the Dalziels and told them the size blocks he required, and after he had completed his drawings on the wood, he returned them for cutting. On receiving the engraver's proofs he sent them to Carroll for comment, himself "touching" them by brush with his minute corrections, which he explained in marginal notes. After the improvements were made Tenniel inspected the new proofs before he gave approval for the block to be sent on to Macmillan's for electrotyping and printing.<sup>12</sup>

The Dalziels' statement (made thirty-seven years later) that "During the process of completing the illustrations a great deal of correspondence, always of a most agreeable nature, took place with the Rev. Mr. Dodgson, as to their execution and finish" should be discounted as so much amiable twaddle as there would have been untold confusion had the Dalziels received instructions from two sources. Later, it would be necessary for Carroll himself to deal directly with the firm regarding the blocks for *Rhyme, and Reason* and *A Tangled Tale* as the artist, Arthur Burdett Frost, was then in America.<sup>13</sup>

Carroll made one known visit to the Dalziel shop when they were working on *Wonderland* (on 28 October 1864), afterward recording in his diary, "Mr. Dalziel showed me proofs of several of the pictures . . . and decidedly advised my printing from the wood-blocks." As the practice of printing from electrotypes (duplicate plates made by a process discovered in 1839) was fairly standard from around midcentury, it is probable that Carroll, meaning to write "decidedly advised [against] my printing from the wood-blocks," inadvertently left out the key word.<sup>14</sup>

It was Carroll's responsibility to deal directly with the publisher Alexander Macmillan on such matters as paper, page size, type, layout, printing, binding—some of these things being arranged first with Tenniel. In order

to communicate with both publisher and artist on chapter and page layout, Carroll would have needed the pagination guides that were, indeed, found among his papers—one for each of the books. In the case of the *Alices* these would have been especially needful as some pictures were planned to register on successive pages—for example, “cat in tree” and “cat’s grin.” Tenniel probably had a similar system of accounting for the placement of his cuts. His letter of 8 March 1865 (above) and another of 4 April [1870] in which he appends, “You shall have some more sizes in a few days,”<sup>15</sup> show that he furnished some of the information for Carroll’s guides. The suggestion that is often made by Carrollians that Carroll used these lists to impose his own ideas on Tenniel hardly seems flattering to the author, who was far too intelligent and too aware of his own inexperience to engage a seasoned professional only to dictate to him.

### Drawing for Carroll

Far from being “no easy man to work with,” his correspondence with illustrators shows Carroll to have encouraged their input, even with respect to his texts, and to have softened his own artistic proposals with such qualifiers as, “All these are merely suggestions: *you* will be a far better judge of the matter than I can be, and perhaps may think of some quite different, and better design”; “Don’t adopt any of it if you don’t like it”; “If you think you can find a better subject, I shall be quite disposed to defer to your judgment”; and “If you don’t think the proportions . . . pretty, you can alter them.” Contrast this with Dickens’s precise laying out of scenes for Hablôt K. Browne and the detailed changes he required.<sup>16</sup> Yet Dickens has no similar reputation for dictatorialness or overfastidiousness.

Carroll praised generously. To Holiday he pronounced the head of Hope (a personification originated in this instance by the artist) to be “a great success.” His early letters to Frost were interspersed with compliments such as “This is very charming”; “This is a *great* success, I think”; and “With such pictures the book will be famous at once.” He declared himself “charmed” with Furniss’s idea of dressing Sylvie in white and wrote, “If pictures could sell a book, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* would sell like wild-fire!” Of course, Carroll had to object to pictures that ignored his texts or were deficient in humor when that was required, or that failed to portray a character consistently from drawing to drawing.<sup>17</sup>

Still, it would be a mistake to take Carroll’s dealings with his later illustrators as the model for his working arrangement with Tenniel. Besides Tenniel’s greater experience and reputation there was their difference in age. Holiday, born seven years after Carroll, came next, and Frost, E. Gertrude Thomson, and Furniss ranged from eighteen to twenty-two years younger than the author. This was bound to have affected the relationship.<sup>18</sup>

While Carroll might call for modifications in Tenniel’s work (in one case

in “the face of the heroine” and in another in the chessboard landscape) these seem to have been infrequent. His delight in the *Alice* drawings is well documented: his invitations to Duckworth and others, as new sketches arrived from Tenniel, to come to his rooms and “feast . . . on the pictures”; his anxiety to procure Tenniel’s services for the second book; his displaying of the yet-unpublished *Looking-Glass* designs to the family of Lord Salisbury and the aristocratic company at Hatfield House; and, after *Looking-Glass*, his renewed search for “any artist worthy of succeeding to Tenniel’s place.” Later years would find him “chortling” to the young readers of *The Nursery Alice* over Tenniel’s animals, “Isn’t it a little *pet*?” and “Isn’t it a little *darling*?” and telling the historical painter Mrs. E. M. Ward that the success of *Alice* had been due “entirely to its beautiful illustrations.”<sup>19</sup>

Carroll’s subsequent illustrators were to be assessed by the standard set by Tenniel. Of Holiday, Carroll wrote in his 1874 diary, “If *only* he can draw grotesques . . . the grace and beauty of his pictures would quite rival Tenniel, I think.” From Frost, he required pictures with “the same amount of finish as Tenniel’s drawings usually have,” later telling him to consider himself engaged for the yet-unnamed *Sylvie and Bruno* “now that Tenniel is past hoping for.” When the quality of Frost’s work deteriorated with *A Tangled Tale*, Carroll suggested that he examine his pictures in juxtaposition with either the *Wonderland* or *Looking-Glass* cuts. Furniss would be similarly enjoined.<sup>20</sup>

If there was a drawback to working with Carroll it was his habit of starting his artists when he himself had not completed or, sometimes, not begun writing; giving them bits of text out of order; making frequent changes to his manuscripts; and exhibiting his perennial tendency to be behind his own optimistic schedules. In later years, referring to the “chaotic mass of fragments” from which *Sylvie and Bruno* had evolved, he would confess, “I *can’t* write a story straight on!”<sup>21</sup>

Although in 1863 and early 1864 Carroll had the Clarendon Press in Oxford supply him with trial pages in type for “*Alice’s Adventures*,” these would have represented writing that was still in flux. At first progress was slow. Carroll noted in May 1864 that he “sent to press a batch of manuscript from the first chapter.” A few days before, he had supplied Tenniel with the “first piece of slip set up” from the beginning of chapter three, but it would not be until August that he sent this chapter to Mr. Combe of Clarendon Press, possibly with the addition of the caucus race, which did not appear in his original manuscript. Before 12 October Carroll seems to have had a shorter book in mind, more on the order of the first version, as may be shown by the trial title pages for 1864, which announced only twenty illustrations. In mid-December Carroll wrote Macmillan that he had sent him “the whole” of his “little book in slip.” But he was to have been further inspired, for next March he had a more complete version of “A Mad Tea-Party” than did Ten-

niel (see above), which implies that he had recently worked on this chapter. From Carroll's notation, "20 June 1865,—sent last portion marked press," it appears that he revised and expanded the text right up to the printing deadline, increasing the final version by two entirely new chapters. This would have entailed considerable revision as the new characters—the Cheshire Cat, Duchess, Hatter—reappear in later chapters. As for the expanded length, the collector Justin Schiller places the final word count at 26,708 as opposed to 12,715 in the original manuscript.<sup>22</sup>

*Looking-Glass* saw the same disparity between wish and actuality. With his usual enthusiasm, Carroll first projected a publication date of Christmas 1867. But he did not complete the manuscript until 4 January 1871.<sup>23</sup> Tenniel's letter of the previous April reveals the still-fluid state of the plot:

My dear Dodgson,

I should have written sooner but I have been a good deal worried in various ways.

I would infinitely rather give no opinion as to what would be best left out in the book—but since you put the question point-blank, I am bound to say—supposing excision somewhere to be absolutely necessary—that the Railway scene never *did* strike me as being *very* strong, and that I think it might be sacrificed without much repining—besides—there is no subject down in illustration of it in the condensed list.

Please let me know to what extent you have used—or intend using—the *pruning knife*—my great fear is that all this indecision and revision will interfere fatally with the progress of the book.

In haste to even post

Yours sincerely  
J Tenniel

You shall have some more sizes in a few days.<sup>24</sup>

Carroll was still struggling with his plot in June of 1870, as shown in Tenniel's better-known letter of the first, in which he recommended that Carroll have Alice lay hold of the Goat's beard when the railway carriage rises up in the air, and that he excise the "wasp chapter"—suggestions that were both taken up. This writing pattern would be repeated for Carroll's later books.

### A Curious Fact

After *Looking-Glass*, Tenniel terminated his illustrating of books, with the exception of *Punch's Pocket Book* (which appeared annually through 1881), two drawings that he contributed gratis to S. C. Hall's temperance books, and a few designs for a projected Shakespeare. In response to Carroll's proposal that he illustrate another of his books, Tenniel responded, "It is a curious fact that with *Through the Looking-Glass* the faculty of making draw-



ings for book illustration departed from me, and, notwithstanding all sorts of tempting inducements, I have done nothing in that direction since.” Certainly, much has been made of this, although Tenniel gave no indication that he had ceased illustrating *because of Looking-Glass*. His continued good relations with Carroll are shown by Tenniel’s consent in 1875 to draw a frontispiece for “Alice’s Puzzle-Book” (a project that failed to materialize) and his work on *The Nursery Alice* in the 1880s.<sup>25</sup>

Actually, Tenniel had greatly curtailed his work (outside of *Punch*) after *Wonderland*, doing only thirty-one illustrations in the five years between the two *Alices*. Five days after Carroll recorded that *Looking-Glass* was “now printing off rapidly,” Tenniel turned down a “very flattering proposal” from the publisher George Bentley on the grounds that painting would henceforth occupy his free time. True to his word, Tenniel (who as early as 1863 had confided his wish to resume painting to his *Punch* colleagues) returned to his exhibition work and was subsequently elected to the Institute of Painters in Water-Colours. Another “inducement” that he rejected in this period was the opportunity to take up where Leech had left off and illustrate a third volume of *The Comic History of England* for Bradbury and Agnew.<sup>26</sup>

A still more compelling reason for Tenniel’s cessation of outside work may have been the fragility of his vision. For thirty years he had strained his one functional eye; in 1864 he revealed his fear of going blind from all his close work to his comrades at the *Punch* table.<sup>27</sup> Understandably, he would husband the sight remaining to him.

### Fees and Benefits

Some have suggested that Tenniel, and not Carroll, was the more difficult co-worker, taking an inordinate amount of time with his illustrations and requiring a costly reprinting of the first book. But the fact is, from a pecuniary perspective alone, Carroll could hardly have been more fortunate. Tenniel’s fee for the forty-two *Wonderland* pictures was £138, or about £3 5s. 8d. apiece. Had he adhered to his scale of charges for *Once a Week* or for *The Ingoldsby Legends*, his total would have been around £230. This suggests that—as he and Leech had done when illustrating H. Cholmondeley-Pennell’s *Puck on Pegasus* three years previously—Tenniel lowered his rates to help a fledgling author. This allowed Carroll, who had initially proposed, via Taylor, “a dozen woodcuts. . . . done in pure outline, or nearly so,” the forty-two finished drawings that he got. It may, in fact, have given him the liberty to expand his text. Comparing with the usual charges of Carroll’s subsequent and less-experienced illustrators: Frost would have required around £170 for *Wonderland*; E. Gertrude Thomson £176; and Furniss, with rates ranging from five to fifteen guineas per design, almost three times as much as Tenniel.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, Tenniel’s low figure seems to have included an outright sale of copyright; at least there is no indication that his permission was sought

for the reuse of his designs in jigsaw puzzles, playing cards, songbook wrappers, biscuit tins, calendars, wallpaper, posters and book for Savile Clarke's play "Alice in Wonderland," Carroll's "Wonderland" Postage-Stamp Case, *The Nursery Alice*, or lantern slides. Tenniel himself was careless of such things, informing A. W. Mackenzie, in the month after Carroll's death, that Mackenzie's lady friend was "welcome to make a Calendar out of" his "'Alice' designs," but typically responding on receipt of the published calendar in the next year, "I venture to hope that you do not expect me to go into transports of admiration over the 'reproduction'—which might certainly have been better."<sup>29</sup>

Although Carroll did not usually exact payment from others for the use of Tenniel's pictures, he must have been aware that the growing *Alice* industry served to publicize his books. Yet some sort of remuneration to artists when a work was used for purposes additional to the original one was not unknown. For example, Bradbury and Evans's republication of Doyle's *Punch* series "Manners and Customs of ye Englishe" in book form led to a nineteen-year dispute with the artist during which the publishers did not entirely discount Doyle's claim. A similar embroilment in the nineties followed the firm's sale of a drawing by Furniss to Pears' Soap.<sup>30</sup>

Tenniel's reputation alone was a great asset to the little-known Carroll. Review after review included such comments as "No less than (42) pictures by John Tenniel"; "When we add that it is . . . illustrated by Tenniel, the great art-draftsman of *Punch*, we have said enough"; "Forty-two illustrations due to the practic'd pencil of John Tenniel, and that fact itself should be a strong recommendation"; and "Forty-two illustrations by Tenniel! why there needs nothing else to sell this book, one would think." Finally, the *Illustrated Times* (one of the few papers to pan Carroll's story) considered that its best hope of success lay in Tenniel's drawings.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, being conversant with book production, Tenniel could relieve Carroll of such responsibilities as would later plague him with his other illustrators. The advantage of this was soon apparent when Henry Holiday, a designer of stained glass and a painter, failed to mark the proofs of *The Hunting of the Snark* for the printers. When confusion ensued as to the order and placement of the pictures, Macmillan wrote to Carroll, "I suppose that in the former books you worked with Tenniel who is familiar with these things." Whereas Tenniel worked directly with his engravers, this chore fell to Carroll in the case of Frost's pictures. It seems from Carroll's correspondence that it was also his responsibility to work with Swain on the *Sylvie and Bruno* blocks. Unforeseen problems arose. Lacking the feedback from Frost that he would have received from Tenniel, Carroll allowed the poem "The Three Voices" to become "overpictured"; even more worrisome, he discovered that Thomson and later Furniss had both drawn their illustrations too large to reduce favorably to the sizes planned.<sup>32</sup>