



An 1862 Alice: "Cross purposes"; or, "Which dreamed it?"

Citation

Wolff, Robert Lee. 1975. An 1862 Alice: "Cross purposes"; or, "Which dreamed it?". Harvard Library Bulletin XXIII (2), April 1975: 203-211.

Permanent link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364261>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

An 1862 Alice: "Cross Purposes"; or, *Which Dreamed It?*

Robert Lee Wolff

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a little girl named Alice, who was complaining half-aloud in her canopied bed one evening because the rosy light of sunset was dying down and everything was turning gray. When the tiny fairy Peaseblossom appeared and invited Alice to go with her on a trip into the sunset, Alice accepted the invitation, and began to get up. Suddenly

she found that she was no bigger than the fairy; and when she stood up on the counterpane, the bed looked like a great hall with a painted ceiling. As she walked towards Peaseblossom, she stumbled several times over the tufts that made the pattern. But the fairy took her by the hand and led her towards the foot of the bed. Long before they reached it, however, Alice saw that the fairy was a tall, slender lady, and that she herself was quite her own size. What she had taken for tufts on the counterpane were really bushes of furze, and broom, and heather, on the side of a slope.

They are in the countryside, and off on their adventures.

The passage is arresting when one remembers Alice's namesake, whose frequent changes of size and their accompanying dislocations have prompted so much comment from psychologists. *This* Alice has been caught twice while she is shrinking: first when she has shrunk to the size of Peaseblossom, and again when the process is complete, and she has become the proper size relative to Peaseblossom in her new incarnation: a little girl accompanying a fairy who is a grown-up. Our Alice is the heroine of a fairy tale called "Cross Purposes," written by George MacDonald (1825-1905), novelist and mystic, now remembered chiefly for his children's stories, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), and *The Princess and Curdie* (1878, 1882), and for his two remarkable dream-narratives for adults, *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895). "Cross Purposes" appeared in *Dealings with the Fairies*, a small volume of MacDonald's collected stories, in 1867, two years after *Alice in Wonderland* was

first published. So, on an earlier occasion, when writing about MacDonald's work, I quite naturally pointed out that in this passage he was imitating the *Alice* of his good friend Lewis Carroll. It was true, I noted, that, before he had met Carroll and long before *Alice*, MacDonald in *Phantastes* had got the hero out of his bedroom, into his dreams, and away into the scenery of fairyland with similar skill. But in "Cross Purposes" the size-changes and the identity of name, I assumed, were borrowed from Lewis Carroll.¹

There has, however, just come to hand a set of *Beeton's Christmas Annuals* — a popular magazine published once each year at Christmas — beginning with the first number, for 1860. In the number for the third season — Christmas 1862 — George MacDonald's "Cross Purposes" appears: its hitherto unrecorded first publication. The *Christmas Annuals* went on public sale about 1 December, and were distributed to newsagents and booksellers well before that in preparation for very large sales running to tens of thousands of copies. Even given the speed and docility of London printers in the 1860s, each number would have had to go to press no later than 15 October. And of course any story scheduled for publication in it would have had to be completed considerably earlier than that. So we are reasonably safe in conjecturing that George MacDonald had actually completed "Cross Purposes" by early October 1862 at the latest. If the editor of *Beeton's Christmas Annuals* was as exigent as other editors of similar publications, July or August 1862 would be an even more probable date.²

¹ Quotation from George MacDonald, *Dealings with the Fairies* (London: Strahan, 1867), pp. 210–211. The story was later reprinted in the ten-volume *Works of Fancy and Imagination* (London: Strahan, 1871), IX, 3–90, re-issued in 1876 and 1884. It has recently come back into print in George MacDonald, *The Gifts of the Child Christ. Fairytales and Stories for the Childlike*, ed. Glenn Edward Sadler (London and Oxford: A. R. Mowbray, 1973), I, 179–198. For a recent collection of essays on Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, including both Freudian and Jungian contributions and a useful bibliography, see Robert Phillips, ed., *Aspects of Alice. Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as Seen through the Critics' Looking-Glasses* (London: Gollancz, 1972). For my earlier comments on "Cross Purposes," Robert Lee Wolf, *The Golden Key. A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 128–129. Both Freudian and Jungian concepts were used in discussing MacDonald's life and writing.

² The standard bibliography of MacDonald is J. M. Bulloch, "A Bibliography of George MacDonald," *Aberdeen University Library Bulletin*, V:30 (February 1925), 679–747, reprinted in an edition of fifty copies as *A Centennial Bibliography of George MacDonald* (Aberdeen: University Press, 1925). The entry on "Cross



PLATE I

GEORGE MACDONALD, A PHOTOGRAPH BY LEWIS CARROLL, 1862,
FROM GEORGE MACDONALD AND HIS WIFE, BY GREVILLE MACDONALD, M.D.
(NEW YORK: THE DIAL PRESS INCORPORATED, 1924)

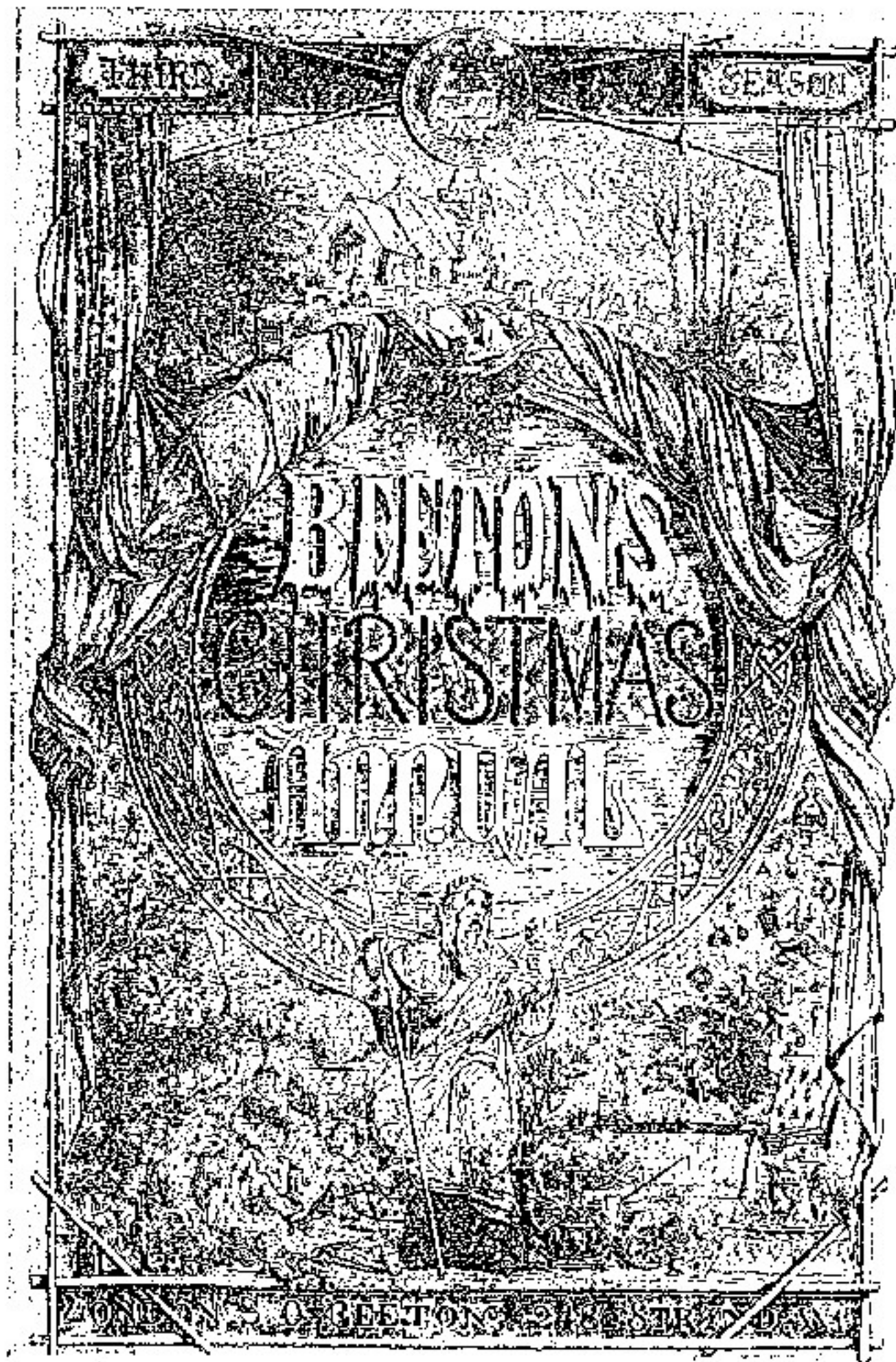


PLATE II

BEETON'S CHRISTMAS ANNUAL, THIRD SEASON, [1862]: OUTSIDE FRONT COVER

This renders it impossible any longer to assert that MacDonald was imitating Carroll's *Alice* when he made his Alice change her size. Carroll told the original version of *Alice's Adventures Underground* to the three Liddell girls and Canon Duckworth on the picnic of 4 July 1862. But he did not begin to write it down until 13 November 1862, well after "Cross Purposes" had been finished. He did not complete it until about 10 February 1863. And soon afterwards he gave it to the MacDonald family to read. On 9 May 1863, he wrote in his diary, "Heard from Mrs. MacDonald about *Alice's Adventures Underground*, which I had lent them to read, and which they wish me to publish." George MacDonald's son, Greville, born in 1856, twice long afterwards told in print how the MacDonald children's beloved "Uncle Dodgson" had asked George MacDonald's opinion of his manuscript, "illustrated with pen-and-ink sketches by himself and minutely penned in printing characters." MacDonald suggested that his wife read the story to their children as an experiment. Greville recalled that — aged six — he had "exclaimed that there ought to be sixty thousand volumes of it." He did, however, resent the sudden ending precipitated by Alice's discovery (and announcement) that the characters were all a pack of cards. And Lewis Carroll, who did not like little boys as a usual thing, certainly made an exception for Greville.³

"Purposes" appears on p. 15 of the reprint and mentions no periodical appearance before book publication in 1867. Bulloch's work is thorough, and I relied on it in writing my book. But "Cross Purposes" first appeared on pp. 58-63 (small print, double columns) in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. (*Third Season*) Edited by the Publisher. (London: S. O. Beeton, [1862]). While there is no date on the title page, the date 1862 is a certainty. Each issue of the *Annual*, beginning with the first, was published with an inserted beautifully-illuminated "Almanac": i.e. a calendar, with all Church holidays noted, for the coming year. The set of *Annuals* has these Almanacs preserved, and that in the number for the third season is for 1863; so the number was issued for Christmas, 1862. In the issue for the first season there is no Almanac, but in its place a voucher, dated 8 December 1860 (further evidence, if any were needed, for the date of 1862 for the third season), in which the publisher, S. O. Beeton, explains that 20,000 copies of the *Annual* with the Almanac had already been sold, and that the supply of Almanacs was temporarily exhausted. The voucher entitled a purchaser of the *Annual* to obtain a free Almanac from his bookseller, when they were again available. If 20,000 copies had been sold by 8 December 1860, the date of 1 December for public sale is surely a conservative estimate. As for the time when manuscripts were due, the unpublished manuscript diaries of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, who between 1878 and 1892 edited her own Christmas annual, *The Mistletoe Bough*, show that she had all copy for each Christmas issue available for editing by the previous August.

³W. H. Bond, "The Publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*," HAR-

True, Lewis Carroll and the MacDonalds were intimate friends, and it was natural for him to give them his manuscript to read. But for the first time it is now clear that he did so two months *after* George MacDonald's "Cross Purposes" had been published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for 1862. So it is plausible to suggest that Carroll had read "Cross Purposes," and had been struck by the heroine's name and sudden double shrinkage. Carroll's heroine had to be named Alice after Alice Liddell; so that was pure coincidence; but he may possibly have borrowed the contractions of George MacDonald's Alice. And if he did not borrow them, he must have been astonished, on reading "Cross Purposes," to find his friend independently working the same vein of fantasy. Would he not — before going to a publisher — have been still more anxious to share with George MacDonald his discovery that their imaginations had been busy with the same phenomena? So while it cannot be proved that Carroll was inspired by "Cross Purposes" or "cleared" his *Alice* with MacDonald before publishing it, it is surely possible. In any case his far more athletic heroine did not begin to change her size on paper until after MacDonald's Alice had already done so.¹

YARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, X:3 (Autumn 1956), 306-324, gives the chronology for the early progress of *Alice* summarized here. In addition, see Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1924), p. 342, and *Reminiscences of a Specialist* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932), pp. 15-16. When the six-year-old Greville was sitting to the sculptor, Alexander Munro, who used his head as a model for the *Boy Riding a Dolphin* fountain in Hyde Park, Lewis Carroll pointed out to the child how useful it would be if his head were actually made of marble: he would never have to comb his hair or try to learn his lessons. And Carroll sketched Greville, holding his new marble head in his hands, and terrifying Munro with it.

¹ The remainder of "Cross Purposes" is very different from *Alice*, except insofar as the heroine's lengthy adventures prove to be a dream that had lasted only a few moments, since the sunset light has not yet altogether faded when she awakens. MacDonald made his Alice a squire's daughter and a "silly" child with that special sanctity that he, like Wordsworth, attributed to the slow-witted. On her trip to fairyland she falls in love with a poor village boy, from whom she separates at once after their return to their homes. Only in fairyland can there be a successful love affair across class lines.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

MADELINE ROWSE GLEASON was described by Professor W. K. Jordan, in a preface written in 1967, as one "who has worked with me on all my books for almost thirty years."

KATHERINE SCHALL JARVIS is an editorial assistant for the *Bibliography of American Literature* which was being compiled under the direction of Jacob Blanck until his death on 23 December 1974.

WILBUR KITCHENER JORDAN, Leroy B. Williams Professor of History and Political Economy, *Emeritus*, at Harvard and former President (1943-1960) of Radcliffe College, has written many articles and books, including *The Development of Religious Toleration in England* (4 vols., 1932-40) and *Edward VI* (2 vols., 1968-70).

RICHARD S. KENNEDY is Professor of English at Temple University; his Harvard dissertation (1953) was a critical bibliography of Thomas Wolfe, he contributed "Thomas Wolfe at Harvard, 1920-1923," to the 1950 volume of the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, and his other writings include *The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe*, which was published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1962.

RUSHWORTH M. KIDDER, Assistant Professor of English at Wichita State University, is the author of "Religious Imagery in the Poetry of Dylan Thomas," a Columbia University dissertation (1969).

EDWARD A. LANGHANS is Associate Professor of Drama at the University of Hawaii; his dissertation at Yale (1955) was entitled "Staging Practices in the Restoration Theatre, 1660-1682."

ROBERT LEE WOLFF, Coolidge Professor of History at Harvard, has written books and articles on the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires and on the Victorian novel; his writings on the latter subject include contributions to the 1959 and 1974 volumes of the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN and three books: *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (1961), *Strange Stories* (1971), and *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (soon to be published).