

Foreword

Here is a collection of twenty letters and acrostics written by Lewis Carroll to his friends. Lewis Carroll, the author of the *Alice's adventures in wonderland*, wrote hundreds of letters to his friends. These letters are enjoyed by children and adults alike to this day. They fascinate and challenge the mathematical, logical and creative side of the brain.

This compilation includes some of the rarest letters that have not been re-printed in the popular books.

Enjoy!

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July 3, 1880

My dear Dora

So E. D. is de rigueur? Very good. It is not the only E. D. I have met with possessing this character. But why 'of course'? Are there no exceptions? Surely, if you go to morning parties in evening dress (which you do, you know), why not to evening parties in morning dress?

Anyhow, I have been invited to three evening parties in London this year, in each of which 'Morning Dress' was specified.

Again, doctors (not that I am a real one only an amateur) must always be in trim for an instant summons to a patient. And when you invite a doctor to dinner (say), do you not always add 'Morning Dress'? (I grant you it is done by initials in this case. And perhaps you will say you don't understand M.D. to stand for 'Morning Dress'? Then take a few lessons in elementary spelling.)

Aye, and many and many a time have I received invitations to evening parties wherein the actual colours of the Morning Dress expected were stated! For instance, 'Red Scarf: Vest, Pink.' That is a very common form, though it is usually (I grant you) expressed by initials.

But I spare you. No doubt you are by this time duly ashamed of your too-sweeping assertion, and anxious to apologise. Will you plead that you know not how to apologise, and that ladies never do apologise to gentlemen? Then take a few lessons in elementary manners.

Yours affect.,

Lewis Carroll.

December 15, 1875

My dear Magdalen, — I want to explain to you why I did not call yesterday. I was sorry to miss you, but you see I had so many conversations on the way. I tried to explain to the people in the street that I was going to see you, but they wouldn't listen; they said they were in a hurry, which was rude. At last I met a wheelbarrow that I thought would attend to me, but I couldn't make out what was in it. I saw some features at first, then I looked through a telescope, and found it was a countenance; then I looked through a microscope, and found it was a face! I thought it was father like me, so I fetched a large looking-glass to make sure,

and then to my great joy I found it was me. We shook hands, and were just beginning to talk, when myself came up and joined us, and we had quite a pleasant conversation. I said, "Do you remember when we all met at Sandown?" and myself said, "It was very jolly there; there was a child called Magdalen," and me said, "I used to like her a little; not much, you know—only a little." Then it was time for us to go to the train, and who do you think came to the station to see us off? You would never guess, so I must tell you. They were two very dear friends of mine, who happen to be here just now, and beg to be allowed to sign this letter as your affectionate friends,

Lewis Carroll and C.L. Dodgson.

August 22, 1869

My Dear Isabel,—Though I have only been acquainted with you for fifteen minutes, yet, as there is no one else in Reading I have known so long, I hope you will not mind my troubling you. Before I met you in the Gardens yesterday I bought some old books at a shop in Reading, which I left to be called for, and had not time to go back for them. I didn't even remark the name of the shop, but I can tell where it was, and if you know the name of the woman who keeps the shop, and would put it into the blank I have left in this note, and direct it to her I should be much obliged A friend of mine, called Mr. Lewis Carroll,

tells me he means to send you a book. He is a very dear friend of mine. I have known him all my life (we are the same age) and have never left him. Of course he was with me in the Gardens, not a yard off—even while I was drawing those puzzles for you. I wonder if you saw him?

Your fifteen-minute friend,

C.L. Dodgson.

Have you succeeded in drawing the three squares?"

January 31st, 1855

My Dear Henrietta,

My Dear Edwin,

I am very much obliged by your nice little birthday gift — it was much better than a cane would have been — I have got it on my watch-chain, but the Dean has not yet remarked it.

My one pupil has begun his work with me, and I will give you a description how the lecture is conducted. It is the most important point, you know, that the tutor should be dignified and at a distance from the pupil, and that the pupil should be as much as possible degraded.

Otherwise, you know, they are not humble enough.

So I sit at the further end of the room ; outside the door (which is shut) sits the scout; outside the outer door (also shut) sits the sub-scout: half-way downstairs sits the sub-sub-scout; and down in the yard sits the pupil.

The questions are shouted from one to the other, and the answers come back in the same way — it is rather confusing till you are well used to it. The lecture goes on something like this:

Tutor. What is twice three ?

Scout. What's a rice tree?

Sub-Scout. When is ice free?

Sub-sub-Scout. What's a nice fee?

Pupil (timidly). Half a guinea!

Sub-sub-Scout. Can't forge any!

Sub-Scout. Ho for Jinny!

Scout. Don't be a ninny!

Tutor (looks offended, but tries another question). Divide a hundred by twelve!

Scout. Provide wonderful bells!

Sub-Scout. Go ride under it yourself!

Sub-sub-Scout. Deride the dunder-headed elf!

Pupil (surprised). Who do you mean?

Sub-sub-Scout. Doings between!

Sub-Scout. Blue is the screen!

Scout. Soup-tureen!

And so the lecture proceeds.

Such is Life.

from

Your most affect. brother,

Charles L. Dodgson

Feb. 10, 1882

My Dear Birdie,

As are the feelings of the old lady who, after feeding her canary and going out for a walk, finds the cage entirely filled on her return, with a live turkey— or of the old gentleman who, after chaining up a small terrier overnight, finds a hippopotamus raging round the kennel in the morning —such are my feelings when, trying to recall the memory of a small child who went to wade in the sea at Sandown, I meet with the astonishing photograph of the same microcosm suddenly expanded into a tall young person, whom I should be too shy to look at, even with the telescope which would no doubt be necessary to get any distinct idea of her smile, or at any rate to satisfy oneself whether she had eyebrows or not!

There that long sentence has exhausted me, and I have only strength to say, "Thank you very sincerely for the two photographs," —they are terribly lifelike! Are you going to be at Sandown next summer? It is just possible I may be running over there for two or three days; but Eastbourne is always my head-quarters now.

Believe me, yours affectionately,

C. L. Dodgson.

"Birdie" was Florence Balfour

May 23, 1864

My Dear Child,

It's been so frightfully hot here that been almost too weak to hold a pen, and even if I had been able, there was no ink — it had all evaporated into a cloud of black steam, and in that state it has been floating about the room, inking the walls and ceiling; till they're hardly fit to be seen: to-day it is cooler, and a little has come back into the ink-bottle in the form of black snow — there will soon be enough for me to write and order those photographs your Mamma wants.

This hot weather makes me very sad and sulky: I can hardly keep my temper sometimes. For instance, just now the Bishop of Oxford came to see me — it was a civil thing to do, and he meant no harm, poor man: but I was so provoked at his coming in that I threw a book at his head, which I am afraid hurt him a good deal — (Mem: this isn't quite true — so you needn't believe it — Don't be in such a hurry to believe next time — I'll tell you why — If you set to work to believe everything, you will tire out the muscles of your mind, and then you'll be so weak you won't be able to believe the simplest true things. Only last week a friend of mine set to work to believe Jack-the-giant-killer. He managed to do it, but he was so exhausted by it that when I told him it was raining (which was true) he couldn't believe it, but rushed out into the street without his hat or umbrella, the consequence of which was his hair got seriously damp, and one curl didn't recover its right shape for nearly two days. (Mem: some of that is not quite true, I'm afraid —).

Will you tell Greville I am getting on with his picture (to go into the oval frame, you know) and I hope to send it in a day or two — Also tell your Mamma that I'm sorry to say that none of my sisters are coming to London this summer. With my kind regards to your Papa and Mamma, and love to you and the other infants, I remain

your affectionate Friend,

Charles L. Dodgson

Lewis Carroll wrote this letter to Mary McDonald

Dec 11, 1868

My Dear Dolly, — I'm going to send your Papa a little present this Christmas, which I daresay you may like to look at: it consists of some thin slices of dried vegetables that somebody has found a way of preparing so that it doesn't come to pieces easily: they are marked in a sort of pattern with some chemical stuff or other, and fastened between sheets of pasteboard to preserve them. I believe the sort of thing isn't a new invention, but the markings of these are quite new: I inserted them myself.

... No more at present from

Your loving friend

C. L. Dodgson

The "present" was a copy of Phantasmagoria, the "thin slices" being the paper leaves, and the "markings"; the print.

January 1, 1895

... You are quite correct in saying it is a long time since you have heard from me: in fact, I find that I have not written to you since the 13th of last November. But what of that? You have access to the daily papers. Surely you can find out negatively, that I am all right! Go carefully through the list of bankruptcies; then run your eye down the police cases; and, if you fail to find my name anywhere, you can say to your mother in a tone of calm satisfaction, "Mr. Dodgson is going on well."

This letter was sent to Edith.

January 15, 1886

*Yes, my child, if all be well, I shall hope, and you may fear, that the train reaching
Hook at two eleven, will contain*

Your loving friend,

C.L. Dodgson.

Written on a scrap piece of paper, Lewis Carroll sent this to Gertrude Chataway.

March 8, 1880

My dear Ada, — (Isn't that your short name? "Adelaide" is all very well, but you see when one's dreadfully busy one hasn't time to write such long words— particularly when it takes one half an hour to remember how to spell it—and even then one has to go and get a dictionary to see if one has spelt it right, and of course the dictionary is in another room, at the top of a high bookcase—where it has been for months and months, and has got all covered with dust—so one has to get a duster first of all, and nearly choke oneself in dusting it—and when one has made out at last which is dictionary and which is dust, even then there's the job of remembering which end of the alphabet "A" comes—for one feels pretty certain it isn't in the middle—then one

has to go and wash one's hands before turning over the leaves—for they've got so thick with dust one hardly knows them by sight—and, as likely as not, the soap is lost, and the jug is empty, and there's no towel, and one has to spend hours and hours in finding things—and perhaps after all one has to go off to the shop to buy a new cake of soap—so, with all this bother, I hope you won't mind my writing it short and saying, "My dear Ada"). You said in your last letter you would like a likeness of me: so here it is, and I hope you will like it — I won't forget to call the next time but one I'm in Wallington.

Your very affectionate friend,

Lewis Carroll.

October 13, 1875

My Dear Gertrude, — *I never give birthday presents, but you see I do sometimes write a birthday letter: so, as I've just arrived here, I am writing this to wish you many and many a happy return of your birthday to-morrow. I will drink your health, if only I can remember, and if you don't mind—but perhaps you object? You see, if I were to sit by you at breakfast, and to drink your tea, you wouldn't like that, would you? You would say "Boo! hoo! Here's Mr. Dodgson's drunk all my tea, and I haven't got any left!" So I am very much afraid, next time Sybil looks for you, she'll find you sitting by the sad sea-wave, and crying "Boo! hoo! Here's Mr. Dodgson has drunk my health, and I haven't got any left!"*

And how it will puzzle Dr. Maund, when he is sent for to see you!" My dear Madam, I'm very sorry to say your little girl has got no health at all! I never saw such a thing in my life!" "Oh, I can easily explain it!" your mother will say. "You see she would go and make friends with a strange gentleman, and yesterday he drank her health!" "Well, Mrs. Chataway," he will say, "the only way to cure her is to wait till his next birthday, and then for her to drink his health."

And then we shall have changed healths. I wonder how you'll like mine! Oh, Gertrude, I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense!...

Your loving friend,

Lewis Carroll.

April 30, 1881

Hateful Spider, (You are quite right. It doesn't matter a bit how one begins a letter, nor, for the matter of that, how one goes on with it, or even how one ends it—and it comes awfully easy, after a bit, to write coldly—easier, if possible, than to write warmly. For instance, I have been writing to the Dean, on College business, and began the letter "Obscure Animalcule," and he is foolish enough to pretend to be angry about it, and to say it wasn't a proper style, and that he will propose to the Vice-Chancellor to expel me from the University: and it is all your fault!)

No, I fear I daren't send the precious book to your house: it was only lent me for myself and my cousin. But I daresay I shall have it, or a copy of it, with me at Eastbourne, and then, any day you happen to lounge in, by yourself, (I think I see you doing it!) just to amuse yourself with my books, or photographs, or orguINETTE, while I go on with my work, but still keeping one eye on you to see you do no mischief—why, I don't mind your reading a few lines of it, with one eye, with your other eye all the while beaming with gratitude on me. What did Amyatt think of "the Colonel"? A friend here tells me it is "utter rubbish"!

And so farewell,

ever scornfully yours,

C. L. D.

Jan 22, 1878

My Dear Jessie,

I liked your letter better than anything I have had for some time. I may as well just tell you a few of the things I like, and then, whenever you want to give me a birthday present (my birthday comes once every seven years, on the fifth Tuesday in April) you will know what to give me. Well, I like, very much indeed, a little mustard with a bit of beef spread thinly under it; and I like brown sugar—only it should have some apple pudding mixed with it to keep it from being too sweet; but perhaps what I like best of all is salt, with some soup poured over it. The use of the soup is to hinder the salt from being too dry; and it helps to melt it. Then there are other things I like; for instance, pins—only they should always have a cushion put round them to keep them warm.

And I like two or three handfuls of hair; only they should always have a little girl's head beneath them to grow on, or else whenever you open the door they get blown all over the room, and then they get lost, you know. Tell Sally it's all very well to say she can do the two thieves and the five apples, but can she do the fox and the goose and the bag of corn? That the man was bringing from market, and he had to get them over a river, and the boat was so tiny he could only take one across at a time; and he couldn't ever leave the fox and the goose together, for then the fox would eat the goose; and if he left the goose and the corn together, the goose would eat the corn. So the only things he could leave safely together were the fox and the corn, for you never see a fox eating corn, and you hardly ever see corn eating a fox. Ask her if she can do that puzzle.

I think I'll come and see you again—suppose we say once every two years; and in about ten years I really think we shall be good friends. Don't you think we shall? I shall be very glad to hear from you whenever you feel inclined to write, and from Sally too, if she likes to try her hand at writing. If she can't write with her hand, let her try with her foot. Neat footwriting is a very good thing. Give my love to her and Kate and Harry; only mind you keep a little for yourself.

Your affectionate friend

Lewis Carroll.

Feb 6, 1873

My Dear Mary,

Love to Lily, and very best wishes for her happiness on attaining the age of 21 — a very young age, as it seems to me. Why, last year I was double her age! And once I was three times her age, but when that was, I leave you to find out. It will be a nice arithmetical puzzle for those who like such things.

Also love to all,

Yours ever affly

C. L. Dodgson

1874

What remarkably wicked children you are! I don't think you would find in all history, even if you go back to the times of Nero and Heliogabalus, any instance of children so heartless and so entirely reckless about returning story-books. Now I think of it, neither Nero nor Heliogabalus ever failed to return any story-book they borrowed. That is certain, because they never borrowed any, and that again is certain because there were none printed in those days.

Affectionately yours,

C.L.D

This letter was sent to Julia and Ethel Arnold

Ap. 19. 1870

My Dear Child,

I took your letter and the book-marker to Mr. Lewis Carroll this morning. He sends you his thanks for the book-marker but he was Very unwilling to take it. "I meant the book for a present," he said: "I don't want anything in exchange!" However I persuaded him to take it at last. When he saw your letter he said you were too old for the book, and that I must have made a mistake about your age, he thought you might be "thirty" not "thirteen." "No child of thirteen ever wrote such a hand as that!" he cried. However I told him you certainly were a child, and that you had been to a very good school at the bottom of the sea.

He is writing another book about Alice, telling how she Went through the looking-glass into that wonderful house that you see in the looking-glass over the chimney-piece — but I don't know when it will be finished.

He sends you his kind regards, and I send mine to your Grandpapa and Grandmamma. I am glad you got home safe on Wednesday. Mr. Carroll says I ought to have seen you safe to your journey's end, and that he would have behaved better if he had been in my place!

Very truly Yrs

C. L. Dodgson.

Lewis Carroll wrote this letter to Miss Mary Marshall

May 15, 1869

My dear Isabel, — Words cannot tell how horrified, terrified, petrified (everything ending with "fied," including all my sisters here saying "fie!" when they heard of it) I was when I found that I had carried off your ticket to Guildford. I enquired directly I got there whether anything could be done, but found you must have arrived in London some time before I got here. So there was nothing to be done but tear my hair (there is almost none left now), weep, and surrender myself to the police.

I do hope you didn't suffer any inconvenience on account of my forgetfulness, but you see you would talk so all the way (though I begged you not) that you drove everything out of my head, including the very small portion of brain that is usually to be found there.

Miss Lloyd will never forgive me for it—of that I feel certain. But I have some hope that after many years, when you see me, an aged man on crutches, hobbling to your door, the sternness of your features may relax for a moment, and, holding out the forefinger of your left hand, you may bring yourself to say, "All is forgotten and forgiven."

I hardly dare ask what really happened at Paddington, whether the gentleman and lady, who were in the carriage, helped you out of the difficulty, or whether your maid had money enough, or whether you had to go to prison. If so, never mind: I'll do my best to get you out, and at any rate you shant be executed.

Seriously, I am so sorry for it, and with all sorts of apologies, I am sincerely yours,

C. L. Dodgson

While calling one day upon Mrs. Bremer, Lewis Carroll scribbled off the following double acrostic on the names of her two daughters, Trina and Freda –

Two little girls near London dwell,

More naughty than I like to tell.

Upon the lawn the hoops are seen:

The balls are rolling on the green. T u r F

The Thames is running deep and wide:

And boats are rowing on the tide. R i v e R

In winter-time, all in a row,

The happy skaters come and go. I c E

"Papa!" they cry, "Do let us stay!"

He does not speak, but says they may. N o D

"There is a land," he says, "my dear,

Which is too hot to skate, I fear." A f r i c A

Lewis Carroll once sent the following Double Acrostic to Edith Argles as a joke about her sister Dolly:

*I saw a child: even if blind,
I could have seen she was not kind. C r u e l*

*“My child,” said I, “don’t make that noise!
Here, choose among this heap of toys.” D o l l y*

*She said “I’ve tumbled in the river:
And that’s what makes me shake and shiver.” C o l D*

*“And what’s your name, my child?” said I.
“It’s Juliet, sir,” she made reply. R o m e O*

*“You know,” said she, “I hates my pa—
Never says nothing to my ma” — U n f i l i a L*

*“My child,” I cried, “you make me sad.
How can you be so very bad?” E v i L*

*At which she laughed in such a way,
I lost my hearing from that day. L o u d l Y*

Lewis Carroll wrote this unique double acrostic for *Gertrude Chataway*. The verses embody her name in two ways – by letters, and by syllables

***G**irt with a boyish garb for boyish task,
Eager she Wields her spade—yet loves as well
Rest on a friendly knee, the tale to ask
That he delights to tell.*

***R**ude spirits of the seething outer strife,
Unmeet to read her pure and simple spright,
Deem, if you list, such hours a Waste of life,
Empty of all delight!*

***C**hat on, sweet maid, and rescue from annoy
Hearts that by wiser talk are unbeguiled!
Ah, happy he who owns that tenderest joy,
The heart-love of a child!*

***A**way, fond thoughts, and vex my soul no more!
Work claims my wakeful nights, my busy days;
Albeit bright memories of that sunlit shore
Yet haunt my dreaming gaze!*