Hanging Round the Deanery, or Random Jottings of a Mathematics Tutor Touching Matters Not Wholly Mathematical

In Memoriam C.L.D.

We have the most absolutely splendid game here these days. It has endured for I-don't-know-how-many seasons, one-and-a-half at the least, quite outliving the game of Bowls and entirely outrunning the game of Plantation Road. We are not even much interested in the game of Bagley Wood – though Penvers goes up on occasion and brings us back a brace. As briskly as it ousted the game of Logic it flouted the game of Binsey – yet it is a game of both in its way. And as for the game of Chess, the game of Chess endures here as a vestige, no more, an hollow ritual its meaning and majesty foregone, an old religion, its fiends but fetishes. The teeny treen figurines comfort our fingers; but all the joy and the dole across the inglorious battleground is our new salvation and sanctification – the game of Little Girls.

Further introductory remarks touching Little Girls, and the game of same, its superiority to Logical propositions and its effect upon turf

Excellent is not too strong a word. Dashed excellent, Duckers would have us call it. Spiffing has also been proposed. Hanging Round the Deanery, March Hare's name for it, though he has assuredly borrowed the expression, with his whole cupboardful of colloquialisms, from Chittock his old Bedmaker. I must admit a partiality for the phrase, albeit I suspect its conjuring a fine sort of May skipping-ritual with boughs and blossom and bare Little toes, round-o-lay and derry-down, all of a green lawn, is not the picture Mrs Chittock meant to paint with it. Nor Marchington neither, hanging around is precisely his notion of strategy, he was a past master at Plantation Road (to say nothing of boringly unbeatable at Draughts) (or beatable, if that is worth boasting of or mentioning). It is in the way of being a philosophy with him.

Draughts indeed is scarcely considered a game any longer by those upon whom even Chess has relinquished its hold, even Logic loosed its tenure. Logical propositions have lost their power to charm, Logical contradictions to amuse, or bemuse. If I say what I mean do I mean what I say? Hardly ever, I should think. If Girls are pretty things are pretty things then Girls? If Girls have noses does it follow that they smell? if cabbages smell why do they not have noses? if Tycho had no nose how did *he* smell? It is all to no purpose, it is void. There are Little Girls in the world, and the world bows to their being. Lectures fall silent not two-thirds through, luncheon loses its taste nearly half-way across the plate, evening prayers (ah prayers) are begun but have

no middle, sleep is as-often-as-not unslept, dreams have no bottom. The game, the game is of Little Girls. The game of Little Girls is afoot.

Spring has revived it – like all sports it flags in the Winter, a Little – and we take up our positions by the garden gate, renewing our claims, rekindling our half-remembered hopes, re-toeing our crease. I'll have to be putting flags there, Duncraddle the old groundsman remarked. I pictured them fluttering about the arch, like a triumph or a visit from the Queen, or the Duke of Clarence (he is distinctly more likely to). But Duckers thinks he alluded to paving stones, where we wear out his grass as we hang around. We do it so much there is, I confess, a teasing Little bald patch, a tempting Little sock-potato, a tantalising glimpse of Nature's bareness bared. We do it so much we are known for it, renowned I might have said: Hanging Round the Deanery is recognised the length of Merton Street as a species of sophistication (I like to think), a refined *imbroglio* peculiar to Gentlemen Tutors of a certain delicacy of taste (not taken with the scrummage). We do it so much the Telegraph Boy came directly here when March got his telegram.

Some account of the situation pertaining to the status of claimants upon the persons of Little Girls, taking its start from an improvement in the prospects of one such, with speculations regarding a chart or list

His bachelor Uncle's demise was a stroke-of-fortune for March, for it brings him materially closer to his belovèd Celia. His father is now the next heir after another Uncle, who if not exactly a bachelor takes Little pleasure (as I understand it) in either his Wife or her Sister, nor yet their stout Housekeeper, and is not interested in Maidservants at all (though I can scarce believe it, of a pure-bred Anglo-German part-Norwegian and-a-bit-of-Greek member of the English aristocracy, with an American-Irish racehorse, an Arabian footman and an ample establishment) (it may be *vice versa* as regards horse and footman); no, Maids are a matter of indifference to him and March is the second son (of his father, that is, that is, March's father, not his Uncle's nor the footman's, so far as we infer) (nor the horse's). If only his brother would die (March's, that is, though obviously his father's too) or give his life nobly in the cause, for he is out in the Foothills; or contract a brief but incurable disease, for he is out in the Foothills; or fall off a precipice ... Oh it would be icing on the cake. It would be a cherry.

For the principal disadvantage we are at in our game, cherries aside, is the handicap of status. Even Penvers no more than teeters, teeters on the brim when it comes to the Dean's Wife's scales, being called Lord because he's the fourteenth (or something) son of his father. Which is not a very good excuse to be called Lord. I think the Dean would not himself be so correct (for I am almost sure it is correct); but his dear Mrs Dean has a definite pernicketyness when it comes to the titular honorifics, expectations and issue-number of the gentlemen who may apply (hope may we all, nay yearn, ah yearn, but these alone may apply) to mate with her Maidens, an hierarchy of hereditary suitability

all-mapped-out she has. I suspect she does have a map, or a diagram, a chart of suitable suitors, lettered in red or gold. She assuredly has a list.

A list, alas, the which we are not on. Unless, as I say, Lord Penvellasey (to accord him his rightful appellation) unless he lurks in the margins of same. Mr Marchington (oh cruel titular ordinariness, one might think him a Commoner) meanwhile hopes increasingly to be pencilled into said margins, but cannot suppose he is yet there. I am sure there are Dukes' sons at the head of it, this list or chart, though where they are Dukes of is less susceptible of speculation. The Prince of Wales, it is suggested, must take first position, but since he has but lately got himself one from across the water and may be viewed with her in any stereoscope I think the suggestion superfluous. At any rate, husbands have to be assigned prior to sorting out things like Mistresses and Maidservants, it is simple protocol. I am in Little doubt the Deanery Daughters will make capital Mistresses, when their time comes.

note Lord Fitzroy Something and Something-Else Penvellasey is his Lordship's approximate appellation entire. He derives the name from someone called Fitzroy, but the rest is a blur; he told us as much in hope of quelling the drollery that he was named after a barometer.

Continuation of a discourse anent the status of claimants upon the persons (hands would surely have been better) of Little Girls, with an instance, extending into a lament upon the lamentable neglect of Tutors in advancement to the Baronettage

Only a son of the higher-to-middle peerage and preferably a son-and-heir will do for Eliça. If not a Dukedom then an Earldom. To which end we fear the said Dean's said Wife has an understanding already for Viscount Wilmore to succeed. He has twice visited – a pale, fragile person with long hair, like someone the Royalists accidentally (if not deliberately) left behind when they departed hence in the 1640s. Pallor tending less to the Angelic than the ghostly, less pearly than grey. Her demeanour when they had him at high table serves notice that she means to have him at the altar table; though whether, being so out-of-his-century, he will survive to taste the sacrament is the more pressing question. We hope not of course, fervently, we are Roundheads in this regard. Though perchance the Little Viscountess (if she or rather he succeeds) (succeeds in passing her the pudding I mean) perhaps she will straightway be a Dowager, a Widow barely touched – for Eliça (or any one of them) will surely have him for breakfast and still be more than a Little peckish. Whençe her Mother will perceive the folly of digging up anaemic Viscounts of antiquated lineage to perpetuate her pulchritude, or her Daughter's, or her Daughters', and revisit the conclave of red-blooded Tutors who hang around her gate – surely.

Ah but if a Viscount and apparent heir to an Earl and no less, will serve for the bed and belly of Eliça, her firstborn, her Prize Heifer, her creamiest Cow, then for Çelia, the second, the runner-up, it needs must

be a reigning Viscount proper, or else an Earl's younger son or a son of such a son. And for Laçie a Baron or heir presumptive to the Barony. And Aliçe, Little Alice, Alice Little, number 5, must make do with a Baronet or the certain heir to a Baronetçy, or at bottom one aspiring to the Baronettage and with well-placed friends and relations to see to it. Which sometimes happens to professors and doctors and members of the Lower House, it is true, if they or their grandfathers have cultivated apt acquaintance, but is a calling but seldom awaiting the lowly Tutor or Chaplain, or idle loafer. And therein our handicap aforementioned, and our sorrow, or woe: woe is infinitely the better word for it.

Refining the equation for a new sort of rhomboid, or penning an epistle (not to say an ode) on bicircloids addressed to Mr Perigal, or baffling the regular respondents to the arithmetical column of the *Gentleman's Fortnightly Gazette* (or the *Ladies'*) (let it not be said the Deanery gate entertains opponents of the salon, we are all-for-it), or cramming the assinine head of a second son of a second son with what it needs retain but briefly to enter Her Majesty's Army: are things seldom known to earn the elevation required for a Dean's Wife with Daughters to dispose of to consent to one's being grafted to her shoots nor yet have one more than now-and-then to tea. Excepting when said assinine head is on a Prince, or when (I hear it occurs occasionally, in hybridising) the shoot is a frog. There *are* Princes about, nearly English and not-so English, with whom sadly or happily we lack acquaintance. But none of our Little tadpoles are frogs, they are most assuredly not, not a croaker among them, not a single green leg (at least with their hosiery removed, which is greatly to be preferred), they are every one a butterfly, each and every one of them a flutterer. Yes, even Irene.

Incomplete consideration of the numerical (or numerological) symmetry of the ages of Little Girls, giving way to contemplations upon Irene, as likewise upon her conception speculatively treated

Not that the game is not Mathematical. It is; though I expect all life is, the universe is, all St Aldate's is. But not everything is symmetrical. Donkin's universe aside, siblings are seldom exemplars in that respect, and sometimes they are all-over-the-place, or at the least lopsided; symmetry is rare, a rare quality, not all families can manage it, I suspect not all parents even attempt it. But our esteemed Dean and his likewise Wife value symmetry almost above anything: aficianados they are, nay they are devotees of it, votaries no less, and devotion, devotion conduces to a masterpiece. Like Michael Angelo. A masterpiece of Mathematical symmetry, just such are our four Little Girls. Seven nine eleven thirteen ... 40. Perfect beautiful symmetry. Seven thirteen ... 20, nine eleven ... 20. Symmetry *is* beautiful – it is not in the beholder's eye. It's like a Little Girl: no one but no one but could find her in every part and particular of her aught but beautiful and perfect and nice.

And in their midst the nominal 10, the Angel, the decimal, the Little Cherub, watching sweetly over them, as she did in life. A tithe it is, of

sorts, though doubled in cost – for an innocent Little Girl's soul is worth two of anyone's – so for every five Daughters you must pay one to god. A fifthing, I think I shall call it, when I venture a sermon upon the topic. A mite, a pure Little coin, a silver groat, maundy money which may not be spent, one puts it instead in the collection dish. Or in a pouch next the heart, a Little velvet purse made of softest textile, dyed. A tax of Sparta, let us call it, a Chinese bundle, a Dutch Niece. A lamb, a Little lamb. Abraham's Daughter with braids, obedient and trusting as he stands over her on the mountainside. With his cleaver. The flesh that is loaf: out of five you must lay one upon the stone.

The Dean's Wife herself knew not, nor knows, nor will know, nor ever needs to know (for god's purpose is unknowable, as we know, as well as Mathematical) why her biology faltered in the middle, or raced rather, beyond its perfect period, its proper harmony, its rhythm or metre, and produced the Little offering; the Reverend Dean may never know, needs never know (will certainly never remember if someone tells him) why he warmed to his Wife so urgently sooner, climbed the Deanery stairs so eager and cleft her that one time before time, or out of time, and made something exquisite thereby. For number 3 was exquisite, do not doubt it. She *was*. She was not a frog, oh cruel world that said so, no, nor yet a newt. She was not. She was a Cherub, a Little Angel. So delicate, so delicious, so much a delight, yet also a delict, so thus it was, that the only just claimant of her was god. Ah me. Amen.

Resumption of an explication of the Mathematical symmetry and numerological principles of the game of Little Girls, with correlations appertaining to participants therein, and some pertinent allusions

Duckers is 29 years of age, so his place in the game's equation is assured. Penvers we believe to be 31, March reputedly 33, Chester undeniably (and why would he?) a shrill 27. I admit to 30 rounds of the celestial volvelle, or ellipse, which places me certainly at the centre of our side, if not perhaps in the most favoured position, Mathematically or teleologically considered. 29 being 20+9 leaves 11, so the Duck gets dear Celia, and March's unending enmity all his days (should we choose to play the game that way); or else 29 being 20+9 might be thought to suggest 9 and the ravishing Lacie, Chester note (should we choose to play the game that way). 33 being 20+13 leaves 7, so the March Hare is perchance in his way the luckiest of all, 7 being surely the perfect age for a Little Girl, an Alice, *the* Alice; or 13, Eliça, *numero uno*, so he is perchançe the luckiest of all, 13 being surely the perfect age. 20+11 leaves 9, the ravishing Lacie, oh envy avaunt; or 11, dear Celia, dear dear Celia, dear dear. And 20+7 gives our junior member inheritance of the Kingdom, the Spanish heiress, Eliça, our *prima donna* of 13, the perfect age; or, *la donna minima* at 7, the perfect Aliçe, oh Alice. Damn his hide and QED.

It is not a good way to play the game. For it is somewhat pre-ordained, there is no chance and as Little skill in it: the youngest gets the oldest

and the oldest the youngest (or *vice versa*) and the poor ass in the middle – good evening – gets a peripherally fogged photograph of an Angel howsoever the sums are done. Needless to say being contràry Chester prefers Lacie (and who would not), Marchington pines for Celia (and who would not), Lord Penvellasey pants and slobbers after her highness the Heiress (a paragon – I feel I ought to have used the word earlier), and Duckworth dotes, fairly dotes on and even writes rhymes about the Tot, and draws Little pictures of her in his sleep. While I ... well, there's no need for me to draw pictures. Mine is etched upon glass by the sun, mine is ageless. I have no preference, no choice.

Choice and chance both have been toyed with. Normally the choice should be the Lady's, I think we are all happy with that proposition. But how to effect it: a form of the game that entails a free selection, or at any rate a selection. We are beset by rehearsals in which (using actors of our own company) each Girl has appeared to choose the same Tutor (Penvers, need I reveal); or Celia played by March has chosen herself (March), which cannot really be right; or the Tot played by Duckers has chosen someone we scarcely know from Exeter, which we concur is more plausible. So the play is all ruins. As for chance, "lucky dip" (a bran tub) has been proposed, and I was all-for-it as an exit from my *impasse* of being the pivot, or fulcrum (as we say when we err into experimental philosophy). The question then arose not, as one had expected, of probability but of mortality: whether Irene should be in the tub at all, being immortal. There was near universal objection to it; whereby the pot would proffer but four Prizes for five players.

note The idea of bringing in the Acland Girl has been mooted and is under the table, as they say. She is not a stranger to the Deanery garden, which is no bad thing, for her parents have placed her in the impossible position of being solitary but for brothers, who are all boys.

Digressive lucubration upon Sisters and the mensuration of same, with particular reference to particular Sisters, and remarks apropos their photography and nomenclature

I have five Sisters too. All living, oddly. I remember their names and birthdays ... Their names assuredly I remember (I have a mnemonic) (when I remember the mnemonic). I remember when each of them celebrates christmas, almost to the day, without fail, most years. They are quite grown, excepting one, though an inch above five foot minus or plus could barely be shared-out between them. I tried once, the measuring game, puellometry (or arguably sororometry) I might have called it, had I written a treatise; but they were not all that patient, not at all inclined to be still and treat it seriously, nor yet humorously. The results were desultory. Mensuration is held in indifference in the Palatine Counties, the more so by Females. Tiptoes and bow-legs and a singular amnesia of posture, of dame-school decorum, were the order-of-the-day whenever I used to appear with my scale, or my camera.

Averaging made them five, as I knew it would. It must, the five of them, it had to. But never have I been able to make beautiful symmetry of their ages. Nor to complete the pictorial inventory I set out upon, back when my mastery of the camera was too mature to have thought there would be quibbles, too innocent to have foreseen there could be qualms. I have grown reluctant, and unaccountably sensible, and have neglected the task. At any rate with four of them. I admit I tired of it a Little, even apart from qualms and quibbles, I wearied of persevering. Now I only think of it on Thursday afternoons in term, or during Autumn walks near Mesopotamia. Alas they are too old now, too too unchildlike to look upon it with disinterestedness. Photography, that is, being posed and exposed – they have quite simply grown out of it.

Nor of their names ... there again are we lacking, as with ages the requisite symmetry cannot be found. Though I have not given up the quest, for algebra was discovered to this purpose (or end), as surely as Pythagoras made-do without logarithms and Oughtred managed tolerably without an arithmometer (Laplace was not so lucky, and Babbage we never mention). Our parents named us all individually, my Sisters and I, whence we have each a distinct appellation. I do not mind it for myself; but for the symmetry of nomenclature my Sisters are all-of-a-jumble. I may be reconciled to their lack of interest in algebra (our parents', that is, though I suspect others of it too) but I continue astonished at their indifference to anagrams, their snubbing of acrostics, their veritable sticking-their-tongues-out at magic squares. Thus are they spoiled, my Sisters that is, and whether in the Palatinate or at some watering-hole one is obligated to nominate them variously.

Elucidatory disquisition upon the nomenclature of Little Girls, both individually and collectively considered, incorporating explicatory derivations of their respective supplementary appellations

But here, here "Alice" does for all, all our Little Girls here. "Girls, Little", the Daughters of the Deanery, Dean and Mrs Little and their Little Littles. Little Alice Little. They are all Alices and each an Alice. I call them Alice severally, and altogether, collectively. An Alice of Littles, a Little of Alice. A litany of Alices, a liturgy of Alices, a litter of Alices; a chatter of Littles, a flutter, a giggle, a pulchritude, a pondful ... I know, collective nouns are last-season. A boatload. Here our nomenclature has advantage, over against Sisters aforementioned, for the parents (or godparents) (are not godparents charged with the naming? so of right it is they we have to thank) they had the foresight to endow them each and all with a name at-once agile and economical. For Alice does for all, as I think I have stated: they are Alices every one. Eliça Celia Irene Lacie Alice. All four at any rate. The middle one, the Little Angel, was a mistake. A river? a river of Alices.

Like Cats however they have other names too. They must and they do. Supplementary (vulgarly called middle) ones, seldom utilised nor voiced, but essential considering their place in society. Alice Peabody,

Lacie Robertson, Irene ... well no, not Irene, she alas did not have a middle name, Celia Hargreaves, Eliça Mantova. They are family names of course, perforçe. Mrs Little's Mother was sired by an intrepid Irishman upon an exceedingly formidable Spanish Lady, the Doña Elisabetta Mantova Garraleon – her portrait on the stairs is *so* formidable they had to remove the French windows to get her in, and tip the men double. It is best viewed at a distance, or from across the Meadow. The Dean's Mother's Mother was not nearly so grand, nor probably had a portrait done at all, but he honours her nothing the less, named Lettice Robertson but known as Lacey. Which I suppose was a blessing. She took-in washing, until reformed of the habit as a second helping by his grandsire Sir Ebenezer Hargreaves, a philanthropist and fierce opponent of women and children working for their living.

Dean Little's parents were cousins once removed, in case you are thinking the symmetry impaired – his paternal granddame's name was Hargreaves also, giving Miss Celia her supernumerary label. She was the aforementioned Sir Ebenezer's Niece. It is always best to marry a relative if at all feasible. While the Dean's Wife's father was the son of a Daughter of Dr Peabody, blest improver of the inverted swan-neck catheter and author of a scarce octavo pamphlet of two gatherings thereupon, entitled *Animadversions on the Utility of Fistulas in Cases of Chamberleyne's Droop, with Remarks on an Improved Catheter (the Invention of the Author) and a Refutation of Dr Darwin's Practice, Lately Commended by the Gentleman's Magazine*. Whence it is, that Alice Peabody Little carries the burden or privilege of the Sisterhood's heritage in the healing art, as also some inherent credit for the near extinction of a malady but Little heard-of these days, if it ever was.

Retrospective account of the taking of the likeness of Irene and of apparent Angelic intervention in same, with concomitant reflections

But Irene – plain Irene, pale Irene, poor Irene, the Cherub, the fifthing, the runt – she was not meant to be. Her age was wrong, her name wrong from the start, and she had no middle one at all, leaving her nothing to fall back on. Pale and limp, all her short days. And when they sent to me, Paxton the Butler in such a state, to take her picture, pale and limp indeed. It was her doom, not to *be*, to be ... Irene. Her Mother stood stone-faced as I worked, erecting my tripod, pouring my collodion: not an hint but that she knew. She knew she was an offering, an oblation. From the moment she named her I think she knew, from the moment she bore her, who knows, from the moment she conceived at the wrong time, welcoming the Dean into her night-dress untimely, unthinking (unconscious?): she knew the erroneous issue was forfeit.

I am not fond of photographing the departed. I suspect it a foreign fashion, possibly Spanish. I avoid it as a rule. I should not have done it for aught-or-any but my belovèd Alice, my belovèd Irene. My fingers fumbled, I spilled my collodion. I have a vestige on my waistcoat yet. Having exposed two plates as I found her, I stammered my way into

completing the record, the final exposure. I fingered the edges of her clothes. I ... I ... I've ... one more plate, I wer-wondered ... wer-wer-with her ... bare-bare being ... so de-de ... delicate, all her ... wee-wee ... we never ... taa-taa ... took her, in her ... Ah me, ah we, *we* blessèd few: doctors, undertakers, husbands, photographers. A sacred discretion, the State of Nature, all others avert their gaze; even the doctor in a degree; even an husband will turn the lamp down, if requested so to do, or so I am led to believe. But the photographer needs must deal in light, light and the unstinting gaze. Oh how delicate an office, the act: the act of removing the silky garment, disposing the limb thus, illuminating the soft white pulchritude, gazing upon it (focusing I mean), uncovering the lens ... Little Girls are such patient sitters, such perfect patients, corpses, Wives: eager to be exposed, happy to be opened up or laid out, content to be copied. They lie so limply and are not ashamed.

I shall believe until I stand before him and am withered for my insolence that the breath of heaven infused that sunlit room in the moment of unveiling. Invisible Angels paddled their chubby Little feet as I made my exposure, and, the moment after, floated down and tenderly elevated her soul, the kernel from the husk. A Little cloud, a slight draught. I distinctly felt it go. Paxton closed the curtains on the fleeting beams, the flesh greyed again, the Maid refreshed her tears, the dust fell back to the carpet. And I hurried to my rooms with the plates, half-expecting Angels in my tray. God is ever ambiguous. The sides of the plate are fogged – it is not, it's not of my doing. I made no mistake and I did not vignette it. I do not hold with vignetting: I once very nearly posted an epistle opposing it to the editor of the *Photographic Almanac*. It is not I, I have not interfered with it, god has. God has breathed on it. It is the most beautiful photograph I have taken. It is my masterpiece. Or the Dean's Wife's ... I told her it did not come out.

note Since writing the above I confess to having a change-of-heart as regards the exhibition of the aforementioned likeness *de natura*. Mr Rejlander tells me the Queen herself has one of his, in like vein, and graciously looks upon it (in either sense of the phrase) without qualm.

Impromptu summation of the impudent bid of an elderly member of the nobility, excited to a belated enthusiasm for matrimony, coming but lately to the author's notice, with remarks upon Cows

Apparently Lord Daresbrook wants a Wife. He doesn't much mind if she's fifteen if he can't get one that's sixteen; and he'll settle for thirteen-and-a-half if it's all that's going – either way she has sixteen in her and with luck and exercise will come on admirably, so long as he can hold out. He is sixty-seven by the way, sixty-eight before the Summer is out, sixty-nine next year. Sixty-nine-and-a-half a year or so after. So holding out is the question. He has a limp from the Crimea and a bad cough from the Foothills. But only lately has it occurred to him – or Duckers thinks, been drawn to his attention by a solicitor or a stockman – how his prolonged neglect of Girls, Little and otherwise, or

at any rate of matrimony, may have sown uncertitude regarding the continuance of his bloodline. The fate, no less, of his House and Herd.

His concerns extend to billiards, deer stalking, affairs in India, and these Cows that breed on his Northumberland estate. Or cattle rather. He concedes that a Wife (hypothetical, or presumptive) need take no interest in the first whatsoever (and will probably not be allowed in that room), and might be expected to do Little more than follow with quiet indifference or occasional oh-did-you-dears his narratives anent the middle ones (he is a noted and exceptionally tedious raconteur, avoided at table and baize in all the appropriate clubs when in Town). But he does hope in earnest that she may be the sort of Girl who will take to breeding, and apply herself to the activity as if it came naturally to her, at the least within a couple of years if not immediately. For the Daresbrook Hairy Buffs have been on the edge of extinction too long.

I am given to understand that his overtures to the Dean's Wife have eliçited a confession from her Prize Heifer that cattle have hitherto failed to come before her youthful consideration. Though she has she thinks espied them in the Meadow, and wondered what they were for. Thus are our juvenile Fair denied fulfilment in Fields that are germane to their Nature – for what more natural and healthful and Girlylike than to be curious about Cows. It is lamentable that their governesses don't get them started on it. I have begun at onçe to write her a book about them, with Little marginal illustrations and a table. Excepting the index and bibliography it will not take me long. I shall tire of it before the week after next, and light the fire with it. As I did with sundry others I commenced (reprieving only the one upon Angels, which I revisit intermittently). Then I shall resume my series on transportation.

note My companions of the gateway have tabled the proposition of a shooting party, to stalk the old stag to his lair (which is undoubtedly the Athenaeum) and bag him on his way in – or out, as they all look the same from behind. A whimsical intent, alas, a mere pipe-dream.

Partial tedious contemplations concerning the appositeness of the hierarchy of nobility, with digressions respecting Marquesses and Fellows and the effect or otherwise of railways

It is hard to hate the peerage, given its orderliness and symmetry and the elegant hierarchical simplicity of it. Duke Marquess Earl Viscount Baron. There is something more palpably satisfying in being an Earl who knows that a Marquess is one's superior (and surely cannot with justice mind it, particularly as he may presumably marry one of the squeakier of his Daughters) but that the whole rabble of Viscounts not to mention everyone else is and are one's inferiors, than being a Tutor who must allow the whole rabble of Fellows to be his superiors and put up with an impecunious hoard of Lecturers not to mention everyone else being and being his inferiors. There are occasions (I know you

will scarce credit it, but I have myself witnessed approximately three) when Lecturers are mistaken for Tutors, even by educated persons.

And the thing about a Marquess is that he is effortlessly tall, and with it superior, and there are exceedingly few of them about. One might easily go miles (anywhere but in the House of Lords, and perchance certain hostelries about Knightsbridge, or Soho) miles and miles before spotting another, which is why a Marquess's son (one of them, surely, say the dull one next-to-last) might haply be allowed to marry a Dean's Daughter. And a Marquess's *eldest* son, his son-and-heir, is an Earl as of right, as a Marquess may upon examination turn out to be the son-and-heir of a Duke. And so on ... It is so beautifully hierarchical it needs no explanatory diagram, it falls into place like two-and-two or Bradshaw's. While owning half of Northumberland (or of any umberland, frankly) is a distinct advantage in the game of Little Girls.

Fellows by contrast are of all sorts of sizes and shapes, right down to diminutive and dumpy, and each college has excess of them. I shall not make too much of the fact that they are lazy, for it is well known that Fellowships are specimens of sinecures and I should not wish (were my opinions to go forth) (to go forth, that is, and meet with remark) I should not like to be mistakenly applauded as a reformer; sinecurism is one of the indubitable benefits of the Fellowship system, for it ensures that *of* them a goodly portion inhabit country parsonages, public schools, and watering places, which are by far the best places for them (Cheltenham excepted of course). Railways have not greatly disturbed this benign diaspora, albeit concomitantly it may be admitted that our hope for the more irksome ones to be induced by steam to spend more time in Herefordshire *etcetera* has not been discernibly satisfied either.

note The distinct advantage above referred to – of owning a moiety (or I dare say any substantial portion will suffice) of a large shire or erstwhile Anglo-Saxon Kingdom – may arguably be disallowed as unfair. We shall duly consult the Rule Book, once I have written it.

Musings with reference to an hypothetical Reader, his hypothetical inventions and their hypothetical utility in the game of Little Girls, with lamentations in regard to the insufficient utilisation of Tanks

Were there a Reader in Applied Mechanics (as there are in Anatomy, Chemistry and even, it will surprise you to know, Physics, though he is mercifully quiescent) were there such we should have him invent a more convenient form of transportation, one that comes to the door of one's staircase and takes one straight there without having to change at Banbury or Reading or walk around the flower-beds. It is hypothetical however, as the Fellows and divines will never countenance giving a post to an engineer, no matter what they may be saying at Trinity, and such carriages would be banned from the cloisters notwithstanding, as was the railway (the proposal to use one of the less celebrated colleges as a railway station being resisted in Convocation not only by the

resident Fellowship but by Fellows no one had ever seen before, whom we suspect of having been brought in by railway for the purpose).

Such a Reader would also have to be lured (if he is somewhat more applied than mechanic) (that is, he designs his bridges not to fall over) or alternatively embraced with havannahs and *bon-homie* (if he is true mechanic) (he designs them and doesn't give an hoot) would either way need to be recruited into our game, for he could undoubtedly contribute to the art (or science, as art is inclined to be called these days, though as Mathematicians we cannot countenance the misnoma) would surely contribute by inventing a contraption (or any number of contraptions) (why would he stop at one?) to enhance the enjoyment of Little Girls. Our hypothetical Applied Mechanician (or Harcourt may have one we can co-opt from the Metropolis) might haply be induced to contrive a conveyance or container adapted to their requirements, if not indeed uniting the two (container and conveyance), noting with satisfaction how the lexikon licenses the word "trap" for either.

I have long been mystified at the Tank – where they do experiments about ships and rudders and propellers – not being applied to such utilitarian ends (or purposes). Allowing that its proprietors are perforce constrained by obligation to use it in purely nautical considerations (for Tanks are beset by petty regulations delimiting their usage, as we discovered when we enquired about visiting the Pumping Station) even so allowing, it is a fact beyond dispute that Little Girls go on ships, as well as boats. I have personally waved at several who were in the very throes of doing so, so I cannot but think it irrational that the authorities will not let their Tank be used for experimenting with Little Girls. Alas I have digressed from the bent of my discourse, a tendency I have begun to observe in myself of late, or in-point-of-fact since I was three.

Animadversions embracing the application of aerostation to the game of Little Girls, in anticipation of a mooted aerostatic venture, with preliminary consideration of the disposability of apparel

Duckers thinks he knows one of the Spencers (no, not those Spencers, the aeronautical ones) and can procure us a ride. Taking Little Girls up in balloons we calculate will be the *zenith* of the game. For taking Ladies (as they are generally called) in balloons is widely thought (more than amongst ourselves) (nay, it is a commonplace in places where smoking is permitted) taking Ladies up in balloons is widely considered an absolutely assured method (surer than the railway train, surer even than the commonly used rowing boat) an assured means to winning their allegiance. Females, be it vouchsafed, respond admirably to aerostation. Their senses are all elevated with their bodies; it is beneficial to their physiology and responsivity. By all accounts they are as exhilerated by immersion in air as they are by immersion in water, by supermersion as by submersion (I think I shall call it, when I write the treatise upon it). And with less detriment to their apparel.

While tipping them out is bound to prove more straightforward (more than on the river, that is) for I believe throwing things out of balloons is how one steers them in any case. It may well be unavoidable. Mr Spencer may insist upon it, and have a roster. Or they may (as they do on the river on occasion, I cannot deny it) jump out of their own volition, *pro bono* as it were. For Ladies and Little Girls are by no means apt not to be accommodating, should a Logical proposition be put to them. It will alas, alas, give us not-so-good an excuse for taking their clothes off them – wetness being so very convenient in that regard – *unless*, and Mr Spencer concurring, it were policy to count clothing as separate from contents (Little Girls *aux naturelles*) or in short, to separate same whilst still in the state of aerostatic suspension.

Frocks are heavy things, all-told, taken with all their under-skirts and scaffolding, puffs and padding, ribbons and fastenings (fastenings are so unnecessary on frocks, or any Feminine attire, I always feel). And woolly vests and bloomers (I am reasonably certain a Dean's Wife will insist, if the Deanery nanny has omitted to, should the word balloon be mentioned, at the least upon woolly vests and bloomers) woolly undies are indisputably ballast, in an aerostatist's classification. I have a Table of Correlations (Aerostatical) already envisaged, and an equation for calculating disposability from an integration of weight and relative unnecessariness. The Art of Aeronautical Disencumberment: Little bootees to start (Fyfield or Islip, a matter of wind-direction), eight in four sizes; before long (it is to be hoped) Little stockings, likewise; four Little bloomers, four Little vests, four Little liberty-bodices, four Little petticoats (Little as they weigh, they are nothing but a nuisance); four Little bonnets (bonnets are signally unneedful, nay ruinous to that without which no Little Girl is finished nor differentiable from a china doll) (I refer to hair); neither last nor least, four frocks aforementioned.

note It has occurred to me to agitate for an Act of Parliament against bonnets, at least insofar as Little Girls are concerned. Compelling Girls as young as seven to wear bonnets is an abuse that I should have thought had been eradicated under the Factories Act, or some such.

Elucidation of the means of transportation found most often to be advantageous or serviceable in the game of Little Girls (viz the rowing boat), and the principal benefits accruing therefrom, with procedures

Yet wetness is so peculiarly serviceable for taking off clothing, as well theoretical as practical, imparting to the latter that tinglesome sensation of peeling that so enhances the practice, the sacred act I might almost call it, the Art of Undressing Little Girls (as I mean to explain in my treatise so titled, with case-histories and a digression on the physics of frictional adhesion, partly hypothetical). Nothing surpasses the rowing boat and the river for that, for getting them wet, and ripe for peeling. Indeed, we of the fraternity of the garden gate are naturally of opinion that nothing can match throwing Little Girls into the river. Unless it be pushing them. Or rocking the boat until they tumble, or jump. Or their

jumping *extempore* – which is not unheard-of, and may be aided by the art (or science) of persuasion, including reasoning (no, it is not to be despised), for Little Girls will oftentimes respond to it, in the heat of the moment. As also to stories. While having them already alarmed by how the boat wobbles when they stand (even if they are everso short, as is preferable and apposite in Little Girls) may be half-the-battle.

Another treatise is to be written on the management of Little river craft and their Little occupants in such a way as to optimise the probability of diminutuve Female voyagers tumbling over the side – though whether the capital sport of picking them up and chucking them be included as Chapter or Appendix is a question really of whether it be approached from the point of view of the pleasures and perils of aquatic navigation (it is indisputably both) or else from the perspective of the sporting perquisites or concomitants thereof, wherein the exertion of chucking may be accounted apropos and promoted as an healthsome and athletic pastime (as Scotchmen throw trees). Either way it is infallible. I have seldom if ever known a Little Girl go in the river without coming out wet, while wetness is invariably found not only improving (to which I expect Little demurral) nor yet merely useful (in respect of the purpose stated) but the one guaranteed way of making her Mother say What, you let the Little mite picnic in her wet clothes – it didn't occur to you to take them off her? You're a bounder sir, a seven-year-old is not safe with you, if she lives you shan't have her again till she's fourteen. Which is of course entirely to be avoided.

So we follow as a matter of policy such maternal wisdom, once they have been in the river. It is the Code of the Riverbank (Appendix III): all soggy cloth to be removed as quickly as may-be on making land, and a good rubbing administered (optional in sunshine); after the picnic, their clothes not yet dry, a Little dancing and a Little "tickle-tickle" are followed by a Little nap; tickling and napping duly done, they discern that Duckworth has their Little frillies in his waistcoat pockets and must be chased to get them back. It is all exceedingly healthful and also inexpensive, and requires no more than the initial wetting to render it rational, and entirely consistent with a Mother's expectations (with the possible exception of Duckers's waistcoat, but that is but a trivial part of the proceedings and may either be justified in its beneficial effect to the circulation or omitted from the account).

Explication of the utility of transportation by river and immersion therein in the classification of Little Girls, prefaced by a résumé of the place of Taxonomy amongst the disciplines

That is one way of classifying them too, for like all things they needs must be classified. "Girls, Little, blaa-blaa-blaa." After Mathematics (inclusively considered), hydrostatics, pneumatics, Logic, acrostics and anagrams, our favourite discipline is Taxonomy. (Aerostatics awaits approbation and elevation – pardon the pun – once the Spencers have made their mark.) Metaphysical and moral philosophy too must find

favour, albeit one can allow but the strictly theoretical parts of the latter. Chemistry I should add (in deference to the stains on my cuffs and waistcoat) chemistry is a necessitous ancillary to photography (and photography to visiting, or rather to being visited) but is not to be countenanced in its own right, chemistry that is, except in university extension. Taxonomy, however, Taxonomy is our theme: not one of us but has attended two-and-a-bit lectures, and one of us a full two-and-three-quarters, in the New Museum anent the Taxonomic art, subsumed aptly under morphology and confined to the back corner.

There are various approaches, favoured in varying degrees, for it is only to be expected, and the river need not be the most favoured, Taxonomically (if in practical terms unsurpassed). But a simple division between Little Girls who, immersed in the river and soaked to the skin, will stubbornly insist upon Undressing *themselves*, sometimes (if you can believe it) behind a bush or a blanket, eschewing help even with those irksome fastenings I have mentioned and deplored, and Little Girls who will languish supine in feigned exhaustion or pretence of having all-but drowned whilst one removes every offending layer of moist peel from their damp white flesh and their limp Little shivering limbs ... It is an infallible way of making division between the Irenes and the Geraldines (or *vice versa*) and provides early intimation of which ones are liable to get their knickers back from Duckers. How it works in balloons I await with curious anticipation to discover.

Also serviceable, the very procedures of immersion answer to the calls of Taxonomy, should one choose to play the game thus. Give notice that it is time for Little Girls to enter the water (or Go Overboard, one may be permitted to say if pirates have been reported) and you will observe four categories (I am by no means excluding the probability of sub-categories), assuming an adequate attendance. The Little Girl *par excellence* will jump in with not the least hesitation, feet and skirt first, usually but not necessarily holding her nose. The Geraldine will totter at the side, wobbling the boat until the inevitable occurs, as if by accidence; the semi-Geraldine hesitate uncertainly, which is no more than a ploy to invite assistance, easily provided. The Irene meanwhile will adopt a doggedly fixed stance and scowl, or else (sub-category) whimper, which is the cue (either way) to pick her up and throw her.

note Stories suited to the auditory of Little Girls during or preparatory to aquatic adventure (read aloud, recited or *extempore*) may be treated of as an Addendum, in tabular form. Those of castaways, Mermaids, and tropical islands where clothing is unknown are by far the most apt.

Continuation of a discourse upon Little Girls treating somewhat more particularly of their Undressing and classification, with comparative instances provided from the sartorial art of being photographed

I am not meaning to imply that aught or anything surpasses in practice the act: the act of Undressing Little Girls (it occurs to me indeed as an

alternative title for the treatise I suppose I shall never write) (or else I shall) Undressing them is the tops, it is the *apogee* of the game. It is better even than equations or algebra, better than harmonic curves (which is not to imply that Mr Perigal and his friends are not interested in Little Girls, excepting only slightly, though it is hardly appropriate here to go into it). But in truth, Little Girls will Undress them*selves*, it comes naturally to them, they will do it at the drop-of-a-hat, as anyone versed in their management will attest. It is not an *end* to which we are baffled of the means. They have barely any compunction. Open the French windows to the sight of a lily-pond and they will be in it before you can say *naiad*, a trail of Little undies across the lawn. Open a trunk of old clothing and before one's plates are sensitised they will be climbing into an oversized frock or corset, their Little frillies cast about the carpet. Their eager Little bottoms all-in-a-row as they bend into the trunk is a picture to behold. I got one with nearly no blur once, a near-perfect exposure. While the Little bare seven-year-old with a top hat on her shoulders instead of an head is my fourth-favourite photograph.

So my second-favourite way of classifying them is by letting them choose how they are photographed, I mean, how they dress-up to be photographed. I say Waif. And Dodie Ramage stands in front of the camera a mound of rags and a floppy hat, an *impromptu* jumble-sale, nought but her chubby Cherub face peeping out; most charming. But Alice – any Alice, any one of my Little Alices, at just the right age – strips herself bare as god created her and carelessly pulls on the ragged Little liberty-bodice that no more than shades her private parts, adopts her brazen-sulky look, and stands like a begging urchin – and then (oh nectar to my lens) she raises one foot on to a sack of something (*what* matters Little on such an occasion). Oh shameless innocence, the garden of eden, the grove of myrtle ... A lesson in chiaroscuro.

I say Geisha. And Winifred Watts-Craddock kneels demurely as a cone of colourful kimono, an oriental exhibition, flickers a fan and puts chopsticks through her hair; quite delightful. But Alice – my Alice, any one of our Little Alices, at the just-right age – strips herself bare as Nature intended her to be and carelessly pulls on the oversized gown covered in butterflies that opens at the front, adopts her brazen-sulky look, and lolls on a sack of something (potatoes will do, but beans or oatmeal are better for lolling) lolls as if she were a lineal descendant of Cleopatra – and then (oh oil to my shutter) allows nay wills the gown to slip slowly from her shoulders, uncurtaining her perfect boyish chest, her Little cherries, her bellybutton. And then (oh Muses, oh Bedmakers) she raises one of her knees ... A veritable *tableau vivant*, a vision. It is definitely the second-best way of classifying Little Girls.

Intermission respecting a curacy in the Palatinate, lately brought to the author's consideration, with sundry contemplative digressions

I have been offered a place near Mobberley, a living I mean. I forget the name, a village I have not heard of, a chapelry-of-ease that supports

a Perpetual Curate. I shall have to devise a mnemonic ... “Alice” is a perfect mnemonic anagram, backwards. I also have one for my Sisters, I meant to mention it: “Jasmine”, which is a smelly blossom-bush, thus suiting its purpose. Jane Anne Sarah Mary plus “mine”, mine own, my favourite, whatsername, number 5. But I am digressing wilfully so as to not have to contemplate a position near Mobberley. If they have Girls there, Little or not, I know not, nor as to rivers, though there are certain to be Cows. I might supply my own trunk. And it is bound to be the sort of place one can get to by balloon – for balloons invariably take one to places one has never heard of, and does not want to go to.

But ... I forgot to say she was 6, the Cherub, the photograph. *Is* six, for ever, forever six. She never made it to the magic Alicean 7, the perfect age. That I suppose is why she seemed so Little. She never got there, it was not meant to be. Ten, which I may have mentioned, is her would-have-been age. She is 10, yet she will never be: she was never meant to be. Life forgets her. We hang around the garden gate regardless, dis-regarding her – Hanging Round the Deanery, not having her in mind. Melancholy most probably explains it, my lapsing into contemplations of Irene. Thoughts of a curacy near Mobberley and returning to the Palatinate have put me out of sorts and brought it upon me. It is not unlike being called from the gateway of a Spring morning after four Little Girls have skipped out on their forty bare toes and commenced dancing about the blossom-tree, not yet noticing the petalled pond ...

Elizabeth, is the name of the Sister with whom (benefiting from her youth and a grassy bank, and sunshine) the Little Sister with whom I or we, she and I, have completed the record, the inventory. Or nearly so. They are very nice photographs. I have prints from them mounted within wavy cartouches in my treatise upon Angels, and elsewhere. Anonymously of course. 11 going-on 12 she was, which is the perfect age – for Sisters (I know I said otherwise before, but it is different for Sisters – Little Girls are not the same as Little Sisters). When he came into the Palatinate in quest of ancestors and exercise I encouraged the Duck to take a fancy to her, but it showed Little promise, nimbly as she chased and caught him and rummaged in his waistcoat. The Palatine calls you, he says, by way of encouragement: verdant Cow-pastures, cheese and Cholmondeleys, Venableses Lowndeses and Antrobuses and considering your place in the game ... He is right, I am doomed to win, howsoever the game be played, or lose. My Prize is pre-ordained.

Elucidatory remarks upon an alpha-numerical anagram or value, and related observations, in reference to Sisters, including a numerical (or numerological) correlation deemed extraordinary

I have been trying to make an anagram of their names. Unfortunately they have all plain ones, excepting the exception. My Sisters, I am speaking of. Letters zilch, but I am more optimistic about numbers, for you will readily see that if A = 1 and B = 2 *etcetera* they come to 256, which is of Little significance until you recall that Elizabeth (Zetah

Lieb) is exceptional – you may feel she has no place in the game of Little Girls, my Little Sister, and I sympathise with this view as I once held it myself – so that the number really is 168+88, the latter being her, or she. It is one of the largest values that may be obtained in this particular numerological branch. Anything with zed in it carries advantage, so I am seeking a Girl's name with several. Zaza is let down by her vowels, being but 54; Zuzy sounds contrived; Zoenlinda however is the dark horse, as they say, for she scores more than merely an high number but the perfect 100. I should immediately essay a tediously long poem about her had Charles Ash not already written it.

But we must return to my Sisters with their plain, anagram-resistant nomenclature, excluding Elizabeth. Excluding Elizabeth – 88 – their alphabetic value of 168 you will readily concur is an exceedingly significant and interesting number. And quartered evenly it is 42, which is beautiful. My demonstrative lecture upon the four-and-twenty sevens to be illustrated by Little Girls apparelled in pillow-cases and drawn from the college-servant class fell victim to the whooping cough in St Clements. No matter – the symmetry is elegant whether Little Girls in pillow-cases have portrayed it or not. Yet a further alpha-numerical pattern emerges in that their numbers (my Sisters that is, excluding Elizabeth) match exactly inversely their actual sequence of ages divided by 2, the individual totals being 30, 34, 47, 57 and their actual ages being 34, 32, 25½, 20½ (I am in the middle there as usual, or rather I am not, and Elizabeth is 14, like Irene an inexplicable error).

Another extraordinary Mathematical correlation is that my eldest Sister has the same numerical value – 30 – as the Little Girls severally, each (with the usual exception) having needless-to-say the same number, algebraically expressed thus: a+c+e+i+l=30 (a total of 120, a splendid number, as I hope to show in a discursive paper for the *Mathematical Gazette*). Alice and Jane are thus numerologically equal or equivalent, a thing the which one would scarce have entertained until applying the inscrutable Logic of Number to them. (It is almost worthy a missive to the same periodical, or arguably a different one.) Not that she is of consequence, or barely so since marrying a stationer in Sandbach, or I should say since betrothal, for that was the more startling occurrence, matrimony following (as it will) once all parties were accustomed to the notion. My middle and proximate Sister Sarah – numerical value 47 – has more promise in that she is not betrothed nor as yet, so far as I can discern from the Girlish chatter of our mutual sibling Elizabeth, whose *confidante* she is believed to be (Girls are not entirely reliable in this capacity), neither betrothed nor in any expectation of it. So I may yet find a use for her should I venture upon a life beyond the cloister.

note I have but lately learned (and can only lament my neglect of it heretofore) that the carriage or cabin suspended beneath a balloon may partake not merely of the shape but of the title of "gondola" (*viz* a Venetian punt). It is a correlation most fertile in its suggestiveness.

Further animadversions upon Sisters or more especially a particular Sister, and the undesirableness (an exception being allowed) of being taken for an Uncle, occasioning recollections of Hettie Duncan (dear Hettie Duncan) with eulogistic or sentimental procrastinations

Chester takes the view, commonly held I believe, that Sisters are good for practice but are not the real thing. I thought so too, throughout my childhood (spent bereft of my best beloved but in ignorance of it, she being unborn). But Elizabeth, my parents' Little mistake at a time-of-life when Little mistakes are but seldom blessed with such a memorial, Elizabeth is 15¾ years my junior, so that I shall soon by an inexorable Mathematical law be twice as old as she and we shall commence our growing together (cleaving, one might call it, a cleaving together: yes, I find that a most satisfactory expression) our gradual cleaving together until, when she is 110¼ she will be but seven-eighths of my age and surely – since mortals hardly hope for the consummation of infinity – close enough to loose the shackles that constrain us from considering ourselves to-all-intents-and-purposes twins. I shall hope at the least by then that those espying us together will no longer take me for an Uncle.

You will object I know, Duckers indeed was there before you and laughs, nay scoffs (is his word for it, though I cannot abide dubious neologisms) scoffs at the idea, that the game of Little Girls puts us all in the way of being mistaken for Uncles. I shall acknowledge candidly not only that it has happened to me but that I recollect at any rate one instance when I played the part with alacrity. The Scottish boarding-house landlady's shrill assurance that Your Uncle will have you out of those wet clothes and in a warm blanket in no time, I took as more than permission, more than a blessing upon our bent but a sacred obligation conferred, an enlightened prescription from a person who kens weel what's good for Little wee Girls. Her broth was excellent too, duly taken on the hearth-rug with said warm blanket about her Little freckled shoulders. Indubitably the healthiest way to partake of broth.

But Hettie Duncan aside (dear Hettie Duncan) – no, I cannot, I cannot leave her aside, not before lucubrating to the effect that she stands with the principals of these reflections (Girls, Little) – dear Hettie, who called me "Uncle" in inverted commas ever-after (I must pen her a jocular epistle, on the pretext of an happy remembrance having called her to mind, and sign it "Uncle" quote-unquote) – Hettie Duncan aside (wee Little Hettie Duncan), squat in her blanket whilst I dried her bare toes, each one individually, counting approximately 10, bless every Little one of them – dear dear Hettie (I suppose this Mobberley business is what is making me morbidly sentimental, I am not as a rule unduly susceptible) Hettie Duncan aside (dear Hettie Duncan) I am generally disinclined to have Nieces and quite opposed to the notion of being my own Sister's Uncle, it is genealogically unsustainable, I simply shan't stand for it. She must find her own, if she wants them, or if her Aunts want her to have them (we share a multitude of Maiden

Aunts, I forgot to say, or rather it was hitherto irrelevant) if her Aunts want her to have Uncles they must marry them and be done with it.

note Hettie Duncan (dear Little Hettie Duncan) was a once-upon-a-time travelling companion and interpreter in a tour of the symmetrical architecture of Dumfriesshire. She is now happily engaged to a well-to-do household in Annan as governess of sundry Little Scottish Girls.

Tentative proposals anent a contraption or container derived from a dressing-up trunk, adapted for enticing or entrapping Little Girls, with specifications and parameters for same

In the absence of a Reader in Applied Mechanics aforementioned, hypothetical (for I am resuming my digression regarding the utility of such a Reader as it affects the game of Little Girls, or in point of fact the lack of such a Reader), in the lack or absence of same (on which I expect scant contradiction) I am intent myself upon designing a trap for Little Girls, the usual devices being manifestly unsuitable. I have worked for a long time (I think it was nearly twenty minutes, with scarcely a break) upon a dressing-up trunk theoretically adapted to said purpose, based upon its proven infallibility as a Little Girl attractor (I may call it magnet in my treatise, I am not averse to metaphor if used sparingly and drawn judiciously from the philosophical lexicon). The happy thought of a Little Girl in a trunk will be neither unpleasant nor novel, and I hold no monopoly upon it. It is a question of harnessing the happenstance, nothing more, which is the very hub of mechanics.

But it is as a water-hole rather than a trap, I think it unfair to see it otherwise (unfair to trunks I mean); and as in a water-hole (a pond, let us say, I believe I mentioned them before) the unabashed innocence and willingness with which a Little bare Girl will splash about in it might incline towards hesitancy not to say reluctance (reluctance in Little Girls is so much to be regretted and avoided, I feel I have placed insufficient emphasis upon it) might turn into reluctance should it go forth amongst their kind that once one has disrobed and tiptoed-in one cannot get out. A treacle pond, as it might be. A trunk must always be a thing a Little Girl beholds and leans-into in joyous wonder, unafraid of it closing upon her. For darkness is anathema to every Little Girl, as unconscionable almost as iron jaws closing upon fragile ankles.

So the infallible trap or magnet I must design is to be pleasant and painless, not otherwise in common use nor familiar, containing textiles or liquid (let us say soft or fluid substances) and decorously scattered with enticements such as clothing or bangles or sweetmeats, an assured way to a Little Girl's Little bellybutton being her belly. This is what we call in the science (or art) of invention our specification (not to be confused with a specification in a patent, which seems at variance with lexicographic consensus). While a constraining consideration, or as we inventors say a parameter (not to be confused with a parameter in the higher Mathematics), is that the material of the trap must not squash

them, nor damage them at all, so that iron, whether cast or wrought, has to be discountenanced, even in this industrial age, and wood is decidedly dubious. Yet there are evident drawbacks to traps made of tissue or silk, albeit treacle aforementioned (or similar, say albumen) has alluring possibilities. I shall consider basketwork, notwithstanding its sharp ends, for I believe the balloonists employ it indifferently. This is as far as we may venture into the topic at present, as inventions must be kept strictly confidential, for some reason that I have forgotten.

Partial expansive resumption of the subject of Sisters touching those of others participant in the game of Little Girls, or Maidservants in lieu, together with contemplations regarding a bespoke trunk and linings

Chester speaks from experience (if not all that often), having like me five of his own (or four rather, the fifth one being nominal) and having found them I think more co-operative, or possibly less co-operative. Duckers has older ones only, which perhaps is why he scoffs. By a catastrophe Penvers has none at all, in either direction, nor half nor step – Sisters I mean – nor cousins but such as are boys, as are also his innumerable older brothers. He says boys would do, at a push (a widely held view, I believe). Luckily there was a Maidservant who supplied the want when he was younger, but who's gone now, he says. She grew older (which is almost inevitable), married an under-gardener (I find it hard to believe it was not a footman), and moved to a village off the estate (a deeply regrettable eventuality for all concerned).

But surely they've replaced her? says March, who understands the workings of a Lordly establishment. Oh yes but she's a plump'n, *was* to start with, says Penvers, shaking his chin. Had her in the back pond once but she liked it too well, paddled and wouldn't come out, couldn't be doing with her. I ought to have another go with your inverted slide-rest, next vac, says March – he is not yet out of his lathe phase and fond of plump Maidservants, in ponds and out, while both his Sisters were married to a Baronet at an early age (quite possibly two Baronets were involved, bigamy being *infra dig*). Celia is filling out nicely for him, for March Hare I mean, if only more of his relatives would die. Then once they are all set up a Maid should follow naturally, like horses and a Mistress. He said he didn't see, the day I told him I'd spied the Dean's Wife nearly look his way on their way into Hall.

I may abandon the inventing of a trap that is not a trap, and pursue a versatile bespoke trunk to the same end, *sub voce*, probably made of basketwork ameliorated by padding and a silk lining, if that were feasible. I need to seek the acquaintance of someone conversant with upholstery, perchance an undertaker. Or one of my Sisters (one with her own household) may have broached the matter of linings, say with a curtain maker, if such there be. Someone needs must make curtains, though I cannot say the name of the trade leaps to mind (as a milliner makes hats and an haberdasher ... haberdashery), Tutors having Little occasion to allude to textile operatives excepting one's tailor (and

disallowing seamstress) (no, let us not disallow it, a seamstress sounds deliciously dexterous, all fingery and frilly and Girlylike) as well as ordinarily being content with those provided – curtains I mean. So, Undressing Trunk will be its appellation, eschewing entirely metaphor and the vocabulary of entrapment: the Patent Hyperstatical Undressing Trunk for the Improved Distraction of Little Girls. Allowing myself therein an inverted pun upon the half-expected word "attraction".

note Kindly take cognisance that my bespoke basketwork Undressing Trunk with soft lining may serve the purpose of an aerostatical carriage (if that is the term) or gondola. While in aquatic or riparian application it need be no more than placed upon the boat or riverbank, as required.

Concluding remarks and peroration of a sort, embracing musings upon digressions and endings, together with a resolve (of a sort) in respect of a position near Mobberley and the requisite household

It is not improbable that you may by now have begun to discern, or at the least to suspect, one of the obstacles that leaf my path toward the completed treatise: I allude neither to my pressing need for fire-lighting materials nor to my Bedmaker cutting them up into Little squares for the chamber of easement, but to a slight tendency of my own to digress, to err towards a miscellaneity of discourse such as is not uncommon in common rooms and *de rigueur* at dinner, yet may perhaps be thought unsuited to a treatise. Positively unsuited to a paper that aspires to the *zeitschrift*s, to be remarked upon at high table by the professor of natural philosophy (natural, that is, not he of the experimental sort, which is another proposition entirely). Likewise less suitable than it might be for a didactic discourse tailored to a youthful auditory (Female) upon topics tending to Girlish utility and delight, such as may be Cows, anagrams, or Angels. Or the Art of Undressing.

What I need I know is a *modicum* of discipline, the which I should I think assume were it tending to an end, sometimes known as a purpose. And therein, I might propose, lies the fluttering heart-and-soul of the game of Little Girls. For it has purpose and no purpose in the same moment, end and no end, except in its end. Or possibly it has purpose and no end, or *vice versa*. It has purpose insofar as we glimpse our desires (through the garden gate to which I have severally alluded), glimpse our aspirations, our purposes; it has no end in that we shall never attain same. It has end insofar as we toy (we do, I believe I have confessed it or as good as) toy with the hems, feel the fabric, turn it back to behold what pulchritude is beneath; it has no purpose in that that is the all of what we may do, and barely that. Purpose or end insofar as we have them upon the riverbank, in our trunk, in a basket in the sky (tidings of the mooted endeavour eagerly awaited); no purpose or no end, or rather an end, in that we must needs bring them home, damp or dry, and *there* is the end – an end of our having of them.

I think I may yet resign myself to the appointment, the living near Mobberley. Once there I might mount and frame my likeness of Irene full-plate, as a moral type, an Angel, matted in oval and intentionally vignetted, perchance by Mrs Cameron with the approval of the Bishop of Salisbury (say), allowing it to be hung in a downstairs reception-room in full view of Ladies and Clergy. I shall make it known about the parish that I am a confirmed bachelor with a consuming interest in algebra (something they will already suspect, I should think), having given up photography entirely and symmetry nearly, and am in token of it keeping my middle Sister (being a spinster who has turned out above-suspicion) my Sister Sarah as Housekeeper and my Little Sister (I shall tend to call her, from now on) my Little Sister Elizabeth *in statu pupilari*, which is an honourable estate. But assuredly not as Niece. A Maid I feel confident (a skinny one will suffice) a skinny Maid may readily be procured amongst the neighbouring peasantry.

Further final concluding remarks, less extempore and tending to a termination, without further digression unless briefly upon transience

To this purpose (or end) I am writing to the Archdeacon directly, and to the Dean's Wife also. And also to Hettie Duncan, my epistle to whom having come back unopened, affording opportunity not only to inscribe the address more clearly but to revise it generally, or else variously, with addition of a palindrome I know she'll like, and a drawing of her teeny toes, taken from memory (ah memory). I shall say (or perforce I shall not say) that Little Girls are ephemeral, they are but transient, they are temporary: the game is over ere one has sketched out the rules. A moment in eternity, a leaf on the water – then a breeze, everso slight, and the moment is gone. Therein is proven apposite their correlation with Angels. One forenoon in Spring, the Deanery garden is replete with pretty blossom – and then it is no more.

ꕥ

© Tony Simcock 2010 onwards 2010/1