

21st May 2021

Too

“Too kind, too kind.”

Florence Nightingale,

Reported to be what she remarked when the *Order of Merit* was brought to her at her home in 1907.

Charles Dodgson was born in 1832. From an early age, he had a flair for entertaining children with stories. Gifted in maths, he became a lecturer in Christ Church College, Oxford, trained as a minister of the Church and, now the Reverend Dodgson, became good friends with the College's Dean. He spent many hours telling amazing tales to the Dean's children, the oldest of them being Alice, and it became natural for him to have an Alice in his stories. The most fantastic of these was *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, and, in time, Dodgson gifted a hand-written copy of his story – with his own, modest illustrations – to the young Alice.

The story was eventually published under the more familiar title, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Dodgson taking the pen-name Lewis Carroll, and the rest, as they say, is history. Dodgson, however, recognised that his own illustrations for the story would never be good enough. So he turned to John Tenniel, at that time a cartoonist with *Punch* magazine, and it is Tenniel's drawings that we're familiar with today. Tenniel was meticulous in his work, self-critical and somewhat intolerant of the failures of others. On one of his illustrations he noted, “Eyelash – a little too long.”

Being self-critical and keeping high standards for one's own work is one thing. But transferring that judgement onto other people is quite another. Too tall ... too short ... too plump ... too thin ... too talkative ... too quiet ... too Scottish ... too internationalist ... too set-in-their-ways ... too liberal ... The list is endless (perhaps even including “eyelash – a little too long” among our criticisms and judgements.) But beware of an overuse of the word “too”, for it almost always refers to, and criticises, a perceived flaw in someone else's life. If we are to use “too” at all, take a leaf out of Florence Nightingale's book, to indicate your gratitude, or modesty, or appreciation. “Too kind, too kind” should be measurement enough.

A prayer for today

“Too kind, too kind.” That's what you are to me, Lord. A criticism? Not at all. More like an expression of awe and wonder. Can I ever be “too kind” in response? Amen

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