Plum Lines

A Quarterly Publication of The Wodehouse Society

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Notes from Plum

The surprise in this note is Plum's statement that both his English and American publishers think that *Bachelors Anonymous* "is my best to date." It's an extraordinary work for a man of 91, but few today would consider it among his best. Richard Usborne, in *A Wodehouse Companion*, calls it "a most benign, autumnal novel: formulaic but much simpler in plot than Wodehouse in his long summer would have thought fair to his cash customers."

P. G. Wodehouse
Remsenburg
Long Island, New York 11960 July 6-1973

Dear Captain Bleed.

So glad you liked the Monty book.

There has been a mix-up in publication dates. Pearls Girls was published in England last Fall, but it has only just come out over here under the title of THE PLOT THAT THICKENED. Not a good title to my mind, but Simon and Schuster wanted it.

The novel I was just finishing when you wrote was BACHELORS ANONYMOUS, which both my English and American publishers think is my best to date. This will be out in England on the 25th of the coming October, but not in USA till the summer of 1974. I also have an Omnibus book coming out here in the Spring of 1974. I am not quite sure, but I think it is the Omnibus book of my Golf stories.

I am looking forward to getting your book.

Yours P.G. Wodehouse

My English publishers are doing a spate of my books in Omnibus form, - The Jeeves stories, the Mulliner stories, the Psmith stories and the Golf stories.

Inside

Wodehouse in Clubland

Sylvia Kozak-Budd sent me this foreword from *Leather Armchairs -A Guide to the Great Clubs of London* (Coward-McCann, New York, 1964). Charles Graves, the author, wisely asked P.G. Wodehouse to write the foreword. Plum was ideal for the job: he joined a number of London clubs and resigned from most of them, and many of his characters exist, in the deepest and truest sense, only in London clubs. Here is Plum's foreword.

When my old friend Charles Graves asked me to write a foreword to this book, I thought at first that I should have to issue a *nolle prosequi*, for the subject seemed to me too sad for my typewriter. I got the impression that all the clubs in London were crying for bread and at a loss to know where their next ten bob was coming from. The gaunt faces of those sixteen dukes at the Turf [Club] rose up before me, and I recoiled from the task. Then I nerved myself and decided to have a bash at it.

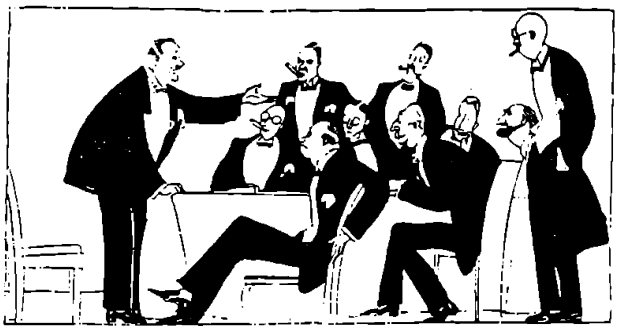
I read the proofs with the greatest interest. Indeed, it was not too much to say that I was gripped from start to finish. But I detected three rather serious omissions. The first was that the author did not touch on the tendency of weak-minded people like myself to join clubs and omitted to give us some hints on how this was to be avoided. You know how it is. You lunch with a friend at his club and in the course of the meal he says "You ought to be a member here". It is impossible to reply that you would consider it the fate that is worse than death, so you make polite noises and the next thing you know you have been elected and all the weary work of resigning to be done.

And here the author lets us down again, for he gives no advice on how to word the letter of resignation.What you want is something that will not hurt anybody's feelings but at the same time make it quite clear that the twenty pounds a year you have been paying for never going into the place has got to stop. "Kindly accept my resignation" seems so abrupt, and one feels one ought to edge into the thing with a few preliminary remarks on the weather, the crops and any good books one may have been reading lately, springing the news in a postscript. (P.S. Oh, by the way....)

Another serious omission is that while the author speaks freely of the Travellers', Boodle's, White's and others, he makes no mention of the really interesting clubs such as the photographers' Negative and Solution, the debutantes' Junior Lipstick, and the Senior Bloodstain, where the private investigators congregate. I shall never forget lunching with Adrian Mulliner, the private eye, at the Senior Bloodstain on the occasion when by purely deductive methods he tracked down and exposed a piece of kidney in the steak and kidney pie. "Child's play," he said, passing it off lightly, but I doubt if any other private investagator could have done it.

These are all blemishes on the book. Nevertheless, you can't sit there and say it isn't fascinating. You can always rely on old Charles to do a good job on any theme he may select, and in this volume, his forty-fourth, he has in my opinion - and mine is an opinion not to be sneezed at - excelled himself.

P.G. WODEHOUSE



Tea at Remsenberg

J. D. Forbes

An afternoon in the life of the well-known dog fancier P.G. Wodehouse

People don't go around in dudgeon any more, but that's what Ethel Wodehouse was in when she opened the front door. Her thoughts were clearly not on her hostessly duties.

"What would I do with *ten* dogs?" she asked rhetorically. While in no way simmering down, she explained that there were nine stray dogs and six stray cats on the premises on lend-lease from the Wodehouse Shelter of the Bide a Wee Foundation. A misguided neighbor had just telephoned to ask if she could quarter her dog on the Wodehouses while she went off for the weekend.

That was a strategic blunder.

Then Plum appeared. There were greetings exchanged. He led the way onto the terrace where tea things were laid out.

It was a pleasant tea-party. We had corresponded for years, and I had been reviewing his books regularly for the Sunday books supplement of either the *New York Times* or, more recently, the *Herald-Tribune*, so there was a lot to talk about.

Then all hell broke loose.

Dog Number Ten came prancing out of the shrubbery at the edge of the lawn. The nine resident dogs who had been lolling about the terrace resented his coming. There followed the fanciest dog fight I ever saw. Ten assorted mutts tore at each other with wild yelps and gnashing of bared teeth. Nor was all the animus directed toward the newcomer. Accumulated in-house differences surfaced. Dog ate dog, or tried to.

The battle surged through the tea things upsetting dishes and spreading havoc generally.

Throughout the entire hostilities, Plum -- Plummie to his womenfolk and now to his tea guests -- sat imperturbable, holding cup and saucer in the stiff, genteel pose of the seated bridgegrrom of a wedding daguerreotype holding his bowler hat.

He was my host, so I prudently also ignored the raging carnage. Meanwhile, Ethel and Nella, her sister-in-law, Armine Wodehouse's widow, both octogenarians, waded fearlessly into the mêlée and grabbed one pooch at a time by the scruff of the neck or the tail, detached him from the press, and rushed him into the house. The house has many small rooms. Each dog was put in solitary confinement.

When the last combatant was locked up and the dust settled, I got down on all fours, righted the triple-shelf curate's assistant which had been knocked over, picked up the cucumber sandwiches and arranged them neatly on the plate, and reassembled the tea-drenched but miraculously unbroken china. I felt like the man who carries the piano stool while others have lugged in the grand piano.

Order was finally restored. Plummie, still oblivious of the drama that had swirled around him, continued to try to explain to me the mysteries of the Silver Ring (whose bookmakers tend to overdo their intake of the starchy foods).

"We have no evidence whatsoever that Sir Galahad was ever called upon to do anything half as dangerous as stopping a dog-fight. And anyway, he wore armour. Give me a suit of mail, reaching well down over the ankles, and I will willingly intervene in a hundred dog-fights. But in thin flannel trousers, no!"

The Girl on the Boat, 1922

How Reading P.G. Wodehouse Can Help in Real Life

Ann Whipple

We had the Yuletide Spirit and we were having one for the tonsils before getting down to the serious business represented by the festive board.

The subject of P.G. Wodehouse had come up. A Dry Martini remarked that he knew some people who did not, for a complex of reasons, acknowledge reading the works of Agatha Christie or Rex Stout or Wodehouse, and he supposed one had to respect this reticence, however misguided, as he in fact considered it; besides, Wodehouse was *different*. A White Wine expressed a willingness to become acquainted with this wizard of the written word and told how she had learned not to apologize for the level of her reading matter, whether heavy or light. A Whiskey-and-Soda added, reverently, that Wodehouse had pretty much taught her all she knew; the Dry Martini nodded approval, for he knew the W-and-S to be clear on the question of the stars being God's daisy chain (they aren't). The D.M., a goodish sort of egg, then offered to lend a reading copy of *Carry On, Jeeves* to the W.W. to launch her in the world of Wodehouse.

Christmas dinner and word games and other merriment intervening at this point, it was not for some time that these questions could be gone into more deeply. In the post-Yule lull, however, it occurred to the celebrants that they had scarcely pitched it strong enough. Plum's works as practical Guides to Life - now there was a subject one might get one's teeth into. Leaving aside the truly big questions such as How to Deal with Aunts, The Mating Season, or What the Well Dressed Man is Wearing, let us take one small but vital lesson to illustrate Plum's subtle wisdom for everyday living.

I contend that no one who has read the memoirs of Wooster, B., would, whatever the temptation, hide behind a sofa or desk to avoid being seen.

Aunts might loom, or an old-silver-collecting uncle spoiling to discuss gadroon borders, sconces, or foliation - surely we all have our version of Bertie's uncle tucked away somewhere. A soupy fiancée might appear, or an inflamed in-law, or a small child peddling cookies or raffle tickets. Whoever might lurk - choose your own blister most worthy of running miles over rough country in tight shoes to avoid - the Plum-initiate does not execute that Woosterian swan-dive.

The entrance of the menace may be unavoidable, and the initiate's eye may glance around the room in a fine frenzy rolling (not Jeeves's, that). He may note that the spacious desk would make an excellent zareba or that he could easily conceal himself behind the sofa. To do so would be the work of a moment, but he toughs it out, preferring to face aunt, uncle, small child, finacée, or canvasser rather than take a line through Bertie's behavior. Why does he do this? Not simply to emerge from the ordeal a finer, better Wodehouse fan, with a paid-up membership in The Disadvantaged Choreographer's Relief Fund or a box of chocolate chip cookies. No. He sticks it out because he knows the sofa-or-desk maneuver to be bootless - or fruitless, if you prefer. He has been through the ordeal of ducking behind furniture with Bertram Wilberforce Wooster many a time and oft, as the saying is, and he knows it just doesn't work.

True, there are exceptions. In "The Episode of the Dog MacIntosh," Bertie conceals himself behind the sofa with signal success. But mark this: he has done it *at the direction of Jeeves*. Furthermore, while there, he has to listen to Jeeves describing him as pretty much a Grade-A loony. No, the Wodehouse reader, on his own, knows he must face whatever music comes.

For undoubtedly your nose will be tickled by dust and you will sneeze, causing the fiancée or whoever to pounce on you, crying "So!" or some equally unanswerable thing. Or a white wooly dog will sniff you out, causing a stocky female to fetch her gun and say "Come on out of it, you!" convinced that you are a burglar. Or possibly worst of all, a recently reunited pair of lovers will wander in, forcing you to listen to the most frightful bilge.

No, the Wodehouse reader's way is clear: If he can't leg it - say by means of a convenient water pipe - he must cope another way with the looming menace. He must not duck behind desks or sofas.

I call that a valuable lesson for real life, and my gratitude goes out to Sir Plum for making it so vivid - though not to Bertie.

Besides, "zareba" is probably worth a point in the postprandial word games of Christmas Day.

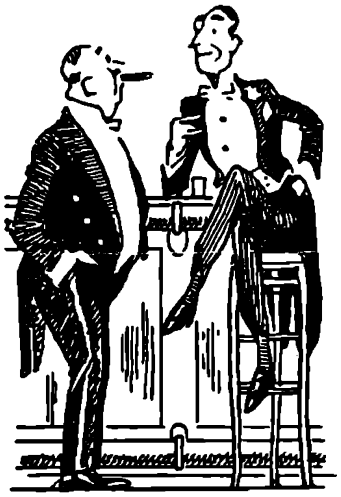
Wodehouse vs. TV

I'm fascinated by the variety of responses to the "Jeeves and Wooster" British television series. Reviews have been quite favorable and many Wodehouse Society members responded as I did: we had to be won over, but we were won at last. On the other hand some Society members have sent me negative responses, and strong ones, at that. Here's a well stated sample from Mark Lasswell.

> As a new member, I'm inclined to maintain a respectful silence, but enough is enough. Let it be said that at least one TWS member recommends phoning veiled threats to stations that intend to compound their error by showing more of *The Code of the Woosters.*
>
> The initial problem with the Granada production is that, incredibly, it omits Bertie's narrative voice. Most of the humor in the stories resides in the narration, not the dialogue. Restricting Wodehouse's prose to what lies between quotation marks results in what we have here: faintly amusing comedy that disappoints devotees and leaves the uninitiated wondering what all the fuss over Wodehouse is about.
>
> Still, the project might have prevailed despite the misstep of ignoring Bertie's narration. But it couldn't survive the wrongheaded casting. Stephen Fry's Jeeves is unfortunate -- too young, too dripping with unmasked condescension and too talkative by a long shot. What sort of production is it that gives us a Jeeves that leaves viewers wishing he would just shut up and wipe that smirk off his face?....Laurie seems to have read Wodehouse and come away thinking of Wooster as no more and no less than the goggling simpleton he appears to be to his detractors. It's *The Code of the Woosters* as rewritten by Aunt Agatha, a pen in one hand and a hatchet in the other.
>
> Was it interesting to see Wodehouse on televison? Yes. Was it worthwhile? Not necessarily. And I meant that to sting.

Almost in the same mail I received from William Hardwick and Tina Griffin highly favorable reviews from the *Daily Express* and *Daily Telegraph*, and another English reviewer wrote that "Fry and Laurie are quite perfect."

Translating Wodehouse into another medium is like translating poetry into another language: essentially impossible, because language is the essence. The difference between the original and the translation may be as great as the difference between the real Santa Claus, in the mind of a little child, and a department-store Santa. I agree with Mark that the TV series could be improved in ways that are easy to see - I especially miss the narrative voice. But P.G Wodehouse has so many riches to offer that even this department-store Wodehouse, if such it is, stripped of some of its riches and distorted in translation, is still a pleasure for me to watch.



Pelican

I had been a Wodehouse fan for years before I found out what lay behind a certain Wodehouse title: *A Pelican at Blandings*, 1969. (Published in the US as *No Nudes is Good Nudes*.) The title refers to Galahad Threepwood, of course, hero of the story and a former member of the Pelican Club. The Club, I learned, was a real London club that flourished from 1887 to 1892. Norman Murphy may have characterized it best in his *In Search of Blandings:* "If you could tell a good story, drink til six in the morning, make people laugh, and if you cared nothing for the Victorian attitude to sex, you joined the Pelican club."

PGWS Tenth Anniversary

Rob Kooy, editor of *Nothing Serious*, the newsletter of the Dutch P.G. Wodehouse Society, writes:

This year's fall our Dutch P.G. Wodehouse Society will celebrate its 10th anniversary, an event certainly not to be left passing by unnoticed, and various spectacular activities are in full course of preparation.

In cooperation with Olau Line (U.K.) our members will be offered a London week-end trip on September 27/29 at reduced prices, including a Wodehouse-connected sight-seeing tour guided by Norman Murphy, and several on-board extras.

We've contacted the city of Zutphen to see if anything can be done there. Zutphen, you'll know, is the city where Sir Philip Sidney, when wounded and offered a drink, spoke the memorable words, "their need is greater than mine"; which act of complete unselfishness has enabled Plum to use this quotation, in and out of season, in several novels. Zutphen's PR-woman is interested and willing to cooperate. We're thinking of planting a tree (wouldn't a plum tree be capital?) and/or installing a plaque explaining the Zutphen-Wodehouse link through Sir Philip. Now we're seeking a sponsor for the proceedings; a Zutphen-based distillery may be interested.

An "Aunt Dahlia" medal has been designed and cast, and a lady MP, Ms. Erica Terpstra, has consented to be presented its first example. Ms. Terpstra, a lady of well-developed physics and an equally well-developed sense of humour will be proclaimed "Netherland's Most Prominent Aunt Dahlia" at our PGWS meeting of October 12 next.

Also, we've found a grower/exporter of dahlias who is very willing of christening a newly developed variant of dahlias after either P.G. Wodehouse or one of his characters or so (for example "Bertie Wooster" or "Milady's Boudoir"). This grower is known to have huge exports to the U.S.A. and England, so you may be looking forward to see these new Wodehouse-dahlias being marketed in your country. Also the British ambassador to the Netherlands, or rather his lady, will be asked to come to our den and accept a first bunch of these Wodehouse-related dahlias on behalf of the Patroness of our PGWS, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

- I wish I could be on hand for it. We will look for those dahlias. From our Society to yours,

Name That Wine

Haines Ely writes from the Sierra foothills of California:

My wife Liz and I are part owners of the Nevada City Winery. The winery makes prize winning red wines, and a few really good whites, from grapes grown in the Sierra foothills.

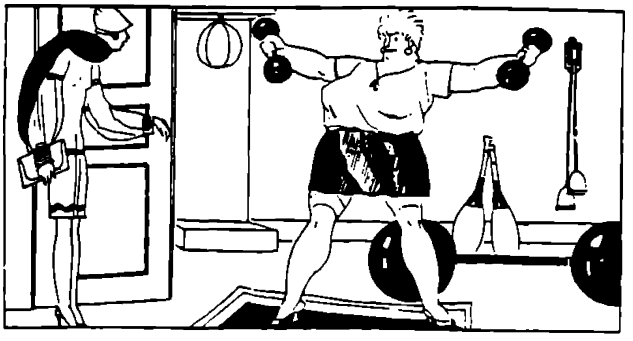
We have been making a Charbono since 1980 which is sold under the name "Douce Noir." Robert Parker called it "the best Charbono in California" in his wine newsletter. In 1988 the wine was made in more of a Rhone style, combining Charbono grapes with Mourvedre and Grenache. We now have a problem of what to call it since it is not a Charbono at all.

We propose a contest: The Wodehouse Society member who can come up with the best name/label suggestions will win a case of the stuff and will have the pride of seeing his or her ideas on a wine label. Artwork is also appreciated if it fits with the text.

The wine is medium bodied with supple tannins. At present there are multiple layers of flavors including raspberries, cherries, and licorice. Our red wines age beautifully and I'm sure this will be no exception.

The first label suggestion we got was "Lord Emsworth Special Reserve Claret." On the back label the Empress of Blandings is pictured as saying "This stuff is swill." TWS members would get it, but the general public might be put off by such a description.

. . . . .



One for the Ages
Mike Skupin

Jimmy Heineman has recently published Plum's "The Great Sermon Handicap" in a number of languages. (James H. Heineman, Inc., New York, 1988, 1989, 1990) The series includes three volumes at present with several more planned. As an monolinguist I have no access to them, nor do I recall reading any comments on the translations as translations. I was therefore interested in this review by Mike Skupin, an accomplished linguist, reprinted with permision from *The Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers, Volume 20.* (The Epigraphic Society, San Diego, 1991) The *Occasional Papers* are edited by Bill Rudersdorf, husband of our very own Toni Rudersdorf.

As fascinating as this series is for us in the last decade of this century, its importance will be even greater for future generations. The premise is simple: take a story and translate it into different languages, making a modern Rosetta stone. The first volume includes Latin and its daughter languages (extending as far as Catalan and Romanian); the second, Middle English and the continental Teutonic languages (including Frisian, Swiss German, and Luxemburgian); the third, Scandinavian. (Other volumes covering Semitic and Oriental languages are in the works.) This linguistic sampler's journey through time will surely be of no less interest than the Voyager spacecraft's course into deep space.

It is especially gratifying to note that the story chosen for this adventure is by P.G. Wodehouse (1881-1975). It could be argued that this is poetic justice, compensation for the way Wodehouse was cruelly and unjustly villified by the British media during World War II (the lie that he was a traitor is still perpetuated unquestioned by low-wattage journalists in the United Kingdom). The reason he was chosen is simpler: Wodehouse was the greatest genius in modern English fiction, which is something either you understand or you don't.

Any number of Wodehouse's stories would have done, but I suspect that "The Great Sermon Handicap" was chosen because it is extremely difficult to translate. This kind of challenge leads either to caution, to failure or to genius on the part of the translator. An especially tricky passage found on p. 9 will serve as a touchstone. The lovesick Bingo Little is addressing the narrator, Bertie Wooster.

> "Pop off now, old man, there's a good chap," he said, in a hushed, far-away voice. "I've got a bit of writing to do."
>
> "Writing?"
>
> "Poetry, if you must know. I wish the dickens," said young Bingo, not without some bitterness, "that she had been christened something except Cynthia. There isn't a dam' word in the language it rhymes with. Ye gods, how I could have spread myself if she had only been called Jane!"

The Portugese is cautious.

> *--que ela tivesse outro nome. Não existe rima para isso.*
>
> ("...that she had another name. There is no rhyme for this.")

The Italian is abominable: note the jarring reference to the English original.

> *...Non c'è un'unica parola in tutta la lingua inglese che rimi con Cynthia.*
>
> ("There is not a single word in all the English language that rhymes with Cynthia.")

The Latin is sheer genius.

> *"...Cynthia enim nisi casu nominativo versibus elegiacis immane quam male aptum est; pro Jupiter, quanta et qualia carmina evolvissem, si Corinna nominata esset!"*
>
> ("Cynthia, you see, is hopelessly unsuitable for [the rhythm of] elegiac poetry, except in the nominative case; by Jupiter, the quantity and quality of poems I could have set forth if she had been named Corrina!")

I have not only illustrated the different approaches to translations, but also how easy it is to get carried away by this language feast; I recognize the symptoms and put down my pen.

Amaryllis Lives!

In our last thrilling episode we concluded that Bob Plunkett's elusive girl friend Amaryllis existed in Milton's "Lycidas" but not, as he hoped, in Wodehouse. Heartening evidence to the contrary has now arrived, and we hasten to present it to our readers.

Hazel Steward was the first out of the starting gate, with this note to Bob:

> I refer you to a couple of pages into Chapter 10 of *Ice in the Bedroom* [1961]. "Freddie had told her (Sally) that he shared Peacehaven with his cousin George, the sleepless guardian of the law. Policemen, she knew, have their softer side and like, when off duty, to sport with Amaryllis in the shade." I trust this will save you a few sleepless nights!

Erin Stehle and Charles Bishop separately found another and much earlier use of the phrase in the short story "Something to Worry About" in *The Man Upstairs and Other Stories*, 1914. The passage runs as follows:

> The average irresponsible young man who has hung about North Street on Saturday nights, walked thrugh the meadows and round by the mill and back home past the creek on Sunday afternoons, taken his seat in the brake for the Sunday outing, shuffled his way through the polka at the tradesman's ball, and generally seized all legitimate opportunities for sporting with Amaryllis in the shade, has a hundred advantages which your successful careerer lacks.

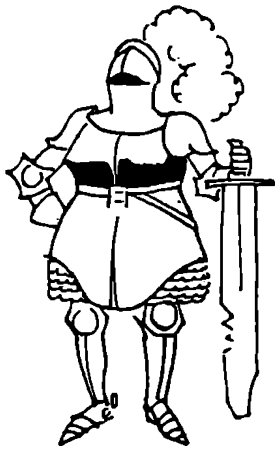
No one else, to my knowledge, has found these examples. The boundaries of Wodehouse scholarship having thus been pushed back a notch or two, we can only congratulate Hazel, Erin, and Charles on discovering a line that probably gives us more pleasure than it gave Milton. As Bob Plunkett notes, "I feel sure Milton was frowning heavily when he wrote it."

With View Halloo

Bill Horn, exploring the far end of the Wodehouse spectrum, finds that Bludleigh Court is not entirely fictional. He sends an article from the *Wall Street Journal* describing the home of Mr. Hew Kennedy in Shropshire, which is, as Bill notes, Wodehouse country. An excerpt follows.

> At Acton Round Hall, Mr. Kennedy's handsome Georgian manor house, one enters the bizarre world of a P.G. Wodehouse novel. A stuffed baboon hangs from the dining room chandelier. ("Shot it in Africa. Nowhere else to put it." Mr. Kennedy explains.) Lining the walls are dozens of halberds and suits of armor. A full suit of Indian elephant armor shimmers resplendently on an elephant-size frame.

Mr. Kennedy's chief contribution to this our life is a reconstruction of a medieval war machine, a trebuchet, which he uses to hurl pianos, dead pigs, and small cars hundreds of feet through the air - a matter regrettably beyond our purview.



The shock to Colonel Wedge of finding that what he had taken for a pile of old clothes was alive and a relation by marriage caused him to speak a little sharply. *Full Moon*, 1947

New Members

Limerick

Mindi Reid

I cannot sing the blues
Regarding Wodehouse dues;
While other bills
May give me chills
O'er *this* I can enthuse!

Stanstead House Preparatory School was faintly scented with a composite aroma consisting of roast beef, ink, chalk, and that curious classroom smell which is like nothing else on earth.

The Little Nugget, 1913

The Coming of Spring

P.G. Wodehouse wrote this fluffy little piece for *Vanity Fair* around 1920, and Pauline Blanc found it recently. It's an example of the light articles he wrote in great quantity for that magazine.

Spring is here! What magic in those words. We look out of our window at the heaped-up snow, which Street Cleaning Commissioner Fetherston has been unable to clear away; we turn on a little more steam heat; and we say to ourselves, "Well, Spring is here. Hurrah!"

What a gay, happy season it is. On every side the book-stalls are bright with next December's Christmas numbers of the magazines. The latest costumes, designed in Paris by some lunatic with a grudge against the human race, cause us to renew the vow we swore on New Year's Eve to avoid the demon Rum. Hats which we have only seen in nightmares smite the eye wherever we go. We hear the joyous note of the automobile salesman honking to his mate. The traffic policemen discard their ear-muffs. The panhandler emerges from Blackwell's Island where he has been spending the winter and parades the streets once more. In Central Park swarms of happy children are digging their heels into the young grass and not doing a thing to it. Out in Brooklyn is heard the whirr of the wheels of a hundred thousand baby carriages. In a million stores a million commuters are buying the flower seeds which will shortly fill their gardens with bindweed. Brimstone and molasses flow in a gurgling stream down a million happy young throats. For it is Spring!

What a thrilling promise of love it brings! Soon, all over New York, bankers will be spending the better part of their lives on the Follies Roof. And soon the fashionable young polo player will be wooing his best friend's wife. And the serious-minded businessman will be offering the usual tribute of gardenias to the coy and diffident *coryphées* in one of the thousand and one Russian Ballets now devastating our fair Island of Manhattan.

And, over the whole scene, Cupids - flying Cupids, dancing Cupids, musical Cupids, robust Cupids - will be whirling about and adding to the chaos and confusion of Love's triumphal merry-go-round. . .

Ding Dong

Hazel Steward, who was the first to find Amaryllis (see page 8), asks for and surely deserves our help in finding another phrase:

> Years ago I read a PGW novel in which the hero speculated about giving a young couple "a peel of bells" instead of the usual fish slice as a wedding gift. The couple, as I recall, were to be married in a cathedral with a red carpet and mitred bishop or archbishop in attendance.

Since projected weddings are endemic in Wodehouse, this one may be hard to find. Could the double "e" have been a misprint, I wonder? But even a peal of bells is an odd present, and we would have a residual mystery.

The Sands o' Dee

Dan Garrison has found another literary source for us. He writes:

When Bertie remarks that his Aunt Dahlia's lightest whisper is like someone calling the cattle home across the sands of Dee, he is alluding to a poem by that celebrated advocate of Muscular Christianity, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), which I quote in its entirety:

The Sands O' Dee

"Oh Mary, go and call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
Across the sands o' Dee."
The western wind was dark and wild wi' foam,
And all alone went she.

The creeping tide came up along the sand,
And o'er and o'er the sand,
And round and round the sand,
As far as eye could see;
The blinding mist came down and hid the land -
And never home came she.

"Oh, is it weed, or fish, or floating hair -
A tress o' golden hair,
O' drowned maid's golden hair,
Above the nets at sea?
Was never salmon yet that shone so fair,
Among the stakes on Dee."

They rowed her in across the rolling foam,
The cruel crawling foam,
The cruel hungry foam,
To her grave beside the sea:
But still the boatmen hear her call the cattle home,
Across the sands o' Dee.

I'm sorry to tell you that there is no official Sands o' (or of) Dee in Great Britain. The very latest and hottest edition of the Ordnance Survey Gazeteer lists no such place. There are, however, several rivers named Dee and I have no doubt that each is fully equipped with sands.
OM

Cricket in Hollywood

Donald Daniel sends the following from a recent edition of an English newspaper.

SIR - How nice to learn that the Hollywood Cricket Club, under Lord Alexander Rufus Isaacs, scored more than 100 runs in an innings, but this was not a first as you reported (Peterborough, Aug. 9).

The club was started by Sir Aubrey Smith (1863-1948). P.G. Wodehouse took the minutes at the inaugural meetings and the XI produced many innings of more than 100 runs. I do not have the complete figures but in a match against Pasadena, "Gubby" Allen and C.B. Fry played for the Hollywood team. Allen, then captain of England, scored 77 and Fry, a former England captain, 12, and David Niven 13.

In another match Sir Aubrey, who was the great C.A. "Round the Corner" Smith of Cambridge, Sussex and England, was 61 not out in a total of 106. Sir Aubrey was, of course, C. Aubrey Smith, the actor, notable in such films as The Prisoner of Zenda, Little Lord Fauntleroy and Rebecca. He played, with a runner, until the year of his death.

As well as Niven and Errol Flynn, H.B. Warner, Nigel Bruce, Boris Karloff, Herbert Marshall, Ronald Colman, George Arliss and (once only) Laurence Olivier turned out for the great man.

Stanley Reynolds
West Monkton, Somerset

. . . . .

The presence of P.G. Wodehouse at the inaugural meeting seems to date that meeting to 1930-1931 or 1936-1937 when Plum worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter. The cricket club has thus survived for some six decades. TWS members in the Los Angeles area have a chance to see the hallowed game live and in color.
OM

A Sense of Lack

Mindi Reid

The thing that peeves,
The thing that grieves,
Is this:
I do not have a Jeeves.

I bow my head upon my sleeves,
The tears flow as my soul upheaves;
I do insist!
The thing that's missed - is Jeeves.

Perhaps I'll leave
Some fatal eve,
To search:
From Portland OR, to Tel Aviv -

Somewhere there MUST be my own Jeeves.
(If not, I'll join a gang of thieves
Besmirch
My good name for a Jeeves.

Fie king's employ, or khedive's!
I'll snatch away from such my Jeeves!
They'd best all keep on the qui vive -
With criminal intent
I'm bent on parting them from any Jeeves!)

Why not? I truly do believe
That life is pointless sans a Jeeves;

> One needs a Jeeves to quote Spinoza,
> Bring perfect toast forth from the toastah;
> One needs this Saint-cum-major-domo,
> To patch one up with tea and Bromo;
> To chide one when the rent is due,
> And fend off Aunts who "View, Halloo!!"
> This deux ex machina Sage
> Dispensing wonders like a Mage:
> Saving one from countless troubles
> Creating castles from life's rubble;
> Oh PLEASE, don't let me be mistaken!
> Not EVERY Jeeves can yet be taken!
> If the Fates bereave ---
> Me of a Jeeves ---
> My wits no shrink will e're retrieve!!!

Something New

Len Lawson

Judy Stroup has sent me Catalog No. 51 from A Common Reader in Pleasantville, New York. The catalog lists 24 books by PGW plus *The Penguin Wodehouse Companion* by Richard Usborne. All are paperbacks, mostly Penguins. Judy says she was able to pick up 5 titles she hadn't been able to find anywhere else. She says these folks are a pleasure to deal with and they are prompt.

Bill Horn, a steady contributor to this column, has sent me a copy of the *New York Times Book Review* of June 16, 1991. It contains a review of *Our Age: English Intellectuals Between the World Wars - A Group Portrait* (Random House, New York, 479p, $30) by Noel Annan. The review mentions vignettes by many notable people including P.G. Wodehouse. Neither Bill nor I have seen this book. Can anyone tell us about the PGW vignette?

Dolores Robinson tells of a new trade paperback edition of *Wodehouse on Crime* (International Polygonics, Ltd., $9.95).

Charles Edward "Biffy" Biffen in "The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy" set a standard of forgetfulness exceeded only by me. Someone who will remain nameless because of my remarkable memory informed me of *Frivolity Unbound* by Robert Kiernan (1990, Continuum Publishing Co., 370 Lexington Avenue, New York NY, 10017, about $20). Mr. Kieman writes about six authors he considers camp humorists: Thomas Love Peacock, Max Beerbohm, Ronald Firbank, E.F. Benson, P.G. Wodehouse and Ivy Compton-Burnett. My local bookstore had to go to the publisher to get me a copy; you may want to go there direcly. I do apologize to our unnamed informant.

Jim Earl, our man in England who is two full sizes larger than Roderick Spode, tells me that there is a new paperback edition of *Week-End Wodehouse* (Pimlico, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA, £8). This edition is especially welcome because it contains the original Hilaire Belloc introduction which is missing from the American edition.

Tom Wells has been busily comparing his books with their description in the recent and monumental McIlvaine bibliography. He has listed quite a number of variants and some omissions and typos. Tom offers his list of 50 or 60 entries as a five page supplement to be mailed flat for $5.

I strongly urge all of us who have the bibliography to do as Tom has done. Compare your materials with the entries in the bibliography, make up a list of differences, and send it to James H. Heineman, 475 Park Avenue, New York NY 10022. Be very careful in your comparisons and descriptions. Photocopies of the pages containing the important details would certainly be helpful. In time either a supplement or second edition may be issued. The bibliography is an excellent piece of work but input from all of us can make it even better.

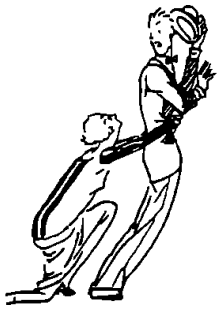
I saw that Anastatia had buried her face in her hands, while William, with brotherly solicitude, stood scratching the top of her head with a number three iron, no doubt in a well-meant effort to comfort and console. "Rodney Has a Relapse," *Nothing Serious*, 1950

Wodehouse, 1941-1943

Donald Daniel is a frequent contributor to *Plum Lines* on Wodehousian matters in Britain. Now he asks for a little help in his investigation of Wodehouse's war years.

> I have just read *Wodehouse at War* [New York, Ticknor and Fields, 1981] with much interest. I had hoped that it would contain details of the Wodehouse's life between Plum's release from internment [in 1941] to the departure for Paris in 1943. Although I have read everything I can about Plum's life there has been infuriatingly little concerning this period, about which I am very interested. It seems that the Wodehouses stayed with various members of the German aristocracy. Since I am related to other members of the aristocracy, I would like to see if I could through family links discover just how the Wodehouses lived during those years.
>
> If you could put this request for details in the newsletter with a request that anybody with any information could write me, I should be most grateful.

The most complete account of the 1941-1943 period I have found in a brief search is in Chapter 13 of Frances Donaldson's *P.G. Wodehouse, A Biography* . It does not overflow with detail. OM



Remember
The Wodehouse Convention

Sheraton Park Avenue Hotel
New York City

Remsenburg October 11
New York October 12-13

For information write to Marylin Macgregor at the address given below or call her at (916) 758-6783.

Information and New Memberships
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues Payments and Address Changes
Tom Wainwright

Editorial Contributions
Ed Ratcliffe, OM

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Market Snodsbury is mostly chapel folk with a moral code that would have struck Torquemada as too rigid.
Much Obliged, Jeeves, 1971

A Few Quick Ones

Blaise Baker presents this idyllic scene: "I imagined myself seated comfortably in an armchair by a fireplace, a bone china teacup and saucer on the polished mahogany side table, the fragrance of bergamot, a small dish of reading biscuits, and P.G. Wodehouse in hand."

It's from *Stranger in the Forest* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1988) by Eric Hansen. "Obviously an estimable gentleman" says Blaise, and I agree.

William Hardwick notes that BBC Radio broadcast five short stories from the Blandings saga this last spring. Not available on tape yet, as far as I know, but we live in hope.

Bill Montgomery provides some inside scoop about securing the British "Jeeves and Wooster" TV series for American viewing. An inquiry at his local Public Broadcasting Station brought him the information that TV station WGBH in Boston purchases the British productions, produces them in America under the "Masterpiece Theatre" name, and distributes them to PBS stations around the country.

Those of us who want to see the series on American televison should write to the following person and urge her to purchase the series for American production:

Ms. Rebecca Eaton
Executive Producer
Masterpiece Theatre
WGBH
125 Western Avenue
Boston MA 02134

Tina Griffin sends a column from the English *Daily Express* telling us that Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie are working on a third "Jeeves and Wooster" series, presumably to appear in 1992.

Tina also notes that the recent Michael Walsh book *Andrew Lloyd Webber: His Life and Works* (Harry N. Abrams) includes a section entitled "Jeeves Comes a Cropper," outlining the history of that ill-fated 1975 musical.

Bill Horn has sent out a letter to 25 TWSers and other Wodehouse fans in and near Minnesota, proposing the first meeting of a new local chapter of our Society. He suggests cocktails ("Jeeves is a magician with the old shaker"), followed by the perusal of a collection of Wodehousian books with a thought for possible purchase, then dinner at "the rather Edwardian Minneapolis Club." It sounds like a very good evening.

As some great writer once remarked, it can be pretty lonely out there, surrounded by people who have never heard of Wodehouse. Getting together in a chummy little Wodehouse group can be a lot of fun. Fun and successful meetings are just exactly what we wish Bill and all his fellow Plummies.

Bill Horn advises us that the life of a pig farmer, whether at Blandings Castle or in humbler surroundings, is not easy. He sends an article from the *New York Times* reporting that Charles Russell, a pig farmer in Shropshire, could not get a bank loan to build a breeding enterprise for his herd of rare Gloucester Old Spot pigs. Prince Charles, hearing of his distress, will provide the money.

"It takes time to establish performance records and we have had to spend money improving the roadway and the housing for the pigs," Mr. Russell said. "I am rapidly discovering why farmers have one of the highest suicide rates."

Lord Emsworth would have every sympathy. I confidently expect these pigs to win silver medals at the Shrewsbury Agricultural Show. Not, of course, in the Fat Pigs class.

John Provancher notes, in support of the spelling of "Wodehousian," that "no less a personage than Isaac Asimov uses the spelling twice in his forward to the anthology *Wodehouse on Crime*...."

I cannot help remarking that Mr. Asimov's authority in the matter is given immense weight by his membership in that lofty literary group, the Wodehouse Society.

OM

The Oldest Member

The Masters as the Servants
Wodehouse on the Housatonic

Dan Garrison gives us this view of a New England preparatory school and English public schools as a kind of Wodehouse world, where the servants are the masters. Dan is an alumnus of Kent School, Kent, Connecticut, and wrote this article for the Kent Quarterly in 1988. Charles Gould, whose Wodehouse catalogs are often listed in Len Lawson's column, is in the Department of English at Kent.

The housemasters are his starchy butlers, never ruffled, never fazed. The headmaster himself is of course the omniscient, omnipresent Jeeves who like any beneficent deity, will always save youthful pranks from turning serious.

Gerald Clarke in *Esquire*, May 1974

The story is told of the headmaster presenting a sorry case of failing grades to a boy's fur-laden mother. "I can't understand it," she says: "Freddie always got along so well with the help at home!" The mental demands of boarding-school life so readily eclipse its baronial aspect that as striplings we scarcely notice that we are being catered to by a considerable staff of cooks, janitors, laundrymen, office workers, nurses, drivers, watchmen, technicians, groundskeepers, and bottle-washers. We are only dimly, if at all, aware, that the faculty who work like pistons from one dark winter month to the next to redeem us from savagery do so because they are being paid. The veneer of self-help takes us all in; we perceive that we are wringing a hard life from the grudging soil of New England, while the masters who so cheerfully torment us do their worst for the satisfaction of seeing us squirm.

The official school propaganda of our time actually encouraged this delusion. Though I now forget most of the words used, we were often compared in our rugged self-reliance to the pampered slugs at Hotchkiss and Trinity-Pawling, and we generally felt a bit sheepish when our teams failed to give theirs the shellacking they deserved. There was a work holiday in the fall of my third form year during which, on the pretext of harvesting a crop of potatoes from the large field between Mount Algo and the Housatonic, we spent half a day throwing potatoes at each other and the other half feeling smug about our sturdy self-sufficiency while hastily summoned workers tried to salvage what was left of the crop.

But we were never allowed to bask for long in the assurance of our natural worthiness. There was always Mr. Armstrong to warn us that indolence was just around the corner. The withering scorn with which he depicted the spinless torpor of our earlier life made us laugh uneasily in the knowledge that we would gladly slide back into that primal idleness. "Study is HARD WORK!" And so it went. In the ceaseless tug of war between the

self-reliance and steadfastness that made us Kent Men and the hormonal doldrums that made us adolescents, there was no rest for the wicked. We were in no position to appreciate the wisdom of the lady in furs who equated the masters at school with the help at home.

Which brings us to the mighty P.G. Wodehouse, Anglo-American poet-laureate of boarding school. Though most will think first of Jeeves and his cloth-headed employer Bertie Wooster, anyone who tracks the Wodehouse muse to the first decade of our century will find about fifty stories and half a dozen novels about life at fictitious schools named Wrykyn, Locksley, and St. Austin's, all modeled on Dulwich, a public school in the suburbs south of London, whence Wodehouse, unable to afford Oxford or Cambridge, went to work at the age of eighteen in the Lombard Street office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. After two years of diurnal tedium and nocturnal scribbling, he finally earned enough in 1902 to leave this distressingly real job and make his way as a professional writer. Though he would in the next seventy years write more and earn more from his writing than any other author in print, his first ten years were of a type to win him neither riches nor fame. Almost all of what he wrote between "The Prize Poem" in 1901 and the significantly titled "Out of School" in 1909 was about school life, and written to be read by schoolboys, in the pages of such magazines as *The Captain* and *Public School Magazine*.

Though many of these stories were never reprinted, a fair amount of his early work has recently reappeared in paperback and can be sampled in cheap Penguin editions. Most of what you will now find in casual browsing is surprisingly good after all these years, though it lacks the zany bite of the best Blandings Castle novels and the misadventures of Bertie and Jeeves, all of which started to bubble up around 1915. Wodehouse's school stories are based on his life at Dulwich between 1895 and 1901. Like mid-century Kent, turn-of-the-century Dulwich was more wholeheartedly athletic than intellectual, but at the same time determinedly tough-minded about traditional education: in Wodehouse's day,

> To the ordinary parent, education meant Classics. I went automatically on the Classical side and, as it turned out, it was the best form of education I could have had as a writer....We were a great all-around school in those days....The brainless athlete was quite a rarity. We might commit mayhem on the football field, but after the game was over we trotted off to our houses and wrote Latin verse.

Wodehouse was himself a good athlete, a prefect, and editor of the school magazine, but his schoolwork was fitful. His studymate William Townend, also to become a novelist, remembers their evening hours in the Senior Study:

> We were supposed to prepare our lessons for the next day. I don't remember that Plum ever did. He worked, if he worked at all, supremely fast, writing Latin and Greek verses as rapidly as he wrote English.

But in the summer term of 1899 his place in the Classical VI form was twenty-third of twenty-five, and reports of his work were less often "V. Fair" than "Just satisfactory," "Fair," "Bad," and "Not very strong." His headmaster, the famous classical scholar A.H. Gilkes, included in his assessment of the future humorist:

> He has the most distorted ideas about wit and humour; he draws over his books and examination papers in the most distressing way and writes foolish rhymes in other people's books. Notwithistanding, he has a genuine interest in literature and can often talk with much enthusiasm and good sense about it. He does some things astonishingly well, and writes good Latin verses.

He was, in short, the type known in my time as a hacker: abstracted, not very social and when not being useful to the school as athlete, editor, and prefect, a bit prone to get into ghastly scrapes. After five years of this, he had ample material for a decade of schoolboy fiction.

By the time he reached his thirties, he had outgrown his youthful and impecunious audience and was spending most of his time in America where there was good money to be made writing funny stories about the strange and dying race who send their sons to Eton and Oxford and occupy country estates in Shropshire and other pastoral exurbs. But though he proved to the satisfaction of all that he could entertain adult readers, Wodehouse's intellectual, moral, and spiritual develoment stopped sometime late in his fifth form year, and he was at his best writing about similarly arrested characters. Lord Emsworth, somehow a father of legitimate sons without ever being a husband, is ruled over by his beaky sisters. His heart belongs to his sow, the Empress of Blandings. And, speaking of being arrested: his younger brother Galahad was arrested so often in his prime that he got to know more policemen by their first names than any other man in London.

A younger generation of Wodehouse characters (he created over 2100) are members of London's Drones Club. History records the names of some forty-four Drones, from William Egerton Bamfylde Ossingham Belfry, ninth Earl of Towcester (pron. Toaster) to Algy Wymondham-Wymondham, who are living proof that the type of school on which Kent was modeled back in the Edwardian age puts its stamp on men who grow up to be boys. There is Freddie Widgeon, whom girls always like at first - but if all the girls he loved and lost were placed end to end, they would reach halfway down Piccadilly - or farther, as some of them were pretty tall. Of an innocent and unsuspicious nature, Freddie believes everything he reads in *Time*. Another favorite Drone is Gussie Fink-Nottle, Nature's last word in cloth-headed guffins, who prefers the company of newts, which he keeps in a glass tank. The only Drone who doesn't drink, he makes history for English humor in *Right Ho, Jeeves* when he unwittingly drinks a pitcher of orange juice spiked with two tumblers of gin immediately prior to distributing the prizes at Market Snodsbury Grammar School.

But I digress. The frantic world of Wodehouse's London and outlying counties is served by a corps of butlers, of whom we meet no less than seventy in Wodehouse's seventy four novels and two hundred thirty four collected stories, and a brotherhood of valets and gentlemen's personal gentlemen who share with the butlers membership in a London club of their own, the Junior Ganymede. Wodehouse's England is matriarchal: a man in service is a spent force if he takes employment of a married gentlemen. The best and brightest refuse to stay in the employment of a man who marries. Such a hero is Jeeves, Bertie Wooster's manservant in twenty-seven stories and a dozen novels. Tall and dark and impressive, like one of the better-class ambassadors or the youngish High Priest of some refined and delicate religion, he has eyes which gleam with the light of intelligence, and his finely chiseled face expresses a feudal desire to be of service. He opens conversations with the gentle cough of a very old sheep clearing its throat on a misty mountain top. Though Wodehouse named him after a Gloucestershire cricket bowler killed in the Battle of the Somme, the only hint of his military past comes in *Ring for Jeeves*, when he admits to having "dabbled in the First World War to some extent." There is, in fact, something ghostly about Jeeves, who enters Bertie's employ in *Jeeves Takes Charge* (1916 - the year his namesake was killed):

> He floated noiselessly through the doorway like a healing zephyr. That impressed me from the start....This fellow didn't seem to have any feet at all. He just streamed in...."Excuse me, sir," he said gently. Then he seemed to flicker, and wasn't there any longer. I heard him moving about in the kitchen, and presently he came back with a glass on a tray.

If Percy Jeeves the Gloucestershire bowler joined the immortals as Reginald Jeeves the gentlemen's personal gentleman, he took with him a curious blend of features which has less to do with professional cricket than with the manipulative craft of the schooolmaster. Privately educated, Bertie's Jeeves was first employed as a page-boy in a school for young girls. His reading habits show a preference for Spinoza; and his knowledge, particularly of literary quotations, is encyclopedic. Finding his employer "mentally somewhat negligible," he makes it his business to extricate Bertie and his friends from all sorts of personal embarrassments, a task for which his size 14 cerebellum and diet of fish render him eminently fit.

Anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with Bertie and Jeeves will recognize that we've come back to the master-servant conundrum with which our pleasant diversion began. The lady in furs instinctively knew (in her dim way) that in the topsy-turvy world of schools like Kent, Dulwich and St. Austin's, the ranking servants are "masters." If she could change places for a day or two with her mentally somewhat negligible son, she would learn the unnerving genius of such master servants for noiseless entrances at the most inopportune time, their unerring mastery of literary quotation, their philosophic turn of mind, and their uncanny command of the psychology of the individual. If she were then to pick up some P.G. Wodehouse, she would recognize in her hapless son an avatar of no less a luminary than Bertie Wooster, described by one critic as "the bubbling, bumbling fifth-former, the perpetual adolescent who finds the world too confusing but always gets by, if just barely."