



Plum Lines

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

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Summer 1995

THE DAY I MET THE MASTER

by Barrie Pitt

Marilyn MacGregor has provided, through the good offices of Norman Murphy, this rare, probably unique, description of an encounter with P. G. Wodehouse in his internment camp during World War II. It's from the *English Lifewise*, November 1993.

I first saw P. G. Wodehouse from behind the barred window of a prison cell in Upper Silesia, and was not at that moment particularly interested in who he might be. The elderly occupant of the other bench in the cell offered comment.

'Know 'oo 'e is?' He indulged in yet another bout of heavy coughing, then added, 'Woodarse' 'is name is. Funny bloke, they say. Never read 'im meself. Never 'ad time for bloody books.'

There followed a conversational hiatus during which I inspected the rest of the limited view from the cell window and wondered if and how the hell I would ever get out. Then my brain finally 'clicked.'

'Woodarse?' I cried. 'P. G. Woodarse?'

'Yus,' he replied. 'That's 'im. 'Eard of 'im, 'ave yer?'

Heard of him? My stars! By then it was the best part of eight years since I had regularly smuggled extra copies of *Jeeves* or *Blandings* out of Portsmouth Municipal Library—enough for three or four days of golden hilarity until I could get back for more—and one of the most infuriating aspects of my present position was that, when I had been captured, in June 1940, my pack containing *The Code of the Woosters* was in a blazing lorry the other side of the field.

It was several days before Sonderfuhrer Heide decided that I might be let out the cell and mix with the other inmates of Ilag VIII b, Tost, and then only so long as I reported to the Kommandatura several times a day at regular intervals. A further week passed before I summoned up my courage and, holding a copy of the prison-camp newspaper *The Camp* which that month carried the most appalling travesty of a Jeeves short story, reputedly by Peegee Wudhaus, walked across and into the remnants of a pre-war school tennis court

which the other inmates seemed to have decided was inviolate to their most distinguished colleague.

'Dreadful, isn't it?' he agreed. 'Third person, for goodness sake. You don't think anyone would really believe I wrote it, do you?'

I assured him that no one who had ever read a word written by him would be so mistaken.

'Oh, good,' he said with patent relief. 'You'd have thought that even this lot could do better than that!' He paused and looked around. 'Why do you think that so many of the guards and chaps around here look as though they have been carved out of old potatoes?'

I ventured the possibility that perhaps the soldiers chosen to guard elderly civilians in the depths of Upper Silesia were not likely to be the pride of Hitler's Wehrmacht, at which he gloomily agreed that I might be right.

'Oh Lord', he said as whistles sounded and bells rang. 'What do they want now? I suppose they're going to count us again. It must be nearly three hours since they did it last.'

Upon which note we parted.

Boredom, lack of any opportunity to plan for much in the way of future within the constrictions of the regular attendance at the Kommandatura, and perhaps the very proximity of my literary idol, prompted me to commit to paper two or three of the short stories which had been maturing soggily at the back of my mind, and in due course, with great trepidation, I told The Master of their existence.

'Oh splendid!' he said immediately. 'Would you like me to read them?'

Pallid with excitement I raced away to my bedspace, delved under the palliase, and raced back. 'Thank heavens

you can write clearly,' he said, and walked off towards the main block, bearing my hopes, my ambitions, my liver and heart with him.

Two days later he drew me out from a column queuing for some now-forgotten purpose, and sat me down on a fallen tree in what we called 'The Park,' between the main building and the 'White House' or hospital-cum-theatre.

'Now then,' he said. 'Who are you going to send these to?'

As I had given no thought whatsoever to any possible market, or indeed anything except getting the stuff written, I hesitated and then offered *Lilliput*?

He frowned *Lilliput*? Do they publish stuff this length?' Pause. 'Oh no. Much too long I would think. Fifteen hundred words is about their limit'—thus introducing me to one of the simple, basic factors of the profession I was hoping to enter. He frowned again...*Atlantic Monthly*, I would think, they might do. Hum! But they won't have heard of you, will they?

As at that time I hadn't heard of *Atlantic Monthly*, this seemed on the surface to balance things out, but did, I could see, present an obstacle—quite apart, of course, from that of getting a hand-written script from upper Silesia to New York in 1941. He thought a bit more, then sighed.

'Look,' he said 'I don't want to try to tell you anything, but have another look at this yarn of yours about the watch and the French chap. It's about four thousand words, isn't it?' (I had no idea.) 'If you disentangle the two stories you've got there, they'll both stand up and you'll have two stories of about fifteen hundred words each. One anyway. You'd have a better chance then with *Lilliput*, or perhaps the *Strand* if it's still going. Oh, Lord. Time to feed. Wonder what colour gravy they've boiled the old socks in today?'

It was at about this time that he began writing *Money in the Bank*, and, until he rather curtly told me to shove off as he was working, I did have a tendency to hang about at the end of the dining-room, watching him.

Often if the weather was fine and the majority of inmates were walking around The Park, he would do what I have since learned from Norman Murphy's book was called The Wodehouse Glide and come across and join me sitting on one of the fallen trees. And he would talk to me about the craft of writing, of which he never tired.

'Do you go to the theatre much?' he asked. 'Try to see your stories in terms of scenes in a play. Then you will be sure to put in the right amount of dialogue. Readers like lots of talk.'

'They say writing is a good walking-stick but a bad crutch. I've been all right, though. Never had much trouble. Except right at the beginning of course. But we

all have that.'

'How are you on Classics? Oh,' he said despondently. 'Small Latin and less Greek, eh? Shakespeare, did all right, I suppose?' He gazed into the middle distance. 'Pity, though. I suppose it's too late for you to take one of 'em up now? You may not have much else to do for some time. I wrote Latin hexameters at Dulwich: very useful when it comes to writing lyrics. Cole Porter and I always tried 'em out in Latin first. Showed up the flat spots immediately!'

Then one day, to my stunned astonishment, he rather shyly asked me if I could spare time to look through the first chapters of *Money in the Bank*! As I had been urging myself for some time to ask him if I might be allowed to, it came as something of a Heaven's Opening, and I sped away with hammering heart to my bed and began reading immediately. Needless to say, the only comments I had to make when next I met him were to the effect that his portrait of Max Enke was unmistakable, and he had obviously changed Sandy Youl's sex.

'How about the last bit?' he asked anxiously.

This was a typical Wodehouse semi-climax, obviously foreshadowing another spell of hilarious misunderstanding, to lead inevitably to complexities ultimately resolved, gloriously, in the final pages. I told him this.

'Ah,' he said. 'It works, does it? how about the bit when...?'

'Oh, yes! That's even better. I almost fell out of bed!'

'Hum! Yes, well. It's very difficult, you see. I write everything for first serialisation in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and this means I have to have a cliff-hanger at the end of each instalment. First one at the end of seven thousand words, then one every five thousand words until the end of the book. Comes a bit wearing after a time. But thank you. Glad you like it.'

I have no idea of the date, but the time came when I watched him being escorted down the staircase by a somewhat sinister character and by Sonderführer Heide and two German guards, and the next thing I knew was that he had been released and was living in Berlin. Here he made those broadcasts, and as they were repeats of amusing talks he had given at Tost which gently extracted the Michael from the German authorities, all four of which I had read weeks before he left, I was never able to understand what offence anyone in their right minds could take to them.

I never met him again, and I reproach myself bitterly. During the late 1960s and early 1970s I travelled to America frequently, and by then I had quite a few books published. Every time I returned to England I

would tell myself that the next time I was in New York I would send him a copy of something I had written, and, if he remembered me, ask if I might visit him.

But one dire morning in February 1975 I was lying in bed listening to the eight o'clock news, and at the end of the headlines the announcer's voice droned on:

'Sir Pelham Wodehouse, P. G. Wodehouse, the humorist...' and I knew that I had left it too late.

As both Psmith and Bertie Wooster said on occasion, 'The saddest words are these: It Might Have Been.'

Barrie Pitt is a writer on military affairs.

A small china figure...represented a warrior of pre-khaki days advancing with a spear upon some adversary who, judging from the contented expression on the warrior's face, was smaller than himself.

Indiscretions of Archie, 1921

FOR SALE: LOW WOOD



Donald Daniel, William Harding, and Margaret Slythe send an item from the English *Daily Telegraph* of March 25, 1995, announcing that Low Wood, the Wodehouse's Le Touquet house, is for sale. The price, if you're in the market, is 5.3 million francs, equivalent to US \$1.06 million or £662,000. It's on Avenue de Golf, 'still the best address in town.' Low Wood is described as 'English in style but built with a strong French accent... a long, low building with gables and verandas in the Arts and Crafts tradition.' Plum and Ethel rented the house in 1934, bought it a year later, and lived there until he was interned by the Germans in 1940 and the house was requisitioned by the Germans shortly afterward. The Wodehouses never lived there again. At the end of the war they visited Le Touquet, found the house in very poor condition, and sold it.

Yearning for something a bit better? There's a house for sale just down the street that belonged to one of Plum's neighbors, Edward, Prince of Wales. They'll wrap it up and tie a ribbon around it in exchange for your 5.5 million francs. If pleasure is proportional to price, you'll have 4% more fun there than in the Wodehouse place.



ANIMALS DEPEND ON PEOPLE TOO
THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

This certificate officially recognizes
THE P. G. WODEHOUSE SOCIETY
as a Zoo Parent of
AN ASIAN NEWT
effective
MARCH 1995

Alexander L. Hoskins

Alexander L. Hoskins
President
Chief Executive Officer

the
Zoological
Society of
Philadelphia

THE PHILADELPHIA ZOO ◻ 3400 WEST GIRARD AVENUE ◻ PHILADELPHIA PA 19104-1196 ◻ (215) 243-1100 EXT. 232

THE GREAT NEWT EXHIBIT

by Susan Cohen

Susan and her husband Daniel are Founding Mother and Father of our Chapter One in Philadelphia. A most important event in the life of the group took place this spring when it sponsored (i. e., funded) a new newt exhibit at the Philadelphia Zoo. Here Susan, with entirely pardonable pride, describes the Grand Opening. It was quite an event.

The Grand Opening of the Newt Exhibit at the Philadelphia Zoo was a triumph. The event took place on March 9th at 1:30 p. m., attended by the director of the zoo, the curator of the Reptile House, three television crews, an Associated Press photographer, other representatives of the media, members of our Chapter One, and quite a number of interested spectators, most of whom had probably never before attended the opening of a newt exhibit.

The newt tank itself is a spacious, sweet, smiling, green, watery place, situated in a prominent spot in the Reptile House. It is the first new exhibit in the soon-to-be redecorated House, so the Zoo was very pleased to get the publicity; reptiles and amphibians do not usually get the credit they deserve from mammal-loving mammals.

Our poisonous Mandarin Newt, with its bold orange markings, was there in the tank, serenely unaffected by all the excitement, as was the Paddle-Tail Newt, which is not poisonous but sprays its scent at the female and paddles its tail to spread the scent. If she follows the scent, they breed.

Our plaque, prominently on view on the tank, reads 'Exhibit of Asiatic newts funded by members of the Wodehouse Society.' Due to a Zoo rule we could not name the Exhibit after Gussie, but the name Wodehouse shines for all to see. We expect to receive a proclamation from the mayor's office, commemorating the great event.

We of Chapter One are very proud of our newt achievement. We thank everyone who contributed to our project and made it possible. We hope all members of TWS will visit the sacred shrine of our newts when they can, and that other chapters will adopt newts as well. Newt numbers are declining world-wide and they need our support.



Susan, Daniel, and all the members of Chapter One deserve our heartiest congratulations and thanks for this living monument to Gussie Fink-Nottle, to the objects of his obsession, and most of all to P. G. Wodehouse. The Philadelphia Newt Exhibit will surely become a place of pilgrimage for all Wodehouse fans who visit the area in the future.

THE SCENE

By Richard Jones

This column from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of March 9 is merely a sample of the excellent media coverage of the newtish doings. Reporters, photographers, zoo officials, and a crowd of interested citizens made it an exciting day indeed for Chapter One-ers. I tried to use several photographs Susan sent, to give us a glimpse of the excitement, but their reproductions here would have been very poor.

Day 65 of the Republican 'Contract With America,' and at the Philadelphia Zoo it's time for a change. The Philadelphia chapter of the Wodehouse Society has teamed up with the zoo to sponsor a new exhibit designed to 'Take Back the Newt.'

It may seem like a crazy idea, but perhaps there is a confusion of Newts in the world these days. 'What got us started was the whole Newt Gingrich thing,' said Susan Cohen, co-founder and chairwoman of the society's local chapter. 'We really just want to reclaim the name.'

The Wodehouse Society, an international organization for fans of author P. G. Wodehouse, got involved because newts figure prominently in the humorist's books. Wodehouse created the fictitious Gussie Fink-Nottle, the world's foremost newt fancier, who lived 'completely surrounded by newts.'

'Until recently,' Cohen said, 'Wodehouse was the one who was always associated with Newts. He was the Newt Person before Newt Gingrich. Now...'

Now there's the House Speaker and his 100-day-long, 10-point Contract, which has distorted the image of the semiaquatic salamanders. For example, experts say real newts have much simpler agendas. So today at 1:30, the zoo will open its Gussie Fink-Nottle Newt Exhibit to finally set the record straight.

Cohen stressed that the event was totally apolitical. She also hopes the exhibit will increase education about newts, which are neglected animals that are suffering mysterious declines all around the world.

A spokeswoman said the zoo is 'committed to the ... conservation of these amphibians.' She didn't mention anything about preserving the Washington variety.

TWS CONVENTION '95!

Program

The time has come to send in your reservation for the 1995 gathering of a Chortle* of Wodehousians in Boston. Said Chortle will be hosted by a Nottle** of NEWTS; and said NEWTS are having a barrel of fun planning for your visit! An all-star line-up of speakers is just one of the many jewels in our convention crown. Music, games, and activities galore will have you clamoring for more, not to mention the sheer pleasure of cavorting with fellow Wodehousians.

'Enough teasers!' we hear you cry. 'Let us have details!'

Well, all right then, since you asked—

Thursday, October 19

The Information Table manned by your helpful hosts, the NEWTS, will be ready and waiting in the lobby of the Copley Plaza Hotel as of Thursday evening. Sign in at any time and pick up your Welcome Packet and program, as well as a schedule of activities.

Early arrivals are also encouraged to take the free 'Boston by Night' tour, as conducted by NEWT John Fahey. Learn about Boston's rich historical and cultural heritage as you wear down a little shoe leather. The group will depart from the Copley Plaza at 7:00 P.M.

Friday, October 20

The morning is yours! You may choose to join an expedition to Lexington and Concord, a whirlwind tour of literary landmarks and fabulous foliage. The bus will leave from the Copley Plaza at 8:00 A.M. and return in plenty of time for the start of the program at 2:00. Box lunch will be included, all for a mere \$15.00.

If you prefer to stay in Boston, the NEWTS at the Information Table will be happy to suggest places to go and things to do in the city. In addition, the meeting room will be open at 10:00 A.M., allowing you to browse through the Chapters Corner and book dealers tables, as well as to meet and hobnob with your Wodehousian comrades in fun.

2:00 P.M. Opening remarks and entertainment

Anne Cotton: *The Old School Tie That Binds*

David Landman: *You, Too, Can Croon in June: Wodehouse as Lyricist*

Dan Cohen: *The OM's Ghost Story*

'Pig-hoo-o-o-o-cy!'—Skit performed by the Blandings Castle chapter

6:30 P.M. Reception, approximately 2 hours

Cash bar; hors d'oeuvres provided. Special entertainment!

Games: Egg-and-Spoon Race; Top Hat Card-Toss; Pot the Bending Baxter;

Pinch the Bobby's Helmet

Dinner afterwards? Where you like with whom you like!

Saturday, October 21

9:00 A.M. Opening remarks (we'll keep it clean)

Jan Kaufman: *What the Well Dressed Man is Wearing*

Norman Murphy: *Behind the Green Baize Door—or, P.G. Wodehouse and the Servant Problem*

* Collective noun courtesy of Jeremy Thompson ** Collective noun courtesy of John Graham

Tony Ring: *Wodehouse in the Pavilion*

TWS Business Meeting

12: 00 *Noon* Lunch

1: 30 P.M. Peter Schwed: *Wodehouse as Light Poet*

Charles Gould: *Cracking the Code of the Woosters*

Daniel Garrison: *What Every Young Schoolgirl Should Know*

About the Three O'Clock Race—Or, Wodehouse and the Plain Style

3:30 P.M. Special Round Table Discussion with the speakers (optional)

6:30 P.M. Cocktail Time, with a special performance of The Great TWS Kazoo Chorus, led by President Toni Rudersdorf

7:30 P.M. 'Agatha Agonistes'—An original skit by Max Pokrivchak, performed by a Nottle of NEWTS

8:00 P.M. Buffet Dinner

Come in period costume! Fabulous prizes to be awarded!

Tables will compete to demonstrate the Best Use of Table Objects to Describe a Golf Shot, with a prize to the winning table

After-dinner aperitif: A reading of a Wodehouse short story by NEWT Stephen Spaulding

Plenty of breadrolls will be provided—practice your wristy follow-through now!

Special toasts, prizes, and musical entertainment galore

And: Clean, bright entertainments will be scattered throughout Friday and Saturday, provided by the NEWTS and Mr. Hal Cazalet—not to be missed!

Sunday, October 22

Our traditional brunch will be held in the Copley Plaza Hotel at a time to be announced. Afterwards, interested parties may amble down to the Charles River to view the Head of the Charles Regatta. Police helmets may be pinched at your discretion. Fourteen days without the option a distinct possibility.

Highlights and Special Announcements

Fancy-Dress Banquet Conventioneers are strongly encouraged to come in costume to the Saturday night banquet. Dress as your favorite Wodehouse character! Pierrots strongly discouraged—Bertie would not approve. Prizes will be awarded for the best costumes.

Chapters Corner Calling all TWS chapters! Your fellow TWS-ers want to know all about you. To that end, we will have a 'Chapters Corner,' complete with tables and easels, to allow you to put yourselves on display, as it were. Posters, photographs, articles, books—whatever it takes to show yourselves off to advantage. Call or write to Elin Woodger (see below).

Book Dealers Tables are still available for book dealers to display/sell their wares. The fee is only \$25.00 per table. Call or write to Elin Woodger (below) to indicate your interest.

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF BARBERS

THE MASTER



BARBER-SURGEONS' HALL,
MONKWELL SQUARE,
WOOD STREET,
LONDON, EC2Y 5BL.
ENQUIRIES TEL: 0171-606 0741.
HALL HIRINGS TEL: 0171-600 1704.

April 20, 1995

Dear Ms. Macgregor,

I understand that you are the Secretary of the P.G. Wodehouse Society of the USA. I believe your members may be interested in advance notice of a 'P.G. Wodehouse Event' in London on 11th. July 1995.

On that date, as the final celebration of my Year of office as Master, the Barbers' Company are promoting a Gala Evening in support of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, one of the three leading Music Colleges in London, and our own Barbers' Company Charities. The Worshipful Company of Barbers is one of the ancient craft guilds of the City of London, the first recorded Master was Richard le Barbour in 1308! The Company controlled the development and practice of Surgery from the middle ages up to 1745 when the Surgeons were split off by Private Act of Parliament leading to the formation of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Today, the principal objects of our Charities are in support of education, primarily surgical and medical, in view of our history. Barber-Surgeons' Hall, the third such Hall on the same site, stands close to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, hence our support for that fine centre of Music and Drama training.

Each summer the Music and Drama sides combine to perform a superb musical. This year it is to be:-

'Leave it to Jane'

Music by Jerome Kern, Lyrics by P.G. Wodehouse
Book by Guy Bolton & P.G. Wodehouse

It was first performed in New York in 1917, and successfully revived there in 1957. The story centres on a Thanksgiving Day football match between two rival colleges, with witty lyrics set to delightful music. The Director of Drama, believes it may never have been produced in the U.K.

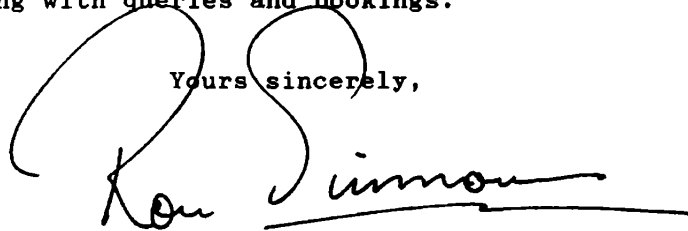
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The Barbers' Company Gala Evening will commence with a Champagne Reception at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, followed by the performance of 'Leave it to Jane' in the GSMD theatre. We will then all, including the orchestra and cast, take a short walk to Barber-Surgeons' for a Buffet Supper and Wine.

It will be a great pleasure to welcome your members to this unique 'P.G. Wodehouse Event' and I will send you a formal invitation towards the end of May when they are due to be sent out to our own members and friends. Tickets will be limited to a maximum of 300 and will only cost £50 each, to include the Champagne reception, the Show and the Buffet Supper and Wine when guests will have the opportunity of looking round Barber-Surgeons' Hall.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to let us know. Pauline Bannister on 0171 600 0950 will be dealing with queries and bookings.

Yours sincerely,



R. Simmons,
Master

Thanks to Marilyn MacGregor, who provided this letter. If any reader attends this event, please let me hear from you.

ROSIE M. BANKS IN REAL LIFE PIG LOVERS, RALLY ROUND!



Surgical Nurse

The drama, thrills and heartaches of a beautiful young nurse in a big city hospital

Rosie M. Banks



Bob Nissenbaum of Chapter One made this sensational discovery recently, and passed it along to me via Susan Cohen. The book, Susan assures us, is a *real* book—a Pocket Book published in June 1939, and this copy (shown reduced in size) is from its third printing, so it must have had some success. The same author has written a volume entitled *Navy Nurse*, it seems. The author's name can't be a coincidence—whoever it was must have been a Wodehouse fan.

Does anyone have any information at all about the author? Was it a him, her, or it? What other works of enduring worth were produced? To exactly what depth was the human soul plumbed, and what, if anything, was found down there aside from a few bent paperclips? Did the author lay the soul of Woman bare as with a scalpel? Did the stories approach the nobility of *Mervyn Keene*, *Clubman*, or *Only a Factory Girl*?

Tony Ring demonstrates just how far we have fallen, pig-wise, in these degenerate latter days with this item from the Times of London, April 28, 1995.

A desperate squeal has gone out from pig fanciers for patronage. Fine swine are slipping down the social scale and there are fears that breeds will die out for lack of aristocratic support.

This month's issue of the *Ark*, the bible for breeders of rare farm animals, warns that the landed gentry have turned their backs on pedigree pigs of old. 'Once there was a strong link between the aristocracy and swine,' it snuffles. 'That link has now been stretched to near breaking point.'

Valiantly holding the fort are such aficionados as Lord Lichfield, the Duchess of Devonshire and Lord Runcie, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, all of whom own pigs. But the numbers are dwindling, warns Richard Lutwyche, secretary of the Society of Gloucestershire Old Spots, a breed which holds court at Gatcombe Park, the home of the Princess Royal.

In his article, Lutwyche cites P. G. Wodehouse's pig, Empress of Blandings, and her devoted owner Lord Emsworth. 'How valuable the Empress was in supplying comfort and succor in hours of need,' he says.

He adds that the difficulties faced by some members of the Royal Family could be directly linked to their interest in pigs. 'That the Princess Royal attracts most esteem can be credited to Her Royal Highness's sensible attitude in maintaining a small herd of Gloucestershire Old Spots.'

On her face was the unmistakable look of a mother whose daughter has seen the light and will shortly be marrying a deserving young clergyman with a bachelor uncle high up in the shipping business.

Blandings Castle and Elsewhere, 1935

A FEW QUICK ONES

Margaret and Doug Stow, just back from New York, report the happy news that 'the New York Public Library is celebrating its Centennial with an exhibition entitled 'Books of the Century.' Wodehouse's *The Inimitable Jeeves* is included in the category of 'Optimism, Joy, Gentility.' We were delighted!

And so are we all. Are there better words to sum up his writing?

David McDonough unearthed this little tribute to PGW in the fertile fields of the New York Times recently: 'At the Booker Awards earlier this fall, one of the judges could be heard muttering that no one was writing novels like P. G. Wodehouse any more.' Alas, too true, too true.

William Hardwick writes that 'BBC Radio have dramatised six of Plum's golfing stories. The six were 'A Mixed Three-some,' 'A Woman is Only a Woman,' 'The Clicking of Cuthbert,' 'Ordeal by Golf,' 'Sundered Hearts,' and 'The Salvation of George MacKintosh,' all under the title of 'The Oldest Member.' It was a fine series, but it was set at Priors Heath Golf Club, and not as in the books Mavis Bay. So I wrote to the producer, Edward Taylor, asking the reason why.

Taylor wrote in reply that Mavis Bay 'sounded to us like some ghastly caravan park. So we invented Priors Heath. I don't think the old boy would have minded too much.'

William also reports that the new Oxford Book of Humorous Quotations contains many gems by Wodehouse, who is surely God's gift to anthologists of humor.

Ann Nicholson found a Wodehouse quote in the Classic Quotes section of the May/June 1995 issue of the magazine *Civilization*, issued by the Library of Congress. Plum's quote—'Few thing so speedily modify an uncle's love as a nephew's air-gun bullet in

the fleshly part of the leg'—is just below a zinger from Socrates about children and just above a rather nasty crack about ugly babies from Queen Victoria. Lofty company, and well deserved.

And she discovered Plum's marvelous poem 'Printer's Error' in the *Oxford Book of Comic Verse*.

Plum's elder brother Armine was a prominent Theosophist. An article about the 1870s origins of this little-known religious and philosophical movement is included in the May 1995 *Smithsonian* magazine.

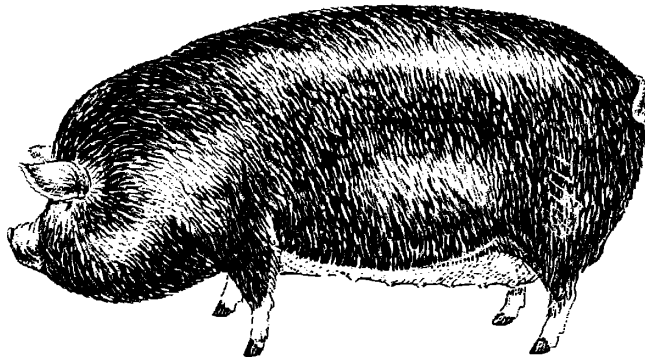
A letter of about 1920 from Plum to Townend remarks that Armine is 'as keen on Theosophy as ever, but devours vast quantities of meat and all the drink he can get! Bang against the rules, of course.'

In the last issue I printed a copy of Plum's ninetieth birthday invitation sent to Dr. and Mrs. Jerome Rogers, neighbors and friends of the Wodehouses who remember them fondly. Joan Rogers recalls that 'PGW and Guy Bolton were constant fixtures walking together about

Remsenburg.' She once saw Plum walking the dog in his pajamas—Plum's, not the dog's.

I spent a delightful month in England this spring, and I'm greatly indebted to my English Wodehouse friends—the Fletchers, the Hardwicks, the

Hemmings, the Murphys, the Rings, the Slythes, and others—for their generous and thoughtful hospitality. I was privileged to see the special exhibit of Wodehouse memorabilia at Dulwich College and to meet Dr. Jan Piggott, head of the library and of the rare book collection. I had the pleasure of meeting James Hogg, who kindly wrote Whiffle's *The Care of the Pig* after Whiffle carelessly neglected to write his own book. Finally, I wish to report that precisely one hundred million daffodils bloomed in England this April. I know, because I counted fifty million and that was only half.



OW

The Oldest Member

'RIGHT HO, SAHIB'

by Shashi Tharoor

Jon Lellenberg forwards this interesting and heartening view of Wodehouse in India. It appeared in the *Washington Post Book World* of February 5, 1995, with the above headline.

Twenty Valentine's Days ago, I was sitting in my college room at Delhi University with my then and future valentine when All India Radio announced that P. G. Wodehouse had died. It was a typically sunny February afternoon in Delhi, but we both felt a cloud of impenetrable darkness had settled over us. The newly (and belatedly) knighted Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, creator of Jeeves and of the prize pig the Empress of Blandings, was in his 94th year, but his death still came as a shock. Three decades earlier, Wodehouse had reacted to the passing of his step-daughter, Leonora, with the numbed words: 'I thought she was immortal.' I had thought Wodehouse was immortal too, and I felt the bereavement keenly.

For months before his death I had procrastinated over a letter to Wodehouse. It was a collegian's fan letter, made special by being written on the letterhead (complete with curly-tailed pig) of the Wodehouse Society of St. Stephen's College, Delhi University. Ours was probably the only Wodehouse Society in the world at the time; and I was its president, a distinction I prized over all others in an active and eclectic extracurricular life. The Wodehouse Society ran mimicry and comic speech contests and organized the annual Lord Ickenham Memorial Practical Joke Week, the bane of all at college who took themselves too seriously. The Society's underground rag, *Spice*, was by far the most popular newspaper on campus; even its misprints were deliberate, and deliberately funny.

I had wanted to tell the Master all this, and to gladden his famously indulgent heart with the tribute being paid to him at this incongruous outpost of Wodehouseana thousands of miles away from any place he had ever written about. But I had never been satisfied by the prose of any of my drafts of the letter. Writing to the man Evelyn Waugh had called 'the greatest living writer of the English language, the head of my profession' was like offering a soufflé to Bocuse. It had to be just right. Of course, it never was, and now I would never be able to reach out and establish this small connection to the writer who had given me more joy than anything else in my life.

The loss was personal, but it was also widely shared: P. G. Wodehouse was by far the most popular English-language writer in India, his readership exceeding that of Agatha Christie or Harold Robbins. His erudite butlers,

absent-minded earls and silly-ass aristocrats, out to pinch policemen's helmets on Boat Race Night or perform convoluted acts of petty larceny at the behest of tyrannical aunts, are familiar to, and beloved by, most educated Indians. I cannot think of an Indian family I knew that did not have at least one Wodehouse book on its shelves, and most had several. In a country where most people's earning capacity had not kept up with international publishing inflation and book-borrowing is a part of the culture, libraries stocked multiple copies of each Wodehouse title.

In the 20 years since his death, much has changed in India but Wodehouse still commands the heights. His works are sold on railways station platforms and airport bookstalls alongside the latest bestsellers. In 1988 the state-run television network broadcast a ten-part Hindi adaptation of his 1923 classic *Leave It to Psmith*, with the Shropshire castle of the Earl of Emsworth becoming the Rajasthani palace of an indolent Maharaja. (The series was a disaster. Wodehousean purists were appalled by the changes, and the TV audience discovered that English humor does not translate too well into Hindi.) Quiz contests, a popular activity in urban India, continue to feature questions about Wodehouse's books ('What is Jeeves's first name?' 'Which of Bertie Wooster's fiancées persisted in calling the stars "God's daisy chain"?'') And reports from St. Stephen's College tell me that the Wodehouse Society still flourishes, despite a brief banning when one of its Practical Joke Weeks went awry.

Many are astonished at the extent of Wodehouse's success in India, particularly when, elsewhere in the world, he is no longer much read. While no English language writer can truly be said to have a 'mass' following in India, where only two percent of the population read English, Wodehouse has maintained a general rather than a cult audience amongst this Anglophone minority; unlike others who have enjoyed periods of popularity, he has never gone out of fashion. This bewilders those who think that nothing could be further removed from Indian life, with its poverty and political intensity, than the cheerfully silly escapades of Wodehouse's decadent Edwardian Young Men in Spats. Indians enjoying Wodehouse, they suggest, makes about as much sense as the cognoscenti of Chad lapping up Jay McInerney.

At one level, India's fascination with Wodehouse is indeed one of those enduring and endearing international mysteries, like why Pakistanis are good at squash but none of their neighbors are, or why the

English, who stuffed their civilization with the best of so many foreign cultures, never managed to steal themselves a decent cuisine. And yet many have convinced themselves that there is more to it than that. Some have seen in Wodehouse's popularity a lingering nostalgia for the Raj, the British Empire in India. The British journalist Richard West thought India's Wodehouse devotees were those who 'hanker after the England of 50 years ago (i.e. the 1930s). That was the age when the English loved and treasured their own language, when schoolchildren learned Shakespeare, Wordsworth and even Rudyard Kipling. It was Malcolm Muggeridge who remarked that the Indians are now the last Englishmen. That may be why they love that quintessentially English writer, P. G. Wodehouse.'

Those lines are, of course, somewhat more fatuous than anything Wodehouse himself ever wrote. Wodehouse is loved by Indians who loathe Kipling and detest the Raj and all its works. Indeed, despite a brief stint in a Hong Kong bank, Wodehouse had no colonial connection himself and the Raj is largely absent from his books. (There is only one notable exception I can recall from his oeuvre, in a 1935 short story: 'Why is there unrest in India? Because its inhabitants eat only an occasional handful of rice. The day when Mahatma Gandhi sits down to a good juicy steak and follows it up with roly-poly pudding and a spot of Stilton you will see the end of all this nonsense of Civil Disobedience.' But Indians saw that comment was meant to elicit laughter, not agreement.) If anything, Wodehouse is one British writer whom Indian nationalists could admire without fear of political incorrectness. My mother-in-law, the daughter of a prominent Indian nationalist politician, remembers introducing Britain's last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, in 1947 to the works of Wodehouse; it was typical that the symbol of the British Empire had not read the 'quintessentially English' Wodehouse but that the Indian freedom-fighter had.

Indeed, it is precisely the lack of politics in Wodehouse's writing, or indeed of any other social or philosophic content, that made what Waugh called his 'idyllic world' so free of the trappings of Englishness, quintessential or otherwise. Unlike almost any other writer, Wodehouse does not require his readers to identify with any of his characters: They are stock figures, almost theatrical archetypes whose carefully plotted exits and entrances one follows because they are amusing, not because one is actually meant to care about them. Whereas other English novelists burdened their readers with the specificities of their characters' lives and circumstances, Wodehouse's existed

in a never-never land that was almost as unreal to his English readers as to his Indian ones. Indian readers were able to enjoy Wodehouse free of the anxiety of allegiance; for all its droll particularities, the world he created, from London's Drones Club to the village of Matcham Scratchings, was a world of the imagination, to which Indians required no visa.

But they did need a passport, and that was the English language. English was undoubtedly Britain's most valuable and abiding legacy to India, and educated Indians, a famously polyglot people, rapidly learned and delighted in it—both for itself, and as a means to various ends. These ends were both political (for Indians turned the language of the imperialists into the language of nationalism) and pleasurable (for the language granted access to a wider world of ideas and entertainments). It was only natural that Indians would enjoy a writer who used language as Wodehouse did—playing with its rich storehouse of classical precedents, mockingly subverting the very canons of colonialism had taught Indians they were supposed to venerate. 'He groaned slightly and winced, like Prometheus watching his vulture dropping in for lunch.' Or: 'The butler was looking nervous, like Macbeth interviewing Lady Macbeth after one of her visits to the spare room.' And best of all, in a country ruled for the better part of two centuries by the dispensable siblings of the British nobility: 'Unlike the male codfish which, suddenly finding itself the parent of three million five hundred thousand little codfish, cheerfully resolves to love them all, the British aristocracy is apt to look with a somewhat jaundiced eye on its younger sons.'

That sentence captures much of the Wodehouse magic—what P. N. Furbank called his 'comic pretense of verbal precision, an exhibition of lexicology.' Wodehouse's writing embodied erudition, literate allusion, jocular slang and an uncanny sense of timing that owed much to the long-extinct art of music-hall comedy: 'She ... [resembled] one of those engravings of the mistresses of Bourbon kings which make one feel that the monarchs who selected them must have been men of iron, impervious to fear, or else short-sighted.' Furbank thought Wodehouse's 'whole style [was] a joke about literacy.' But it is a particularly literate joke. No authorial dedication will ever match Wodehouse's off-plagiarized classic, for his 1925 collection of golfing stories, *The Heart of a Goof*: 'to my daughter Leonora, without whose never-failing sympathy and encouragement this book would have been finished in half the time.'

Part of Wodehouse's appeal to Indians certainly lies in the uniqueness of his style, which inveigled us into a sort of conspiracy of universalism: his humor was inclusive, for his mock-serious generalizations were, of course, as absurd to those he was ostensibly writing about as to us.

'Like so many substantial citizens of America, he had married young and kept on marrying, spring from blond to blond like the chamois of the Alps leaping from crag to crag.' My own favorites stretch the possibilities of the language in unexpected ways: 'She had more curves than a scenic railway'; 'her face was shining like the seat of a bus driver's trousers'; 'I turned him down like a bedspread'; and the much-quoted 'if not actually disgruntled, he was far from being grunted.'

This insidious but good-humored subversion of the language, conducted with straight-faced aplomb, appeals most of all to a people who have acquired English but rebel against his heritage. The colonial connection left strange patterns on the minds of the connected. Wodehouse's world is a world we can share with the English on equal terms, because they are just as surprised by its enchantments. Perhaps that is as good an argument as any for a long-overdue Wodehouse revival in America.

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Jon Lellenberg passes on this additional information from Pravindrajit Sandhu via Internet:

Shashi Tharoor is a graduate of St. Stephen's College at Delhi University, a focal point of Wodehouse enthusiasm in India, and took a doctorate in economics at Tufts University, Boston. He now works for the United Nations and seems to shuttle between postings in Geneva and New York. His other works include an examination of Indian foreign policy called *Reasons of State* and the novels *The Great Indian Novel* and *Show Business*. He is also a familiar figure in the *New York Times Review of Books* where his incisive reviews of other works of Indian authors in English are a pleasure to read.

I'd like to close with a speculative comment that no other single author has had as much influence on the Indian literary landscape as Wodehouse. I say this because almost every Indian writer of note currently active seems to cite Wodehouse as a formative influence. And it's an interesting phenomenon that every bookstore in India worth its name is crammed to bursting with Wodehouse titles, as opposed to the three inches of shelf-space devoted to him in most U. S. bookstores. Indeed, almost any Indian who reads, reads and loves Wodehouse—to repeat a phrase used on this net recently, 'they're devotees to a man.'

WANT AD

Prices include postage within the US.

Blandings Castle and Elsewhere, London: Herbert Jenkins, 1935. First Edition. VG (covers faded as usual) in first issue 7'6 DJ, chipped at top of spine and scuffed on back, but front cover complete and bright. (A NF/NF copy was recently offered by a well-known dealer for \$1250.) This copy: \$295.

The White Feather, London: A&C Black, 1914. VG 2nd ed. in same format as 1907 first, except no gold on spine. (VG firsts routinely sell for over \$1500.) This copy: \$175.

P. G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration, The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1981. 25 essays, pictures and the first McIlvaine bibliography. NF/NF hardback. (1/1000 copies sometimes listed for more than \$500). This copy: \$135.

Barry Phelps, *P. G. Wodehouse: Man and Myth*, London: Constable, 1992. Mint in DJ, inscribed by Phelps. \$30.

ADVERTISEMENTS IN PLUM LINES?

Some members have suggested that we offer to sprint advertisements in *Plum Lines* by specialist Wodehouse book dealers, and I would like members' opinions on the subject. I believe such booksellers perform an important service for us. In the United States, at least, they are the only reliable source of Wodehouse books beyond the dozen or so titles we see again and again in new book stores. Advertisements in any publication usually become out-of-date faster than the editorial material, but I could print the advertising on a separate sheet to eliminate this problem.

WODEHOUSE AND DULWICH

An Exhibition



WODEHOUSE LIBRARY

March 14 - 23
April 18 - May 5

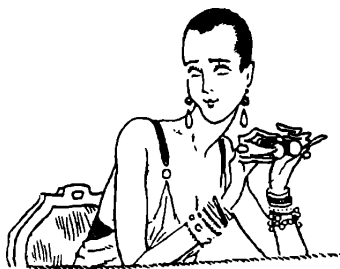
Weekdays only, 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

This poster announced an exhibit at Dulwich College Library this spring, featuring the special regard Wodehouse felt for the College.

PGW PLAYS IN ENGLAND 'HEAVY WEATHER' AHEAD

Tony Ring writes that the Palace Theatre, Watford, just north of London, is producing *Good Morning, Bill* from May 25 to June 17, 'and a party is planning to attend,' he writes, 'probably on June 10.' He adds this is the theatre which put on Plum's *Candlelight* in 1989, in what was remarkably the UK première, and repeated it in 1990 before sending it on tour.

Tony has heard that *Sitting Pretty* will be 'one of the four lost musicals to be featured in the Barbican series this summer, but no details are available.' The Barbican, he explains, is a London theater which has recently presented a few performances of musicals which have barely seen the light of day either since their first production, or for forty years or so, or perhaps have never been put on in the UK.



ANOTHER NEWT SOURCE?

by J. Murray Wilson

I feel the correspondent in the Spring 1995 *Plum Lines* (page 14) is perhaps looking a little too deeply into why PGW had Gussie take an absorbed interest in newts. As a boy in England I kept newts for a while; many of us did as a byproduct of playing around in mud and ponds I suppose. It's reasonable to think the great man may have done too in his time, and thought when he came to create a rather goofy character that a consuming interest in newts retained into manhood would be an indication of that goofiness. It could well be of course that Robert Benchley's piece jogged his memory, but the keeping of newts was a stage most English boys went through.

I'll tell you right off the bat that everything in this column and on the next page is from **William Hardwick**, prominent TV critic. First, an item from the English *Daily Express* of May 12, 1995. Here it is in its entirety:

Actor Peter O'Toole is to star as the pig-loving Lord Emsworth in a £3 million BBC TV adaptation of P. G. Wodehouse's novel *Heavy Weather*. Richard Briers also appears in the film along with Rod Hull, who plays Beach the butler. A pig to star as the Empress of Blandings has yet to be chosen.

TURF NOTES

William Hardwick, prominent Silver Ring bookie, brings us up to date on the really important events of the English racing season.

Plum First: Seven rides, first on two occasions at 8/1 and 6/1. The other rides nowhere.

Wodehouse: One outing, nowhere.

Winsome Wooster:

One outing, third at 7/1.

Laughing Gas (a new horse in our stable):

Three outings, one first at 16/1 and two seconds.

In these twelve outings our horses have been in the money six times. A respectable showing, I think.

SIR MICHAEL HORDERN

William Hardwick, prominent theater critic, reports sadly that Sir Michael Horder, one of my favorite English actors, died on Tuesday, May 2, at the age of 83.

'According to newspaper reports,' writes William, 'he played everything from King Lear to Paddington Bear in a fifty-eight year career. No comment was made on the role for which I will always remember him: he was Jeeves in the BBC Radio plays of the 1970s.'

Like Beach in *Something Fresh*, he had a 'fruity voice, like old tawny port made audible.' When shall we hear his like?

OILING THE LITTLE GREY CELLS

Does eating fish really make you brainy?

Matthew Sturgis checks out an old wives' tale

William Hardwick, prominent physiologist, found this valuable information in the English *Daily Telegraph* of February 18, 1995.

Fish: Bertie Wooster considered it the source of Jeeves's great intelligence; old wives have long extolled its mind-sharpening qualities. But how seriously should we take the Wodehouse stories and the old wives' tales? Does fish really feed the brain?

'Well,' says Dr Tom Sanders, professor of nutrition at King's College, London, choosing his words with care. 'It's not altogether codswallop. In fact, there is a great deal of truth in it.'

'The brain is very rich in a particular fatty acid — Decosahexaenoic Acid (or DHA). This acid can be synthesised by the body but not easily. It really has to be found in the food chain. It is present in meat and eggs. But it exists in really rich amounts only in fish, particularly "oily" fish.'

'Oily' fish include not only salmon and trout but also those perennial bargains, mackerel, herring, sardine and tuna. So-called 'white fish' — such as cod and plaice — are less satisfactory because they store most of their DHA in their livers. But who would choose a spoonful of cod-liver oil above a char-grilled sardine or *truite aux amandes*?

The beneficial impact of DHA is not, it seems, confined to the brain. Indeed, charting the range of this fatty-acid's good effects has become a main concern of nutritional science. It appears to improve eyesight, blood circulation, skin and rheumatoid arthritis. Its effect upon the brain, although undisputed, is more difficult to assess. There is, however, evidence to suggest that it increases both learning ability and visual awareness.

Tests on animals have pointed in this direction. Rats fed on a DHA rich diet learn to escape from their mazes quicker than those that have been deprived of it. Similar experiments on primates have yielded parallel results.

Other scientists have tried to fit DHA into the broader

picture. Prof Michael Crawford argues persuasively in his book *The Driving Force* that the quantum leap in human brain-capacity occurred when homonids living close to estuaries took to a fish-rich diet.

Hard, contemporary evidence has, however, only become available recently. A study at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge has compared the progress of premature babies fed on expressed mother's milk to those taking 'pre-term formula' milk substitute. Formula does not contain DHA, while mother's milk does. The effects on the group were striking.

After eight years tests carried out on the

children showed that there was an eight-point IQ difference in favour of those who had been fed with expressed milk. A similar study from Holland, published in the *Lancet* at the end of last year, discovered comparable differences in visual acuity and manual dexterity, again favouring those children reared on mother's milk.

Amazingly, despite the strength of this evidence, the manufacturers of pre-term formula are

still not adding DHA to their brews. This is grave, as research suggests that the brain deprived of DHA during the early stages of its growth, cannot pick up the deficit later.

According to Dr Sanders: 'The brain is "hard-wired" during its early development. After that it is difficult to alter its basic pattern. The peak of brain growth is between the fourth month of pregnancy and the ninth month post-partum.' This is the period during which DHA can have its effect. Jeeves's mother was clearly eating fish both before and during the infant butler's first months. Bertie's, one would guess, was not.



ABOUT THESE MYSTERY STORIES

by Tony Ring

This title was used by P G Wodehouse for a 1929 essay, published in both *Saturday Evening Post* and *Strand*, deprecating the complexity of actions employed by criminals in detective stories to achieve their objectives. Its use for this article is equally apposite for, despite the immense amount of research and publication concerning various aspects of his life and work, new mysteries about which we know little appear with unexpected frequency.

The first part of this article concentrates on questions arising from publications. This writer has no complete answer to any of them, and in most cases, no answer at all. Readers' help is requested with facts, sources and suggestions which might permit some enlightenment.

1. Murray Hedgcock, an Australian journalist who has been resident in London for many years, told me that in 1932 the Australian publisher Angus & Robertson Ltd produced a book entitled *Googlies*, in the advertising supplement to which is a strong suggestion that it had published the Wodehouse book *Big Money*. McIlvaine offers no Australian editions as far as I am aware.

Question: how many of PGW's books were published in Australia, by whom and when? And to this question, a partial solution, as I took advantage of a Christmas trip to cricketland to visit an antiquarian bookshop in Melbourne, where I tracked down a copy of *Big Money* published in 1931 by Herbert Jenkins Ltd, Waterloo, New South Wales. This suggests that any role which Angus & Robertson had was as distributor rather than publisher. In response to some questions sent to the present parent company of Angus & Robertson, they said that there is nothing on their files to suggest they published anything by Wodehouse under a licence arrangement. However, it is possible that A & R may have bought on a co-edition basis, printed in the UK and shipped out to Australia, possibly carrying the A&R logo.

2. At least one of the stories published in each of *Ellery Queen* and *The Saint Detective Magazine* was translated into French and included in French versions of those magazines. Marilyn MacGregor found copies of *Ellery Queen Mystère-Magazine* for juin 1952, and *Le Saint Détective Magazine* for mars 1956, featuring respectively 'Un grand jour pour Mr MacGee' and 'Le triomphe de M Oakes,' stories which appeared in the American originals in November 1950 and June 1955. Since neither of these stories had appeared in Wodehouse collections in either the UK or the US, it is surprising to find them in translation.

Question: how many stories appeared in French magazines, which and when? (Supplementary: have any readers knowledge of other translated stories in magazines?)

3. *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets* and *The Code of the Woosters* were published by Herbert Jenkins in 1940 and 1938 respectively. I have a copy of the first of these titles in a version which clearly used Herbert Jenkins printed pages from the first edition (including the 'First published 1940' statement), which has a plain pale blue binding and a stylised cartoon jacket referring on its rear panel to both books. The descriptions to be found there, together with about two inches square of Chinese characters on the rear endpaper, make it clear the book was published by a Chinese company.

Question: how many books were published by East Asia Publishers based in Shanghai, which, and when? A slight complication arises from the translation of the Chinese characters by a Chinese friend, who thought that the date it gave was 1939! Surely not a Chinese first? How could they have obtained the Jenkins sheets so soon?!

4. *The Head of Kay's* was published by A & C Black in 1905, and reprinted in 1910 and twice in 1922. On the face of it, it seems odd that it should have been reprinted twice in one year after a gap of twelve years, but there may be an explanation based on printer's error. I have two copies of the first 1922 printing, and one of the second. One (but only one) of the copies of the first is unusual, in that instead of pages 18/19, 22/23, 26/27 and 30/31 of *The Head of Kay's*, one finds poor quality offset printing of pages 162/163, 166/167, 170/171 and 174/175 of *The White Feather*!

Question: could the publisher have decided to withdraw the first 1922 printing because of this fault? And as supplementaries, how many copies of the 'wrong' version might there have been, and most fundamental of all, how could something like that happen?

So extensive was P G Wodehouse's output for the theatre that there will always be a suspicion that completed plays were tucked away untried, or maybe performed once or

twice in some unsuspecting town or village in rural England or the USA before being filed in that drawer marked 'Requires fixing.' Many plays and musicals which bear his name have been performed elsewhere than at the major stages, so a full record would be impossible to create with any confidence. The following items, though, perhaps may be susceptible to further information:

5. The unpublished play, *Who's Who*, was produced at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1934, where it ran for only 19 performances. This play has an unreasonably complex history even by Wodehouse standards. It started as a play, entitled *If I Were You*, written by PGW and Guy Bolton in 1929, and a play of that name was privately published in the UK, although it is not obvious when. It was rewritten as a short serial of the same name in the magazine *American* and appeared in the issues April to July 1931, before being further expanded and published as a novel in both the UK and the US in 1931. Movie rights were sold to MGM in May 1931. The change of name to *Who's Who* was a late decision—the typescript heading to Act Three shows an original title of *Leave It To Me*, which was, of course, used as the title of the film version of the Wodehouse/Hay play version of *Leave It To Psmith*.

Question: was the play *If I Were You* actually performed, and if so, where? And as a supplementary, who published it, and when?

6. It is understood that on March 27, 1930, the BBC broadcast a twenty-minute operetta written by Leonora Wodehouse and C Denis Freeman, entitled *Zara*, with lyrics by P G Wodehouse, for which a fee of £ 30 was paid to be split between the three collaborators.

Question: what was the subject of the operetta, and what has become of it?

7. It appears that in the first half of 1921, or thereabouts, PGW wrote new lyrics for a review entitled *London, Paris and New York*, at the Pavilion Theatre (see the *Alleynian*, June 1921).

Question: which Pavilion Theatre, who wrote the book, the music and the original lyrics, how many performances were there and has any record of the show survived?

8. The news columns in the *Alleynian* are a rich seam for unanswered queries. According to an entry in June 1929, PGW wrote a *sketch* entitled *Doctor Sally* which was produced at the Coliseum. The novel of that name, of course, evolved from the play *Good Morning, Bill* which had its première at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1927.

Question: what was the *Doctor Sally* sketch, why and for whom was it written?

9. Also according to the *Alleynian*, this time in November 1936, there was a radio broadcast 'on the National station' of *Meet the Prince*, a musical comedy adapted from one of his stories, presumably some time in the preceding few months.

Question: was the story *The Prince and Betty*? Who did the adaptation, was it of the US or the fuller UK plot, when was it performed, did it have a theatrical run and who starred in it?

10. Finally, a mysterious reference appears in the *Alleynian* for June 1934, which it is worth quoting in full (with thanks to Dulwich College).

'A theatre to be devoted exclusively to the works of P G Wodehouse is being organized. It is hoped to build up the repertory company on the basis of the party of players, who have been appearing in the revival of his 'Good Morning, Bill', at Daly's and the Saville Theatres.'

Question: was this ever a serious proposal, what was its origin, and why did it fail?

Accurate and complete answers to these questions may well prove elusive, but just as the question may be obscure, so may those pieces of information in readers' hands, hidden away for years, throw up solutions. If readers have handy their copy of the UK's guide to radio and television programmes for the 1930's (*Radio Times*), for example, they can help with questions 6 and 9. Please send any contributions of fact or deduction to the Editor, so that your thoughts can be shared.

15 February 1995

(See Tony's post script on page 24 — OM)



A FEW 'PLUMS'

by Beverley Nichols

William Sarjeant found this early interview with Plum in *Are They the Same at Home?*, a collection of such pieces by Beverley Nichols published in 1927 by George H. Doran, New York. This was the period of *The Play's the Thing* and *Oh, Kay!* on the stage, and *Carry on, Jeeves* and *Meet Mr. Mulliner* in bookstores. Early in 1927 Ethel rented a magnificent sixteen-room house in Mayfair, complete with ten servants and a chauffeur for the Rolls. Plum, beyond all doubt, was thriving and his works were very well known, but the interview makes it clear that the man himself was as little known as he remained.

'That monkey,' said Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, in a firm and dispassionate voice, 'is wearing its club colours in the wrong place.'

It was. The animal in question was a vast and obscene form of mandrill called George, which darted shamelessly in and out of its cage, snorted, turned its terrible multi-coloured back upon an outraged populace, and departed again, leaving everybody a little breathless and pale, and talking hurriedly about moving on to see the lions.

But P. G. Wodehouse did not hurry on to see the lions. Perhaps he was too fascinated by the curious reactions caused by George's anatomy upon the sedate families whom fate lured towards his cage. What are these families to say? George was evidently the work of God. But he was even more evidently obscene. How to reconcile these two distressing facts, especially when the originator of the problem was flaunting its provocation in one's face? I do not know the answer. But perhaps P. G. Wodehouse one day will, through the medium of laughter, give it to us.

And here I must warn you that this is to be no recital of Wodehouse epigrams on the subject of animals. He made none. He merely gazed mildly through his glasses at all the specimens of beasts that came his way, offering them, throughout the course of an entire afternoon, the wrong sort of food, which, to his increasing pain, they rejected.

He grew increasingly sombre and preoccupied. Perhaps that was because he could not find the snakes. Whenever there was a pause in the conversation he said, rather plaintively, 'I suppose there are snakes?' and the rest of us, who did not at all wish to see the snakes, remarked quickly that of course there were snakes, lots of them, and just *look* at that lovely antelope. He looked, sighed, and said, 'Yes, it is a beautiful antelope.' But one knew that in his heart of hearts he cherished a resentment against that antelope, simply because it was not a snake.

How dreadful it must be to have the reputation of a great humorist! I am sure that Wodehouse feels it. When I first met him, we were both lunching at the House of Commons, and I noted that whenever he opened his mouth the faces of the politicians seated round him prepared to twitch up into set smiles. They were saying to themselves, *Now* he's going to begin! And when he did not begin, and behaved like an ordinary human being (although his conversation was more coloured and alive than that of most of us), they were quite disappointed. They looked as though they had been cheated. I fail to see why. He is excellent company and he radiates charm. Best of all, he never talks about himself. If you wish to learn anything about 'Plum' (as I really cannot help calling him) you must learn it from his wife. And here, jotted down at random, are some of the things that one learns...

The Wodehouse Glide. This refers, not to his prowess as a dancer, but to his almost uncanny capacity for disappearances. Whenever he finds himself at a party where the ground is a little too thick with millionaires, or where too many peeresses are calling to their young, or where the wits are warbling too shrilly, he disappears. There is no other word for it. At one moment he is there. At the next moment he is gone. Many legends have been invented to account for this capacity. Some say that he slides down the banisters. Others affirm that he carries a drooping moustache in his pocket, which he affixes while blowing his nose. Whatever his method, he disappears.

These disappearances are really the key to his character, which is dominated by a loathing for display. They enable one to understand the next mystery about him, which may be described under the heading of:

Saturday Afternoons. Every Saturday afternoon, Mr. P. G. Wodehouse disappears. For many years the reasons why he went, where he went, and what he did when he got there, were insoluble problems to his family. But they never inquired. He simply departed into space.

I am able, from a secret source, to throw light upon the problem of Mr. Wodehouse's Saturday afternoons, and I give the information with a strict sense of my responsibility to the future literary historian. He *goes to a football match*. There! It is out. Please do not follow him there. He does not want you at all. He wants to pay his sixpence, or whatever fee they charge one at these functions, and to enjoy the supreme English pleasure of standing in an icy wind watching a number of young men scramble about in the mud, while hoarse men breathe down his neck. I would give my soul to be able to like that sort of thing, because I cannot imagine a cheaper pleasure, nor one

which so quickly sets one in tune with the rest of mankind. But I cannot.

The next fragment may be labelled:

The Simple Life. This is best illustrated by a brief anecdote. Before Plum was married, he lived in the country, working. One day a sumptuous gentleman called upon him to indicate that for a trifling fee he would confer upon him the benefits of insurance. Plum said that he would be delighted to receive, and pay for, this benefit, and would the sumptuous gentleman accept a cigarette? He accepted a cigarette, and as he lit it he remarked:

'I see you are just on the point of moving into this house. Where was your home before?'

Plum gazed at him blankly. 'Moving in?' he said. 'What do you mean?'

The shadowy suggestion of a bum bailiff must have danced through the sumptuous one's mind, for he answered a little tersely:

'Well, look at this room.'

Plum looked at it. He saw a table and two deck chairs. Nothing else. He suddenly realized his shortcomings. It was an empty house. An empty house! Oh, Plum! Perhaps it was the company of your twelve dogs that had made you forget its emptiness for three whole years? At any rate, I understand that the sumptuous one departed in a huff.

Equally simple are his clothes. For the past two years there have been reposing at a famous tailor's shop two suits of clothes marked 'Wodehouse.' One of them, in shape and colour, suggests Ascot. The other, by its rich blue and *chic* cut, indicates that one is meant to lounge in it. But Plum has neither strutted in the one nor lounged in the other. New clothes are a torture to him. Many men say that and do not mean it, taking a secret and unholy pleasure in preening themselves before those fascinating triple mirrors which do such funny things to one's profile. But Plum really does mean it. Only some serious crisis will ever make him enter that tailor's shop again.

Money. I imagine that Plum makes quite a lot of money. He certainly deserves it. But I am quite certain that money to him means principally a curious and almost mythical product which enables one to purchase golf balls and books. After these essentials to life have been obtained, money is something which, when it arrives in large quantities, must be handed to one's wife rather as though it were an explosive. You will observe that I said 'in *large* quantities.' For when a cheque for, say, £3 6s. 9d. arrives (representing the royalties on two million copies of *Psmith, Journalist*, in Vienna), that cheque is seized and sat upon by Plum, who would not be parted from it except by

brute force. It goes to his own little private banking account, which never seems to rise much above a hundred pounds. He takes as much pride in this banking account as a child takes in its strip of garden, scattering in it a few golden seeds, which are promptly extracted again before they have had time to bear fruit, to see if they are still there.

Under the same heading of 'money' might be placed the final story which I am going to tell you about Plum, for it illustrates his complete guilelessness. The scene is the station at Southampton, the occasion of the arrival of the Wodehouse family from the United States. Mrs. and Miss Wodehouse are seated in their railway carriage, awaiting the arrival of Plum with a certain agitation, for the train is about to depart. At the last moment Plum puts his head through the window. 'I don't think I shall come to London,' he says.

Mrs. Wodehouse gasps. 'You don't think you will... what?' Prospects of mountains of luggage, tame animals in the van, new houses, etc., etc., loom before them like a nightmare.

'No,' says Plum. 'I shall go to Emsworth and see -' (naming an old friend). Upon which he did the Wodehouse glide, and so did the train.

Three days later, Plum arrived at the hotel where his family had ensconced themselves. The following adventures had occurred to him. He had been to Emsworth, and stayed with his friend. He had then, for the sum of twelve guineas, purchased a bicycle, and some bicycling clips. He proceeded to bicycle some seventy miles to London. Arriving at Hyde Park Corner, he suddenly realized that he was much fatigued, and fell off the bicycle. Perceiving in the distance a large hotel, he wheeled the bicycle to it, and demanded accommodation. The manager of the Hyde Park Hotel (for such it was) looked at him suspiciously and formed him that only the Royal Suite was vacant. On being assured that no Queens were likely to intrude upon him in the middle of the night, Plum engaged the Royal Suite, and entered it in his bicycling clips, followed by menials bearing stout and champagne. He then went to bed.

On the next day, he shaved, bathed, attired himself in his bicycling clips, and bicycled round London in search of a family. Having found the family, he presented himself. After a suitable reconciliation, Mrs. Wodehouse asked him where he had left the bicycle.

'Oh—that,' he said airily, 'I left it outside the Club.' 'Hadn't you better go and get it?' He departed to get it. But he searched in vain. The bicycle had gone.

You see, the shameless one who took it did not know that it belonged to Mr. P. G. Wodehouse. The man who would steal from Plum does not exist. There ain't no such person.

AT THE COURT THEATRE

William Hardwick reports an 'aural sighting' of a Wodehouse work on a BBC Radio program. The April 1 program entitled 'Poetry in Action' included the reading of a 1907 Wodehouse poem (below) which made fun of the audiences at the Court Theatre in London. That theater was famous at the time for its 'realistic' plays. The early plays of Bernard Shaw presented there were in sharp contrast to the musical comedies and melodramas that filled the other London theaters of the time. (This information and the poem appear in *The Parrot and Other Poems*.) I think Plum, with his unfailing eye for earnest endeavor, must have particularly enjoyed writing this one.

The Audience at the Court Theatre

They're the Pioneers of Progress, they're the Devotees of Art,
They're the men with bulging foreheads, they're a race of souls apart;
No ordinary drama can rely on their support—
It is Culture—yes, sir, Culture that they ask for at the Court.

Lesser men may like the plays that are produced for vulgar gain;
Lesser men may laugh at Huntley or be charmed by Edmund Payne;—
But the audience would crush you with one vast, indignant snort,
If you showed such plays or mummers any evening at the Court.

But you must not think that every form of fun would come to grief;
They enjoy tuberculosis as a humorous relief.
And a really comic death-scene will infallibly extort
Tears of unaffected laughter from an audience at the Court.

Ah, but what they really revel in is something dark and grim.
If the hero kills his mother, or his mother murders him;
If loud shrieks ('off left') suggest that blood is flowing by the quart,
Then a placid satisfaction soothes the audience at the Court.

How they love it when a character brings out a gleaming knife,
Or kicks the prostrate body of his unoffending wife!
Such events come all too seldom, and such events are all too short
For the reckless, ruthless audience you meet with at the Court.

And when the play is ended, o'er a grateful cup of tea,
They discuss hot buns and Culture at the local ABC.
Then each journeys off to Balham or his Wimbledon resort,
Much refreshed in mind and spirit by his visit to the Court.

NEW MEMBERS



POSTSCRIPT TO 'ABOUT THESE MYSTERY STORIES'

A further mystery story has turned up which requires investigation. We all know that *The Gold Bar* was the third novel, published in 1904. Why should it have reappeared as an eight-part serial in a boy's magazine in January 1923, described variously as 'The Finest School Story Ever Written,' 'A Stunning Story of School Life and the Rugby Game', et al? It had new illustrations, dated 1922, and the text had been edited so that early contemporary references were removed. In addition, some descriptive passages that detracted from the action were also missing. Was it coincidence that the A&C Black series of Wodehouse reprints were being published between 1922 and 1925, to attract a new generation of schoolboys, so a serial by 'world-famous P G Wodehouse' might both promote the magazine and support the reprints? The argument against this may be that the publishers were Amalgamated Press (1922) Ltd, not Newnes, who published the Captain, nor A&C Black, although they may, I suppose, have been part of the same group.

Even if we could answer the above questions satisfactorily, the biggest poser remains. Why was the story serialised as *By Order of the League*? Which of the other school stories enjoyed similar second incarnations?

Tony Ring, 5 April 1995

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VOLUNTEER OFFICERS

Information and new memberships	Marilyn MacGregor
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