



Plum Lines

The quarterly newsletter of The Wodehouse Society

Vol. 17 No 2

Summer 1997

THE FUNNIEST GOLF WRITER WHO EVER LIVED

By Peter Andrews

Jay Weiss found this perceptive article in the May 1994 issue of *Golf Digest*. The writer has some interesting things to say about how Wodehouse wrote. I've removed a good deal of biographical material that was needed for the general public but not for us.

—OM

Funny golf short stories are as rare as baseball movies that make sense. In the history of the English language there have been perhaps 40. The good news is they are easy to find because P. G. Wodehouse wrote 35 of them. There have been a number of nonfiction writers on golf who can be called great, but when it comes to fiction, there is Pelham Grenville Wodehouse and you search the horizon in vain for his equal

Wodehouse golf stories still make us laugh after more than 80 years, which should come as no particular surprise for he is the most popular writer of light fiction ever known. He is read in every language that has a discernible grammar. [Well, not *quite*. —OM]

Among his more than 300 short stories are a clutch of golfing tales, most of which were written in the 1920s. Like a Mozart sonata, each one is a tiny miracle gone in a second, leaving behind a line that lingers sweetly in the memory.

The beginning of his first golf story, "Archibald's Benefit," published in 1910, sets the scene for all that is to follow:

Archibald Mealing was one of those golfers in whom desire outruns performance.

Here is an elemental character we all know: Hamlet foozling

in the rough, Oedipus going way out-of-bounds, King Lear losing his ball on the blasted heath.

In story after story Wodehouse returns to his sportive theme, bringing us characters irretrievably linked to golf. There's the profuse Agnes Flack, the low-handicap women's champion whose voice sounds

like the down express letting off steam at a level crossing.

When she refuses a marriage proposal by Sidney McMurdo on the sixth green,

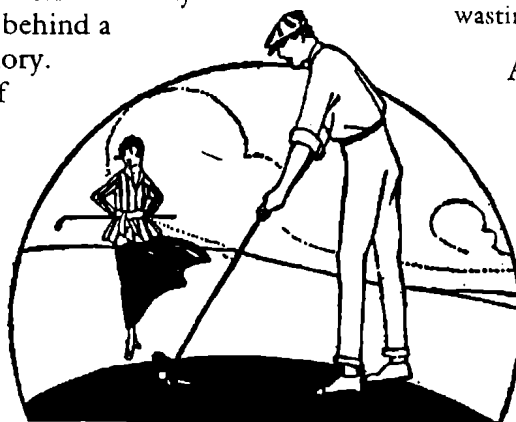
the distant rumblings of her mirth were plainly heard in the clubhouse locker room causing two who were afraid of thunderstorms to cancel their match.

In a Wodehouse golf story, no emotion runs deeper than the game. When Peter Willard and James Todd play a match to win the hand of Grace Forrester, the Oldest Member, who relates most of the stories, notes sagely:

Love is a fever which, so to speak, drives off without wasting time on the address.

As in golf the course of true love does not always run smooth. "There is nothing sadder in this life," the Oldest Member notes, "than the spectacle of a husband and wife with practically equal handicaps drifting apart."

There can be disappointment. Mortimer Sturgis marries Mabel Somerset under the impression she is a golfer when, in fact, she



plays croquet. Their honeymoon, spent viewing the antiquities of Rome, something of a frost. Mortimer's only thought when looking at the ruins of the Coliseum is to speculate "whether Abe Mitchell would use a full brassie to carry it."

Sometimes there is even violence. When the chatty fiancé of Celia Tennant talks during her backswing, she bashes him with a niblick. The Oldest Member approves:

If the thing was to be done at all it was unquestionably a niblick shot.

But there is also redemption. Rodney Spelvin, who had misspent his youth as a *verse libre* poet, is cleansed of his wayward ways by the purity of golf. Hitting a crisp baffy to the green will do that for a man.

Golf is the eternal metaphor. To describe the sweetness of one of his heroines, P. G. writes,

She was one of those rose-leaf girls with big blue eyes whom good men instinctively want to give a stroke a hole and on whom bad men automatically want to prey.

Latter-day critics are forever trying to connect Wodehouse to a real time in a real world. Usually they referred to his stories as "Edwardian," which made him frantic. Wodehouse created his own world in which time had no function. Wodehouse never tires because he never dates. Try to read other 50-year-old funny stories. Most of them are as embarrassing as watching your Uncle Fred get sick at a party trying to put on a chicken suit. An extravagant admirer, Evelyn Waugh, once wrote: "For Mr Wodehouse there has been no fall of man . . . His characters have never tasted the forbidden fruit."

Wodehouse began one story, "The Heart of a Goof," by describing the golfers Eden.

It was a morning when all nature shouted "Fore." The breeze, as it blew gently up from the valley, seemed to bring a message of hope and cheer, whispering of chip shots holed and brassies landing squarely on the meat.

Earthly Paradise. Wodehouse characters did many dopey things, but they were never foolish enough to cross up the Lord and get their playing privileges revoked. Except for *The Wrecking Crew*, a doddering group of octogenarians who never let anyone play through, his stories are bathed in eternal sunlight. Even ex-convicts hurry back to reunions at Sing Sing full of good spirits and bonhomie. And there are golf lessons great and small to be learned. Wallace Chesney is a hopeless duffer until he buys a pair of magical plus fours. His handicap turns to scratch, but he becomes

mean and overbearing in the process. When the plus fours are burned, his game goes but he is once again a good companion, for Wallace learns the great truth, "It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive."

He wrote his first golf stories during his lengthy American stay. There was a course near Great Neck, Long Island, called the Sound View Golf Club, where he played with famous American comic actors such as Ed Wynn and Ernest Truex. "The golf course was awfully nice," he recalled late in life. "However, I wasn't any good at golf. I suppose I ought to have taken lessons instead of playing. I didn't mind losing, because it was such good exercise walking around the holes. If only I had taken up golf immediately after school instead of playing cricket."

Wodehouse never did get very good at golf. He won exactly one trophy, a striped umbrella, which he copped at a hotel tournament in Aiken, S.C., "where, hitting them squarely on the meat for once, I went through a field of some of the fattest retired businessmen in America like a devouring flame."

By the 1920s, with his gemlike golf stories among a host of other work, the Wodehouse style had come to full flower and would stay in bloom for another 50 years. The Wodehouse style is based on clarity and action. His writing is so lucid, you could make it out if it were written on the bottom of the Mindanao Deep. His plots rip along with the speed of a buzz saw working toward the heroine's vitals. Wodehouse was a creature of the theater and his stories are the book for small-scaled musical comedies. If the story is as simple as Chester Meredith falling in love with Felicia Blakeney because she is the first woman he ever met who didn't overswing, I would remind you that the plot of *Okla-homa!* is: Will Laurey go to the box supper with Curly?

Good writing has tension. You want to know how things come out. But there is little suspense in a Wodehouse golf story. You can see the socko-finish a par 5 away. He created tension not by what he wrote, but by the way he wrote it. David Jasen, a perceptive biographer, points out that Wodehouse worked in literary ragtime. Just as ragtime seems to be running all over the place but is actually well disciplined, Wodehouse wrote in syncopated sentences that seemed wild but were always under control. They are like little roller-coaster rides. You have the fun of being scared knowing you are going to get to the end all right.

Here is the Master describing the much-married Vincent Jopp contemplating yet one more wedding before an important match:

There was nothing of the celibate about Vincent Jopp. He was

one of those men who marry early and often. On three separate occasions ... he had jumped off the dock, to scramble ashore again by means of the Divorce Court lifebelt. Scattered here and there about the country there were three ex-Mrs. Jopps, drawing their monthly envelope, and now, it seemed, he contemplated the addition of a fourth to the platoon.

It reads as *The Forsythe Saga* in four dazzling sentences.

He wrote his last golf short story, "Sleepy Time," in 1965, at the age of 84. It was as sprightly as his first, written 55 years before. Under hypnosis, Cyril Grooly, a 24-handicapper makes a 50-foot putt for a 62 to beat the fearful Sidney McMurdo, who is reduced to making "a bronchial sound such as might have been produced by an elephant taking its foot out of a swamp in a teak forest." Cyril almost marries Agnes Flack in the bargain, but the always benign P. G. Wodehouse would never let that happen.

Wodehouse is not well regarded by academicians. My copy of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* grants him a scant 10 lines, a fraction of the space given over to Anthony Wood, a 17th century antiquarian whose major work, *Athenae Oxonienses*, caused something of a stir when it was published in 1691. Wodehouse's very lucidity inveighs against academic evaluation. You might well as well teach a college course in advanced Henny Youngman. But he is read now by the millions as he always has been. When Herbert Asquith went down to defeat as Prime Minister in 1916, he consoled himself with Wodehouse, and when the great Catholic prelate Msgr. Ronald Knox, lay dying in 1957, he called for books by Wodehouse.

P. G. Wodehouse got his share of bad reviews and he hated them. "I felt as if someone had flung an egg at me from a bomb-proof shelter," he said after one vigorous panning. William Lyons Phelps, a distinguished critic, was closer to the mark when he wrote of Wodehouse, "With him Humor is not a means but an end. His intention is pure diversion; he wished to make us laugh...That is, outside of supreme creative genius, perhaps the most difficult thing to accomplish in literary composition. Many try, but few succeed."

He provided his own best review and epitaph: "When in due course Charon carries me across the Styx and everyone is telling everyone else what a rotten writer I was, I hope at least one voice will be heard piping up: 'But he did take trouble.'"

"How absurdly simple these things are when you have someone with elephantiasis of the brain, like myself, directing the operations."

Uncle Dynamite, 1948

SOMETHING NEW

Marilyn MacGregor has found two more Wodehouse books on audio cassette: *The Catnappers* on three cassettes for \$23.95, and *Jeeves in the Morning* on five cassettes for \$35.95. Both are unabridged and are read by Frederick Davidson. I haven't heard Davidson read, but brief excerpts from reviews of the recordings by the *Economist* and the *New York Times* are laudatory. Audio Editions offers them, and you can call toll-free at (800) 231-4261.

By one of those weird publishing anomalies, a group of wonderful articles Plum wrote while he was theatre critic (and later managing editor) of the American edition of *Vanity Fair* magazine were polished by him and printed in book form as *Louder and Funnier* by Faber & Faber in England. There are hilarious articles on the disappearance of the butler from the servant class, the demise of falconry, a scenario showing how Bacon and Shakespeare collaborated on a new play (*Hamlet*), and one decrying a trend to put soppy female characters in the mystery thrillers of that era. They are all uproariously funny.

These articles have never seen the publishing light of day on this side of the big pond in book form.

Cocktail Time is the name of a new journal being published by Plum Press in the Netherlands. The press release states that this newsletter deals with Plum's stories "that appeared (or will appear) in daily newspapers, monthly magazines, weekly papers and others in the Netherlands and Belgium (at least in Dutch)...covering the years 1926-1997)...A newly discovered story in the historical inquiry will be central to every issue." While mostly in Dutch, a small part is in English. If there's enough interest, an English edition will be published sometime in the future.

THE OLD SCHOOL TIE THAT BINDS

By Anne Cotton

This is the second of two parts. The first part was published in the Spring 1997 issue of *Plum Lines*.



Now we pass on to the one truly indispensable aspect of school: games. We have descriptions of Wodehouse's various accomplishments from *The Alleynian*, which printed reviews of the performance of student athletes. From a July 1900 listing of "Cricket Characters:"

P. G. Wodehouse—A fast right-hand bowler with a good swing, though he does not use his head enough. As a bat he has very much improved, and he gets extraordinarily well to the pitch of the ball. Has wonderfully improved in the field, though rather hampered by his sight.¹³

A list of cricket scores is notable for two items: Wodehouse is shown as having bowled nine wickets, and there is an "M. Jackson" among the batsmen. Coincidence, of course.

It is not certain that athletes had any special status at school. They were certainly adored by all the smaller boys, if they were any good; but the masters seemed likely to set extra study sessions, involving sitting over one's books supervised by the master who ordered the punishment, without any regard to whether this caused the scholar/athlete to miss some absolutely vital cricket practice—or even a game. But then, Wodehouse's stories include more than one report of a boy who managed somehow to sneak out of study and into a cricket game. One wonders what made Plum think of such a thing.

Wodehouse also boxed, as Leake says, and the school certainly did not forget it:

Small beginnings are always interesting when they lead to great events. This year the name of the future inventor of Psmith—the great P. G. Wodehouse—appears amongst the boxers. Shades of Hawkins! To think for what his boxing is responsible! Then [quoting a review] "Wodehouse's leads are somewhat wild." He has learnt since how to direct them with greater profit and success.¹⁴

Before we leave the world of Sport, let us close with a comment by Wodehouse on the glorious pinnacle of his post-Dulwich cricket career, which appears in an essay called "Now, Talking about Cricket—" included

in the *Tales of St. Austin's*:

More than once in my career it has been represented to me that I couldn't play cricket for nuts... Later on, the persistence with which my county ignored my claims to inclusion on the team, convinced me that I must leave cricket fame to others. True, I did figure, rather prominently, too, in one county match... How well I remember that occasion! Albert Trott was bowling...; I forget who was batting. Suddenly the ball came soaring in my direction. I was not nervous. I put down the sandwich I was eating, rose from my seat, picked the ball up neatly, and returned it with unerring aim to a fieldsman who was waiting for it with becoming deference. Thunders of applause went up from the crowded ring.

That was the highest point I ever reached in practical cricket.¹⁵

All of this is well and good; but have we discovered how the "old school tie" really got its grip on the hearts of its graduates? Was it just that they had survived together a life intended to weed out the weak and train the strong? Perhaps, in part. There certainly was a Code that was taught to students, often without their fully realizing it. The written rules were easy to understand; one always knew what would get one "sent down," or packed off to one's parents marked "Return to Sender." At my own alma mater, one of these was being caught with even an unlit cigarette on one's person, within twenty miles or so of the campus. At Dulwich, these were clear; Wodehouse outlines them in *The Gold Bat*:

O'Hara... would be expelled twice over, so to speak, once for breaking out at night—one of the most heinous offences in the school code—and once for tarring the statue. Anything that gave the school a bad name in the town was a crime in the eyes of the powers, and this was such a particularly flagrant case.¹⁶

Getting in bad with the town certainly included rannygazooes such as the unfortunate incident in *Mike at Wrykyn*, in which there was an extended scuffle between students and town boys, in the course of which a local policeman somehow ended up in the local pond, along with the aforementioned town lads.

And of course, it is an unquestioned rule that one never, never cheats. I am quite sure that none of us ever resorted to perusing an outline, rather than read the lengthy and less than inspiring Victorian novel that was assigned, when preparing for exams. This sort of thing was also more or less beyond the pale at Dulwich, as a schoolmate of Plum's, Col. W. D. Gibbon, reports:

Cribbing, except, curiously enough, in French, was outside the pale of decency—at any rate on the Classical side.¹⁷

The usual rules of gentlemanly behavior applied at school, naturally, as they did in the rest of society. The commandment "Thou shall not steal" was a necessary

part of the social contract in a world where there was often no secure place to keep one's valuables. Young Farnie, the Prefect's Uncle, finds himself face to face with the serpent of temptation on the occasion of a visit to his elder nephew's study when the nephew happened not to be home. He looks over the furnishings, and:

...his eye was caught by an object more interesting still. It was a cash-box, simple and unornamental, but undoubtedly a cash-box, and as he took it up it rattled.

The key was in the lock. In a boarding House at a public school it is not, as a general rule, absolutely necessary to keep one's valuable always hermetically sealed. The difference between meum and tuum is so very confused by the occupants of such an establishment, that one is apt to grow careless, and every now and then accidents happen. An accident was about to happen now.¹⁸

We are moving now from the written rules, those announced at interminable length by masters, to something more nebulous—a sense of what is “done” and what is not. There was a code of behavior among the boys, and woe betide any boy who violated that code. In *The White Feather*, Sheen violates it by deserting his friends andfunking out in an altercation with some town bullies. He is, as a result, made an outcast among his fellows. Wodehouse's description of his awful penalty is quite enough to freeze the blood:

By murdering in cold blood a large and respected family, and afterwards depositing their bodies in a reservoir, one may gain, we are told, much unpopularity in the neighbourhood of one's crime; while robbing a church will get one cordially disliked especially by the vicar. But, to be really an outcast, to feel that one has no friend in the world, one must break an important public-school commandment.

...It was like living in a world of ghosts, or, rather, like being a ghost in a living world. That disagreeable experience of being looked through, as if one were invisible, comes to the average person, it may be half a dozen times in his life. Sheen had to put up with it a hundred times a day. People who were talking to one another stopped when he appeared and waited until he had passed on before beginning again. Altogether, he was made to feel that he had done for himself, that, as far as the life of the school was concerned, he did not exist.¹⁹

There is evidence enough that the subject matter of the classroom was not necessarily the most important thing the students learned, useful as it is to be able to quote ancient authors. We are beginning to see School as a civilizing influence over these young blighters. “Playing the game” was then at the core of British character. It is the source of Bertie Wooster's constant wish to be a preux chevalier. And Wodehouse could never have had such glorious fun bringing complete disorder to a world that had no order to begin with. Is

it really progress to have lost all that? One wonders what Wodehouse would have to say on the subject now; but we do have what he said and thought in 1909. Mike Jackson was lectured by his schoolmate Wyatt, who repeatedly broke one of the harshest of the official rules by “breaking out,” or going without leave out on the town of an evening, just for the sport of it. Yet Wyatt scolded Mike for committing the seemingly trivial offence of cutting an early-morning cricket practice. Mike pointed out that Wyatt was hardly in a position to come on strong about following the rules. Wodehouse, speaking through Wyatt, finally handed us one key to the heart of the matter:

“...About my breaking out. When you're a white-haired old man like me, young Jackson, you'll see that there are two sorts of discipline at school. One you can break if you feel like taking the risks; the other you mustn't ever break. I don't know why, but it isn't done. Until you learn that, you can never hope to become the Perfect Wrykynian like,” he concluded modestly, “me.”

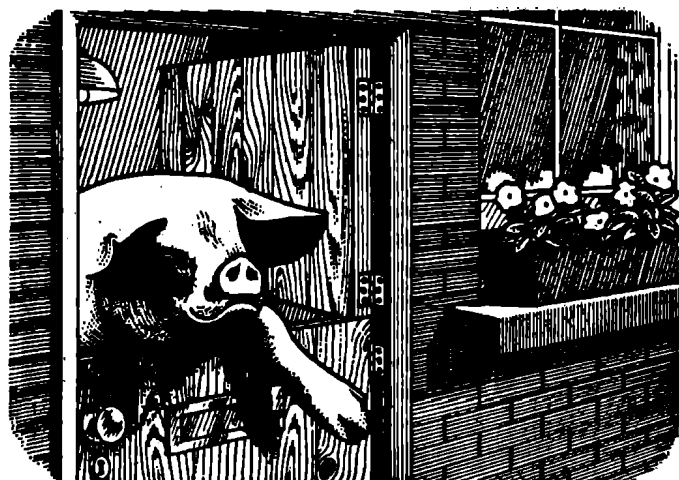
Mike made no reply. He would have perished rather than admit it, but Wyatt's words had sunk in. That moment marked a distinct epoch in his career... If Wyatt, reckless though he was as regarded written school rules, held so rigid a respect for those that were unwritten, these last must be things which could not be treated lightly. That night, for the first time in his life, Mike went to sleep with a clear idea of what the public school spirit, of which so much is talked and written, really meant.²⁰

On the other hand, I suppose it could have had something to do with all that Thucydides...

Notes

1. Wodehouse, P. G. Over Seventy (in *Wodehouse on Wodehouse*; Penguin Books, London, 1981), pg 474 (ch. one, I).
2. Connolly, Joseph. P. G. *Wodehouse: An Illustrated Biography* (Orbis Publishing, London, 1979), pg 21.
3. Wodehouse, P. G. The White Feather (in *The Gold Bat and Other School Stories*, Penguin Books, London, 1986), pg 152 (chapter XXIV).
4. Gilbert, Michael. *Prep School, An Anthology* (John Murray, London, 1991), pg 115.
5. Wodehouse, P. G. *Plum Stones — The Hidden P. G. Wodehouse* (Galahad Books, London, 1993), vol. I, pg 7.
6. Wodehouse, P. G. *The Gold Bat* (see note 3), pg 23 (chapter III).
7. Wodehouse, P. G. A Prefect's Uncle (included in *The Pothunters and Other School Stories*, Penguin Books, London, 1985), pgs 149-150 (chapter 4).
8. Wodehouse, P. G. *Tales of St. Austin's* (see note 7), pg 356 (chapter 13).
9. Usborne, Richard. *The Penguin Wodehouse Companion* (Penguin Books, London, 1988), pg 3.
10. Gilbert, Michael. *ibid.*, pgs 45-46.
11. Wodehouse, P. G. *Tales of St. Austin's* (see note 7), pgs 284-285 (chapter 6).
12. Gilbert, Michael. *ibid.*, pg 10.

13. Dulwich College. *The Alleynian*, July 1900, pg 267.
14. Leake, W. R. M. *Gilkes and Dulwich: A Study of a Great Headmaster* (Alleyn Club, London, 1988), pg 105.
15. Wodehouse, P. G. *Tales of St. Austin's* (see note 7), pgs 370-371 (chapter 15).
16. Wodehouse, P. G. *The Gold Bat* (see note 3), pg 85 (chapter XIII).
17. Leake, W. R. M. *ibid.*, page 68.
18. Wodehouse, P. G. *A Prefect's Uncle* (see note 7), pg 165 (chapter 6).
19. Wodehouse, P. G. *The White Feather* (see note 3), pg 42 (chapter VI).
20. Wodehouse, P. G. *Mike at Wrykyn* (Penguin Books, London, 1990), pgs 129-130 (chapter XIX).



CASTING DOUBLE- GLAZING BEFORE SWINE

William Hardwick has found evidence that the Empress of Blandings is living in comparative squalor. An item in the English *Daily Telegraph* noted that a Welsh borough council wanted pig-owner Dave Davies to tear down his piggery because it had double-glazed windows, a front door, and a pitched roof and was thus a building erected illegally. Davies claimed he simply assembled the sty using bits and pieces found in scrap yards.

And William also noticed, in another *Telegraph* item, that a push-button cooling shower system for pigs to operate with their snouts has been developed by a firm at Woolpit, Suffolk.

In any case this new higher standard of porcine living must be brought to Lord Emsworth's attention at once.

A FEW QUICK ONES

Have you lost or misplaced a precious issue of *Plum Lines*, and are gnashing your teeth or tearing your hair out at the roots because of it? Such bodily damage is not only unhealthy, it is also unnecessary. Our Membership Secretary, **Marilyn MacGregor**, has revealed the existence of a treasure trove of back issues of *Plum Lines*. For a mere \$1.50 per copy, you may apply to Marilyn for any of the following: Summer 1994; Winter and Spring issues, 1995; Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter issues, 1996.

Gail Markell writes: "I was recently re-reading the works of L. M. Montgomery (*Anne of Green Gables*, etc.) and the following passage struck me as peculiarly familiar. '...I think the violets are little snips of the sky that fell down when the angels cut out holes for the stars to shine through. And the buttercups are made out of old sunshine, and I think the sweet peas will be butterflies when they go to heaven.' Does this say Madeline Bassett to you? It comes from *Anne of Avonlea*, Chapter 19. The Anne books were first published in the UK between 1925 and 1939, but much earlier in North America. I am sure PGW's daughter would have read them. I would love to think that Anne inspired Madeline."

Francine Swift informs us that *By Jeeves* opens at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theatre on June 4. Ticket prices are: \$52.50 for Friday and Saturday nights and Sunday matinees, and \$47.50 at all other performances. Francine writes that the original opening date of May 28 was pushed back because the production has previously been staged in the round or semi-round, and needs some restaging for a proscenium house. Francine writes: "There's no word yet on the cast or whether we can expect to have Lloyd Webber grazing from one local restaurant to another."

Helen Murphy writes that BBC Radio is broadcasting a series of PGW golfing stories told by the Oldest Member. An announcement says that "At the age of 87, golf-loving Maurice Denham is perfectly cast as the Oldest Member." Helen adds wistfully, "I only hope they repeat them when I'm at home to listen, in the evenings, not weekends." There is no word yet on whether these broadcasts will be available on videotape.

Sally Schubert sent a review of the second volume of Peter O'Toole's autobiography, *Loitering with Intent: The Apprentice*. The reviewer notes: "There were times, while reading [this book], when I thought that I was being escorted by James Joyce on one side and Dylan Thomas on the other during a pub crawl of London and being met in the private Mulliner, P.G. Wodehouse's presider-gatherings in pubs." We can think of no course!

Belatedly, we acknowledge a note from McDonough concerning an article that appeared in the Travel section of the *New York Times* on December 8, 1996. Entitled "Learning to Love London Deluxe," the article was written by novelist Francis Prose and concerns the occasions she and her husband spent in three of London's poshest hotels (the Connaught, the Ritz, and the Dorchester). Although she had been warned that she might be snubbed by the hotels' staff if she was found to be not up to par, she was pleasantly surprised otherwise. Prose apparently wrote: "Dour Jeeves-like retainers patrolling public rooms have been replaced by fresh-faced recent university grads and attractive young women from Belgium or Japan."

David protests: "First of all, of course, Jeeves is never dour. Grave, perhaps, and austere and shrewd and stoic, and as Jaggard says, with only two recorded incidents of showing real emotion (when Boko Fittleworth shows up in Bohemian garb, Jeeves 'wincing visibly and tottered off to the kitchen, no doubt to pull himself together with cooking sherry,' and when Bingo Little appears in a beard he clutches a table for support), but never dour. Perhaps she has him mixed up with Angus McAllister. Second of all, I don't think Jeeves ever would have worked in a hotel.... wouldn't hotel work be a come-down for someone who had been in private service?"

Carolyn Pokrivchak spotted an item whose Wodehousian connection may not be obvious to common folk, but immediately leaps off the page to any Plummie. From the *U.S. News and World Report* comes news that Richard Nixon's famous pooch, Checkers, may be exhumed from his current resting place and reburied near the Nixons' gravesite, on the library grounds at Yorba Linda, California. If all goes as planned, the black-and-white cocker spaniel's remains will be moved to California in the fall. From whence will he be disinterred, you ask? Checkers is currently buried at the Bide-A-Wee Pet Memorial park on Long Island, New York—the very cemetery where many of the Wodehouses' favorite pets are buried.

For those of you traveling to London, or who are already there, John Phipps notes that *Discover the Lost Musicals* at the Barbican has been announced. John writes: "These musicals use film and live action with many actors from West End shows. They will be held at the Barbican Cinema, except the concert which will be at the Barbican Hall." Of particular interest to Plummies are the performances of *Oh, Kay* on August 17, 24, and 31. Performance time is 4:15 p.m., and

John Phipps tells us that he has some stock left of *Plum to Peter*.

Dan Garrison passed on an e-mail message he received from Hans Hamminga, a member of the P.G. Wodehouse Society in the Netherlands. Hans writes: "I am happy to say that in Holland (as you will know, Holland is the land of the flowers), on June 7, 1997, in Hortus Botanicus of Leyden, a new, deep red '© Poulsen' Floribunda Rose will be introduced, to be named after Sir P.G. Wodehouse." (This is jolly good news, of course, but one does wonder whether they should have made it a pink chrysanthemum?)



Hans also noted that this information was published on the web page of the Dutch Society, which can be viewed at: <http://www.inter.nl.net/users/H.deCeuninckvanCapelle>

Finally, if you have tried to reach either of the editors via e-mail and have wondered at our lack of response, don't worry, it isn't you. The Oldest Member has been away from the Club for some time, while Aunt Dahlia has been hurling curses at her e-mail program, which had been doing uncouth things and sorely trying her nerves. She has therefore switched to a new server; the address is published in this issue of *Plum Lines*. Meanwhile, the O.M., having completed his world tour (collecting a lovely Mickey Mouse with removable head along the way), is about to return to jolly old Felton, CA, where he will catch up on all his e-mail in between rounds of golf. So please keep your electronic correspondence and contributions coming, and trust us to respond in a timelier fashion from now on!

gm & A.D.

AGATHA AGONISTES

By Max Pokrivchak

Note from Aunt Dahlia: *Agatha Agonistes* is an original play with a delightfully Wodehousian twist that was written by NEWT Max Pokrivchak (who writes songs under the nom de plume of Terry Kitchen) and performed by the NEWTS at the 1995 convention in Boston. The applause lingers a year and a half later, and many Plummies have expressed interest in an encore. This being rather difficult, we have done the next best thing, which is to offer this tantalizing tidbit from the script. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the full script, send \$2 (to cover postage) to Auntie via Elin Woodger, 135 Elm Street, Everett MA 02149-5126, and it will be mailed to you toot sweet, as the French say.



Synopsis: The place is Boston, and Bertie and Jeeves have just arrived from New York. They are on the lam from Aunt Agatha, who is en route to New York herself, and Boston seems to be the safest place to hide, in addition to which it is the home of one of Bertie's pals, Horace "Whiskers" Beardsley. Whiskers is a playwright best known for dreary, existentialist fare with titles such as *Medulla Oblongata*. He is desperately searching for a hit so that he may have the oof to marry Esmerelda Peterson, daughter of Peter P. Peterson, Broadway producer, and Camile Peterson, a retired actress. The Petersons are also looking for a hit, one that will star Camile and also please the caustic pen of Harry Chinchilla, a critic whose scathing reviews frequently make mention of his Agatha-like Aunt Zorna. With the help of Jeeves, Whiskers and the Petersons mine Bertie for horror stories of Aunt Agatha to be utilized in Whiskers' latest play, *Agatha Agonistes*—stories he is unwittingly happy to supply. While his friends and valet scheme, Bertie plays the merry tourist, blissfully unaware that the hand of fate is about to tie his shoelaces together...

Bertie (voiceover): Finally it was opening night. Jeeves attended, but I begged off, the memory of *Medulla Oblongata* still being a bit too fresh, and, strangely, Whiskers didn't kick at my recalcitrance, if recalcitrance is the word I want, he just assured me that I'd be there in spirit. So I went to bed early and had my best sleep in months, knowing that not only was an audience being subjected to the work of Horace Beardsley and I was not among them, but that Aunt Agatha was hundreds of miles away.

(Loud knocking on door. Lights come up on Bertie in bed, with a blindfold on. Jeeves hovers nearby.)

Whiskers: Bertie, I say, Bertie!

Bertie (groans): Jeeves, what is that racket?

(Pounding continues.)

Jeeves: I believe it is Mr. Beardsley, sir. Shall I admit him?

Bertie (sitting up, taking off blindfold): I guess you'd better before the police are summoned.

(Jeeves opens door. Whiskers races in, waving a newspaper.)

Whiskers: We've done it! Here's today's *Gazette*, featuring the fall preview by Harry Chinchilla! We've done it, I say.

Bertie: If you promise to stop shouting, I'll read the blasted review. Jeeves, tea!

(Jeeves serves tea. Bertie takes a sip and reads. Whiskers paces excitedly.)

Bertie: "Fall Preview by Harry Chinchilla. The hit of the new season is bound to be the latest from the pen of young Horace Beardsley."

Whiskers: I told you!

Bertie: "Vivid characterizations are the key to his new smash entitled, *Agatha Agonistes*." (Bertie drops his teacup) *Agatha Agonistes!* Whiskers, you didn't! You couldn't have!

Whiskers: Bertie, he loved it. Read on.

Bertie: I won't read on. You've got to quash it or I'm ruined!

Whiskers: Quash it? It's a hit. Listen! (takes paper) "In a triumphant return to the stage, Camile Peterson takes no prisoners as she makes life miserable for craven nephew Bersham Worcestershire."

Bertie: Craven nephew Bersham? I'm in it?

Whiskers: "My Aunt Zorna's finally met her match—no one is immune to Agatha's maelstrom, except the valet, Jeppers, whose quiet dignity fills the stage."

Bertie: And Jeeves, too!

Whiskers: It's fiction. Call it coincidence. That day you told me about her, Bertie, was a godsend. And Jeeves was invaluable.

Bertie (to Jeeves): You helped him with this pestilence?

Jeeves (coughs): You did instruct me to assist Mr. Beardsley in any way possible, sir, and Mrs. Gregson is a strong character.

Bertie: Yes, but in a play?

Jeeves (coughs): It would appear a hit play, sir, thus enabling Mr. Beardsley to press his suit.

Bertie: Dash it, what's his laundry got to do with it?

Jeeves: I should say to pursue his engagement to Miss

Peterson sir. It was Mr. Chinchilla's references to his Aunt Zorna which led me to believe he would react favorably to a drama based on Mrs. Gregson

Whiskers: Jeeves, you're a marvel.

Jeeves: Thank you, sir.

Bertie (rising from bed, donning slippers): Well, what's done is done but this play must never leave Boston. Dial Peter P. Peterson Productions!

Whiskers: But it has left Boston, Bertie. (waves paper) This is the *New York Gazette*. I got it right off the early train.

Bertie: But it can't be the *New York Gazette*! Aunt Agatha's in New York!

Whiskers: I'd love to hear more about your family, Bertie, but I'm due to be smothered with kisses by Esmerelda. I'll leave the review for your scrapbook. Toodle-oo.

(Whiskers exits.)

Bertie: Jeeves, I'm sunk. Agatha will seek me out like a boar to a truffle. Sooner or later—

(Pounding on door.)

Agatha (offstage): Bertie!

Jeeves: I should think sooner, sir.

CALLING ALL BOOK DEALERS

It has come to the attention of the Big Guns of the Chicago Accident Syndicate that many regulars of The Wodehouse Society have been engaged in hanky-panky with lesser authors like Tolstoy and Dostoyevski, Austen, Trollope, and Doyle. Because we have our hands full around here with alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and slot machines, we are ready to take the broad view with matters literary. **We therefore invite book dealers to come to TWS Convention '97** with ripe and fruity offerings in any of the many authors likely to tickle the fancy of our avid reading habits and discriminating tastes.

Please contact the Chicago Accident Syndicate care of Dan "Ukridge" Garrison, 1228 Simpson St., Evanston IL 60201; e-mail to d-garrison@nwu.edu; or call evenings at 847/475-2235.

And please remember, we said book dealers, not book makers. We're all booked up in the latter category, thanks!

CHAPTERS CORNER

We have been receiving numerous newsletters from various TWS chapters, all with a distinctive flair. Charles Bishop of **Blandings Castle** created *The Argus Intelligencer and Wheat Growers Gazette*. Now edited by Blandings president Jan Kaufman, the May 1997 issue features a profile of Pauline Blanc, a charter member of TWS and founder of the Blandings Castle chapter. Pauline's artistic abilities and devotion to Wodehouse are legendary among TWSers, and Jan has written a delightful homage to this remarkable lady.

The **Drone Rangers'** newsletter is an equally nifty bit of reading entitled *Dronestar*. As edited by Toni Rudersdorf, this eye-pleasing account of our Texas chapter includes reports of their various doings (their annual "Remember Plum" party sounds like it was a feast of fun!), poems, book reports, and excerpts from Plum-related postings on the Internet. We like this last idea so well that we hope Toni doesn't mind our appropriating it for future issues of *Plum Lines*!

Our St. Louis chapter puts out a newsletter with a title that gets right to the point: *The Pdrones Club*. The Pdrones' logo features an elegant couple dancing gaily under St. Louis's famous arch, which we believe amply reflects the light-hearted, socially-directed atmosphere of this busy chapter. Recent activities included their annual Afternoon Tea in March and a Missouri Winery Tour in April, with a Picnic in the Park scheduled for June. Let the good times roll!

The latest issue of *The Minewts* reports on the **NEWTS** April nottle, held at the home of Rev. Wendell Verrill. With a priest for a host, it only made sense to conduct a Great Sermon Handicap. After attending NEWTS placed their bets as to how long he would talk, Wendell was presented with a page from the Bible and given the task of ad-libbing about the subject until he ran out of steam. The result of this assignment was apparently nothing short of hysterical!

Chapter One's crew has had no time for newsletters recently, due to their preparations for this month's Summer Binge in Cape May, NJ (June 20-22). Approximately 45 Plummies have signed up for this funfest, which will be fully covered in the next *Plum Lines*.

Chapters all over are getting ready for the biennial convention to be hosted by the **Chicago Accident Syndicate** October 2-5, 1997. See page 10 for details of their latest wheeze, the Scripture Knowledge Contest. If the brainiest coves of your chapter have not yet signed up for the convention, then waste no time in shanghaiing them to Chicago for the Wodehousian Contest of the Century!

THE SCRIPTURE KNOWLEDGE CONTEST!

ANOTHER NEW WHEEZE FOR THE 1997 WODEHOUSE SOCIETY CONVENTION

Bertie Wooster may, like Pooh, be a bear of little brain, but he never tired of boasting that in his school-days he had once won a prize for Scripture Knowledge from the Rev. Aubrey Upjohn. (Never mind what Gussie Fink-Nottle said about this. He was in his cups at the time.)

We Wodehouseans have our own Scripture, of course, the writings of P. G. Wodehouse. And it occurred to us at the Chicago Accident Syndicate that another jolly new wheeze for this year's convention would be a Scripture Knowledge contest of our own, among the various chapters of the Society. The following seem to be alive and eligible at this time:

BLANDINGS CASTLE, *in the San Francisco Bay area*

CAPITAL! CAPITAL! *of Washington, D.C.*

CHAPTER ONE, *of Philadelphia*

THE DRONES RANGERS, *of Houston*

NEWTs, *of Boston and elsewhere in New England*

THE PDRONES CLUB, *of St. Louis*

and

THE WUCKOOS OF THE PALACE, *around the Puget Sound*

So we hereby invite and urge each chapter to form a team of three, feed them fish between now and October, and cheer them on at the convention as they compete to do their chapters proud, and bring the Scripture Knowledge Prize home!

What if I'm not a member of a chapter? In fact, as you will see, we need eight teams for the first heat of the Scripture Knowledge contest, and there are only seven chapters. And (as unthinkable as it seems) some chapter may not wish to field a team at the convention.

So here's what we're going to do. Lots of us don't live near any of these chapters, and we certainly don't want to automatically exclude everyone who doesn't from the rigors of the contest, and the glory (and boodle) that will come from winning. So we are also going to form *Challenge Teams* in addition to Chapter Teams, up to a total of eight of both kinds.

If you and a couple of your friends in the Society, all three of you unaffiliated with any of the seven chapters, want to comprise a Challenge Team, write and tell us so — the sooner the better! Or if you'd like to be on a Challenge Team, but don't have any particular notion of with whom, let us know that you're planning to attend and want to compete, and out of that hat (8¾ — Jeeves's size) we will put a Challenge Team or two together for the contest.

Just keep in mind, though, a total of eight teams are all that the convention-time available makes possible. And we reserve the right to pluck certain individuals off either kind of team

and make them contest judges instead, just to keep the playing-field fairly level. A sort of anti-Steggles measure, if you follow my meaning.

How will the contest work? There will be three heats, each more like a Welsh Rabbit coming to the boil than the last. The first will consist of four rounds, each with two teams competing against each other. The first round will be on the afternoon of October 3rd, at the Friday opening reception. The second will be later that night, following the convention's City Lit Theater production. The third and fourth will take place on Saturday morning.

The four winning teams will go on to the second heat, which will consist of two semi-final rounds, during the Saturday afternoon session of the convention. (Each team's chance to ply its opponents with Strong Drink during the mid-day break for browsing and sluicing.)

The two winning teams from the second heat will face each other in the final heat, one no-holds-barred, winner-take-all round at the Saturday Night Gala Banquet. The winning team will receive the Scripture Knowledge Prize, and be the cynosure of the entire Wodehouse Society.

In case of a tie in any round, there will be tie-breaker questions of fiendish proportions.

What will a round be like? Edifying and highly entertaining at the same time. That well-known Wodehousean Mastermind Tony Ring will pose questions on various aspects of Wodehouse Scripture, and the team which rings, buzzes, honks, or otherwise puts its oar in first will get the first chance to answer. If it fails to answer correctly in 15 seconds, in the view of a panel of canny judges (carefully chosen for their resemblance to owls with a dash of weasel blood in them), the other team will get a chance to answer. And so it will go, for fifteen intensely feverish minutes. Twenty minutes in the case of the final, championship, round. Nurses will be standing by with smelling salts.

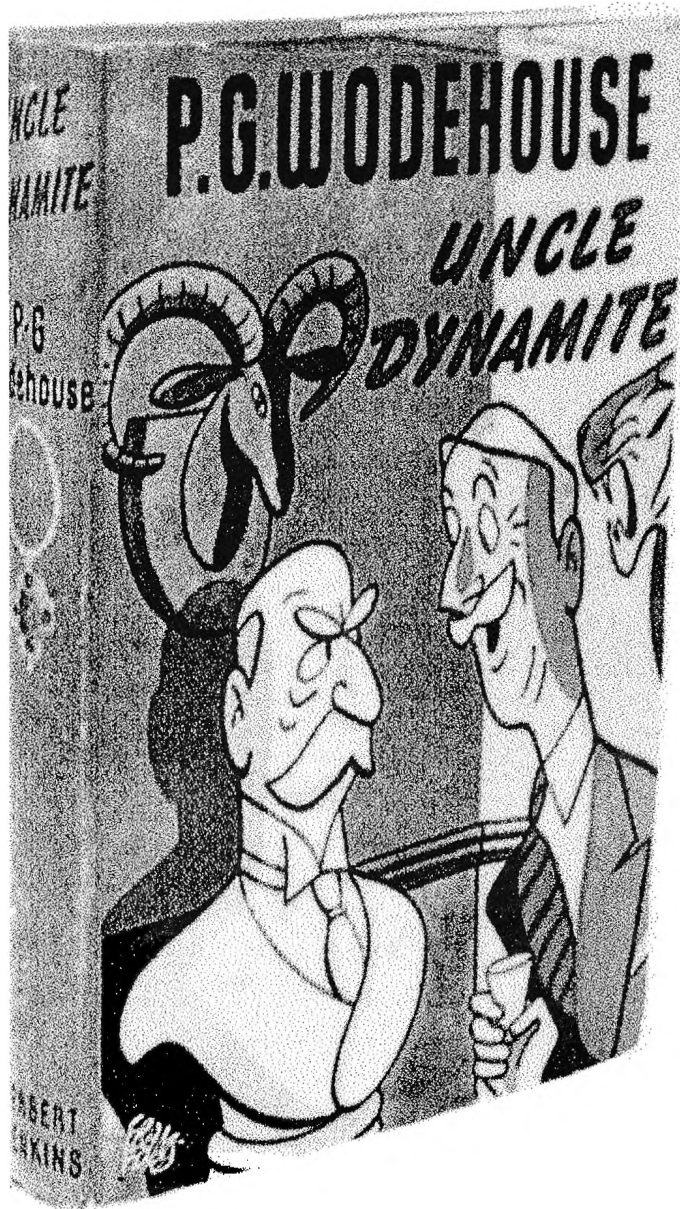
Questions will be drawn from the following parts of Scripture: the Bertie Wooster tales, the Mulliner stories, the Blandings Castle saga, the Ukridge exposés, the Golf stories, the Drones Club chronicles, and the Psmith novels — immortal works of literature which are all sitting on pretty much everyone's bookshelf, or ought to be. There may also be, ahem, the random question here and there drawn from the life of P. G. Wodehouse. So you may also wish to browse through this or that biography of the Master.

Of course the questioning will become more difficult with each successive heat. And by the time of the final round, just about any aspect of the Master's life and work will be fair game. We may even whistle a bit from Plum's musicals, and challenge you to Name that Tune!

What's the Prize? A complete set, believe it or not, of the eight-volume *Millenium Wodehouse Concordance*: four vols. to date and four more to come, a prize worth oodles of oof.

KEEP UP TO DATE ON CONVENTION PLANS AT THE
CHICAGO ACCIDENT SYNDICATE'S WEBSITE: [HTTP://WWW.STICHICAGO.COM/PLUM97.HTM](http://www.stichicago.com/plum97.htm)

SOMETHING GAINED IN THE TRANSLATION?



The dust wrapper on the left is from the first edition, Herbert Jenkins, London, 1948.



Jean Tillson submitted the cover on the right, published by Dell, New York, 1950. Comment is unnecessary.

In the evening of his life his uncle Frederick, Lord Ickenham, still retained, together with a juvenile waistline, the bright enthusiasms and the fresh, unspoiled mental outlook of a slightly inebriated undergraduate.

Uncle Dynamite, 1948

BY JEEVES, THE BRITISH ARE GOOD SORTS AFTER ALL

An Italian newspaper lists the works of P. G. Wodehouse as the pinnacle of British culture. Why, we wonder, is anyone surprised?

By Mark Jones

Norman Murphy passes along this article from the London Evening Standard of Tuesday, March 18, 1997. —OM

In 1956 a lady signing herself "Highland Lassie" wrote to an English newspaper complaining about the works of William Shakespeare. They were, she believed, "grossly materialistic and much overrated," and she "greatly preferred P.G. Wodehouse." There followed a lively debate about the sacrilege of comparing Wodehouse, a mere scribbler of comic novels and musical plays, to Shakespeare.

Wodehouse stood modestly aside. "It is not for me to say whether she is right or not," he wrote. "Shakespeare's stuff is different from mine, but that is not necessarily to say that it is inferior. There are passages in Shakespeare to which I would have been 'pleased to put my name.' That 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' thing. Some spin on the ball there."

Forty-one years later, we are off again. An Italian newspaper has thoughtfully compiled a list of the Top 100 achievements of European civilisation. The idea is to make us more proud of our continent's past and less sceptical about its future. There, in what without being vulgarly competitive we can say is a pretty extensive list of British achievements—loads more than the French, for instance—is Shakespeare; and there next to him, is P.G. Wodehouse.

And there next to them are Church's shoes and Barbour jackets. Groan if you like. So that's it: as far as the Italians are concerned, our contribution to the spiritual and cultural life of our fellows rests solely on our ability to welt brogues, wax jackets and produce amusing dialogue between manservants and young toffs. It is small consolation that the Italian part of the *Corriere della Sera* list features Vespa scooters and Sophia Loren's cleavage. By shoving in Wodehouse and sturdy shoes, they have consigned us, as we are so often consigned, to an Edwardian never-never-land far removed from the serious and sober reality of Britain today.

Let us think for a second who we should have on the list to represent that. We want a modern writer to

balance Shakespeare. Martin Amis, perhaps, to represent black-humouredly the squalid, seedy, voracious underlife of these post-modern, pre-holocaust times. Or Salman Rushdie: the Kipling *de nos jurs*, to show that we have become multicultural, non-colonial, while remaining fearless in the face of tyrants and oppressors. Or (going back a bit further), D.H. Lawrence, as evidence that, contrary to what the Italians think and the French say, we do know something about sex; in fact, we invented it at roughly the same time Logie-Baird invented television. We could have had William Boyd, Julian Barnes, Anthony Burgess, Angela Carter or even Tom Sharpe. Any writer, in fact, who has never put a dodderly earl or a pair of spats in one of their novels.

There is another good reason for not having Wodehouse in the list. He is not very European. Indeed, he is far from being entirely English. Yes, Wodehouse books are full of plus-fours and gentlemen's clubs, earls and castles, country house weekends and Boat Race night antics. But he lived for most of his long adult life in America, and without America he would not be the presiding genius of English prose which the *Corriere della Sera* and others celebrate today.

When he started travelling to the USA to further his budding career as a lyricist and journalist in the 1930s, Wodehouse was a middling writer of school stories and mildly funny tales of Edwardian social life. His stuff was sub-Jerome K. Jerome and quasi-Thackeray. Compared, say, to Saki's Reginald stories, Wodehouse's early work is cumbersome and a bit plodding. [This date represents either a typo or a failure of memory. The paragraph describes PGW's situation around 1910, not the 1930s. —OM]

America made all the difference. He wallowed in the slanginess and mouthiness of American English. Like a marriage of a New York showgirl and an Anglican priest, his prose began to mix up low-life and high-church, learned quotations from the Old Testament with catchy slogans about dog biscuits and prize fighters. Wodehouse would have disappeared if he hadn't gone to America.

There is another rather serious problem with putting Wodehouse on a list of cultural achievements. He was a philistine. Not a stupid philistine, nor a badly read one. He admired the work of fellow novelists such as Evelyn Waugh and George Orwell—and was admired by them in turn—and he even had a good word for Norman Mailer.

But his real heroes and buddies were golf pros, schoolboy cricketers and Broadway lyricists. The good guys in his novels are rowers, boxers, drinkers, clubmen, plucky little women and dim old aristocrats. The bad guys are blue-stockings, modern poets, female modernists, and intellectual young men who wear side-whiskers and read Russian novels. In his work as in his life, Wodehouse showed a very anti-European antipathy towards conspicuous cleverness of all kinds.

So what do we do? Do we all, as a nation, get up a petition and send it to the *Corriere della Sera* and insist that they find another writer to represent Britain on their list, someone who does not perpetuate the absurd myth of a warm and benign England where polished welshed brogues still march gaily down the spotless pavements of Piccadilly?

No. Reality is all very well, but it has its limitations. We've got to have a spot of fantasy, and as far as fantasy goes, P.G. Wodehouse is erotica for many of us. How much more gratifying to have someone on the list who will allow us to pretend for eternity that we are an affable and essentially harmless race, where the only threat to the social order is that policemen get their helmets stolen on Boat Race night.

It's funny that, now the social and political arguments that went so far over Wodehouse's head are largely over and done with, it has become highly respectable for Important figures from the Left and the intelligentsia to admit their love for his work. Tony Blair has done it. So has Salman Rushdie. Our most public Wodehousean figure, Stephen Fry, happens to be a Labour man. When asked what an England fit for heroes should be like, Fry often cites Wodehouse's unusual postage habits. When in London, Wodehouse would sit in his club writing letters. When he finished, he would put a stamp on it and toss the envelope out of the window. He reasoned that the English were so honest that someone was bound to pick it up and shove it in a letter box. They always did.

It doesn't quite rival the Social Contract or the Communist manifesto in depth of thought and detail of policy. But if Labour is seeking a sound working philosophy for their general election campaign—and it seems that they are—The Wodehouse Theory of English Affability might do really quite well.

THE LITERARY LIFE

The following was submitted by Susan Cohen and also by David McDonough, who spotted it as an excerpt in the magazine *Civilization*. The source is a book by photographer Jill Krentz entitled *The Writer's Desk* (Random House, 1996). This book features Krentz's portraits of famous literary men and women, along with essays written by her subjects. Her two-page spread on Wodehouse was placed *first* in the book, ahead of articles for 55 other (and lesser) writers, thus showing her good sense in selecting the best of the best! —AD & OM

Remsenburg, New York, 1973

It's curious how a scenario gets lost as you go along. I don't think I've ever actually kept completely to one. If I've got a plot for a novel worked out and I can really get going on it, I work all the time. I work in the morning, and then I probably go for a walk or something, and then I have another go at the novel. I find that from four to seven is a particularly good time for working. I never work after dinner. It's the plots I find so hard to work out. It takes such a long time to work one out. I like to think of some scene, it doesn't matter how crazy, and work backward and forward from it until eventually it becomes plausible and fits neatly into the story.

I've just finished another novel, in fact.... It really is funny. It's worked out awfully well. I'm rather worried about the next one. It will be a letdown almost. I don't want to be like Bernard Shaw. He turned out some awfully bad stuff in his nineties. He said he knew the stuff was bad but he couldn't stop writing.



PGW LETTERS TO COMPTON MACKENZIE

Pete Barnsley writes: "Yesterday I found in a charity shop a copy of *Octave Eight* (1939-1946) of *My Life and Times* by Compton MacKenzie (Chatto and Windus, 1969). There were two references to Wodehouse in the index. The first concerned his war-time broadcasts, but most of the material has been published elsewhere. The second reference concerned the enclosed material, which is new to me...The strange thing is, though [the McIlvaine bibliography] has two references to MacKenzie, there is no mention of *My Life and Times*." Two paragraphs of the first letter that follows were quoted by MacKenzie in *Homage to P. G. Wodehouse* (Barrie and Jenkins, 1973). The other material below has been published only in MacKenzie's *Octave Eight*, as far as I know. MacKenzie's comments are shown below in italics. —OM

I was delighted to get a letter from P. G. Wodehouse in April:

36 Boulevard Suchet
Paris (16)
April 10, 1946

Dear Monty,

Thelma Cazalet-Keir [sister-in-law of Plum's step-daughter Leonora] came over here a couple of days ago and told me of the marvellous way you had been sticking up for me in England. I can't tell you how grateful I am. It makes the whole situation seem different when I know that friends like you are still with me.

The recent remarks of the Attorney-General in the House of Commons came as rather a shock after the attitude taken by the previous Attorney-General, making my position difficult again. Apparently the view taken now, as the result of what the Judge said in the Joyce trial, is that the mere act of speaking on the German Radio is regarded as a crime, irrespective of what was said. My five talks were simply a humorous description of life in camp, designed purely to amuse American readers of my books and made because I wanted to do something to show my gratitude for letters and parcels they had sent me, but that, it seems, does not let me out. The Government seem to be standing firmly on a technicality, against which of course I have no defence. So I can only hope that time will eventually straighten things out.

Meanwhile, things aren't so bad. After freezing for months I am now warm again, and that makes up for a lot. (It's damned cold again today, I admit, but after

surviving December, January, February and the first part of March I snap the fingers. It's a case of "we don't call that cold in Quebec"). Paris has been heavenly this last week or so. My window here looks on the Bois, and every day the view gets more stimulating. The food situation has improved owing to parcels from America, and I have the American Library, where the other day to my joy I found *Buttercups and Daisies*. I suppose it was about my seventh reading of the book, and I loved it just as much as ever. I always stoutly maintain that for sustained comic writing you leave the rest of us nowhere. Except in *Poor Relations* I don't believe there has ever been a funnier series of scenes than the part in *Buttercups and Daisies* that starts with the train journey. My great trouble is that I can't get hold of the middle books of the Winds series. Still, I can and do re-read *Carnival*.

My own position is rather like that of the mild man with the small voice who sits in a corner making remarks that nobody listens to. I keep on writing, and the books have been piling up for five years or so, but I am the only person who reads them. However, the dam shows signs of bursting. Doubleday are bringing out my Jeeves novel in the Autumn [*Joy in the Morning*], and I suppose after that the others will follow. They will be definitely historical novels now, as they all deal with a life in which country houses flourish and butlers flit to and fro. I'm hoping that people, in America at any rate, will overlook the fact that they are completely out of date and accept them for their entertainment value. I think they're all pretty funny, but, my gosh, how obsolete!

How long is it since you wrote a lyric? I hadn't done any, except for one brief spasm in 1929, since 1917, and the other day, stimulated by my election to ASCAP and encouraging letters from Guy Bolton, who says he can get a commission for a Bolton-Wodehouse musical comedy on Broadway, I started in again, and have now completed eleven, mostly duets of the type that can be shoved in anywhere. I want to be ready in case something breaks.

Thelma told me you are on the point of going to India. It ought to be a very interesting trip. I am re-reading Aldous Huxley's *Jesting Pilate*, which is about his visit to India and very good. You ought to have a great time.

A few days ago I received a formal notification from the French Government that I was no longer considered "dangereux" to the safety of the Republic. Up till

now the Republic has been ducking down side streets when it saw me coming and shouting "Save yourselves, boys! Here comes Wodehouse!", but now all is well and me and them are just like that. I am glad of this, because I have always considered them one of the nicest Republics I have ever met, my great trouble being that I simply can't master the language. My instructor at the Berlitz was strong on pencils. She would keep saying "Un crayon. Le crayon est jaune. Le crayon est bleu" and so on till I really got good on pencils. But in actual conversation I found that it didn't carry me very far. I was sunk unless I could work the talk round to pencils, and nobody seemed really interested in them. I now leave everything to my wife who can't speak a word of French but somehow manages to make herself understood.

I do hope you will some day be coming over to Paris, so that we can meet again. I haven't gone at length into what I think of your wonderful loyalty to me, because I know you know how I feel. God bless you!

Yours ever
Plum

I had been shocked by the ill-informed remarks of Sir Hartley Shawcross when asked a question in the House about Wodehouse. I did not feel it was becoming in an Attorney-General to play to the gallery.

I had written to "Plum" Wodehouse and told him that I had started to write Whisky Galore and must somehow finish it before I left for India in the autumn. He wrote:

36 Boulevard Suchet
Paris June 4. 1946

My dear Monty,

It was wonderful getting your letter. Send me more! I asked Watt to send you a copy of *Money in the Bank*. I hope this reaches you safely and that you will like it. I haven't seen any reviews of it yet, but imagine that if there are any they will be stinkers. Still, so long as the public accepts it, I shall be satisfied, and my publishers tell me that they expect the sales to be large.

It's splendid that you should have got such a nice house. I hope you are finding no difficulty in running it. That seems to be the trouble nowadays, the lack of "help". It is a major problem in Paris, but we have been pretty lucky. We have a maid who comes in till five, but that still leaves most of the heavy work to be done by my wife. This flat is one of those ornate ones with mirrors and polished woodwork everywhere, and it is a devil of a job keeping it clean.

Don't forget if you ever do come on a spare copy of any of your books that I haven't read to send it to me. I find that yours can be re-read indefinitely—I have just

finished *The Vanity Girl* for I don't know the whatth time and enjoyed it just as much as ever—but one needs new ones. It is particularly maddening to be without them in the case of the Winds series where you want to have a straight run through.

Whisky Galore sounds promising. I hope it comes out without any of those awful hitches in the middle which whiten an author's hair. Why is it that even if you prepare the most detailed scenario you always seem to strike a snag somewhere in a book? I have just got out the plot of a new Jeeves novel [probably *The Mating Season*, Jenkins, 1949] and it looks as if it would write itself, but difficulties are sure to crop up.

Yes, the Duke of Windsor is practically next door to us. There is only a derelict barracks in between. Oddly enough I haven't seen him yet.

You talk in your letter about getting old and I suppose we are really, but it's extraordinary how few signs of it one feels. I can still do my daily walk. I think the chief symptom in my case is a complete inability to write a short story. The desire seems to have gone entirely. Not that it matters much, because there are no magazines nowadays—in England at any rate, and the American ones have become so awful that they are ruled out. Have you seen an American magazine recently? They seem to print nothing but small-town American stories.

I had an offer from America the other day to do book and lyrics for a musical show about La Pompadour, but it fell through because I couldn't get over there in time. I'm sorry in a way, because it was a big production and will probably be a hit, but I must say I always shrink from those "period" pieces. This may be because I wrote one thirty years ago which was one of the biggest flops on record. It was an incredible sweat to write the lyrics, and the thing ran a week.

Yours ever
Plum

Looking back now on the treatment of "Plum" Wodehouse, who never returned to England, I am still shocked by the dastardly behaviour of some of my fellow authors. The B.B.C. has at last made some amends for the part it played with the cheapjack columnist who called himself Cassandra by producing two excellent sets of Wodehouse tales on television.

"I've seen the light," said the policeman, hitherto an atheist, "and what I wanted to ask you, sir, was do I have to join the Infants' Bible Class or can I start singing in the choir right away?"

The Mating Season, 1949

BETTING ON BERTIE HEADS FOR THE FINISH LINE

By Herb Moskowitz (aka Vladimir Brusiloff)

On Monday, April 14, 1997, at the Promenade Theatre in New York City, a special reading of *Betting on Bertie* was presented to a select audience. Although primarily intended for potential backers and theatre owners, a very special invitation was sent to Plummies to attend, as well. Many of the members of the creative staff, including Bob Wright and Chet Forrest (noted composers of *Kismet* and *Grand Hotel*), are fellow Plummies and TWSers.

This Wodehousian connection was apparent in the presentation itself. Douglas Holmes and Walter Willison adapted the original book by Wodehouse and Bolton for the modern stage. I hadn't attended the previous reading that Plummies had seen so I have no idea what possible changes they have made, but they certainly know their Wodehouse. As well as being a co-adaptor, Douglas Holmes also played Bertie (and played him to perfection). Simon Jones was Jeeves. In fact, I never saw a better Jeeves. He looked exactly as what I imagined Jeeves should look like when I first started reading Wodehouse.

The plot line is adapted from *The Return of Jeeves* (that's *Ring for Jeeves* in the U.K.). Aunt Agatha has stopped Bertie's allowance. Bertie decides to earn his living by becoming a bookie. To protect the Wooster name, both he and Jeeves adapt aliases (are these Nom de Plums?), wear garish clothing and promptly are thrown into the soup when the horse they have laid heavy odds against to lose—wins! Since they can't make good on the bets they flee to the Wooster homestead which stands in Southmoltonshire, England. That is, it is standing right now, but it could collapse at any moment.

Hiding their bookie costumes, they revert to their usual personalities and find themselves hosting various guests, including the famous American movie star, Brenda Beaumont, and the great hunter, Captain Bigger, who has traced the car that bore the two bookies who cheated him to Wooster Abbey. The Captain has brought his daughter, Zenny, with him and she and Bertie find themselves falling for each other.

The convoluted plot contains stolen jewelry, fake ghosts, collapsing ceilings, horse races, past romances and innumerable surprises. The set on the stage of the Promenade Theatre was for a currently running play set in a modern condominium, so the audience had to imagine they were in decrepit Wooster Abbey. Fortu-

nately, the cast made this very easy to do.

The songs were delightful and were all character driven. The performers were all perfectly cast and had fine voices as well as fine acting abilities. They seemed to enjoy themselves as much as the audience. They positively broke themselves up when Captain Bigger kissed Brenda Beaumont and accidentally gave her most of his mustache!

All the characters are likable and one can only cheer when the plot resolutions leave them all with their heart's desires. The end holds a few surprises for devoted Plummies, which I am not at liberty to divulge. I can say, however, that the last image of the show is one of Jeeves and Bertie nodding to each other with great love and respect.

The evening was over two and a half hours long, but the time just flew by. Frank Loesser was right—this is a darling of a show!

I hope that this musical can be mounted with great success. It would be a wonderful introduction to the world of Jeeves and Wooster for the untutored masses. And if the show is successful, I would be assured of being able to purchase a CD of the score which I started to covet by the third musical number, and was ready to kill for by the end of the first act!



ANSWERS TO "WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE PICTURES?"

Murray Wilson and Frederic Strawbridge were the only two brave and brilliant Plumies who responded to the challenge posed by Charles Gould in the last issue of *Plum Lines*. Both did a creditable job of finding some but not all of the errors in the cover illustrations. Herewith the answers to Charles's fiendish quiz, for the benefit of those who did not eat their fish.

Meet Mr. Mulliner

1. Mr. Mulliner is "stout" and "comfortable." This man is neither.
2. Mr. Mulliner smokes a cigar ("The Man Who Gave Up Smoking"). The cigarette is not in character.
3. There is no indication that he has a moustache.
4. The clothes are all wrong, much too urban or European, to wit:
a) cuff links b) collar pin c) carnation
d) pocket handkerchief e) gabardine suit
5. The design and fabric of the chair are questionable.
6. The pose and facial expression are both too uncongenial for Mr. M.
7. The Angler's Rest is a village pub (see references to the High Street in "The Nodder" and "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom.") This one, with its monogrammed awning and a Rolls Royce at the kerb, belongs in Mayfair.

Sam the Sudden

When Sam Shotter arrives at San Rafael in Chapter 7, he has just come off a tramp steamer and is dressed accordingly. That's partly why Claire Lippett mistakes him for a burglar. He spots the photograph of Kay Derrick in Chapter 10, the scene depicted here, having had a bath and a shave; but Mr. Cornelius mistakes him for a beggar in Chapter 11, and it is clear that he has not changed clothes.

Company for Henry

1. In Chapter Two, Part 2, it is 5:00 p.m. as Henry Paradene is working on his letter to Wendell Stickney. The tower clock reads 4:30.
2. The 3:30 fast train from London to Ashby Paradene does not arrive in time for Jane Martyn to join Henry until *after* 5:00.
3. Henry is using—and chewing—a fountain pen, not a pencil.
4. Even if artistic license places the lake so close to the front lawn, Henry hates the sight of it and surely would not attempt epistolary composition on its very verge.

WODEHOUSE ON *TIME*

Jay Weiss found this little item in the February 1964 issue of the magazine *Fact*. The magazine's editor, Ralph Ginsburg, had invited "celebrities from all walks of life [to] tell of their bitter experiences with *Time* [magazine's] distortions, omissions, and lies." Plum, along with John Osborne, Bertrand Russell, Taylor Caldwell, Tallulah Bankhead, Walter Winchell, Igor Stravinsky, and others, spoke his mind as follows. —OM

T*ime* is about the most inaccurate magazine in existence. They will write just about anything to be picturesque and amusing.

For instance, during the German occupation of France, when I was living in Le Touquet, they did a short squib on my internment by the Germans. They had me "throwing a cocktail party in the jolly old pine woods at Le Touquet" as the German army was sweeping toward Paris. According to *Time*, all of us "revellers" were ceremoniously arrested and carted off—

still in jolly good humor. Can you imagine the bastards inventing an idiotic story like that? I've always wondered where I was supposed to have collected these light-hearted guests when, in fact, the resident population of the town had shrunk so considerably that even a determined host would have found it impossible to assemble the nucleus of a cocktail party. And certainly no one was in the mood for revelry. Furthermore, if one were to believe *Time*, the "party" would have had to continue for two months since there was that time-lapse between the day the Germans arrived and the day I was interned! Apparently everyone believed the story because it has been picked up, time and again. It did me a lot of harm 20 years ago and is still repeated often. It is embedded in the world's folklore—thanks to the inventiveness of one of *Time*'s editors.

Remsenburg, New York



Chicago Convention Registrations

as of May 1, 1997



Rita Anton, Chicago IL
 Jamie Aramini, Evanston IL
 Douglas Bellew, Exton PA
 Roma Benninghoven, Barrington IL
 Alekh Bhurke, East Lansing MI
 Ann & Leon Bishop, Chicago IL
 Lorraine Bonecki, Oak Forest IL
 Susan Brokaw, Cincinnati OH
 Edward Bronstein, Daly City CA
 Bob Brooks, Evanston IL
 Nancy & Randall Burkett, Worcester MA
 Jim & Sue Byham, Landenberg PA
 Karen Byrne, New Britain PA
 Ralph Chermak, Des Plaines IL
 Charlotte & Richard Cody, Chicago IL
 Daniel & Susan Cohen, Cape May NJ
 Jerilyn Cohen, St. Louis MO
 Karen & Louis Constan, Saginaw MI
 Anne Cotton, South Hadley MA
 Ann Coulson, San Mateo CA
 Allan T. Devitt, Bensenville, IL
 Neal De Vos, Aptos CA
 Susan Z. Diamond, Bensenville IL
 Joseph & Kate Dooley, Pebble Beach CA
 Winston L. Duke, Barrington Hills IL
 Dianne van Dulken, Leichardt, NSW, Australia
 Micah Ian Evans, Brighton MA
 Sally Fairweather, Barrington, IL
 Susan Fitzgibbon, St. Louis MO
 John Fletcher, Maidenhead UK
 Mary Ellen Fornsel, Centereach NY
 Deborah Fox, Exton PA
 Dan & Tina Garrison, Evanston IL
 Johann George, Evanston IL
 Daniel Love Glazer, Chicago IL
 Sandy Gleaves, Tipton IA
 Bob & Christina Griffin, Mattawan MI
 Richard Hanson, Seattle WA
 Mary Harney, Chicago IL
 Helen E. Heinrich, Stony Brook NY
 Susan Jewel, Evanston IL
 Jan Wilson Kaufman, Oakland CA
 Merideth Kelley, Seattle WA
 Linda Kessler, New York NY
 John Ketcham, Elon College NC
 Len & Shirley Lawson, Livermore CA
 John & Nicholas Lellenberg, Evanston IL
 Emelie & Patricia Levenson, Culver City CA

Katherine Lewis, Chicago IL
 Marcia & William Libby, Ridgefield CT
 Sheila M. Markley, Canton OH
 Cecily & Carey Martin, Evanston IL
 Marilyn McGregor, Davis CA
 Justine McKeon, Chicago IL
 Charlotte Meloney, Daly City CA
 Dean Miller, Chicago IL
 Richard H. Morrissey, Framingham MA
 Helen Murphy, London UK
 Alicia & Andrea Olin, Chicago IL
 Dick & Ruth Olson, Mexico MO
 Eric & Linda Otten, Ballwin MO
 Jelle Otten & M.A. Otten-Scholten, Deventer,
 Netherlands
 George R. Paterson, Wilmette IL
 Sushila Peterson, Kansas City MO
 Michael Petterson, Evanston IL
 John & Terri Phipps, Adamstown MD
 Mai Pillai, Chicago IL
 Amy Plofker, Hamden CT
 Carolyn M. Pokrivchak, Easton PA
 Max T.K. Pokrivchak, Watertown MA
 Ann & Paul Richardson, Tucson AZ
 William F. Richardson, Auckland, New Zealand
 Tony & Elaine Ring, Great Missenden, Bucks, UK
 Barbara & Ben Rooks, Evanston IL
 James & Joan Rybarczyk, St. Joseph MI
 William Saddler, Chicago IL
 Britta & Sven Sahlin, Osterskar, Sweden
 Carolyn Scheierhorn, Chicago IL
 Shana Singerman, Oakton VA
 Margaret Slythe, Faversham, Kent, UK
 Alex & Irene Snead, Chicago IL
 Jane & Randall Sprague, Woodland CA
 Bibby Starks, Des Plaines IL
 Don "Catsmeat" & Lou Stone, Dallas TX
 Doug & Margaret Stow, Half Moon Bay CA
 Martha Swift, Chicago IL
 Jay E. Taub, Fair Oaks CA
 Craig Tighe, San Mateo CA
 Jean Tillson, Foxboro MA
 Frederick & Natalie Trump, Fayetteville NY
 Gail Wagner-Miller, Chicago IL
 Beth & Tom Wainwright, Walnut Creek CA
 Edward Whittaker, New Britain PA
 Tina Woelke, Chicago IL
 Elin Woodger, Everett MA

THE U.K. SOCIETY

RELAUNCHES

It was with great pleasure that we received the first issue of *Wooster Sauce*, the new journal of the P G Wodehouse Society (UK). This lovely 8-page newsletter begins by announcing the progress of the UK Society's relaunch. Richard Briers, OBE (known to us for his numerous interpretations of Wodehouse on both audiotape and film, and most recently starring in *Heavy Weather* as Galahad Threepwood) has graciously agreed to become President of the Society. Chairman is Norman Murphy; Founder and Vice-Chairman is Richard Morris. Helen Murphy will serve as Membership Secretary, and Tony Ring takes on the task of Editor of *Wooster Sauce*. Other members of the Society's organizing committee include John Fletcher, Oliver Wise, and Sir Edward Cazalet, QC.

The debut issue of *Wooster Sauce* also includes a rousing welcome from Norman Murphy, an interview with the stars of *By Jeeves*, a report on the Wodehouse season at the National Film Theatre, book reviews, poems, and other articles of interest to all Plummies. Tony Ring has done a smashing job of creating a handsome and enjoyable newsletter. The headline and logo (reproduced below) are rendered in—what else?—a rich plum color. We congratulate the organizing committee on getting off to such an impressive start! What more is there to say, except: Yoicks! Har for'ard!

Dues in the new U.K. Society are £15 per year. For further information, write to Helen Murphy at 16 Herbert Street, Plaistow, London E13 8BE, England.



Sir Raymond's attitude towards those about him—his nephew Cosmo, his butler Peasemarch, his partners at bridge, the waiters at the Demosthenes and, in particular, his sister, Phoebe Wisdom, who kept house for him and was reduced by him to blob of tearful jelly almost daily—was always that of an irritable tribal god who intends to stand no nonsense from his worshippers and is prepared, should the smoked offering fall in any way short of the highest standard, to say it with thunderbolts. To have his top hat knocked off with a Brazil nut would, in Lord Ickenham's opinion, make him a better, deeper, more lovable man.

Cocktail Time, 1958

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Thanks to Jean Tillson for her assistance in the preparation of this issue.
—AD & OM

VOLUNTEER OFFICERS

Information and new memberships
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues payments and address changes
Tom Wainwright

Contributions to *Plum Lines*
Ed Ratcliffe, OM Elin Woodger, AD

Dues are \$20 per year.

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