



# Plum Lines

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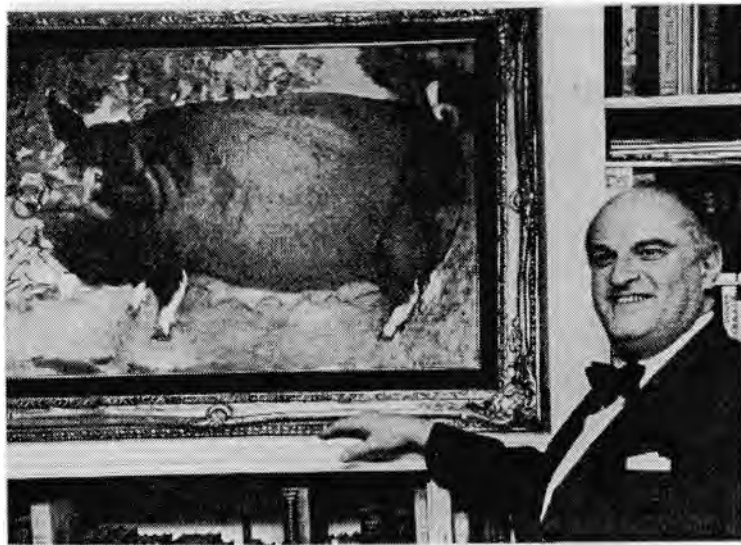
## THE GREAT HEINEMAN HANDICAP

By Aunt Dahlia

On June 26 of this year, a Wodehousian event of unprecedented importance took place at Sotheby's in New York City: the auction of James H. Heineman's Wodehouse collection, certainly the finest in the world.

To all who knew Jimmy, this was an event filled with mixed emotions. On the one hand, it set off a frenzy of avarice and anticipation among collectors and other Plummies. On the other, there was a profound sadness

that the aggregation of books, manuscripts, magazines, sheet music, drawings, paintings, correspondence, and other collectibles into which Jimmy had poured his heart and soul for more than forty-five years would be broken up against his expressed wish that it



James Heineman and the Empress

remain intact after his death. Unfortunately the size and value of the collection made that impossible, and his daughters were obliged to turn to Sotheby's.

This was, in fact, Jimmy's second Wodehouse collection.

As a Plum devotee

from the age of ten, he had already amassed a large quantity of first and other editions which he was forced to leave in his parents' home in Brussels when World War II broke out. He subsequently served as a soldier in the U.S. army, and in 1944 returned to Brussels to find the house in good condition after four years of German occupation—but every Wodehouse book was gone. Undeterred, Jimmy set

about rebuilding his collection with dedication, energy, and quite a lot of money. By the time of his death in August, 1994, Jimmy had compiled an astounding array of more than 6,500 Wodehouse and Wodehouse-related books and other items—including first editions of every book that Wodehouse wrote. It was the most complete and comprehensive such collection anywhere in the Kingdom of Plum. In the process, he became a publisher of books by and about Wodehouse.

In his introduction to the catalog created for the Wodehouse centennial exhibition at the Pierpont Morgan Library in 1981, Jimmy wrote, “The geniality Wodehouse inspires is especially evident among collectors. The collector’s temperament, alas, is not always large-minded and open-handed. He can be avid, petty, devious... Wodehouse does not draw out that kind of nastiness. Most Wodehouse collectors know each other and are friendly competitors...” He would have been happy to see the truth in that statement on June 26 as Plummie collectors

(and non-collectors) gathered in New York City to witness or take part in the auction. Many who couldn’t be there had sent bids by mail or had a representative bidding for them. Among those present and bidding were Charles Gould, Elliott Milstein, Frits Menschaar, John Graham, Gus Caywood, Jay Weiss, and Nigel Williams. Among those *in absentia* was Tony Ring, who nevertheless managed to make off with some of the most prized pieces. The rest of us observers, including Susan Brokaw, Carolyn Pokrivchak, Richard Morrissey, Jean Tillson, and Yours Truly, were merely along for the ride, grateful for the chance to see most of the collection before it was broken up, and to experience a Sotheby’s auction in all its whirlwind glory.

Whirlwind indeed! The Heineman materials were only the first of six collections to be auctioned that day, including some fascinating items from the estate of actor Burgess Meredith (i.e., original drawings by James Thurber, Charles Addams, and Ludwig Bemelmans). How could Sotheby’s offer the 6,500 Heineman items and still have time for the other auctions? It boggled our minds—but not Sotheby’s. Their solution was to break the collection down into a “mere” 150 lots. Are you thinking these were small lots, inexpensive lots? Not for a collection this big. The reserve prices, or minimum selling prices, of the lots ranged from \$500 to \$30,000, with an average of perhaps \$2,000, beyond the reach of many of us. Sixteen lots contained more than 100 items each; only twenty-two lots consisted of a single item, such as a rare first edition or a manuscript. The most controversial lot was #95, which had been profiled in a pre-auction *New York Times* article. It included a number of letters Plum wrote during World War II, which for some raised doubts about his presumed naiveté during his Berlin broadcasts. Others could see nothing wrong in the letters and felt that the *Times* article had created a tempest in a teapot.

Before the auction some specialists believed that Sotheby’s pricing often failed to reflect the true value of certain lots. However, given the results of the bidding, it appeared that the auction house was pretty well on target in most cases. The arrangement and pricing of the lots provoked criticism from many of us who wished the collection had been made accessible to all; but as one of us noted, “I make allowances for the fact that it was a tough job.”

Most Plummies came armed with an auction catalog. To their credit, Sotheby’s had put together a beauty of a catalog, filling it to the brim with photographs and rich descriptions of the Heineman collection. Those of us who had paid \$50 to get a copy in advance were a trifle stunned to learn that the catalog would be available at half price after the auction; nevertheless, we considered the money well spent, especially as it represented the only way we



Original drawing for frontispiece of *William Tell Told Again*, 1904. This and other illustrations in *William Tell* were the earliest illustrations to appear in a Wodehouse book. Note the artist’s date, 1900. Wodehouse wrote the text to fit the illustrations. See the centenary catalog, page 57. (All pictures in this article were taken from the Sotheby catalog and illustrate items that were auctioned.)

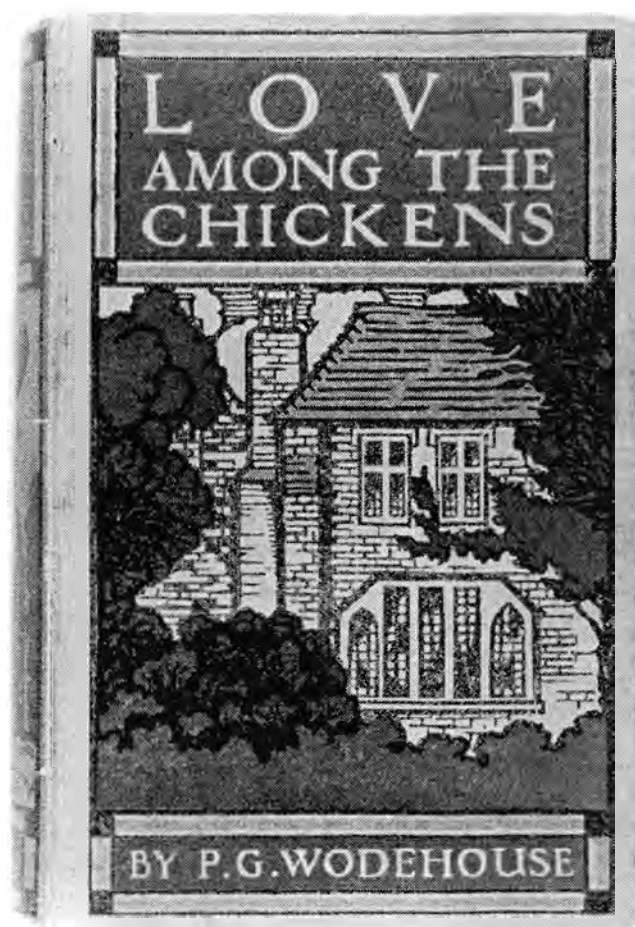
would get the least bit close to anything Heineman!

The catalog informed us that the auction would begin promptly at 10:15 a.m., and so it did. The Wodehouse materials were the first to be sold that day. A cluster of Plummies, many of them clutching auction paddles like bouquets of flarze, took most of two rows of seats in the center of the room. We saw other paddle-clutching Wodehousians scattered about the room amongst forty or so faces unknown to us. At the front and along one side of the room, Sotheby's employees were lined up like sentinels, some on phones, others in charge of mailed-in bids. The auctioneer was a pleasant-faced, pleasant-voiced British chap who wasted no time in starting the bidding, or in describing the lots unless one had been changed, so anyone who didn't have a catalog was out of luck.

The very first lot was unusual, as it contained a single item: A letter written by Wodehouse to the young Jimmy Heineman, valued (according to the catalog) at \$1,000–\$1,500. In the blink of an eye, it had been sold for \$900—or so we neophytes thought. A few weeks later, when we received the list of items sold at the auction, Lot #1 was nowhere on it. Many other lots were also missing from the list; they had not been bid up to their reserve price and so had not been sold. Post-auction bidding took care most of these.

Lot #2 (early letters from Plum to a friend) would suffer no such ignominy; valued at \$6,000–8,000, within a minute the auctioneer declared it sold at \$8,500. (Taxes and fees made the total price \$9,775.) Lot #3, a large number of magazines containing Wodehouse's earliest published efforts, went for \$4,750. The next three lots of magazines, however, failed to make the grade and were returned to sender. Lots containing multiple copies of single books: *A Prefect's Uncle* in #8, *Tales of St. Austin's* in #9, and *The Gold Bat* in #10, were collector's dreams, and all sold rapidly.

Lot #11, containing five copies of *William Tell Told Again*, provided the first excitement of the morning. Priced at \$1,000–1,500, the bidding bounced around the room like a ping-pong ball, going higher and higher, from \$1,500 to \$2,500 to \$3,500 in a matter of seconds. It was a telephone bidder who made off with the prize at \$3,500. More lots of early Wodehouse books followed, some making their reserve price easily, others clearly worth more than Sotheby's thought. The nine volumes of *The Head of Kay's* in Lot #13 were valued at \$1,500–\$2,000, but sold at \$4,750. Lot #16, containing five copies of *Not George Washington* (\$1,000–1,500), set off a furious round of bidding, with the winner scoring a bulls-eye at \$6,000. More excitement followed with Lot #17 (four volumes of *The Globe By the Way Book*, priced at \$1,200–1,800)—when the dust had settled, the Heineman estate was richer by



An early, probably English first (1906), edition of Plum's first adult novel. The adjective has since acquired a new meaning.

another \$6,000.

So it went—and quickly. The auctioneer was a speedy fellow, clearly determined to move things along as fast as possible. His eyes darted rapidly around the room, taking in bidding signals and noting the numbers on the bidding paddles. His hand moved quickly, first here, then there, as he acknowledged each bidder. When bidding was furious, as happened several times, he remained unflustered and kept control like a Spartan general leading his troops. A most capable johnny, don't you know, even if he did reveal his ignorance by pronouncing Psmith as P-smith. (Had he stopped to listen, he would have heard several Plummies in the room advising him under their breaths that the P, as everyone knows, is silent, as in pfish.) Nevertheless, we followed his every move, fascinated to the core, and craned our necks to see who had won a bid, smiling happily when it was somebody we recognized and wondering aloud at the identities of the successful phone or write-in bidders.

One of the biggest prizes of the day was in Lot #21: an

autographed manuscript of *Plum*, *Journalist*, originally belonging to one of Plum's earliest U.S. friends, Leslie Havergal Bradshaw. Priced at \$20,000-\$30,000, bidding for it was understandably intense. The winner snagged it for \$24,000, and Auntie is happy to report that it is now in good (and friendly) hands, although discretion prevents her from revealing the name of the owner of those hands.

Lot #28, nine copies of *The Prince and Betty*, was valued at \$1,200-1,800 and sold for \$3,750. Fourteen copies of *The Little Nugget*, priced in the catalog at \$800-1,200, sold for a whopping \$3,000. Fourteen copies of *Their Mutual Child*, priced at \$1,000-1,500, sold at \$3,250.

For twelve copies of *Indiscretions of Archie*, priced at \$1,200-1,800, bidding started low and moved slowly, then suddenly intensified until, before we knew it, we were hearing a winning bid of \$4,750 (gulp).

Two copies of *Three Men and a Maid* grouped with seven copies of *The Girl on the Boat* (Lot #47; \$1,200-1,800) set off another bidding war, with the anonymous winner paying \$5,000. Many of the following lots failed to meet their reserve price, recalling to us the comment that Sotheby's had overpriced many items. Lot #70, however, excited a lot of interest: the original watercolor-and-ink drawing of Plum done by Rex Whistler for the first edition of *Louder and Funnier*. Wodehouse, understandably, loved the portrait. He is presented as one of the jollier and more relaxed Roman emperors, who knows that the next batch of rebellious legions can't get across the Alps till the middle of next month. The lucky winner was an absentee bidder, at \$3,700. The other famous drawing of Plum is the portrait by David Low, part of which is used on the masthead of every issue of *Plum Lines*. A lithograph of that drawing was valued at \$1,000-1,500 and sold at \$4,000.

We finally came to Lot #95, containing the controversial letters written following Plum's release from the internment camp at Tost in World War II. Many of us felt

this group of letters should have been returned to the Cazalet family; however, they went on the block priced at \$25,000-30,000. Bidding ended at \$19,000, below the reserve price, so the lot remained unsold. A similar fate awaited Lot #97, containing recordings, transcripts, and notes related to the Berlin broadcasts. Valued at \$5,000-7,000, bidding faltered and closed at \$3,250.

Subsequent lots of correspondence often failed to sell, but such was not the fate of Lot #105, priced at \$6,000-8,000. A collection of 107 typed letters, they were written to Guy Bolton throughout the 1950s, with many providing Plum's assessment of the current theatrical scene (from which the two had been absent for so long). Bidding quickly intensified, and a nondescript gentleman walked away with the lot for \$14,000! A 1960s collection of letters to Bolton

(Lot #118, \$4,000-6,000) went for \$9,000 after a furious round of bidding.

Another surprise was Lot #116, a first English edition of *Jeeves in the Offing* inscribed by Plum to Robert Graves "with profound admiration." One would have thought Sotheby's had it right, pricing this book at \$3,000-3,500; however, bidders failed to agree, and it remained unsold at \$1,500. The same was true for Lot #117, an autograph manuscript and typescript of *Service with a Smile*, complete with notes of the work in progress. Valued at \$8,000-12,000, it was a no-go when bidding closed at \$6,000. Ditto for Lot #132, the preliminary outline and typescript manuscript with notes for *The Girl in Blue*, valued at \$10,000-

15,000; it remained unsold at \$5,500.

Although most of the Heineman collection was safe behind glass in cases at the sides of the room, Lot #134 was, much to our delight, on full display, hanging on the wall immediately in front of us. Lord Emsworth would have been even more happy to see it: an oil painting of the Empress of Blandings by American artist Jan Gallione (posing, no doubt, as Landseer), who completed the work in 1980 on a commission from Jimmy. (See page 1.) This masterpiece was, to many Plummies, worth far more



Here's a rare item—a 9.5-inch phonograph record of one of PGW's broadcasts from Berlin. The record is dated 9 July 1941.

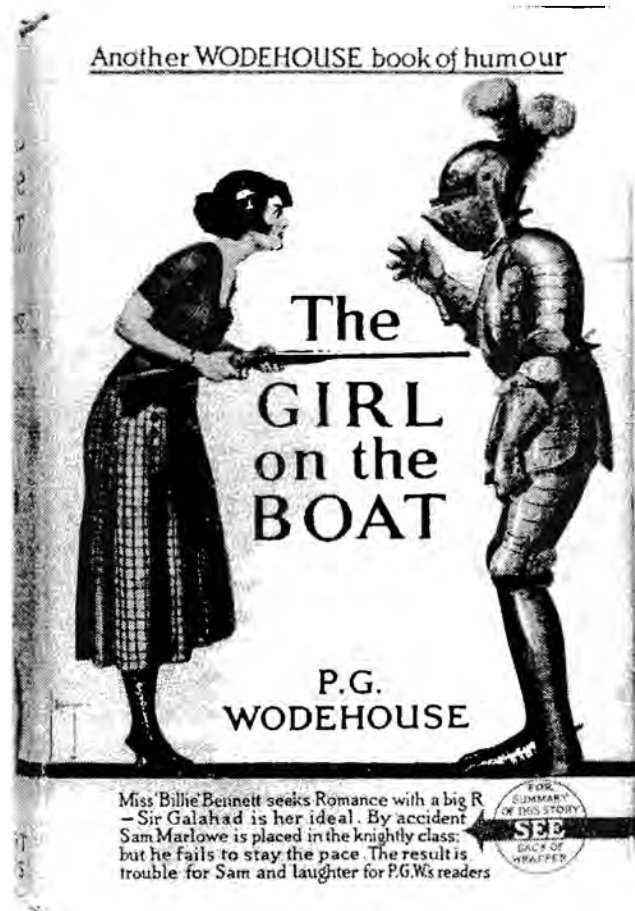


In *The Performing Flea*, Wodehouse wrote, "The best thing about *Louder and Funnier* is the jacket by Rex Whistler."

than it was assessed in the catalog, if only for sentiment's sake; but the identity of the buyer was even more important. It couldn't be just anybody; it would have to be someone who appreciated the painting's importance, who would treasure it and care for it as tenderly as a child — or so Auntie would like to think! Well, I am happy to report that it did go to just such a person, and I'm sure he would not mind my mentioning his name: Tony Ring was the successful bidder, and he must now expect flocks of Plumies descending upon his house to view the prize. (Sorry, I am deliberately omitting the reserve price of the painting and the price Tony paid for it.)

Not all the books being auctioned were by Wodehouse; Lot #139 was unusual in that it contained a variety of books by other writers to which Plum had written the introduction or made a contribution, and a number of volumes he had edited. With a catalog value of \$1,500–2,500, this lot was sold for \$1,200, and was followed by four successive lots that failed to excite any interest: translations of PGW books (#140–142) and a lot of almost 150 biographies, bibliographies, and other reference materials related to Plum (#143). The final lots consisted largely of peripheral items and books related to some of those items. Lot #144, for instance, contained a wealth of sheet music, recordings, posters, programs, and other materials connected to Plum's theatrical work. Valued at \$2,000–3,000, it sold for \$4,750. Lot #145 was related to adaptations of Wodehouse stories for movies, television, and radio, including photographs, posters, lobby cards,

and videotapes; it went for a low \$2,000. One of the lowest-priced lots, #146, contained a large number of books on tape; the winning bidder got it for \$400. Lot #147 was an ephemera collector's dream. The catalog describes it thus: "A collection relating to the world of P. G. Wodehouse, including personal possessions and family photographs, autographs, ephemera and memorabilia such as Wodehouse society keepsakes and souvenirs, books dedicated to PGW, and a large archive of fan letters." Among the 700 items in this lot were bronze relief medals of Aunt Dahlia and the Empress of Blandings, an aubergine velvet waistcoat with black braid trim, and an attaché case with the letters PGW stamped in gilt, not to mention almost 500 fan letters, dozens of framed and unframed photographs, and miscellaneous items too numerous to detail here. When the smoke had cleared, Elliott Milstein found himself the lucky possessor of this impressive lot — much to his surprise, since he had had no intention of bidding on it! (Ah, impulsiveness! To avoid being ejected from the family home, Elliott is now selling



Natives of the far-off, exotic United States call this book *Three Men and a Maid*. The celebrated "way of a man with a maid" seems to have gone off the track here.



A Nicholas Bentley drawing for the London *Sunday Telegraph*, about 1965.

many of the items from this lot and others. For details, see the article “E. Milstein, Bookseller,” on page 8.)

Lot #148 was a collection of thirty items devoted to the Empress of Blandings, including pencil sketches of the noble animal, a bronze medallion, rubber stamps, pins, and books; valued at \$1,500–2,500, it failed to meet its reserve price. Lot #149, with approximately sixty Jeeves-related items (books, illustrations, and ephemera), sold for \$1,900.

As the hands of the clock approached 11:45, the final lot, #150, came up for grabs. This was an impressive collection of original artwork and prints created by the artist Ionicus (Joseph Armitage, recently deceased), largely as cover

illustrations for Penguin editions of Wodehouse books. Valued at \$5,000–7,000, bidding ended with a sale to a telephone bidder at \$4,000. And with that, the excitement was over. Without even a sentimental sigh, the auctioneer turned his attention to Burgess Meredith items.

As we left the auction room and milled about the lobby, our feelings ranged from elation to disappointment. Elliott Milstein, who had unexpectedly acquired Lot #147, said: “I don’t know what happened to me, but I ended up bidding without quite knowing why I did it.” As the lunch hour was upon us, we gathered in a nearby restaurant, there to browse and sluice as we discussed the auction and its consequences. We had enjoyed a unique



This portrait by Ronald Searle was used to illustrate the Wind profile of Wodehouse in the May 15, 1971 *New Yorker*. This and a copy of the magazine sold for \$3,500.

experience, but also a saddening one, watching the irrevocable disposal of Jimmy Heineman's treasures. For many Plummies Jimmy's collection was the Holy Grail of the Wodehouse universe. We will never see its like again!



It's barely possible that some readers will miss the significance of the title of this article. I'll just remind them that Jimmy commissioned and published translations of "The Great Sermon Handicap" in fifty-eight languages.

Finally, I can't resist quoting a few of Jimmy's comments about himself in the 1981 centenary catalog, which

he co-edited:

"...During World War II he served overseas in Military Intelligence, a term which an earlier edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* listed several paragraphs beneath Animal Intelligence...His residence in several countries prompted a former friend to comment that Heineman was illiterate in four languages and quite useless in three others. He was born on the fifth of May, a day he shares with...the first train robbery in the United States...He feels that the world would be an insane place were it not for Mozart, French cooking, his daughters, and Wodehouse." —OM



## E. MILSTEIN, BOOKSELLER

If you've read the preceding account of the Heineman auction you know that Elliott Milstein, our esteemed past president, attended the auction and loaded up on Wodehouse items to an almost unbelievable extent. A lesser man in such a predicament might have sent the telegram the Wodehouse character once sent: DOOM STARES FACE. But Elliott, stout fellow, decided to unload—er, I mean—share some of his treasures with us. The following letter is the result. —OM

Dear Friends:

As some of you may already know, I took part in the Auction of Wodehousiana at Sotheby's. Having been carried away by the moment, I am now the proud owner of many books and memorabilia that I have no great desire to own. I am also a tad light in the pocket. I am therefore hoping to repair the results of my impulsiveness by selling off the items that I do not cherish (keeping of course the ones I do). To that end, I enclose a list of said items with prices.

[Editor's Note: The list is two pages long and includes sixty-five items with short descriptions, too much to include here. Briefly, the offering includes twenty-six copies of five Wodehouse novels (first and later editions), minor printed items such as *Plum Pudding* and *The Toad at Harrow*, original drawings and paintings by Low (including PGW's own copy!), Van Straaten, and others, medallions, and fourteen photos of Plum by the excellent photographer Jill Krementz. Please contact Elliott directly for more information. —OM]

These prices are my best effort at establishing a true, honest, fair market price for these items. If you are a particularly knowledgeable person in these matters and find the price high, it is only my stupidity, not greed, at work. Therefore, please feel free to discuss the issue. If you find the price fair, please don't haggle. If you find the price low—well, by all means take advantage of my stupidity—I deserve it.

Notes: The McIlvaine numbers are from Sotheby's or Heineman—whoever wrote them on the protective covers. In the cases where I had to guess I put a "?". Many of the non-first editions have Heineman's bookplate in them. If you are interested in a certain item and this is an issue for you, let me know and I will advise on this. Following the practice of the other honorable PGW dealers I have known through the years, I have, if anything, understated conditions. Naturally items are returnable if found to be in unacceptable conditions. All items will be shipped

insured for full value FOB my home (that means you pay shipping). Payment: well, I guess if it's a small amount of money I'll trust you for it, but a large amount I guess I would need something in advance, don't you think? We can talk about that. When ordering, always include the "EM item#."

To communicate: I can be reached either at work (M-F 7:30–5:00 usually—sometimes I goof off) or home (evenings and weekends, when not traveling). The best way to communicate with me is by Email. FAXing is also OK. If you need to talk, naturally I am happy to do so. At work, if you ask for me you will generally get my secretary, Jenell. Just tell her it's about Wodehouse and, if I'm free, she'll put you right through. At home, just tell my wife or daughter that you are planning to take some of that stuff out of the basement and they will assist you in any way they can! He

## RIGHT HO, CITY LIT!

The City Lit Theatre will once again make life merrier for Chicago audiences when they open their new season on September 29 with a "new and improved" production of *Right Ho, Jeeves*. Look for Gussie Fink-Nottle in scarlet tights—shades of last year's convention! City Lit will mount their production at The Theatre Building, 1225 W. Belmont, Chicago. For details, call (773) 327-5252.

There's a bonus! Artistic Director Mark Richard informs us: "Sometime in the late fall or winter, there will be a Sunday post-matinee panel discussion of Wodehouse's wit and other unique qualities. Dan Garrison will lead the discussion with director and cast and at least one other academic type or critic."



# SOTHEBY'S LONDON

## SHOWING

By Helen Murphy

Several weeks before the Heineman auction in New York City on June 26, a selection of the material to be sold was displayed in London in a setting that could not be described as spartan. Here's Helen's report on the orgy. —OM

What a super thrash it was. If we hear next month that Sotheby's has gone bust, we shall know why. One could hardly move, or eat a quail's egg, or take a sip of wine without some minion surging forth to replenish one's plate or glass. And, most importantly, the quality of the material on display! To those of us who are not in the top rank of collectors (to say the least), "here's richness!" as Wackford Squeers would have said. The auctioneers had been kind enough to send over material that was really dazzling—to the extent that your correspondent felt as if she were in an art gallery or museum, knowing she would never attain in a million years to the stuff on offer—and you have the makings of a very good party. About forty members attended—a great opportunity to get together—and we were extremely grateful to the auction house for putting up with us. A wonderful opportunity for viewing some of the late, great Jimmy Heineman's collection.

## EDITORS' NOTE

As you know, we produce this journal in our spare time. For the past several months the Real World has set in with unusual severity, spare time has vanished for both of us, and this issue is very late. Spare time will continue to be scarce in the near future, and we have decided to add an extra dollop of goodies and call this a double issue, for Summer and Autumn. We regret this more than you do, but we have no choice. We expect to be back in bloom, lovely and with a delightful fragrance, and possibly even on schedule,\* with the Winter issue.

OM and AD

\*It's no use asking what our publication schedule is. It's our most closely guarded secret, it is foreign to our policy to reveal it, and ravening lions couldn't tear it from our vitals.

# LORD EMSWORTH'S GHOST

—A Tale of Gothic Horror—

Pensive above the Severn's leaden glow,  
Alone in glim'ring dark and doubtful shade,  
I loit'ered down the yews' funereal row  
Where once the boneless earl of Emsworth swayed.

'Tis whispered in the Emsworth Arms that, doomed,  
The ghost of Clarence nightly doth return;  
I brooded—and at once a spectre loomed  
Like coveralls draped o'er a marble urn.

"Avaunt!" cried I, "or fiend or bugaboo,  
Why dost thou haunt these eldritch allées slow?  
Art harbinger of grief or crime dost rue?"  
The phantom first said "Eh?" and then said "Oh.

"Why bless my soul, I never heard such piffle!  
I love the life in my celestial shrine.  
Where sisters fear to tread, I chin with Whiffle  
'Mid warbling choirs of seraphic swine.

"One thing alone our flow of spirit hinders,  
One blasted thing alone conspires to pang us;  
Someone's profaned my moss-grown paths with  
flinders.

That stiff-necked ass? *It was my gardener Angus!*

"Wherefore I shun the high Elysian teas  
And to these former velvet purlicus travel;  
My dear fellow, I ask on wobbly knees,  
Do help me rid these spongy walks of gravel?"

I swore (although I knew I should be pooped)  
So poignant was the phantom's reedy treble.  
Thus every night the ghost and I go stooped  
And will go till we pick up each damn'd pebble.

—David Landman



As you can see, our convention poems reach an incredibly high level of lit'rary sophistication. —OM

# BENNY GREEN

Pauline Blanc has sent an obituary from the London *Times* on Benny Green, an Englishman of extraordinary versatility who died recently. My wife and I heard him talk—he never gave speeches—nine years ago at a banquet at Dulwich College in London. Of all the accomplished and informed and entertaining people who spoke that evening, we remember Benny Green most vividly. He will be missed by a great many people. The following article consists mostly of information from the *Times* obituary.

—OM

Benny Green, who died recently at 70, was a jazz saxophonist, a lyricist, a humorous writer, a shrewd critic of both literature and music, an authority on cricket, musicals, and London, an expert on the works of Bernard Shaw, and a broadcaster whose voice was familiar to millions. He is interesting to us as an authority on P. G. Wodehouse.

So diverse were Green's talents that those who came across him in one sphere often knew little of his activities in the others; yet he addressed all comers in the same intimate, clubbable manner. On the air, the combination of literate wit and unabashed Cockney pronunciation made him instantly recognizable.

Benjamin Green was born on December 9, 1927, and educated at Clipstone Junior Mixed School "on the slummy edge of Marylebone". He was then "uneducated" at Marylebone Grammar School, which he hated for its public school pretensions and narrow ethos. In 1941 Green absented himself from this institution, and joined "a most wonderful, dissident rabble" at North London Emergency Secondary School, who gave him "a marvelous streetwise education."

"I blew a soprano saxophone for the first time in November 1941." Later Green recalled the awfulness of his early efforts; people risked death by doodlebug bombs, he claimed, rather than endure torture by saxophone in the bomb shelter. But he persevered and became an outstanding jazz saxophonist. He began writing occasional pieces in the musical press, and succeeded Kingsley Amis as the London *Observer's* jazz critic. He recalled serving as "film, jazz, drama and literary reviewer and essayist under so many *noms de plume* that there were some weeks when the column under my own name consisted in its entirety of bitter debate with other aspects of my splintered journalistic self."

His first book was on jazz, succeeded by two novels, and his capacity for nonstop anecdote, invariably seasoned with appropriate quotation, made him a natural radio and television panelist. His friend Peter Clayton once remarked that if everyone else on a panel were to take a vow of silence, leaving only Benny to do the talking, no

one would notice the difference. He edited several cricket anthologies, revised the libretto of *Showboat*, and devised and presented a program of songs by Johnny Mercer.

His interest in music halls prompted one of the best things he ever did, the hour-long radio feature, *Maxie and the Lost Empire*. This was as much about the remembered London of his childhood as about its subject, Max Miller, and was suffused with an aching sense of loss.

Green's knowledge of musicals enabled him to do full justice, in *P. G. Wodehouse, a Literary Biography* (1981), to Wodehouse's theatrical career. Green gave Wodehouse credit for modernizing the American lyric, and quoted Alan Lerner's opinion that he "inaugurated the American musical." Not that Green was any less expert on Wodehouse the novelist; he was the sort of fan who could reel off the names of all ten of Lord Emsworth's sisters. How many of us can do the same?



"I've never gone to work. I just pursue my hobbies."  
Benny Green in 1988.

# WODEHOUSE MAKES A COMEBACK

By Jon Lellenberg

A talk delivered at the Chicago convention of the Wodehouse Society, October, 1997. Jon and Dan Garrison were co-perpetrators of the Chicago convention, Jon was the founder and has been the chief perpetrator of our Capital! Capital! chapter in Washington DC, he is an unindicted co-conspirator in many another TWS activity, a long-standing member of the Baker Street Irregulars, and a founder of the Wodehouse-Doyle cross-pollination group, The Clients of Adrian Mulliner. —OM

I am here today to discuss a painful subject. Everyone who loves P. G. Wodehouse's work finds his World War II radio broadcasts from Germany the one dark cloud in an otherwise sunny sky. And it is a controversy which, it seems, will never die. It got its most recent big airing a year ago, when some British Government documents dealing with the affair were made public, and articles about it appeared in newspapers around the world.

It occurred to me at the time that there was, just a stone's throw from me in Washington, D.C., an untapped source of information about the rummy affair of the radio broadcasts. Before Simon & Schuster, where P. G. Wodehouse is concerned, there was Doubleday, Doran, and before Peter Schwed there was Kenneth McCormick. Doubleday, Doran was Wodehouse's U.S. publisher from the 1920s to the 1950s, and Ken McCormick, who joined its editorial staff in 1934, was editor-in-chief there from 1942 to 1971. In the late 1980s, he gave his papers to the Library of Congress. McCormick's files, I found, shed considerable light on Wodehouse's troubles from the broadcasts—about "what happened," McCormick's notes say, when Wodehouse "was put in a camp and given every comfort in exchange for a few radio broadcasts that suggested he was having a great time in Germany and the Germans weren't so bad. During this time the British were being bombed almost out of existence, and everyone was rationed to death, and their favorite citizen suddenly became a menace."

Plum and Ethel were living in France in the war-year 1940. Rumor that he had been captured when the Germans attacked in May reached Doubleday, Doran that month. Nelson Doubleday wrote to Wodehouse's British agent, Alick Watt, that "we hope soon to hear good news to the effect that he has returned with little disturbance." He did not return, of course, but was instead interned by the Germans as an enemy alien. "P.G.W.'s work was popular in Germany," Alick Watt wrote to Nelson Doubleday on June 24, 1940, "and that fact may be of some use to him now." "I sincerely hope that you are right," Doubleday replied on July 11th, "and that his popularity in Germany will be of benefit to him in the

present situation."

Perhaps this popularity played a role in the German suggestion to Wodehouse that he make shortwave broadcasts to his fans in America. In any event, the Nazi propaganda machine hoped that funny reports by him about his internment would serve German interests. British reaction to the broadcasts was very harsh. Winifred Nerney, Doubleday, Doran's London representative, let the home office know on July 8, 1941, that "There's a frightful howl going on here over the Wodehouse broadcasts to the U.S. What is the reaction over there? It seems to me all very silly, and I cannot see how the broadcasts can do any harm. Surely it is obvious that P. G. is making these broadcasts under duress, and is being as non-political and inane as he can be, knowing full well that Americans are too shrewd and intelligent to be taken in by this kind of propaganda. Only a German would be stupid enough to underrate the American mind."

But American reaction, if not as severe as Britain's, was also adverse. Doubleday, Doran hoped it would not prove lasting, and in January 1942 published *Money in the Bank*, its manuscript having been brought out of Germany while that country was still at peace with the United States. Malcolm Johnson, the book's editor, told Wodehouse's American agent on September 9, 1941, that "I think the new Wodehouse is one of the best in a long time. I don't know how he wrote it under the heavy weight of a concentration camp." But later Johnson told Watt that "advance sales have not been as much as expected, for the broadcasts seem still to be in the trade's minds. We have gone to great pains to explain that any conduct, with Nazi guns at one's back, is explicable, but a certain amount of bitterness persists."

But in time it came out that Wodehouse had not made the broadcasts under duress, had not made them with Nazi guns at his back, nor written them under the heavy weight of a concentration camp. In fact, according to Ken McCormick in later years, Wodehouse never believed then or later that there were such things as concentration camps. So at war's end, Wodehouse found himself in a very difficult position. He was not welcome back in

England, where it took courage on Herbert Jenkins' part to publish him. He was stuck in Paris, and hoping for a visa to come to America, but the U.S. government was in no hurry to grant him one.

Doubleday, Doran quietly polled bookshops to see what the reaction to new Wodehouse books would be, and in December 1945 let Watt know that it wished to resume publishing him—but on reduced terms, because to put Wodehouse over now, Ken McCormick told Winifred Nemey, would take “a Grade A job of promotion to get him back into the selling brackets—a tough job for the first two books at least.” (I should mention here that the lesser terms for Wodehouse were the normal terms for just about any other writer.) Wodehouse wrote to Nelson Doubleday on Christmas Eve 1945 accepting the terms, and giving his explanation of the broadcasts: “there was a very wide impression that they were German propaganda and not, as was actually the case, humorous descriptions of my adventures, designed purely to amuse the American public and to make some return for all the letters I had had while in camp, letters which I had no means of answering. There was not a word in the broadcasts which could not have been published in any English or American newspaper. However, I am not complaining. I made an ass of myself and must pay the penalty. But I hope everything will soon be all right again.”

But it was not soon all right again, and Doubleday was becoming increasingly conscious that Wodehouse failed to understand what this terrible war had been all about, and how people felt who had fought it or survived it or had family and friends die in it. Perhaps Wodehouse's willingness to make the broadcasts can be explained in part by the fact that he had been captured so early, at the end of what had been called “the phoney war,” before the real unpleasantness got underway for Britain. Now, it seemed he lacked the capacity to grasp what had followed for his countrymen, and for millions of others. One example of this incomprehension was a letter from Wodehouse at this time to an American fan named Scott Feldman, who sent it on to Doubleday, Doran. It is Wodehouse's lengthiest explanation in McCormick's files, and because it was not written with an eye toward publication it is worth quoting at length:

I have been writing steadily during the war, and now have four novels, ten short stories and a book about my camp experiences all ready for publication, but naturally enough at the present moment editors are a little nervous of running stuff by me and I may have to wait a bit before seeing these things in print. I wish, by the way, you would write me again if you have time, and give me some idea of my present standing in America. I know the Press is still hostile, but meetings which I have had with quite a number of American soldiers here encourage me to hope that things, as regards the general public, are getting better. In England the situation is

puzzling. The papers, as in America, are hostile (tho even there I notice a great improvement. There have been several nice articles lately), but all the Englishmen I meet are cordiality itself and my agent tells me that, tho no new book by me has appeared since the beginning of the war, my old books have sold half a million copies in three years. This looks as tho the public had forgiven me for that unfortunate mistake I made in doing those five talks on the Berlin radio.

The whole thing is an example of what a blunder it is to let your feelings get the better of your prudence. I had no other motive in doing the talks than to make some return for the great number of letters which I had received from American readers during my internment, your card among them. It never occurred to me that there was anything different between using the German radio to tell my friends in America how I had been getting on and using the German postal system to send that article, “My War with Germany,” to the *Saturday Evening Post*. The main trouble, of course, was that practically nobody heard the talks, and so people jumped to the conclusion that I had been doing German propaganda.

I think this view is gradually being changed. The fact that the Attorney-General made that announcement in the House of Commons that the government had absolutely nothing against me must have helped. But it always takes a long time to change people's opinions, and I shall have to be patient. It is so difficult to impress this fact on the public that I was not living at the Adlon Hotel in Berlin from choice but because the authorities made me live there, — and tho I have stated on several occasions that I paid all my own expenses (my wife selling her jewelry), there must still be thousands who think I was being supported by the German Government. As a matter of fact, I never had any trouble about money in Germany, as in addition to the sale of the jewels I was able to borrow from friends. There was quite a little colony of British and American women, wives of Germans, in Berlin at that time and they rallied round. It was only for a very short time, during the winter months, that I was ever in Berlin. Nine months of each year I spent with friends in the country.

But, as I say, it takes time to impress these things on the public. And that is why I should be so grateful to you if you would let me know if the situation in America, as far as you are able to see is changing at all.

It alarmed Doubleday, Doran to learn that Wodehouse had written a book about his internment. Frances Donaldson in her biography calls it “the Camp Book,” but the title Plum actually gave it was *Wodehouse in Wonderland*. A letter from him to his American agent, quoted by Donaldson, calls it “very funny, a little vulgar in spots,” with “a chapter where I state my case to my English critics and—I hope—make them feel pretty foolish.” When Doubleday, Doran got a look at the manuscript, it was appalled. Reported the publisher's reader on February 5, 1946: “Wodehouse was happy in internment camp. After the first few days, he says, he enjoyed it, and proceeds to demonstrate the joys of such

life in the traditional manner his fans admire. Quite a few people will be incensed at the flippancy. The apologia for his broadcasts comprises complete details on his version of the controversy. It would seem to rake up for re-examination something better left buried. Accepted entirely, it leaves him guilty 'only of an indiscretion!' That may be enough for many."

Through the first half of 1946, Doubleday, Doran worked hard to convince Plum that it would be a mistake to publish *Wodehouse in Wonderland* and found him loath to give up the idea. Donaldson says "he agonized" over whether to publish the camp book, "particularly he worried about its tone," but there is no sign of that in his frequent letters to Doubleday, Doran. He was eager to publish it, despite strong advice not to. "Even if it might be best not to remind the public of something they may have forgotten, how about critics?" he asked Nelson Doubleday on February 22, 1946: "Will they be nasty?" He wrote Doubleday again on March 11, 1946, making clear that if he understood little about the war, he was able to calculate what people might think about his actions in it. "Here is a man," he told Doubleday he feared the American reaction would be, unless he explained himself through *Wodehouse in Wonderland*, "here is a man well known to be a Nazi collaborator, and now that the war is over he thinks he can quietly slip back into America. He is trying to take advantage of the fact that emotions are not quite so hot any longer and of the fact that Americans are softhearted and forgiving. Well, we won't let him play us for suckers." "What I am afraid of," he said, "is that the appearance of *Joy in the Morning* without any previous preparation will result in a storm of abuse from the critics which will have a disastrous effect on my position with the public."

Nelson Doubleday got almost frantic trying to talk Wodehouse out of publishing *Wodehouse in Wonderland*. "We are far better off and you are far better off, and your entire publishing plans are far better off, if we ignore the camp book," he pleaded: "You got yourself in Dutch, as we say in America, and when one finds oneself in Dutch, the best thing to do is to act as though nothing had happened." Wodehouse acquiesced, though by April he was back at it again, wanting to publish part of the book in *Variety* to clear the way for his return to Broadway. By June, however, a visa to do so still had not come through, making him anxious about work. "It's pretty maddening," he complained.

The outlook was no better a month later. The U.S. Embassy in Paris would not grant him a visa without clearance from the U.S. Embassy in London, which meant confirming his innocence regarding the broadcasts with British authorities, and it seemed to be nothing doing on that score. A new Attorney General of the United King-

dom took quite a different view of the matter, and had put himself on record in Parliament against Wodehouse. "The hold-up is very maddening," Plum wrote to Nelson Doubleday, "as I keep getting attractive offers for theatrical work, which I shall lose unless I can come over soon." "What I want to know," he told Doubleday a week later, "is (a) Am I going to be refused a visa altogether? or (b) Shall I get one some time or other? In which case, (c) Will it come in time for me to get to New York during the theatrical season?"

Frances Donaldson says that Plum and Ethel received U.S. visas in July 1946, but then for some peculiar reason [See end-note.—OM ] decided not to come for nearly another year. Correspondence in the McCormick files suggests the opposite: that it took nearly another year before Wodehouse finally received a visa to come to the United States, and that he then lost no time in doing so. McCormick says that Doubleday, Doran knew many people in Washington, D.C., even had a wartime ambassador on its editorial staff by this time, and pulled every wire possible to finally get Wodehouse the visa he wanted. He arrived in New York on April 24, 1947. By then *Joy in the Morning* had been published here, doing well enough for Nelson Doubleday to tell Wodehouse: "I think the decision we made was right as rain, and your literary position in this country is all up and up... I will do my part, and you must do yours, and in the long run we shall both prosper."

Before sailing, Wodehouse asked Doubleday, Doran to arrange a big press reception for him when he arrived—ignoring something he had said the year before, when arguing in favor of letting *Variety* publish part of *Wodehouse in Wonderland* to pave his way: "I know from bitter experience what a sap I become when surrounded by a mob of newspaper men asking questions," he had admitted: "In my anxiety to make the party go I say anything that comes into my head, and disaster follows." Wodehouse and Donaldson both mention him giving press conferences upon his arrival in America, always going over fine with a friendly and appreciative American press.

If so, to judge from Ken McCormick's notes, this may have been thanks to Doubleday, Doran's oiling the press before Wodehouse arrived in New York. "He was so naive," recalled McCormick, "that he didn't realize that we weren't ninnies here, but if he made a triumphal arrival in the U.S., the liberal and particularly the Jewish press would murder him. So our Louise Thomas (Doubleday, Doran's publicity chief) went to her pals in the press and pointed out that it hadn't been all beer and skittles for Wodehouse particularly during the final months of the war. That he simply didn't understand the hatred he had caused in England, but if he made a quiet entrance and got to his old friends in the theater he could be in business

again. The press thought he was a very funny man and that it made sense that he didn't know anything about 'politics,' as he called the war. Louise Thomas did a masterly job of getting the reporters to more or less overlook him, instead of beating him up in the papers."

But apparently there was a residual public feeling against Wodehouse. "Our salesmen weren't able to sell him very well any more," McCormick recalled, "so we gave him to Simon & Schuster who mustered their sales magic and got him back to very good sales." But that came later. In the meantime, book sales dragged in both England and America, the old magazine markets had dried up, and others came to agree that some kind of explanation on the record was called for after all. William Townend's store of letters from Wodehouse over the years was chosen as the vehicle, and published by Herbert Jenkins in 1953 as *Performing Flea*. (Doubleday, Doran, ready to give Wodehouse up, did not bring out an American edition; Simon & Schuster did, but not until 1962.)

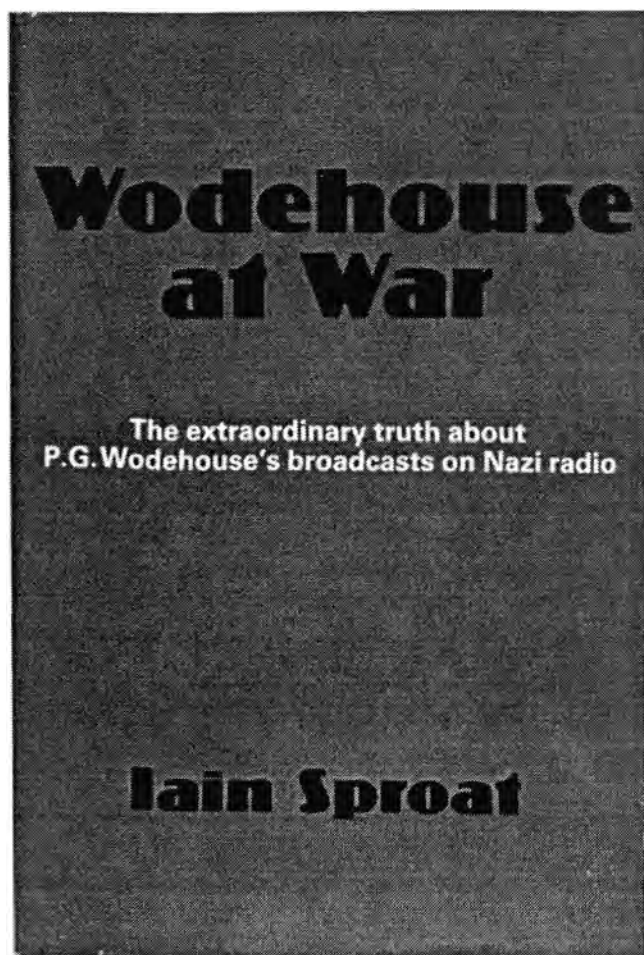
Townend's editorial remarks cast Wodehouse's war-time broadcasts in the most innocent light possible, reprinting sympathetic comments by people as diverse as a former Air Marshal of the RAF, George Orwell, and Sax Rohmer. Letters from Wodehouse to Townend provided Plum's version of the affair, though hardly a complete one. There is, for example, mention of various camps, barracks, and prisons, but not a word about the splendid Adlon Hotel in Berlin and the suite Wodehouse occupied there three winters in a row, or the other nine months a year spent at the country estates of German friends. Or that, when allowed to move to occupied Paris in 1944, of the equally splendid Hotel Bristol where the Germans did pay the bills. There is a suggestion in McCormick's notes that some of these letters in *Performing Flea* were extensively revised to make the desired impression, if not concocted expressly for the book. Donaldson says that Wodehouse "called in" his letters to Townend "and largely rewrote them," and that the originals then disappeared for good, "no one knows how." Wodehouse's impulse to include the texts of the broadcasts was reversed after he read transcripts of what he had said, and it was not until the paperback edition in 1961 that the texts, which by then had appeared in the journal *Encounter*, were included.

"He lived a good part of the rest of his life in the USA writing novels as if nothing had happened," McCormick's notes concluded. Time, as usual, was the great healer. The manuscript of *Wodehouse in Wonderland*, says Donaldson, was destroyed by Plum, or possibly by Ethel. And perhaps it is just as well, even at this late date.

Lellenberg's, not Donaldson's. At the beginning of Chapter 16 of her biography, Donaldson quotes and apparently accepts, as an explanation of the delay, Wodehouse's statement in a letter to his publisher that "...I thought it would be wise to dig in some quiet spot and finish the Jeeves novel, *The Mating Season*, because once I was over in N.Y. I might not have had time to concentrate on it. Also I hated the idea of leaving my wife all alone here, and Ethel refuses to sail til she has got some clothes."

Further reading: The most comprehensive account of the broadcasts and their consequences is given in Iain Sproats's excellent *Wodehouse at War*, published in the US by Ticknor and Fields, New Haven and New York, 1981, and in Britain by Milnor and Company Ltd., date unknown to me. The book includes transcriptions of the broadcasts in addition to much carefully researched narrative, and is well worth searching out if you are at all interested in the subject.

—OM



Clarification: The phrase "for some peculiar reason" is





# A WODEHOUSE ACROSTIC

Once again **Maria Kane** has devised for us that simple and difficult thing, a Wodehouse acrostic. Simple in appearance, fiendishly difficult to create, not at all easy to solve. "The actual creation of the puzzle (making up clue words from the letters of the quotation) was as always a great pleasure," writes Maria. "But THEN! Assigning the letters to their respective squares in the grid and all the other bureaucratic necessities connected with perfecting the puzzle is sheer murder, and I don't think I ever want to do that again. So you can consider this acrostic my 'swan song.'"

## Instructions

Write the answers to the clues on the numbered dashes, then transfer the letters to the numbered squares in the diagram. Shaded squares separate the words. Work back and forth between clues and diagram in which, reading from left to right and top to bottom, a quotation will appear. The first letters of the clue words, reading down, spell out the name of the book from which the quotation is taken.

A. Sensitive plant (2 wds.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
56 64 1 93 98 38 120 17 43 81 102 13 89 115

B. Consequence

\_\_\_\_\_  
48 34 42 30 75 116

C. What \_\_\_\_\_! Exclamation of disgust. (2 wds.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
25 108 12 68 37 78

D. Second in rank (hyph.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
123 61 26 112 47 40 35 22 54 97 96 58 85

E. Once thought to carry the male gene (2 wds.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
82 36 104 122 84 77 87 62 92 71 24

F. Ratted

\_\_\_\_\_  
20 91 125 72 103 66 114 118

G. Butler's utopia

\_\_\_\_\_  
100 4 27 63 9 76 39

H. Grave or circumflex

\_\_\_\_\_  
110 55 50 32 106 59

I. Person who "inspired" the quotation (4 wds.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
83 29 119 53 117 99 107 94 11 49 86 21 46 126 109 18 5 70 31 90 74 6 67

J. One reason for a sublet (4 wds.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
60 10 44 23 52 105 73 2 111 16 51 33 121 7 28

K. Fifty-fifty (2 wds.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
3 113 69 80 88 15 45 95 124 14

L. The beaten track

\_\_\_\_\_  
65 79 41 8 57 101 19

			1 A	2 J	3 K	4 G	5 I		6 I	7 J		8 L	9 G	10 J		11 I	12 C	13 A	14 K
	15 K	16 J	17 A	18 I	19 L		20 F	21 I	22 D		23 J	24 E	25 C	26 D	27 G		28 J	29 I	30 B
	31 I	32 H	33 J	34 B	35 D	36 E	37 C		38 A	39 G	40 D	41 L	42 B	43 A	44 J	45 K	46 I		47 D
48 B	49 I	50 H	51 J		52 J	53 I	54 D	55 H	56 A		57 L	58 D		59 H	60 J	61 D	62 E		63 G
64 A	65 L	66 F	67 I		68 C	69 K	70 I	71 E	72 F		73 J	74 I		75 B	76 G	77 E	78 C		79 L
80 K	81 A	82 E		83 I	84 E		85 D	86 I	87 E	88 K	89 A		90 I	91 F	92 E		93 A	94 I	95 K
96 D		97 D	98 A	99 I	100 G		101 L	102 A	103 F	104 E	105 J	106 H	107 I		108 C	109 I	110 H	111 J	112 D
113 K	114 F	115 A		116 B	117 I		118 F	119 I	120 A	121 J	122 E	123 D	124 K		125 F	126 I			

## BALLY WHO?

Helen Murphy sends along this news item, and her response to it, from the London *Times* of May 2 and 27, 1998. —OM

Very few things would have perturbed Jeeves, P.G. Wodehouse's fictional butler. But the scorn of Dame Muriel Spark might have been one of them. The distinguished author of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* has been laying into Jeeves and Wooster at [a festival at] Hay-on-Wye.

"I can't take it," she seethed at the festival. "I don't like all the deb talk. I hate the 'tootling' this and 'bally' that."

Her outburst came in response to journalist Christopher Hitchens, who had named *Code of the Woosters* as his favourite book. Hitchens collapsed like a soufflé when Dame Muriel declared that Wodehouse's oeuvre contained "nobody at all that you couldn't take out with insect spray." [What a great line! —OM]

**Helen's response in a letter to the editor:**

Oh Londoner, oh Dame Muriel Spark, I cannot believe for a moment that Christopher Hitchens "collapsed like a

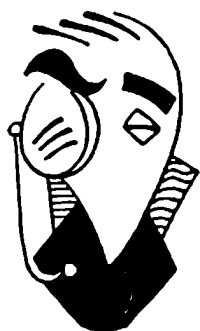
soufflé" at your scathing remarks on the works of PG Wodehouse. Any true fan of the master would be made of sterner stuff.

Doubtless he merely adopted the *preux chevalier* approach of Bertie Wooster and heaved gently, like a Welsh rarebit about to come to the height of its fever, realising that you cannot slosh a sitting Dame.

Probably he replied to your aunt-like remarks with the mildness of one cushat dove addressing another cushat dove from whom it is hoping to borrow money. It is inevitable that some styles do not mix: can one imagine *A Ballad of Valley Fields, A Prime of Miss Bobbie Wickham?*

Actually, PGW covered these topics thoroughly, but not in the serious minded way that has enabled Dame Muriel to achieve set-text status on many a course on 20th century literature.

Dame Muriel Spark is a justifiably renowned novelist, but there is room for all sorts in the broad British literary landscape.

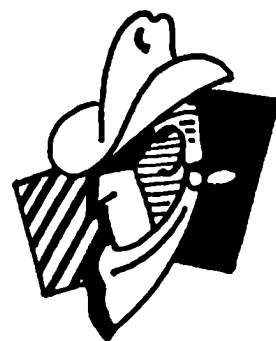


# TWS

## *Come To Texas*

### CONVENTION '99

★ HOUSTON ★



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FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAY OCTOBER 22, 23, 24

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Continental Airlines has offered our convention a discount of 5% plus something that makes it into 10% off the lowest published coach fares. This discount is through their Meeting Works department and is available to TWS convention goers into Bush (IAH) airport from anywhere in the world served by Continental airlines. It will become available for booking in 1999 under reference code OB7VFT Z Code: ZBWO. One may arrive as early as October 17 and depart as late as October 28, 1999.

#### Games to plan for:

##### Cricket (TWS style)

In the park next to the Warwick. Sandwiches, tea and beer will be available to those who sign up (a nominal fee will be requested).

##### Skits or something:

The NEWTS  
Chicago Accident Syndicate  
Blandings Castle? ? ?

##### There will be improving books:

Booksellers & members books offered for sale (bring your "extra" books – please let us know if you plan to bring books).

#### Those who will speak:

Norman Murphy  
Elin Woodger  
Dan Cohen  
Brad Frank  
Darlene McNaughton

(Mr. Sinclair, of the Wilberfloss files, regrets that he may be unable to update us on the doings of J. Filkin Wilberfloss – but he will try).

#### Chapters tables:

Chapters are urged to bring information about the deeds and doings of your group.

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Plan now to close up shop, hang "*Come To Texas*" on the door, and light out for Houston in 1999.

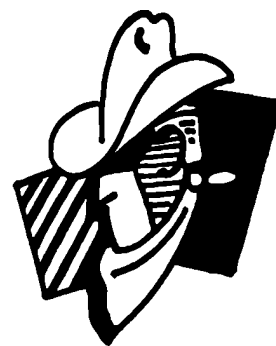


# TWS

## *Come To Texas*

### CONVENTION '99

#### ★ HOUSTON ★



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**FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAY OCTOBER 22, 23, 24**

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The historic Warwick Park Plaza is our official TWS *Come To Texas* CONVENTION '99 hotel. Register by April 30, '99 have a chance to win a free stay at the Warwick during the convention! If you wish to register now, you may call 713-586-1991 (the 1-800 number does not have our rate posted yet. Our rate is \$105 per night plus 17% tax). If you win the free night, you will be told at the Banquet, Saturday evening.

Alternative hotels and one Bed and Breakfast are within walking distance of the Warwick.

The Marriott Medical Center, 1.2 miles from the Warwick. Phone: 713-796-0080

The Patrician Inn, B&B, .3 miles from the Warwick. Phone: 713-523-1114

Days Inn, .5 miles from the Warwick. Phone: 713-523-3777

#### **All about Bread-roll Tossing**

Those who wish to toss bread will be asked to register "BRT" (bread roll tosser). Those wishing to be placed in a toss-free zone will be asked to register "BFZ".

BRT's will be adorned appropriately with propeller beanies or, possibly, bulls-eyes ensuring that all targets will be easily discernable.

#### **Poems in the Wodehouse-happy spirit are now being sought for the Doggerel Verse Contest.**

Send your entry to: Sylvia Bernicchi: 2332 Park Street, #J, Houston, TX 77019. The best will be selected by our brainy judges and the winners will be asked to read their entry at the banquet. Our judges have a keen instinct, not only for poetic style, but also for the poet who turns to an amusing mush when asked to speak in public.

#### **Skits are being sought**

Those who wish to present a skit, cross-talk act or other entertainment, please contact Jane Cherry, Phone Number: (713) 524-8530

If you have a special interest item, such as music, historical materials or other entertainment, tell Jane.

#### **Roommate matching Service will be available for the 1999 Convention.**

Since the Warwick will charge the same for a double or a single room, a nifty way to save a few clams for betting at the races is to share a room with another TWS member. To do this, contact Toni Rudersdorf at (713) 522-6220 and have your name put on the list. Your preferences for a roommate will be noted before being completely ignored.

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Plan now to close up shop, hang "*Come To Texas*" on the door, and light out for Houston in 1999!

## A TASTE OF *BERTIE*

By Elin Woodger

A special treat is in store for Plummies interested in the ongoing saga of *Betting on Bertie*, the musical that Wodehouse and Guy Bolton were working on at the end of Plum's life. In mid-October, Original Cast Records is re-issuing a compact disc recording of *Anastasia: The Musical*, the re-telling of the Anastasia story by Robert Wright and George Forrest, with book by Jerome Chodorov and Guy Bolton. The happy news is that this CD will contain additional, never-before-recorded songs from other Wright and Forrest shows — including "Brain" from *Betting on Bertie*!

You may recall that Wright and Forrest are the songwriters who worked with Wodehouse and Bolton on the creation of *Bertie*, and who, with collaborators Walter Willison and Douglas Holmes, have been aiming for a fully mounted stage production. The inclusion of "Brain" on the *Anastasia* CD is another step in that direction. With original lyrics by our own Plum, "Brain" (sung by Douglas Holmes) describes Bertie's awe and admiration for Jeeves's immense gray matter, as opposed to his own cerebral shortcomings. A funny and fast-moving song, it is just one of many delights in *Betting on Bertie* — which, we are happy to report, will be recorded in full next spring by Original Cast Records. The performers will include Simon Jones (Jeeves), Douglas Holmes (Bertie Wooster), Walter Willison (Captain Bigger), and Judy Kaye (Brenda Beaumont).

The new *Anastasia* CD will be available at record stores by October 15 (Plum's birthday). For further information, write to: Original Cast Records, Box 496, Georgetown CT 06829.

## THE MONOCLE QUESTION

Mark Richard writes: "In his piece on the National Film Theatre series, Tony Ring blames the 1966 *World of Wooster* television series with Ian Carmichael for introducing to an already fallen and wretched world the textually insupportable notion of a Bertie who affects a monocle. Question: on the cover of my Penguin paperback of *Right Ho, Jeeves* the cover illustration also depicts Bertie, as he takes off on his bicycle, displaying a monocle. Coincidence? You decide."



I know of no textual evidence for a monocle, but is it possible that a monocle, like spats, was such a common accessory for the well-dressed young man of the period that Bertie used one with only the slightest mention of it? A cane, or stick, was a common accessory at a certain period, but I can recall, vaguely, only two passing references to a cane by Bertie in the ten novels and thirty-four stories. Once, I believe, in an early story, he asks Jeeves for his stick as he leaves his flat, and once, feeling booms-a-daisy and twirling his cane, he refers to a "clouded cane." Bertie may have worn a monocle and left only the most elusive literary trace of it.

I'm inclined to think that the monocle in the cover illustration by Ionicus shouldn't be taken as canonical. I know of no evidence that Plum had any control over the cover illustrations (especially of non-first paperbacks), and Ionicus may have included the monocle merely to indicate that the man we see from the rear on the bicycle was indeed Bertie and not the grocer's boy.

These are deep waters, Watson.

—OM

## HUMOR ANALYSIS

An unnamed English member sent an article from the *London Times* of May 8, 1998, by Anthony Quinton, in which he analyzes Wodehouse's humor. I'll just give you a thin slice from near the bone:

A number of the best of his jokes are metaphorical connections of men and animals. For instance, a girl says to Wooster, "You're a pig, Bertie," and receives the reply, "A pig maybe — but a shrewd

levelheaded pig." At one level this is enjoyable because of the absurdity of ascribing level-headedness, which implies that his condition has been achieved despite the temptations of flightiness, to a creature as sedate, predictable and unenterprising as a pig...

And so on. All this is undoubtedly good solid stuff, but it reminds me of what Mark Twain said (I paraphrase): "Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. We can do it, but then the frog is dead."

—OM

# J. FILLIKEN WILBURFLOSS

By Tony Ring

Those who attended the Chicago convention may recall that one of the highspots [sic] was the story of the incarnation of J Fillken Wilberfloss.\* They may be staggered to hear that, after all, it is all a mistake!

At the recent Sotheby's auction, one of the items for sale was the autograph manuscript of *Psmith, Journalist*, and it was sent to London for viewing before the auction. Lo and behold, there on page one (of *Psmith, USA*, as it was tentatively called) is the first appearance of the editor-in-chief of *Cosy Moments*. But careful inspection shows that, whatever the serialisation in *The Captain*, or every edition of the book suggested, his name was not J Fillken Wilberfloss at all.

It was J Filliken Wilburfloss.

What implication does this have for the putative businessman, financier and political sponsor?

Is he indeed an imposter?

☛

\* At the convention, Peter Sinclair described how he had been fending off unwanted salespeople and others at the office by referring them to the imaginary J. Fillken Wilberfloss, editor of *Cosy Moments* in *Psmith, Journalist*. J. Fillken aquired a life of his own, receiving numberless phone calls and invitations, and appearing on mailing lists.

—OM

*Psmith, P.S.A.*

*Chapter One: Cosy Moments*

The man in the street would not have known it, but a great crisis was imminent in New York journalism.

Everything seemed much as usual in the city. The car ran smoothly on Broadway. Newsboys shouted "Wanna-try!" to the rows of nervous pedestrians with their usual Carson-like view. Society passed up and down Fifth Avenue in its automobiles, and was there a furrow of anxiety upon Society's brow? None. At a thousand street-corners a thousand policemen preserved their air of massive indifference to the things of this world. Not one of them showed the least sign of perturbation. Nevertheless the crisis was a land. Mr. J. Filliken Wilburfloss, editor-in-chief of 'Cosy Moments', was about to leave his post and start on six weeks' holiday.

In New York one may find every class, paper, and the imagination can conceive. Every part of society is a New York, the

*Sign of the Cross*  
Mr. J. Filliken Wilburfloss, editor

# 'I ALWAYS LIKED NORMAN ROCKWELL'

By Christopher Finch

**Norman Murphy** writes: For obvious reasons, Norman Rockwell was never as well-known in Britain as he was in America. I think I saw my first *Saturday Evening Post* cover about 1946 and probably only saw about thirty or so until much later in my life. But I remember them vividly. They were delightful illustrations of an America that was going through vast changes but they showed America as people wanted to see it—and in many ways, as it was. In 1991, when Charlotte and I came over for the New York convention, we had a look at New England and drove to Rockwell's town of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. It was exactly as he had drawn it so often, and I bought a book of his *SEP* illustrations. I enjoyed the pictures enormously and it was only recently that I bothered to read the introduction by Christopher Finch. He writes very well on the reasons for Rockwell's popularity, his preeminence as an illustrator rather than an artist, and looks for comparisons:

**I**t is perhaps easier to find parallels for Rockwell in the world of literature than in the world of painting. His world is full of echoes of Dickens and Twain, and he has much in common with O. Henry. It seems to me, though, that the writer Rockwell most resembles—despite enormous differences in cultural background—is P. G. Wodehouse, another perennial contributor to the *Saturday Evening Post* and Rockwell's senior by eleven years.

Wodehouse was, of course, as quintessentially English as Rockwell was American. It's worth noting, though, that Wodehouse—a longtime United States resident—always kept his vast American public in mind, peppering his stories with Americanisms that were far from current in his native country at the time. H. L. Mencken credited him with introducing many Anglicisms into the American vocabulary. But while this was undoubtedly the case, he was far more successful in causing his English readers to adopt American slang. What the two have in common, along with being gentle humorists and master storytellers, is a basic concept of innocence allied with tremendous technical skill.

Wodehouse succeeded in placing his protagonists in a kind of Arcadian never-never land, a fabulous environment that bore a recognizable resemblance to the real world but was somehow different, drained of malice. His cast of characters—Jeeves, Bertie, Psmith, Lord Emsworth, and the Mulliner clan, along with assorted debutantes (both bird-brained and spunky), regulars of the bar-parlour at the Angler's Rest, and the various Hooray

Henries who keep the leather armchairs of the Drones Club polished with the backsides of their Savile Row suits—were drawn from the conventional repertory of English upper-class and upper-middle-class types (always, of course, provided with a supporting cast of dour domestics, canny rustics and impoverished clerics). It is the way he handled them that is significant.

Evelyn Waugh, for example, drew on many of the same prototypes for his own acid brand of satire, treating them—in his early novels—as grotesque puppets. Wodehouse, for his part, transformed them into bumbling nymphs and fauns cakewalking their way through a sylvan landscape in which temporary pecuniary embarrassments, dotty aunts, imagined rivals, and stolen pigs take on cosmic significance.

In Wodehouse's world, the loss of timing on the golf links is as near as anyone comes to having an existential experience. It is a world innocent of original sin and hence of real guilt. In the hands of a lesser technician, it would be merely ludicrous, but Wodehouse was such a superb wordsmith—his narrative and dialogue always strike just the right note—that we are able to accept every absurd turn of events as being part of the natural order of things.

Rockwell's skill with a paintbrush was a match for Wodehouse's deftness with a turn of phrase. Rockwell drew on American stock characters, just as Wodehouse drew on the English repertory and—again like Wodehouse—placed them in a world free of malice. ...Rockwell's protagonists come from backgrounds very different from those that produced Wodehouse's characters, but they have the same basic innocence. We might say that both men were genuinely incapable of perceiving evil, or at least of permitting it to intrude into their work. They represented worlds that may never have existed (though most of us wish they could have), and they made them believable.

Both, in short, created utopias—utopias that are all the more agreeable for being so modest, so unpretentious.



Norman Murphy adds, "Now I know why I like Norman Rockwell's paintings so much."



## A FEW QUICK ONES

You will recall that one of our convention speakers last year was **Michael Dirda**, a writer and editor for the *Washington Post*. In response to the recent ranking of the 100 greatest novels in the English language by the Modern Library, Michael put together his own list of "the 100 most amusing comic novels, the ever-reliable masterpieces of humor and high spirit." His self-imposed rule for his list was one book per author; "otherwise," writes Michael, "half the selections would be written by P. G. Wodehouse, Evelyn Waugh, and Terry Pratchett." Showing his dazzling good sense, Michael placed Plum in the number one slot on the list. The book? *Leave It to Psmith!*

The Modern Library list produced quite a reaction, within and without our little group of serious thinkers. **Doug Stow** sent a question: Wodehouse wrote ninety-six books. Who wrote the other four?

**Beth Carroll** sent a comment from a column by J. Peder Zane in the *Raleigh News & Observer*: "And good grief, not a single work from our century's greatest humorist, P. G. Wodehouse. Right ho, heave ho, this silly list has got to go." (Good grief is right!)

**Jan Kaufman** found recent notices of the death of Maureen O'Sullivan, the movie star and Broadway actress Plum and Ethel knew from their early days in Hollywood. Theirs was a warm friendship and Plum mentioned her fondly in his writings in later years.

**Dan Cohen** writes: "In one of the adventures of the famous late Victorian 'Amateur Cracksman' Raffles, a story entitled 'A Costume Piece,' Raffles dresses up as a policeman. At the end of the adventure he explains to his sidekick Bunny how he got the uniform. 'The helmet is one of a collection I made up at Oxford.' Obviously the practice of stealing policemen's helmets was a well established one among the better class of university students. While the somewhat retarded members of the Drones Club never got beyond (or over) that practice, the more intelligent Raffles went on to stealing bigger and better things."

**Bill Carpenter** writes: "I was reading a biography, *Robert Frost* (by Jeffrey Meyers, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996, pg. 35), and was struck by the author's description of Frost's wife, Elinor: 'She never appeared to be a dull and utterly conventional woman, who liked to read Zane Grey and P. G. Wodehouse.' Well, I mean I say! The second part of the sentence contradicts the first!"

Noted on PGW-Net (thanks to Sailesh): "Inspired by the life and achievements of unmarried [Indian] Prime Minister Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, a Bachelors Association has been formed in Sirsa [India]. All it takes to become a member of the 'Bharatiya Avivahit Sangh' (Unmarried Peoples Association) is a firm resolve to stay unmarried and to take up social work." Which leads one to wonder: Did Mortimer Bayliss have a hand in this?

The eagle-eyed **Francine Swift** spotted an item in the *Washington Post* describing the Loudoun Hunt point-to-point steeplechase races that took place in Leesburg, Virginia last April. What caught her eye was the line "Jenkins also had a Win in The Empress of Blandings maiden hurdle with Log Buster, ridden by Gregg Ryan." Francine learned that a Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Miller donate trophies under the respective guises of "the Earl of Emsworth and Lady Constance Threepwood of Market Blandings." That's all very well, but are they sound on pigs?

**William Hardwick** found a mention of an approaching auction of Wodehouse books (not the Heineman auction) in the London *Sunday Telegraph* of last February 15. *The Pothunters* (1902) and *A Prefect's Uncle* (1903) were expected to sell for £350 to £400 (about US \$560-\$640). Other copies of the same editions brought far more at the Heineman auction. *A Pothunters* first edition with four reissues went for US \$3450, or about £2,060. *A Prefect's Uncle* first with two reissues brought US \$1,610, or about £2690. *Vive le passage of time!*

In a recent issue of this august journal a member asked whether Uncle Tom Travers, Aunt Dahlia's husband, ever utters a word. Uncle Tom does indeed speak, responds **Mark Richard**, and he is a man who knows. Mark, Artistic Director of City Lit Theater Company in Chicago, adapted *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* for his company in 1995, and it is in that story that Uncle Tom utters. "Tom not only appears and speaks," writes Mark, "he is a lynch-pin of the farcical plot and not just an off-stage rumor as in so many of the other books." His first words appear on about the sixth page of Chapter 11, when he addresses Bertie Wooster: "Is that you, Bertie, me boy?" The novel was published in America as *Bertie Wooster Sees It Through*.

*(T O and O M)*

Aunt Dahlia and the Oldest Member

# THIS ONE'S FOR YOU, PLUM

By Ranjitha Ashok

This article originally appeared in *Madras Musings* for March 16-31, 1998. Its author recently found Marilyn MacGregor via the Internet, inquired about joining our society, and...well, as you are about to discover, we must encourage Ranjitha by word and gesture. "I belong to South India," she writes, "and have lived here all my life. I am a graduate in English Literature and I went on to do a post-graduate course in Mass Communication from Bangalore University. I am a stay-at-home Mom of two boys. I am also a free-lance writer, and my forte is humour and satire. I contribute articles regularly to a local magazine here in the city, and also do other free-lance work...I would like to correspond with other Wodehouse fans."¹

I shuffled past a poster-laden notice board at the club the other day. I was preoccupied, my heart bowed down with...well, maybe not the weight of woe exactly, but certainly with that sluggish "why-me?" feeling familiar to homemakers the world over. And suddenly certain words fleetingly caught my eye. For a second, I thought I was mistaken. I paused, retraced my steps, and stared at the poster. No, I wasn't mistaken. There it was, the lettering in big bold letters, announcing a talk on (hold your breath now!) "Sex and Violence in the Novels of P. G. Wodehouse"! Naturally enough a large group, positively with curiosity and what-not!—I mean to say....Sex, Violence...and Young Plum?—assembled to hear Jaspar Utley of the British Council, the speaker responsible for springing this topic on us.

Here was a true instance of the hour producing the man. A man of such gentle mien, you could hear the milk of human kindness sloshing around inside him even at a distance. And I must say, his choice of ties endeared him right away to an audience already in a happy Wodehousian frame of mind. Mr. Utley elected to appear before us sporting raiment strictly in accordance with Bertie Wooster's article "What the Well-Dressed Man is Wearing," except that he chose to embellish his striking ensemble with a dark tie covered entirely with cute pink pigs. Yes....Pigs!

If Mr. Utley had wandered thus into the Senior Conservative Club, he'd have caused a sensation among its geriatric members, with the exception, of course, of Lord Emsworth.

Was there any sex in the novels of Wodehouse? Well, as Mr. Utley pointed out, that depends on one's point of



Popular crime novel by P. G. Wodehouse. It is also a sex novel, as shown by the full frontal nudity on the dust jacket. (The book is reviewed in "Is There To Be No Limit?" *Peebles Advertiser*)

view. In an obsessive age that demands constant baring of souls, we find frank, forthright emphasis on sex in everything...from music, art and literature to the sale of batteries and toothpaste! In 1998, most books are so warm and so crammed with every variety of panting passion, you need gloves to take them off the shelves. P. G. Wodehouse's works would appear a particularly mild baby pink next to all this virulent purple.

But if you pause awhile and think, you will admit that Sex, while not exactly rearing its explicit head in the world of Blandings and Wooster, certainly plays its part, causing the most fearful fuss and imbroglios imaginable. Couples are rent asunder, the lute goes mute with alarming frequency, boy falls for wrong girl or vice versa, and girls get their wires crossed and force engagements on chevaliers too proper to tell them to pop off. This world also has its wolves and Romcos. After all, what price Freddie Widgeon and his long line of girls, or Pongo Twistleton, whose heart "had always been an open door with 'Welcome'

clearly inscribed on the mat"? Romance, with all its accompanying trials and tribulations, has been the basis for many Wodehouse stories, and the more the trials the better!

The divine pash, it must also be said, is not the sole prerogative of those filled to the brim with Norman blood. Life among the working classes is equally mixed up, with French cooks falling in love with housemaids and policemen getting their lantern-jawed faces slapped by nannies. As for ever-lasting love, as far as I am concerned, Gally Threepwood's love for Dolly Henderson puts him right up there with the likes of Cyrano de Bergerac and Sidney Carton.

And so to violence. Mr. Utley provided a truly startling list of mayhem and destruction: Pig-napping, kidnapping, an entire household subjected to a horrific day thanks to an airgun (a situation in which the most respectable people behave with regrettable impulsiveness), policeman-helmet-stealing, nobbling practices leading to a sharp decline in the purity of the Turf, attempted theft of practically everything from manuscripts and babies to cow creamers and amber statuettes, drunk and disorderly speechmaking — at a school of all places — lost tempers on golf courses, not to mention both threats and actual fisticuffs flaring up between such unlikely combatants as Roderick Spode, Gussie Fink-Nottle, and the Rev. Stinker Pinker... and Bertie and Orlo Porter. There was a rather thoughtful silence as this list wound to an end and the audience brooded on visions of clergymen running amok with bleeding noses and people dotting other people's guests with large portraits.

Having established the fact that the world inhabited by the Wodehouse characters was liberally sprinkled with blood, intrigue, misunderstandings, family rows, and sleazy characters like Claude Pott and Percy Pilbeam, Mr Utley then asked a vital question. How does one explain this fascination for Wodehouse in a culture so far removed from his own world and the world of his novels? The humour section in any bookshop in this country positively groans under the weight of row upon row of Wodehouse books. Did part of this interest lie in the picture created by Wodehouse's works? This is perhaps how we want to perceive England — a land of afternoon tea, dreamy peers, castles, country houses, and young men with no chins lounging around in soup-and-fish. Which, as Mr. Utley pointed out, was perhaps always a bit of a fantasy, now more so than ever. He couldn't remember ever having heard the words "Toodle-oo" or "Pip-pip"... and who in heaven's name ever says "Jolly good show, what?"

A few Tough Eggs in the audience put it down to a very natural desire on the part of the Indian, particularly in the 40's, or even the 50's, to make fun of British stereotypes

and eccentricities. Wodehouse himself was a bit of an anti-establishment character. The very use of the word "Drones" as the name of Wooster's club sums up his opinion of upper-class shenanigans. He also appeared to have scant respect for the public-school trained mind. Remember, it is Jeeves who is the brains behind every enterprise of Bertie's or his disaster-prone friends, and who rallies around every time a sharp crisis in the affairs of his boss "would appear to have been precipitated...."! "You might say," suggested Mr. Utley seriously, but with a definite twinkle in his eye, "that Wodehouse was a bit of an anarchist".



Wodehouse shamelessly panders to our basest instincts in this lurid tale of four couples uncoupling and recoupling. And once again we are confronted with total nudity. (See, in this regard, "The Growing Menace of the Sex Motive in Fiction," *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*)

Anti-establishment anarchy *and* romance?  
Well, well!

As for the Wodehouse women characters, these are forces to reckon with. The women are invariably tough, self-willed, and the stronger (at times deadlier!) sex in his books. Maybe that's why he created a Madeline Bassett as a sort of balance, except that she was tough too, for all her drappiness. Witness the manner in which she tried to turn Gussie into a vegetarian against his wishes.

Does everyone like Wodehouse?

The audience that day were all pro-Wodehouse, but I've known of instances when a fan's obsession with PGW has led to scenes, with accusations of "throw-back brown sahib" (whatever that is!) and "Anglophile" being thrown about (the fatheads!).

But, you know, pigeon-holing all this analytical stuff about why anyone should be fond of Wodehouse, I think we should stick to the point at tissue, as Constable Oates says. The point at tissue...or the *res*, as one might say...is: Why does the world like Wodehouse?

Because his work is funny, simple, gentle, escapist fare, perfect for human beings of all sizes, shapes, colours, and cultures, for whom the daily task of living gets a little too much at times. Of course we know it is all fantasy, but fantasy tinged with the little truths and details of life, presented with compassion and sympathy for the bumbling human pitted against an inexorable Fate. There is a sense of Hey-I've-been-there-myself. We have all tripped over our feet; we have all had Fate deal us blows with sand-laden socks just when the going was good; we all have relatives who give us the heebie-jeebies, and friends who drag us into their affairs. While details may differ, the World of Wodehouse is really inhabited by people we can recognise, caught up in situations we've been in. Not in the large-scale confusion created by the novelist to keep the plot moving, but in the little details, word-play, or character sketches. Like these words: "It is always annoying when you are up against it and people tell you what a jolly time you could be having if you weren't and how topping everything would be if you were somewhere where you aren't."

Finding a fellow human being who shares one's sense of humour is a rare and wonderful bit of luck. Finding a roomful of people laughing their heads off at all the wonderful lines that have convulsed you over the years is magic. For a brief while that evening, Mr. Utley and his audience dwelt in a world filled with characters we have all known a long while. It was like meeting up with old friends, and meeting other people who have also known and loved our old friends. And all this overlaid by the very gentle spirit of the man who created them—P. G. Wodehouse.

## NATURE'S LAST WORD

Erik Quick writes: In the Spring 1998 *Plum Lines* I note that Dan Cohen asks where did Plum say "it makes you wonder if man is really God's last word"? Well, I am happy to relate two such passages. I am uncertain whether this is the entirety of Plum's usage of this wonderful idea; indeed, I invite other chappies to find additional references:

1. In the short story "Noblesse Oblige" from *Young Men in Spats*, Freddie Widgeon is visiting Cannes and is invited to judge a Peasant Mothers Baby Competition. In hopes of receiving a packet in exchange for such duties, Freddie signs on the dotted line. The following is a gem of a passage:

Now, Freddie's views on babies are well defined. He is prepared to cope with them singly, if all avenues of escape are blocked and there is a nurse or mother standing by to lend aid in case of sudden hiccoughs, retchings, or nauseas. Under such conditions he has even been known to offer his watch to one related by ties of blood in order that the little stranger might listen to the tick-tick. But it would be paltering with the truth to say that he likes babies. They give him, he says, a sort of grey feeling. He resents their cold stare and the supercilious and up-stage way in which they dribble out of the corner of their mouths on seeing him. Eyeing them, he is conscious of doubts as to whether Man can really be Nature's last word.

2. In the essay "Some Thoughts on Humorists" in Chapter 7 of *Over Seventy*, and also in Usborne's *Vintage Wodehouse*, Plum is discussing the possibility that the League for the Protection of Bearded Swimming-Pool Attendants will argue that "there is nothing inherently repulsive about a Vandyke beard." Plum continues:

Perfectly absurd, of course. There is. It looks frightful. A really vintage Vandyke beard, such as this swimming-pool attendant appears to have worn, seems to destroy one's view of Man as Nature's last word. If Vandyke thought he looked nice with that shrubbery on his chin, he must have been cockeyed.



Erik's second example is new to me. In Chapter 4 of *Code of the Woosters*, Gussie Fink-Nottle writes the phrase in his notebook about Spode, and in Section 3 of Chapter 11 of *Pigs Have Wings*, the phrase is used by Lady Constance in reference to her brother Galahad. Several other instances occur—Plum was an early conservationist and prudently recycled good material. —OM

# A NEW WODEHOUSE ANTHOLOGY

By Susan and Daniel Cohen

Some time back, we had proposed doing a Wodehouse Society Anthology, to be edited by members of the Wodehouse Society and published jointly in both the U.S. and the U.K. Over the months, this has evolved into an anthology to be published by Hutchinson (the British publisher of Wodehouse) in February, 2000, the 25th anniversary of Plum's death.

This is not quite what we had in mind, primarily because the final selection of material will be entirely in the hands of the publisher—they hold the copyrights, and thus hold all the cards. However, from all indications Hutchinson plans to do a first rate job, and it is a project that we should all support with unrestrained enthusiasm.

Hutchinson wants a book that will contain the best of Plum, and will help to introduce his works to a new generation—one might say a new millennium—of readers. The publishers say that they will include some material on TWS, and in making their final selection will take into account the views of Wodehouse society members worldwide.

Here is how it will be done. There will be a small committee for each national society (not each chapter) that will collect information and send it on to the UK. The first and most important step will be a vote for the favorite Wodehouse short story in a number of different categories: Jeeves and Wooster, golf stories, Mulliner, etc. We would also like to know your favorite overall story. An official ballot for the favorite stories is included in this issue of Plum Lines.

Members of other Wodehouse societies (based outside the US) will receive instructions from their group. If you are in a country without a national society, feel free to send your ballot to the address above.

Ballots must be received before December 10. Only votes that appear on signed official ballots (or copies) and sent in the mail will be counted. We come from Chicago and know all about stuffing ballot boxes—so don't try.

Other suggestions about selections from novels, essays, poems, letters, articles, writings about Wodehouse, etc., would be most welcome.

We will keep you posted as to further developments in this most exciting and worthwhile project.

"Don't blame me if Lady Constance takes her lorgnette to you. God bless my soul, though, you can't compare the lorgnettes to-day with the ones I used to know as a boy. I remember walking one day in Grosvenor Square with my aunt Brenda and her pug dog, Jabberwocky, and a policeman came up and said that the latter ought to be on a leash. My aunt made no verbal reply. She merely whipped her lorgnette from its holster and looked at the man, who gave one choking gasp and fell back against the railings without a mark on him but with an awful look of horror in his staring eyes, as if he had seen some dreadful sight. A doctor was sent for, and they managed to bring him around, but he was never the same again. He had to leave the Force, and eventually drifted into the grocery business. And that is how Sir Thomas Lipton got his start."

*Uncle Fred in the Springtime, 1939*

The foundation of the beverage manufactured by Mr. Silvers seemed to be neat vitriol, but, once you had got used to the top of your head going up and down like the lid of a kettle with boiling water in it, the effects were far from unpleasant. Mr. Silvers may not have had ideals, but he unquestionably knew what to do when you handed him a still and a potato.

*"Fate," Young Men in Spats, 1936*

# A VISIT TO LE TOUQUET

By John Koenig, Jr.

John is a new and welcome contributor to *Plum Lines*. He describes himself thus: "I am a retired Washington correspondent for Associated Press. Here in Athens, Georgia, I do freelance travel writing. I have been a Wodehousian since I discovered him at age 14 in Philadelphia in the 1930s. And I will be forever a Wodehousian."  
—OM

To find the home(s) of the great writers—at least one's particular favorites—is the natural feeling, as Dr. Johnson might say, of all (literate) mankind.

On a recent trip to France our destination was the pre-World War II home of The Master, P.G. Wodehouse, dubbed by the late Henry Steele Commager the greatest master of the English language since Shakespeare.

But following in the footsteps of The Master it is difficult to avoid stepping, as he would say, on life's banana peels. Bertie Wooster would be interested in finding the house, at Le Touquet, France, but would have to rely on his gentleman's gentleman, Jeeves, to find the way.

We took a roundabout route to Le Touquet, the objective being to see some homes of French writers along the way, but had a look first at some haunts of American writers in Paris, such as the Hotel St. Germain des Prés,

where the *New Yorker's* Janet Flanner lived for years, entertaining Ernest Hemingway at times, and moved on by rented car to Nohant, southwest of Paris, to see the chateau of George Sand.

Wonderful country inn—the Auberge de la Petite Fadette—just outside the Sand chateau, and within the inn and its garden a wedding party with musicians in local historic costumes.

P.G.W. would have loved it even though it was not Bertie Wooster's Cannes on the Cote d'Azur. Perhaps he could have written a song, "Mon Guillaume" (My Bill) for the local musicians to strum on their unique instruments which might have been tuned by one of Mr. Mulliner's innumerable gifted nephews.

And so from Nohant, coursing northward to Rouen and the remarkable little Hotel de la Cathédrale, Rouen being a gateway of sorts to the eastern Norman coast of France. One can cruise from there along the north coast of France—Dieppe, scene of the Allied raid of 1942; St. Valéry-sur-Somme, the little port from which William the Conqueror embarked for England in 1066; and our Wodehousian destination of Le Touquet.

To explore Le Touquet one needs a pied-à-terre. This was readily found. Le Touquet's oceanfront is lined with small hotels. But the one that lent itself most readily for a short stay at the resort was Novotel, a spanking "modern" bastion on the beach. Here one can obtain a most satisfactory room overlooking the sea, and dine if not quite in the style of Anatole the chef at least in a manner rather comparable.



Low Wood in 1998 (photo by John Koenig, Jr.)



In the morning one can set about finding the home that PGW occupied in the pre-war 1930s. This is more easily said than done. Although I had the location of the Wodehouse residence, said to be at the junction of the Avenue du Golf and the Avenue Allen Stoneham, I had more difficulty in finding it than Bertie Wooster had in fleeing the arms of Madeline Bassett by sliding down the rain-spout and catching the 3 a.m. milk train to London.

We were just about ready to give up the search when we spotted by the roadside a small marker reading: Low Wood Manor. This had to be the place. And it was! Making our way around shrubbery, we found the front of the house. A beautiful Norman style domicile, very sizable yet not quite what one might call a mansion.

In *Yours, Plum: The Letters of P.G. Wodehouse*, published by Heineman in 1990, there is a photograph of the

Le Touquet house—half-timbered, neo-Norman style, rambling wings, with numerous casement windows (not unknown in England). It does not look quite the same now. The reason? A couple of overgrown evergreens have altered the appearance of the facade.

The house appeared vacant, though not abandoned. The grounds seemed to be fairly well cared for. Since no one was on the scene, one could walk about this most delectable spot uninterrupted, undeterred and carefree. Bertie Wooster and Mr. Mulliner would have agreed that it was a pleasure ambling about the site.

Here was the residence that Pelham Grenville Wodehouse leased in 1934 and bought a year later. His reasons were many, viz., Le Touquet distant enough from London to keep away friends and others who would interrupt his writing routine, yet close enough should he want to go there. Also easy to get to Paris, or to Cherbourg for transatlantic travel. Further, there was the Le Touquet casino, and a tax system easier on foreign authors. And, important to Wodehouse and spouse, the relaxed French quarantine laws on pets, as compared with England.

But the road to Le Touquet and a residence there was taken, according to Barry Phelps in his *P. G. Wodehouse: Man and Myth*, when Plum in Paris, and his partner Guy Bolton then in Folkestone, began work on a Broadway musical and wanted a midway point at which to meet and work. In Le Touquet they found the spot, and Wodehouse came to like it.

Settling down here, Wodehouse continued to make his typewriter sing. The wordage continued on Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, Mr. Mulliner, Lord Emsworth and others, published in both England and America. In town he could pick up his newspapers, a walking distance of three miles, which he regarded as a good pedestrian workout.

Gazing at the house one can well imagine The Master living and working here, apparently happily, as the years ticked by. In 1939 he made a trip to England to receive an honorary Doctor of Literature degree from Oxford University. He also visited his old school, Dulwich College, for some cricket. As it turned out, this was the last time he saw England.

The storm clouds of war had gathered over the continent. When the German army overran France in 1940, including Le Touquet, the authorities seized Wodehouse's car, radio, and bicycle. To Wodehouse, losing his bike was the worst blow. In the only German he knew, he looked the official in the eye and declared: "Es ist schoenes Wetter!" ("It is beautiful weather."). And as Wodehouse put it later: "I said it nastily. I meant it to sting." Not long



Buck's Club in Mayfair (photo by John Koenig, Jr.)



afterward, he was interned for the duration.

The house was requisitioned and wife Ethel Wodehouse left. After the war, the Wodehouses returned to Low Wood. They found the house in great disrepair and decided to sell it.

Wodehouse was not alone, among his set, in finding a pleasant ambience in Le Touquet. Buck's Club, in London's Mayfair, used to have an annual "Buck's Weekend" at Le Touquet. Plum, in his later years, was reported to have said that, except for its lack of a swimming pool, Buck's had been the nearest thing to his idea of the Drones Club.

With that thought in mind, I nipped off from Le Touquet by ferry-train to London, as Wodehouse himself would have done, for he was reluctant to fly. Locating Buck's in an 18th century red-brick townhouse, at 18 Clifford Street, just east of Grosvenor Square, was the work of a moment. When I arrived the club staff was preparing for lunch and early arrivals were rolling in.

I inquired at the entrance whether I could come in and take a brief peek at the premises. An attendant was very polite and anxiously solicitous, but firm in allowing me no more than a glimpse about the entrance hallway. Which with its decor and pictures was jolly interesting, I might say.

"I'm afraid you must be a member, sir," he said, but indicated a possible loophole, i.e., if I were a member of a club with reciprocal relations with Buck's, even in America. "Are you a member of the Philadelphia Club?" he asked. "If so, I can admit you."

I thought that the position he took was scarcely in accord with the feudal spirit. But it so happens that I grew up in Philadelphia and could cite from the dim past the names of a friend or two who were members of the esteemed Philadelphia Club.

"I'm afraid that's not enough, sir," he said. "If only you were a member of the Philadelphia Club."

"Very well," said I. "Next time I come here I will try to be in the company of a member of Buck's or the Philadelphia Club."

I thanked him for his attention and bade him adieu. And I meant it to sting.



The indefatigable Norman Murphy gives many interesting details about Buck's, and Plum's association with it, in his *In Search of Blandings*—see pages 77-80 of the hardcover edition.

—OM

## FOR THE UNPINNED

Thanks to NEWT Jean Tillson, two unique and attractive pins have been designed especially for TWS members whose attire cannot be considered complete without a pig or a newt as adornment. These pins (pictured here very inadequately and a little smaller than life size) have been created by artist Stan Elfbaum of the Rockhill Crafts Co-Op in Foxboro, Massachusetts, according to Jean's specifications (note the detail of the pin representing the Empress of Blandings, completely per Plum's description of that noble animal)—and Stan is ready, willing, and able to make more!



# BREAD PELLETING

By S. Kitson

Bread-roll throwing, as the following item shows,, is far older than you may think. Perhaps now we can guess why the knights of the Round Table are invariably pictured wearing armor at mealtime. Marilyn MacGregor has been in correspondence with Mr. Kitson, of Calcutta, a recent organizer of The P. G. Wodehouse Society (India). The following item is reprinted from Issue 1 of its journal, 1997. —OM

Our society members are unlikely to be celebrating any Wodehouse event in the usual Drones Club fashion, for reasons given in the *Memoirs* of William Hickey. Hickey was a leading lawyer of two centuries ago amongst the British in India. In 1783 he recorded certain happenings at social events:

In this party I first saw the barbarous custom of pelleting each other with little balls of bread, made like pills, across the table, which was practised even by the fair sex. Some people could discharge them with such force as to cause considerable pain when struck in the face.

Mr Daniel Barwell was such a proficient that he could, at the distance of three or four yards, snuff a candle, and that several times successively.

This strange trick, fitter for savages than polite society, produced many quarrels and at last entirely ceased from the following occurrence:

A Captain Morrison had repeatedly expressed his abhorrence of pelleting and said that, if any person struck him with a pellet, he should consider it an insult and resent it accordingly. In a few minutes after he had so said, he received a smart in the face from one, which although discharged from a hand below the table he saw by the motion of the arm from whence it came, and that the pelleter was a very recent acquaintance. He therefore without the least hesitation took up a dish that stood before him and contained a leg of mutton, which he discharged with all his strength at the offender, and with such well directed aim that it took place upon the head, knocking him off his chair and giving him a severe cut upon the temple. This produced a duel in which the unfortunate pelleter was shot through the body, lay upon his bed several months, and never perfectly recovered. This put a complete stop to the absurd practice.



Some quite reasonable members of our society strongly object to the wildly enthusiastic bread-roll throwing that takes place in these degenerate latter days—notably the snowstorm of high-velocity baked goods at our Chicago convention banquet last year. To the best of my knowledge no duels ensued, but proposals have been made that we provide separate combatant and noncombatant seating sections at our next banquet—with the strict understanding that the noncombatants shall not be targets.

—OM

## BREAD-ROLL MORATORIUM?

Phil Ayers, one of our esteemed past presidents, recently visited Florence Cunningham, another of our c. p. ps, and reports on the visit:

We discussed many things and had a great time punctuated with much laughter, but we did talk about one serious item concerning the society and its convention. We both have been concerned and disappointed in the bread-throwing at the banquets. We both feel it has gotten out of hand. I have noticed it for some time and wish I had done something about it at the 1991 New York convention. I was not at the 1997 Chicago convention but I heard that a wine glass was knocked over and spilled on someone's good clothes. I feel we should stop the bread throwing at the banquets.

I feel that at a lunch or during a day event it might be appropriate. Perhaps a "Pot the Passing Drone" contest. I know from personal knowledge that it starts out OK but pretty soon people are throwing hard and accidents happen. I was hit once by a hard throw that could have been very bad if it had hit someone else.

Perhaps a discussion in *Plum Lines* is called for. I do not in any way want to be a spoil sport, but I really do not feel the banquet is the right time and place for this activity.

# PLUM AND ROSIE: A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

## SOME OF PLUM'S LITERARY SOURCES

By Helen Murphy

A talk delivered at the Chicago convention of the Wodehouse Society, October 1997. Helen has assembled a remarkable collection of 19th century books representing popular culture. Wodehouse read such books in huge quantities as a teenager and young man. Helen illustrated her talk with a number of 35- mm slides, a few of which are reproduced (rather inadequately) here. —OM

As we all know, PGW drew upon all sorts of popular culture to make people laugh. He quoted, with a casualness sometimes amounting to invisibility, from the Bible, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, popular poetry, literature, and songs. He even, in *The Swoop*, pokes fun at the Boy Scout movement and invasion fears, which was in 1909 pretty daring. I'm going to talk about some of the covert and overt references he makes to popular literature, and then about some of the inspirations for Rosie M. Banks and her ilk.

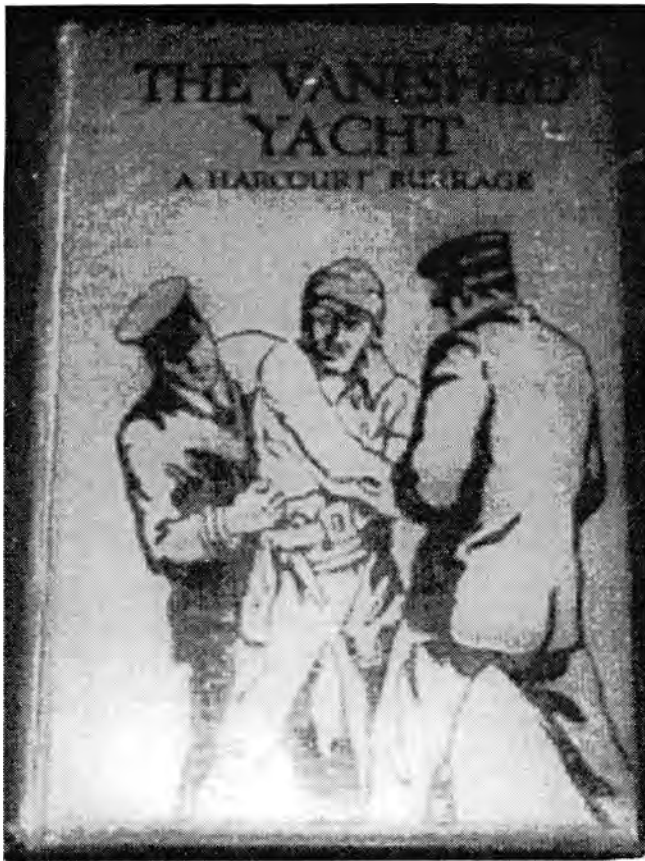
Representatives of certain trades and professions feature prominently in PGW's works, for example servants, the clergy, and especially policemen. We are told in *Joy in the Morning* that the first thing that the Big Four teach the new recruit to the police force is the correct use of the word "Ho!" I have been unable to verify whether this is still on the curriculum at our police training school. There were giants in the earth in those days, pursuing villains by guile and hansom cab. I hate to say this, especially in front of Marilyn MacGregor [a prominent Sherlockian], but Inspector Lestrade was not fit to unloose the latchet of their handcuffs.

But what is PGW's favourite occupation for the struggling young protagonists (when they have a job at all)? Writer. Opening onion soup bars or health farms will only do for the end of the story, offstage. Once again, he was following the injunction to write about what he knew. Ashe Marson has to write about Gridley Quayle, Investigator, in the sort of trashy tale popular for years. Here is Dixon Hawke, Investigator, and there were many others, all following the two-syllables-one-syllable rule of detective nomenclature established by Sherlock Holmes. Many of them have a junior assistant, who calls him 'guv'nor'. Dixon Hawke and the rest call the assistant in return 'the youngster,' as in the well used phrase: 'A half of bitter, landlord—and some lemonade for the youngster.'

Wodehouse characters, especially Bertie, often compare themselves consciously with those in other books. It

may be that the character is named, like Robinson Crusoe with his credit and debit columns, or it may be "some cove who, when it became necessary for him to put people where they belonged, was in the habit of laughing down from lazy eyelids and flicking a speck of dust from the irreproachable Mechlin lace at his wrists." So Bertie proceeds to take Stiffy to task while "laughing down from lazy eyelids and flicking a speck of cigarette ash" from his "irreproachable cuff." This was from *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, but PGW doesn't tell us that. It is a more or less direct quotation. He might adapt a popular catchphrase. In one of the school stories a character discussing the menu for tea asks, "What's the matter with biscuits? They're all right." You wouldn't notice this as a reference to anything at all—unless you remember that there was a popular song of some years earlier: "What's the matter with Gladstone? He's all right." Very occasionally he gets it wrong. In *The Girl in Blue*, a very late book, a character refers to the Cheeryble brothers being in *Oliver Twist*, instead of *Nicholas Nickleby*, where they properly belong. It has no effect on the story whatsoever, and I think is probably a genuine slip.

The faintest kind of reference is where PGW takes an action cliché or a verbal cliché, and uses it himself for comic effect. Often it is so hackneyed that you cannot be sure PGW was referring to a specific book, and such a reference may not be word for word. For example, Dame Barbara Cartland, 97 not out and still going strong, has no truck with modern ways in literature. She is still using the same phrases which PGW started mocking so many years ago. Bertie tells us of a girl wearing a garment "which accentuated rather than hid the graceful outlines of her figure, if you understand me," and in *The Old Reliable* Bill goes to change into a frock in "some clinging material which will accentuate rather than hide my graceful outlines." And here's Dame Barbara writing about a Russian Countess who was "wearing a diaphanous negligee which revealed rather than concealed her figure." The comedy in



Ruffians beware! A. Harcourt Burrage is on your track!

PGW's use of a cliché sometimes comes from the fact that while it may be perfectly appropriate for Conan Doyle to speak of a "nameless dread" in the sinister context of *A Study In Scarlet*, it can scarcely ever be suitable for the sort of problems Eggs, Beans, and Crumpets find themselves facing.

Here are some other examples of the clichés that were so pervasive in contemporary literature: In A. Harcourt Burrage's *The Vanished Yacht* the young lady, after a shock, "reels, and would have fallen." How often does Bertie not do the same! And later, when someone needs to row out to the ship, she says, "What good could a poor weak woman like me do?" As it turns out, not very much—her nerves fail and she almost muffs it. Remember the name—that's A. Harcourt Burrage, the feminist's friend. But this refers us directly to the antithesis of a poor weak woman, Aunt Dahlia in *The Code of the Woosters*:

"Bertie, I am only a weak woman—"  
"I raised a third hand. This was no time

for listening to aunts. "Bertie," said Aunt Dahlia, "I am only a weak woman but if you won't tread on this insect and throw the remains outside, I shall have to see what I can do....Spink-Bottle, you ghastly, goggle-eyed piece of gorgonzola, will you hop it or will you not?"... "Yes, Mrs Travers. At once, Mrs Travers..."

Again, Rosa Nouchette Carey wrote very pure tales—as if any other kind would have been considered!—for *The Girls' Own Paper*, begun shortly after *The Boys' Own Paper* and almost as popular. While much of her work was serialised, some appeared in book form, such as *Our Bessie*. Bessie's mother is the gentle, sweet faced, motherly type which PGW's heroes always hope for and never get, and her father is the kindly, hard working local doctor. At one stage the mother reflects upon the "priceless jewels of innocence and purity, which are the fairest adornments of a young girl." The mind of the PGW reader instantly leaps to Lord Emsworth's thick niece Veronica whose "aim in life was to look as like a chandelier as possible" and of whom PGW says: "a lovely girl needs, of course, no jewels but her youth and health and charm, but anybody who had wanted to make Veronica understand that would have had to work like a beaver."

PGW loved popular literature, however trashy, just as he enjoyed soap operas in later life. He also milked it for some of his best one-liners. For example, a common figure at the time was the pathetic dog, specifically the tragic terrier. A very popular book was *Where's Master*, by The King's Dog. (My copy is from the 13th edition of 1910, the year Edward VII died. At least thirteen editions in one year!) This narrates in the first canine the King's illness and last days, and ends with the little dog accompanying Missus (Queen Alexandra) and the King's Horse, Kildare, in the funeral cortege, even though he is only a little, common dog. It is really touching in a frightfully sentimental way. All this pathos is, of course, much easier to achieve if you are a small terrier. Leave to the larger breeds the dragging back from cliff edges, the rescuing from roaring torrents—the touching terrier lick to the moribund hand is far more fitting than the dribbly Alsatian



The perfect girl: carved in marble with her eyes blunk out.

slobber.

Of course PGW adored dogs. But what does he do with this cliché? Well, in "The Magic Plus Fours" Wallace Chesney becomes so good at golf, and so critical, that he loses all his playing partners and his fiancée. He confides in the Oldest Member, ending:

"Nobody loves me." His voice rose in a note of anguish and at the sound his terrier, which had been sleeping on the rug, crept forward and licked his hand. "The dog loves you," I said, gently, for I was touched. "Yes, but I don't love the dog," said Wallace Chesney.

Just because he used a cliché or phrase for comic effect does not mean he despised the author of the phrase. Leaving aside the classics, like Shakespeare, I have the impression that the use of phrases like "Here, if I mistake not, Watson, is our client now" is in the nature of a tribute.

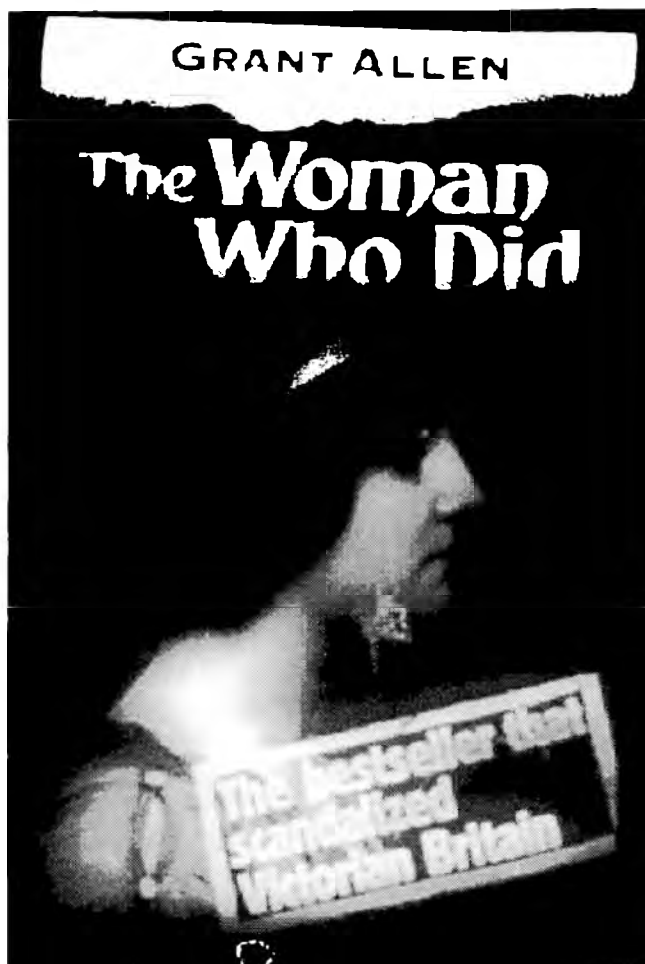
PGW would probably have endorsed Dr. Johnson's view that "no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money." PGW himself always worked hard, but as he says when considering the awful task ahead of Evangeline in the Mulliner story "Best Seller," "It is not the being paid money in advance that jars the sensitive artist — it is the having to work." Thus, it is perfectly okay for Rockmettler Todd to write just enough to keep himself in blissful idleness by spending a few hours every month producing claptrap like the poem "Be!" PGW would only have congratulated him. And in "Honey-suckle Cottage" Mr McKinnon says reprovingly, "No author who pulls down a steady twenty thousand pounds a year writes tripe." PGW may have made fun of certain types of writer, but he respected those who made a living from their work.

However, there is a certain kind of literature that, in the voice of the narrator, he chooses to disparage for comic effect. Such include the works of Leila J. Pinckney, Rosie

M. Banks, and others. Where did these authoresses come from, and who were their originals?

There had been a huge expansion in the market for popular fiction towards the end of the 19th century. The Education Act of 1870 made provision for universal schooling and created the thirst for fiction, the expanding Empire provided wood pulp from vast forests to satisfy it, and I have a personal theory that the growth of the railways and the railway bookstall had something to do with it. However it happened, the masses wanted cheap fiction, and they wanted it purple.

With the occasional exception such as Mary Shelley, who wrote *Frankenstein*, almost all the female novelists had hitherto been fairly respectable: Mrs. Oliphant, Mrs. Gaskell, lots of Brontës. Of the later writers, some were respectable, like L. T. Meade, and some were not. A fair way of telling what sort of book it was, as well as checking the publisher, was to look at the advertisements at the back. If they are for Wright's Coal Tar Soap, or for a work by a



The Woman Who Shouldn't Have Done  
But Who Took a Pop At It

Mrs. Waterhouse called *With the Simple Hearted: Little Homilies to Women in Country Places*, you're pretty sure to be all right. Even those like Mrs. Charlesworth, whose work was breathtakingly exciting, got away with it because they were writing temperance novels, in which at least one character was guaranteed to die horribly with the DTs. Incidentally, like "Elementary, my dear Watson," the exclamation "Dead! — and never called me mother!" was never in the novel *East Lynne* — it appeared in the stage version.

Remember the PGW girl who looked "like a vicar's daughter who plays hockey and ticks off the villagers when they want to marry their deceased wives' sisters"? This was a hot topic in the 19th century, and the plot of *The Fatal Three* hangs on it. Mrs. Braddon, authoress of the book, was one of these late 19th century novelists. Her

most famous book was *Lady Audley's Secret*. She also wrote *Cut by the County*, a fate Uncle Fred cheerfully expected any day.

The book most likely to have been banned in Boston was *The Woman Who Did*, by Grant Allen. In 1895 it created a tremendous stir. It gave PGW the chance to make a joke, again in "Best Seller," about the fashion for "scarlet tales of Men Who Did and Women Who Shouldn't Have Done But Who Took A Pop At It."

Perhaps the most notorious authoress of popular fiction was Elinor Glyn. She is not to be despised. She made an enormous amount of money with her pen, fascinated great men, and later did energetic work during the Great War, spending some time visiting the trenches. She also kept her looks and her lustrous red hair long after one would have expected them to be gone.

Significantly, she toured Egypt, which, as her biographer Joan Hardwick reports, "had a strange effect on many of its Edwardian visitors. De Grenville, in his book *New Egypt*, commented that there was something in the air of Egypt which seemed to excite almost everyone and "which almost maddens certain natures, especially of the weaker sex..." Much more of the influence of the desert on pulp fiction later. But it was on her visit to Italy that Elinor bought her first tiger skin. In those days, of course, conservation had not been invented, and anyone who went abroad, like the inhabitants of Bludleigh Court, went after anything alive, the bigger the better. If someone got in the way, either he was "only a native" or if it was dear old George—well, he'd have wanted to go that way.

Elinor Glyn's tiger skin became her trademark. Shortly after the publication of *Three Weeks*, in which an older woman displays herself to tremendous seductive effect, a rhyme was making the rounds:

Would you like to sin  
With Elinor Glyn  
On a tiger skin?

Or would you prefer  
To err with her  
On some other fur?

Tiger skins arrived for her from the great colonial administrators Lord Curzon and Lord Milner—I suppose one each from the Indian and African species. Lord Curzon also used to correspond with the writer Ouida, of whom more later. Suffice to say that Elinor Glyn popularised the tigerskin as an emblem of seduction, so that PGW can tell us that his young novelist Blair Eggleston, though possessing a tough, cynical manner, "had never actually found himself alone in an incense scented studio with a scantily clad princess reclining on a

tiger skin, but in such a situation he would most certainly have taken a chair as near to the door as possible and talked about the weather."

Ethel M. Dell was more respectable, and if the vicar's daughter had borrowed one of Dell's books from the housemaid she would have been less likely to shove it under the sofa cushions if in danger of discovery. But she was still only in the middle of the respectability scale—Nancy Mitford was forbidden to read her novels, as Murray Wilson told us in the most recent *Plum Lines*. Apart from being obsessed with euthanasia, a line running through *The Keeper of the Door* and other works, she specialised in Bruised Blossoms, Broken Butterflies, the kind of girl who is often pretty near to the Blue Angel, or the tart with a heart, who is dropping down the ladder rung by rung. Sometimes the only difference is that the bruised blossom often ends up with the man, while the Blue Angel never does.

Often the girl has been in the chorus, like Dolly Henderson, whom even Lord Emsworth remembers as "a little bit of a thing in pink tights, with the jolliest smile you ever saw." She sang at the Tivoli theatre. PGW's chorus girls are normally quite happy, of course. But the destination of Ethel M. Dell's girls, had they not been rescued by the hero, and the place where the aunts suspect PGW's heroines would have ended up, is Destitutionsville. As the song goes,

See him in the House of Commons  
Making laws to put down crime,  
While the girl that he has ruined  
Trails her way through mud and slime.

By a happy coincidence, John Hollingshead, who wrote *Ragged London* in 1861, later took over the Gaiety Theatre, haunt of the Pelican Club members. And what did he introduce there? The can-can—and girls in pink silk tights.

Ethel M. Dell also liked to get her teeth into a bad baronet—so to speak—and she was not the only one. The aristocracy in fiction, as discussed in the Mulliner story "The Smile That Wins," were renowned for evil, and the wicked squire—generally some nobleman or another—had been the staple of melodrama for years. But Ethel M. Dell's characters have fits of mad passion and storm drunkenly about the manor house with riding crops, looking for their wives. The butler says: "The master is not himself, your ladyship." In one story the hero begins repairing his riding crop before confronting the villain. The heroines also tend to be passed from one man to another like a shuttlecock, as they give her up to each other with no reference to her opinion at all, just as Barmy and Pongo renounce Angela Briscoe in each other's favour,

after the school treat and the Village Mothers' outing in "Tried in the Furnace."

One of Ethel M. Dell's books was entitled *Storm Drift*, and may well have inspired the title of Florence Craye's novel *Spin Drift*.

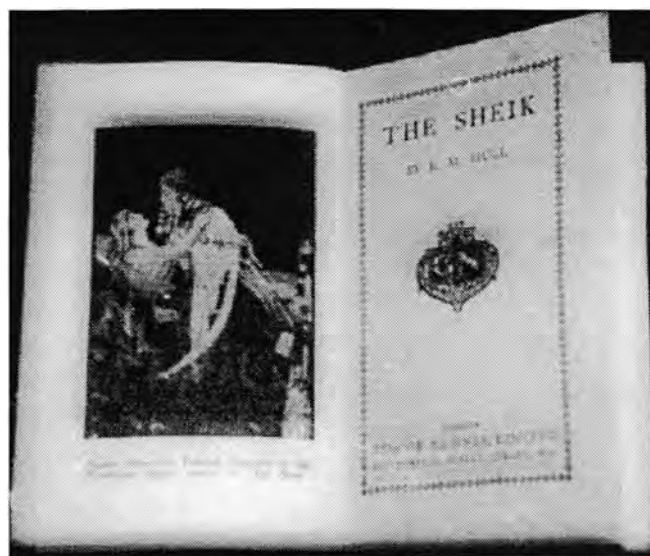
These authoresses provided some source material for the creation of Rosie M. Banks and the rest, but the definitive source was Ruby M. Ayres. She was very respectable indeed, and Dick Usborne confirmed with PGW that Ayres was where he had got the name, though I hope I have shown there were others involved. Dick knew her well. She started off as one of the publisher Harmsworth's young women, like Barbara Cartland, and made a lot of money. Harmsworth was the Lord Tilbury of his time. At one stage he sent Ruby M. Ayres off to the South of France to think out a really big novel he could serialise. She took the advance and went off to enjoy herself, but eventually got a telegram asking for thirteen chapters by the next week. She replied: "Bedroom door open or shut?" "Shut" was the response, and she sent off thirteen chapters in time. That was Ruby M. Ayres.

A little while ago I said we would return to Egypt and the desert. The British and the French had been mucking about in the region for years, on and off, and we have heard how Englishwomen seemed particularly susceptible to the desert atmosphere. So the desert romance was a novel waiting to happen. There may have been others before Ruby M. Hull's *The Sheikh*, but there were none so famous. Rudolph Valentino, star of the early silent film based on the book, was so swooned over that cinema managers used to employ nurses to stand by and deal with the casualties. This type of tale was immensely popular, allowing a fashionable girl like Angela in "Came the Dawn" to refer to her young man as "my desert king."

In "Rodney Fails to Qualify," Jane gets a desert romance out of the library and loves the

wonderful Arab chief with stern, yet tender, eyes, and a girl called Angela, and oases and deserts and mirages, and all like that. There is a chapter where the Arab chief seizes the girl and clasps her in his arms and she feels his hot breath searing her face and he flings her on his horse and they ride off and all around was sand and night, and the mysterious stars...I wish mother would take me to Algiers next winter. It would do her rheumatism so much good.

The Oldest Member accordingly advises William Bates to make his proposal in a large bunker as "I have reason to believe that Jane would respond more readily to your wooing were it conducted in some vast sandy waste." All those atmospheric touches are in *The Sheikh*. Interestingly, none of the sheikhs that I have come across in such books was ever actually a proper Arab: they were always at least half French, English or American, sometimes the missing heir to a title and estates. In *The Sheikh*, for



"There were none so famous."

example, the hero has the famous Caryll scowl.

Even before the sheikh-as-raptor appeared, the desert had been the province of the cliché Dick Usborne refers to as the "crashed Balliol man," that is, the gentleman ranker. The pathos, of course, results from the fact that they know what they have lost. That knowledge is reflected in Kipling's hymn to the banjo (and exile),

I am memory, I am torment, I am town;  
I am all that ever went with evening dress!

In *Barmy in Wonderland* Mervyn Potter says "I'm going to have another drink or two and then go off and join the Foreign Legion, that cohort of the damned (Kipling again) where broken men toil and die, and, dying, forget."

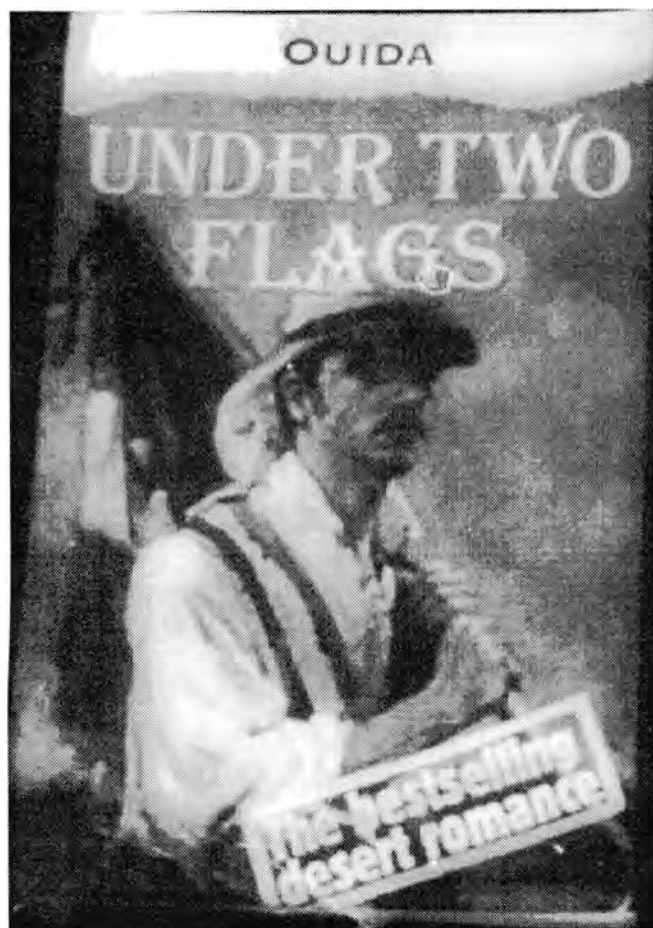
And the curse of Reuben holds us  
Till an alien turf enfolds us,  
And we die—  
And none can tell them where we died.

The whole Empire provided glorious scope for disappearing, a bit like the American West, and provided some of the most popular fictional heroes — Men Who Did Things, according to the heroine of *The Sheikh* and several of PGW's stories. In *Clubland Heroes* Dick Usborne quotes from a critic who says of a certain man that "he is everywhere that is a long way off...It is that, indeed, that makes him bearable."

The crashed Balliol man brings us to possibly the most



famous of Rosie M. Banks's heroes, *Mervyn Keene, Clubman*. First let me tell you about the hero of Ouida's *Under Two Flags*. Published in 1867, it was her best known work, inspiring P. C. Wren and many others to imitations that often stopped just this side of plagiarism. Surprisingly (to me) lots of military officers used to attend on her and thought her works were marvellous. In *Under Two Flags* she makes clever use of the "dead but not dead" fictional device. The hero (rich, in the guards, the idol of all who know him, with what one critic calls an almost suicidal sense of noblesse oblige), admits to forging a bond—although the villain is really his weak younger brother. He confesses to save his brother and, more importantly, his current mistress's honour—it's a matter of alibis. Having faked his death in a handy train crash (just like *East Lynne*) he joins the Chasseurs d'Afrique and endures awful hardships in the Algerian desert. He is the man of mystery, renowned for his superb horsemanship, etc. He is accompanied by his faithful servant, who enlists with him and who later dies faithfully in the sands, having concealed the fact that he has been transpierced by an Arab



How much romance can you put into one illustration? Surely no more than this.

lance. His dying wish is that should the Master by some happy chance be restored to his birthright, the faithful servant should be remembered to the faithful horse, waiting in England.

By chance the hero later comes across his brother, his best friend, and the woman he has loved since she was a little girl. At first she doesn't recognise him—he has grown a beard—but later all is revealed and his secret is known. The younger brother confesses and all should end happily. And so it does, but only after noblesse has obliged him to offer up his life for the lady's honour and face death by firing squad. Fortunately, at the last minute, he is saved by Cigarette, the gamine young girl who is almost the mascot of the regiment and is proudest of all of serving France and the army. She has galloped all night with his reprieve and in a ballistically dubious showdown she hurls herself in front of the bullets and cops the lot, leaving the hero unscathed. Even when he has returned with his lady love to the estates and the faithful horse, he remembers the desert where, carved in a white stone, is "one name on which the Arab sun streamed as with a martyr's glory: CIGARETTE, ENFANT DE L'ARMÉE, SOLDAT DE LA FRANCE." They plant the tricolore by her grave, so the soldiers can salute her as they pass.

In real life the Foreign Legion seem to have been strangely susceptible to gamine little urchins. When Edith Piaf died the Legion sent a wreath in the colours, with the words "A leur môme Piaf — La Legion."

Now, with the exception of the fact that he survives, do certain features of this story remind you of anyone? Here is Madeline telling Bertie about Rosie M. Banks's hero in Chapter 17 of *The Mating Season*:

He was young and rich and handsome, an officer in the Coldstream Guards and the idol of all who knew him. Everybody envied him... But he was not really to be envied. There was a tragedy in his life. He loved Cynthia Grey, the most beautiful girl in London, but just as he was about to speak his love, he found that she was engaged to Sir Hector Mauleverer, the explorer... [H]e spoke no word of love. But he went on worshipping her, outwardly gay and cheerful, inwardly gnawed by a ceaseless pain. And then one night her brother Lionel, a wild young man who had unfortunately got into bad company, came to his rooms and told him that he had committed a very serious crime and was going to be arrested, and he asked Mervyn to save him by taking the blame himself. And, of course, Mervyn said he would... Mervyn fully realized what must happen. But he confessed to the crime and went to prison. When he came out, grey and broken, he found that Cynthia had married Sir Hector, and he went out to the South Sea Islands and became a beach-comber. And time passed. And then one day Cynthia and her husband arrived at the island on their travels and stayed at Government House, and Mervyn saw her drive by, and she was just as beautiful as ever, and their eyes met, but she didn't recognize him, because of course he had grown a beard and his face was changed. He found out that she was leaving next morn-

face was changed because he had been living the pace that kills, trying to forget. He found out that she was leaving the next morning, and he had nothing to remember her by, so he broke into Government House in the night and took from her dressing-table the rose she had been wearing in her hair. And Cynthia found him taking it, and, of course, she was very upset when she recognized him...and there was a very powerful scene in which he told her how he had always loved her and had come to steal her rose, and she told him that her brother had died and confessed on his death-bed that it was he who had been guilty of the crime for which Mervyn had gone to prison. And then Sir Hector came in. And, of course, he thought Mervyn was a burglar, and he shot him, and Mervyn died with the rose in his hand. And, of course, the shot roused the house, and the Governor came running in and said: "Is anything missing?" And Cynthia in a low, almost inaudible voice said: "Only a rose." That is the story of Mervyn Keene, Clubman.

There's nothing wrong with sentiment. PGW uses it himself as a way of making us engage with the characters, instead of just laughing. Thus Gally, musing on Dolly Henderson, could feel that "something that was not of this world went whispering through the garden." But from all we know of him, I suspect that PGW had a strong psychological bond with the bachelor. Gally is single, and even Uncle Fred can only do his best work when unencumbered by Aunt Jane. James Rodman, trapped in Honeysuckle Cottage with a dainty child of faerie, is, we are told,

one of Nature's bachelors. And no ordinary man...can realise the intensity of the instinct for self-preservation which animates Nature's bachelors in times of peril....James liked to breakfast in bed; and, having breakfasted, to smoke in bed and knock the ashes out on the carpet. What wife would tolerate this practice? James liked to pass his days in a tennis shirt, grey flannel trousers and slippers. What wife ever rests until she has inclosed her husband in a stiff collar, tight boots and a morning suit and taken him with her to the musicales?

Of marriage: " 'Don't do it,' said Mr. McKinnon, a stout bachelor. 'You're too young to marry.' 'So was Methuselah,' said James, a stouter."

When Lord Emsworth and Gally finally find peace, perfect peace at the end of *A Pelican at Blandings*, it is because sisters—who can be as bad as wives—have finally vamoosed.

As always, Kipling summed it up nicely in a line which provides a story title in *The Clicking of Cuthbert*, and is adapted for its last line. As Kipling originally wrote it:

Open the old cigar box, let me consider anew;  
Old friends, and who is Maggie, that I should abandon  
you?  
A million surplus Maggies are willing to bear the yoke,  
And a woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a  
smoke!

## A TOUR OF WODEHOUSE'S ENGLAND

David McDonough has passed along an announcement of a ten-day tour of England offered by the Lord Addison travel firm. The tour will depart America next April 15 and return April 24.

"Here is a bright and sparkling itinerary," says the announcement, "designed by Lord Addison for fun and stimulation in the England of Jeeves and Wooster, Psmith, Mr. Mulliner, and the great Plum himself. Our itinerary blends time in London with a road trip into the countryside of Plum's youth and imagination. Here lie the raw ingredients of his fiction, so recognizable to those who adore his timeless England. Our road trip leads into the 'Heart of England' countryside of the 'Wooster Triangle,' to Gloucestershire, Worcester, and Shropshire, the spiritual home of P.G.'s immortal characters and locales. Our base will be a country house hotel in the Cotswolds, just the sort of place to which Bertie and Jeeves would repair for a long weekend. From here, we've some specific visits to sites of importance to Wodehouse life and fiction—place names and country houses Wodehouse fans will recognize as Blandings and Brinkley Court. Principally, however, we're going to travel Wooster-style, recreating the carefree world of the Drones and country house living taking the days as they come, restoring the tissues at a pub or three, and enjoying a dinner or two that would make Anatole proud. We'll begin and end in London, with its matchless riches of history and culture. Lord Addison's four-star London hotels are all superbly located for exploring the town."

Land cost only (no airfare included) is \$2180 per person, double occupancy. For details, call 800-326-0170.

The effect was instantaneous and gratifying. As he drained the first glass, it seemed to him that a torchlight procession, of whose existence he had hitherto not been aware, had begun to march down his throat and explore the recesses of his stomach. The second glass, though slightly too heavily charged with molten lava, was extremely palatable. It helped the torchlight procession along by adding to it a brass band of singular power and sweetness. And with the third somebody began to touch off fireworks inside his head.

"The Story of William," *Meet Mr. Mulliner*

# MANGOLD-WURZELS À LA P.G.W.

By Denver Elkins

Denver is a new and welcome contributor to *Plum Lines*. He writes: "As a professional writer, I'm always on the lookout for another niche to fill with my scribbles. In 1995, I penned a quirky little piece about PGW. I hope it might be welcome in a future printing."

—OM

The tops of my '72 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* volumes were, just the other day, dusty. Not to imply that they've been clean on any given day since about the early 'eighties. But the second sentence of its explanation of *mangold-wurzels* is crisp and clean: "These types interbreed freely." Blowing the dust off and reshelving the volume, I stepped to the computer, flipped some switches, then inserted the '93 CD-ROM version of *The Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia*. Its second sentence in the definition of the same item is "All are members of the goosefoot family, *Chenopodiaceae*." For reasons I'll soon uncover, I wanted to know all about this goosefoot family that was interbreeding freely. But before I continue, please realize that it's P.G. Wodehouse's fault.

In many of Plum's writings, characters casually mention mangold-wurzels. To my discredit, understanding who or what a mangold-wurzel was didn't, for over a decade, seem to matter all that much. So, along with technical banter about the game of cricket, I went willingly uninformed. The plots never suffered as far as I could tell. Jeeves, Bertie, Psmith, and the rest galloped along their storylines as if mangold-wurzels had never been foremost in their thoughts. The context, whether it be the Drones Club, backstage at a Broadway play, or the cavities in Gussie Fink-Nottle's brain, never gave me enough clues.

My guess was that it was a machine, maybe of German or Swiss design, from the turn of the century or thereabouts. Or, I thought, it could be either a type of mustard for connoisseurs or a short-lived British sports car known only to the fanatic few.

Then, one day, I snapped. I had to know. This happened about a week after bingeing on a stack of Wodehouse novels and collected short stories that, to my amazement, I'd found in a bookstore not far from my home. (On three trips to Europe, I'd dutifully scoured bookstores large and small, musty and otherwise, ragged list in hand, making sure to match the American titles against the British ones.) On the day I dusted my encyclopaedia top, I learned the sorry truth about mangold-wurzels.

Why had Plum slipped in all those sly references? Did he think his audience knew what he was writing about?

Could it have been the sound? Take this sentence: "Does your doctor recommend associating with mangold-wurzels?" It can be humorous no matter what they are. Then again, Plum has characters spouting Shakespeare willy-nilly. So, he was not unversed in double entendres and sexual references, despite the near absolute absence of sexual matters in his books. Love? Yes. Passion? Yes. Lust and sex? Never. At least not in the open, regardless of all those spring and summer weekends at country estates groaning with an abundance of nubile, young, eager... et cetera.

Dash it all, Plum. What were you thinking of? Now that I have at my disposal much more information about mangold-wurzels than I ever thought I'd want, need, or normally be willing to admit to, I've come to both a conclusion and a strong recommendation. I've decided, from now and forward, to think of mangold-wurzels as sexy, Swiss mustard-eaters who toodle round in natty little two-seaters. I suggest you do the same. 'Nough said? Good.

But... (Here's where the modern-day Pandoras are identified.)

If you must look up the name, remember that there are numerous variations in spellings, one of which (I'm not supplying you with more than one) is "mangel-wurzel." But I warn you. Curiosity in this matter could lead to disappointment. For those of you who can still hear your teachers' and mentors' voices extolling "Look it up," I say *this* is the exception. You've already mentally located the nearest reference sources. Right? Desist. Please. Take a moment to devise your own definition or feel free to use mine. This is not a "What you don't know will hurt you" situation. Those select individuals who need to be acquainted with the full story of mangold-wurzels already are in the cabal; once in, never to be let out. (And don't I know it.) The rest of you can sleep safely in the knowledge of unknowledge. Because I made the mistake, needn't mean that you should also. My downfall doesn't have to be yours.

Plum was right. Chuck in a mangold-wurzel reference in about every third book whether it's prudent to do so or not. A handful of letters joined by a dash. That's all it is.

A small thing that can elicit a smile no matter who or what it refers to.

Thank you, Mr. Wodehouse. After consideration, I think you knew precisely what you were doing. And to the rest of you:

You  
know  
exactly  
what  
you  
mustn't  
do.

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## SAY, COULD THAT LAD BE I?

At the very last moment before press time (the presses haven't actually begun to roll, but I can hear the beating of their wings), I've received a copy of Peter Schwed's new autobiography, whose title forms the headline of this article. Peter Schwed, as every right-thinking Wodehouse fan knows, was Wodehouse's American editor and publisher at Simon & Schuster for the last twenty-two years of Plum's life, from 1953 to 1975. It was a mutual admiration society, each man gifted in his own field and able to recognize the exceptional work of the other.

But Peter was much more than one writer's editor and publisher. How much more I haven't time to tell you here, but he was a mover and shaker in the book world for decades and became Publisher and Chairman of the Editorial Board of Simon & Schuster. He wrote ten previous books, and if this book is any indication, wrote them very well indeed. As Plum once said in another connection, Peter is "a chap with a good story to tell." If you care about books and how they come into being, or if you would enjoy reading a well-told story of an interesting life, do yourself a favor and get a copy of *Say, Could That Lad Be I?* It's published by Bennett Books, New York.

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