



# Plum Lines

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## HARPIES AND HALF-PORTIONS:

## P. G. WODEHOUSE ON THE WOMEN'S QUESTION

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You know, the more I see of women, the more I think that there ought to be a law. Something has got to be done about this sex, or the whole fabric of society will collapse, and then what silly asses we shall all look. —Bertie Wooster<sup>1</sup>

The conversation turned to P. G. Wodehouse as a few of us were lowering our tall and frosties at the dispensary downtown. A young lady of the party declared that Wodehouse could have no place on her shelves because he was a sexist. To the rest of us this seemed frankly a bit thick. Women who craved independence after the current fashion were too likely as it was to be unable to laugh about their own pretensions, but if the liberation of women meant the banishment of P. G. Wodehouse, then these women were getting above themselves. For to liberate us from Wodehouse would be to take away one of the best consolations we have for having been born into the twentieth century. It fell to me to look into this charge against him—not that we were all sworn to leave off reading him if he couldn't be cleared, but the investigation looked promising.

I must admit to having an ulterior motive: I have never read a P. G. Wode-



One of our best consolations for having been born into the twentieth century. Cartoon by David Low, 1933.

house book I didn't like. Even the school stories from his juvenilia have some of the same moves as the genuine article. No doubt the secondary literature has been kept small by the fact that writing about Wodehouse can't match the delight of reading him. It's a curious thing to read Wodehouse as a judge, because he distracts you with a laugh whenever you might be in danger of becoming too impressed with him. Still, on a second reading or a third, without laughing less, you notice more of his skill at putting every part in its place. Wodehouse, as a teacher of mine said,<sup>2</sup> is a one-man refutation of Marx's idea that communism could allow the free development of all, since the claim that I could do everything at the highest level loses credence when you see that it means I should have to write as well as Wodehouse. His humour hides the

Wodehouse. His humour hides the excellence of his writing, but you come to wonder whether the writing hides some other excellence.

Here is the moment to let the feminists weigh in with their objection that Wodehouse is all fluff and no matter, even if it's devilishly well-written and funny fluff. "No matter" means no concern for the social question, and particularly the women's question. This failing would be said to come from having been born in an unenlightened age when no one questioned traditional sex roles. The charge, in short, is that Wodehouse wouldn't know an exploited woman if you brought her to him on a skewer with Béarnaise sauce. But in fact he does take up the social question. Archibald, a nephew of his ready raconteur Mr. Mulliner, is briefly converted to socialism by his man, Meadowes, who supplies him with pamphlets advocating change in the basic fundamentals of the principles governing distribution. In truth, it is not these rambling pamphlets, with their sections and subsections, that move Archibald: it is the rhetorical power, and especially the invective, of Meadowes, who has a gift for describing the rivers of blue blood that will run in the streets when England's starving masses find themselves a Stalin. Marx's success comes from being propped up on a more spirited horse—call it Nietzsche. Archibald's conversion does him no good with his unliberated fiancée, who finds that it takes the dash out of his dancing. Brooking her displeasure, he stands her up for dinner to have a look at the martyred proletariat. He finds that the proles can do as well without him as he used to do without them. Having made rather a pest of himself by trying to force bread on a pint-sized proletarian whose preferences run to sweets, Archibald ends up at the dinner table being ordered to eat his fat by a truculent busybody from the lower classes. Thoroughly chastened, he rediscovers his real duty in entertaining his fiancée with his particular talent at imitating a hen.<sup>3</sup>

This Archibald is not alone in awakening to the social question. Wodehouse has another of his characters say:

What a curse these social distinctions are. They ought to be abolished. I remember saying that to Karl Marx once, and he thought there might be an idea for a book in it.<sup>4</sup>

But Wodehouse has a different kind of an idea for his books, and he distinguishes them from Marx's in a precise way:

I believe there are two ways of writing novels. One is mine, making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right deep down into life and not caring a damn.<sup>5</sup>

Wodehouse rejects the anxious insecurity that character-

ises modern thought, with its emphasis on "real life"; he rejects it in favour of music, which makes life into comedy instead. He says that our century is particularly prone to worry—one of the German fellows called it *Angst*—and he gives us instead the self-sufficiency of the English gentleman, who doesn't worry. But it would be wrong to mistake his merriment for the empty exercise left to a mind that has plumbed the depths and found nothing there. It may be clearer in his early books—since they are not so glacial on the surface as the later ones, which reflect back every ray of light that strikes them—but Wodehouse has considered the permanent human problems. This consideration is the ground for his humour. And when we come to judge him, we find that, far from being insensitive to the situation of women, he has thought about it more deeply than we have. But then the author of every good book has at least as much of a claim to judge us as we have to judge him, and only those resist this idea who judge thoughts by their prejudices rather than their prejudices by thoughts.

Well-wishers to women will be pleased to note that Wodehouse is not like Nietzsche, who warns the better sort of reader not to venture out among the ladies without a stick or a whip;<sup>6</sup> nor is Wodehouse like Schopenhauer, who tossed his old landlady down the stairs to cure her feminine prolixity.<sup>7</sup> The Germans may drag their women about by the hair, but Wodehouse's gentlemen are far too inhibited. So far from going after women with whips, they can't even go back on incautious engagements—a man's word is his bond, and it wouldn't do for a *preux chevalier* to weasel out. As to Schopenhauer, some of his remarks fall under the head of bandying the name of a woman—indeed, of all women—and what he did to his landlady would be far too shocking for Wodehouse to report. Wodehouse's men do not often come to such a pass as Chimp Twist, who carries his misogyny so far as to wish never to see a woman again, except perhaps an occasional barmaid.<sup>8</sup> But we must face the fact squarely that Wodehouse agrees with Macbeth's witches, at least when they say that fair may be foul:<sup>9</sup> he presents men as sorely tried by the fair sex.

The gentleman will find that women want to put him up to things. Bertie Wooster, Wodehouse's irrepressible hero and narrator, gives his warning against women after hearing how Stiffy Byng has tried to get her man to pinch a policeman's helmet to even a private score. Women are not like gentlemen, who have a code in these things:

She was fully aware that she was doing something which even by female standards was raw, but she didn't care. The whole fact of the matter is that all this modern emancipation of women has resulted

in them getting it up their noses and not giving a damn what they do.<sup>10</sup>

Even when there is no question of breaking the law, the projects of a certain kind of woman can take years off a man's life. Roberta Wickham, who has red hair, persuades Bertie to puncture a man's hot-water bottle with a knitting needle while he is asleep.<sup>11</sup> Angela Briscoe, another female of plausible appearance, almost splits up a friendship by impositions on her admirers: one is called on to help with a school treat, the other to help chaperone rowdy mothers on a bus tour.<sup>12</sup> These demands can drive a good man to drink, the medicine that Gussie Fink-Nottle chooses, with unfortunate result, when he has to address an audience of schoolboys.<sup>13</sup> Nor does age exempt a man from the importunity of women, and marriage always strengthens it. Lord Emsworth of Blandings has to risk getting his top hat knocked off when he appears before schoolboys by order of his sister Constance,<sup>14</sup> and the

American film magnate Ikey Llewellyn has to risk getting caught smuggling a necklace by order of his wife Grayce.<sup>15</sup> The most amiable of a tough lot of aunts that Bertie has is not above ordering him to steal a silver cow-creamer when she needs a present to sweeten her husband.<sup>16</sup> Women have an intuitive grasp of Machiavelli's lesson that it is best to be generous with someone else's resources, and they turn distinctly non-bonhomous when their men shy away from extraordinary executions with a startled *nolle prosequi*.

The fair sex is at its most dangerous in its search for a husband. True as it is that every man ought to be married, provided he can find the right girl, there is the rub. There are so many girls who are just not right. Setting aside ones who have Trouble for their middle name, a man still has many perils to avoid. Men are notoriously susceptible to women who have hair the colour of ripe wheat and eyes of cornflower blue, with a figure as full of



She would still put her hands over your eyes and say "Guess who?" Illustration by Kerr, from P.G. Wodehouse, *Weekend Wodehouse*, (London, Hutchinson, 1939).

curves as a scenic railway. Not that these things should be done without, of course, but a man would be silly to marry a girl like Veronica Wedge, who was a vision of beauty and an heiress, and had about as much brain as a retarded billiards ball.<sup>17</sup>

Marriage meant, to come to essentials, that two people were very often and for lengthy periods alone together, dependent on each other for mutual entertainment.<sup>18</sup>

A woman may look like a pimperino of the first water, but sooner or later you have to talk to her. Besides, men aren't smart enough to go it alone—they need wives with the presence of mind to get them out of tough spots, like the quick-thinking Dolly Molloy, who is the brains of her family.<sup>19</sup> To make your way through life you need a woman who is practical, and so Wodehouse particularly warns against another type of feminine disposition—the soppy, poetic sort exemplified by Madeline Bassett. The Bassett has large, melting eyes and thinks the stars are God's daisy chain. After twenty years of marriage, she would still come down the stairs, put her hands over your eyes while you were trying to get around your morning eggs, and say "Guess who?" Intolerable!<sup>20</sup>

But the worst mistake that a man can make is to plight his troth to a woman who wants to make something of him—to subject him like plasticine to the firm and practiced hand of the sculptress. Bertie Wooster gives us this warning against Florence Craye, now happily a former fiancée:

You know how it is with these earnest, brainy beazels of what is called strong character. They can't let the male soul alone. They want to get behind it and start shoving. Scarcely have they shaken the rice from their hair in the car driving off for the honeymoon than they pull up their socks and begin moulding the partner of joys and sorrows, and if there is one thing that gives me the pip, it is being moulded. Despite adverse criticism from many quarters—the name of my Aunt Agatha is one that springs to the lips—I like B. Wooster the way he is. Lay off him, I say. Don't try to change him, or you may lose the flavour.<sup>21</sup>

A few men are fatheaded enough to want to be moulded, to be made to climb to new heights by trampling underfoot the carcasses of their former selves, and "Stilton" Cheesewright, Florence Craye's new fiancé, is one.<sup>22</sup> What captivates most men, though, is not the intention of the sculptress, for that they barely notice, but her looks. Any man who makes it his business to chat up pretty girls is in danger of finding that one thing has led to another and that he has got engaged to a harpy who takes him as her own personal project. For Wodehouse's imperious women are also tall and poised and handsome, with all the equipment needed to be a pin-up girl and a profile that makes you think everything else can be overlooked. Quite

a number of Wodehouse's novels begin with a man who has just given himself such a woman for a fiancée, and if he has any gumption he is soon appalled at what he has done.

When a harpy swoops down on her prey and tries to mould him, it's enough to make the most toothsome French meal turn to ashes in his mouth. Hardened men of the world draw in their breaths sharply and look at him with mute pity. What Florence Craye did to Bertie was to make him give up reading corking good mysteries in favour of a book shamelessly called *Types of Ethical Theory*, and with the assurance that there was worse to come, since she was an authoress herself. It's one thing for Bertie's man Jeeves, who has nourished his brain on fish, to curl up with a book by a cove like Spinoza; it's quite an-



Gentleman appalled at a harpy who takes him as her personal project. Illustration by Paul Galdone, from P. G. Wodehouse, *Joy in the Morning* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1946).



No more corking good mysteries for him! Illustration by Paul Galdone, from P. G. Wodehouse, *Joy in the Morning*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1946).

other to expect a gentleman and a drone like Bertie to look to the exactness of his ethics. The dreariness of *Types of Ethical Theory* is unmistakable from the bit of it that Bertie gives us in his memoirs. Written with English words and German syntax, the paragraph he quotes from it is the only one I have found in Wodehouse that isn't well written.<sup>23</sup> Florence Craye knows what she means, and she means well, but she is as earnest and humourless as a parson's daughter. Her rule is that there is to be no oompus-boompus of any kind, and marriage to her would be one long fight unless you gave up and let yourself be ruled like a tame animal. One grown-up version of Florence Craye is Clarissa Cork, also an authoress, who runs a health colony inspired by the regimen of the Ugubu tribe, inflicting her peevish vegetarianism and bi-weekly lectures on a small flock of doomed inmates.<sup>24</sup> Another is Bertie's Aunt Agatha, who chews broken glass by the light of the moon, and whose displeasure with her nephew is a fixed star in his constellation.<sup>25</sup> These harpies can be counted on to complain whenever you don't fall smartly into line. Though the hard, bright self-sufficiency that Wodehouse observed in the modern girl hadn't yet got so far as it has in our day, when our parson's daughters take careers as their projects instead of men, still it is not hard to

see why men unexpectedly spared from a life sentence with such a woman looked on the world as a finer, happier place and thought they saw the finger of Providence working in human affairs. As to the poor devils whose sentences were not remitted, their best chance, according to Wodehouse, was to act as if they had gone potty and hope that their harpies would give them up as lost.

P. G. Wodehouse gives examples aplenty of the curious blindness that comes over a man when he falls in love, the symptoms of which all recognise in anyone else: how he admits to his friends that his neglect of everything he once cared for comes from his devotion to *her*; how we remind him that he has fallen in love twenty-seven times before; how he tries to convince us that he has put aside childish infatuations forever now, because this twenty-eighth is one in a million, the perfect number, the real McCoy—a love deeper and stronger and purer than anything that has come over him before. We know, too, how he will laugh at himself in the end when the scales fall from his eyes, and how he will come to agree with Shakespeare's Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing* that

... wooing, wedding, and repenting, is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinquepace: the first suit is hot and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical!; the wedding, mannerly-modest, as a measure full of state and ancientry; and then comes repentance, and with his bad legs, falls into the cinquepace faster and faster, till he sinks into his grave.<sup>26</sup>

With all the disappointments that women hold in store for them, it's not surprising that some men who have crawled back from the edge of the precipice should take matters into their own hands and swear off any dalliance with the fair sex. There are those who drift helplessly in their vice, but there are also those who take steps, and Wodehouse holds up a group of the latter for our consideration:

We call ourselves Bachelors Anonymous. It was Alcoholics Anonymous that gave the founding fathers the idea. Our methods are frankly borrowed from theirs. When one of us feels the urge to take a woman out to dinner becoming too strong for him, he seeks out the other members of the circle and tells them of his craving, and they reason with him. He pleads that just one dinner cannot do him any harm, but they know what that one dinner can lead to. They point out the inevitable results of that first downward step. Once yield to temptation, they say, and dinner will be followed by further dinners, lunches for two and tête-à-têtes in dimly lit boudoirs, until in morning coat and sponge-bag trousers he stands cowering beside his bride at the altar rails, racked with regret and remorse when it is too late. And gradually reason returns to its throne. Calm succeeds turmoil, and the madness passes.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, Wodehouse is poking fun at these anonymous



He had the presence of mind to offer her another man's umbrella. Front dust jacket illustration by May Wilson Preston for P. G. Wodehouse, *Leave It to Psmith* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923).

bachelors, because they get married too in the end. These men, like Beatrice's Benedick, are a notable argument that not even the most hardened bachelor is proof against the attractions of a woman—not even the soberest man in England is willing to live by unassisted human reason alone. Nor is having a career sufficient for happiness, as even the most single-minded career man or woman might learn from reading the experience of Wodehouse's early hero Psmith in the City.<sup>28</sup> Every man must take his chances with the ladies after all, and hope for the best.

Fortunately for Wodehouse's men, the fair sex has more to offer than these moulding women who give you the pip. A man who has been reduced to the level of a watercress garnish by some harpy will scarce credit it, but there is another, finer kind of girl, who has never thought it a misfortune not to have been born a man and is perfectly happy to call herself a girl. For her the difference of the sexes doesn't arise from the malignity of nature but is nature's way of providing for our constant entertainment and delight; and when she walks through the door, speaking in a voice that sounds like sheep bells at sunset, a man feels as though a powerful electric current has passed

through him. Men who are never at a loss for words find their thoughts suddenly wrenched from their customary course and reduced to stunned interjections, as Ashe Marson's were at his first conversation with Joan Valentine: "A wonderful girl ... An astounding girl ... An amazing girl ..."<sup>29</sup> When Psmith spied Eve Halliday across the street standing under an awning waiting for the rain to let up, he gazed at her fixedly for a full five minutes before he had the presence of mind to offer her another man's umbrella.<sup>30</sup> For Jeff Miller, at the first sight of Anne Benedick,

There was something about this visitor that seemed to touch some hidden chord in his being, sending joy bells ringing and torchlight processions parading through the echoing corridors of his soul. Romeo, he fancied, must have experienced a somewhat similar, though weaker, emotion on first beholding Juliet.<sup>31</sup>

The sight of a girl like this makes confirmed bachelors start proposing ten minutes later. She isn't tall and imperious like a harpy—she's a mere slip of a girl; and since she only comes up to your shoulder, Wodehouse calls her a half-portion. But although she's apt to be fondly thought of by her uncles as a shrimp or a little squirt, she has enough spunk and spark and sizzle for two. Anne Benedick wants men to like her, or if possible to love her.<sup>32</sup> For a half-portion like her understands what Plato had Aristophanes say to his fellow tipplers,<sup>33</sup> even if she hasn't read the dialogue: she yearns to be part of a whole, and she finds her wholeness not in managing a man like a third-rate power but in loving him.

When Jeff Miller makes the acquaintance of a half-portion, he knows right away that this is a good thing and ought to be pushed along. He falls in love with Anne Benedick when he hears her silvery laugh, which conjures up

visions of a cosy home on a winter's night, with one's slippers on one's feet, the dog on one's lap, an open fire in the grate and the good old pipe drawing nicely.<sup>34</sup>

The half-portion does offer the prospect of this happy domesticity, but she is far from being the dull homebody despised by our feminists. Joan Valentine, who has worked at all kinds of jobs, may not agree with them that a woman's liberation comes from having a career rather than a husband, but she certainly has enterprise. She inspires the same enterprise in Ashe Marson, who throws over a dull job writing thrillers about a detective who recovers stolen goods to accept the challenge of recovering some stolen goods himself.<sup>35</sup> The sight of Anne Benedick gives Jeff Miller the courage to impersonate a detective, and he joins the Ugubu colony on false pretenses in order to gain the home court advantage with her.<sup>36</sup> The half-portion is no

shrinking violet—she’s a little petunia with mettle and pluck. She calls up the same resources in men, and she expects a man to be manly.

But even a half-portion can fall in love with a man who has all the mettle of the more cowardly sort of rabbit if he happens to be tall, slender, and very good-looking, and this is Anne’s situation when she first meets Jeff. She has got herself engaged to Lionel Green, a selfish and conceited interior decorator who used to be called “Stinker” in school. Here is how her uncle, Lord Uffenham, diagnoses her mistake:

You wouldn’t give that poop Lionel Green a second thought, if he hadn’t the sort of tailor’s-dummy good looks that women seem to be incapable of seeing through, poor misguided creatures. Give me two lumps of coal and a bit of putty, and I’ll make you a better man than Lionel Green, any time.<sup>37</sup>

A certain coolness ensues between Anne and her uncle and extends to her conversations with Jeff, who yields to no man in his contempt for her Stinker. It doesn’t help matters when she discovers that Jeff is the barrister who has just humiliated Lionel in court. But Wodehouse provokes a crisis to open her eyes and remind her how important courage is. Lionel Green, who cares more for money than he cares for Anne, and who has kept his engagement secret from his Aunt Clarissa in hopes that she will underwrite his interior decorating shop, finally shows himself for what he is by his rigid pursuit of this policy of “Safety First.”<sup>38</sup> Anne discovers that he has failed to denounce Jeff to his vegetarian aunt as an impostor because Jeff has agreed to provide him with contraband pork pies. As one who admires courage in the male, she suddenly sees the sense of her uncle’s claims that Lionel is a slimy, slithery, moustache-twiddling young slab of damnation, a pestilential poop of a pop-eyed plasterer, and worse. Never mind the two lumps of coal—you could make Lionel Green out of nothing but putty.<sup>39</sup> The man stands exposed as a coward. As Euripides would say, the slavish fellow sees everything from the point of view of the stomach.<sup>40</sup> To clinch the thing, Wodehouse tells us that this Stinker thought of Anne as a promising pupil who required moulding, presumably to dampen her high spirits and make her into a pliant procurer of pork pies.

This discovery helps Anne to see that she and Jeff are twin souls, and it can also help us to see the advantages of manliness in a man. The trouble with a man of feminine courage is not just that he will be a weak reed in an emergency, though of course he will be; the trouble is that he will also be incapable of loving a woman because his defect of manliness arises from selfish absorption in the needs of his own body. This question is raised in a discussion between Jeff and Lord Uffenham on the proper way to



She isn't all soul. Front cover cartoon for the musical comedy *Sitting Pretty*, by Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern (New York, T. B. Harms Company, 1924).

woo a woman. Jeff prefers the troubadour, who melts feminine resistance with honeyed words, to the stevedore, who adopts the smash-and-grab approach. Anne’s uncle comes down squarely on the other side:

Grab her! Seize her! Fold her in a close embrace. A really close embrace. One that’ll make her ribs creak. Kiss her too, of course. Kiss her repeatedly. At the same time saying, “You are my mate, dash it,” or something to that effect.<sup>41</sup>

A girl appreciates the forbearance of the troubadour, because it shows respect for her soul. But she isn’t all soul, and when a man shows too much moderation, she has to suspect that his diffidence comes from lack of warmth. Anne, as her uncle knows, is a “healthy, normal girl, with a normal liking for romance,”<sup>42</sup> a body that has to be protected, and an intuitive appreciation for Aristotle’s argument that manliness belongs to men and moderation to women.<sup>43</sup> The money in the bank that matters most to a woman is the love of a man who has the excellence of a man. When Jeff finally takes her uncle’s advice, folds the young lollypop in a close embrace, and showers her face with burning kisses, he gives Anne the right reason to let him love her, and he gets the girl.

Are some women today more open to truths when they



are stated by women than by men? I should not like to think so, because you have to belong to one sex or the other, and you don't get a choice. It would seem to be of the essence of sexism to think less of what a human being says just because he happened to be born a man. But if there are such women, I mention for their benefit that P. G. Wodehouse simply gives us, in comic opera form and for the twentieth century, the same truths that Jane Austen put for the nineteenth. The twentieth century knows much that is foreign to Wodehouse, and it is none of it decent. Do we really miss the vapid sentimentalism of the romantics which infects so much English writing after Rousseau? Would his books be better if his humour were of the scatological or excrementitious variety preferred by the Germans, and carried to the plane of theory in the writings of Freud? Are we worse off for being spared in his pages the humour of unmanly self-loathing exemplified in the sour feminism of Alan Alda and Woody Allen? Wodehouse's restraint is reminiscent of Austen, and the result for both writers is a pleasing detachment from the mortal weight of human pretensions.

Wodehouse gives us a world of the sexes that is more inviting than our fashionable world of asexual individuals. Any woman who can should try to be a half-portion, he says, and any man who can should try to find himself one. Here is how he introduces the one that Jeff Miller met:

Nature, in assembling Anne Benedick, had done a nice bit of work. She was a slim girl of twenty-three, one of those alert, boyish-looking girls of whom one feels what jolly children they must have been. She had a demure mouth, with a whimsical twist to it, and eyes that looked as if they saw the humour of things.<sup>44</sup>

Have we eyes that see the humour of things? Evelyn Waugh predicted that Wodehouse would "continue to release future generations from captivity that may be more irksome than our own".<sup>45</sup> Our laughter is a sign of understanding: we are not just sunnier and funnier after reading this plum but also better. It would be more than irksome if our captivity left us no longer free to laugh with P. G. Wodehouse.

## NOTES

- 1 P. G. Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 70.
- 2 Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., in a lecture on Marx from his course on the history of modern political philosophy at Harvard University.
- 3 Wodehouse, *Young Men in Spats* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 161-80.
- 4 Wodehouse, *Quick Service* (Harmondsworth: Penguin

- Books, 1954), 70.
- 5 Wodehouse, in a 23 January 1935 letter to his fellow author and Dulwich College school chum William Townend, published in *Wodehouse on Wodehouse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), 313.
- 6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, part 4, section 147; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, part I, "On Little Old and Young Women".
- 7 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 24-5; cf. 80-8.
- 8 Wodehouse, *Money in the Bank* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), 146.
- 9 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act I, scene i.
- 10 *The Code of the Woosters*, 85.
- 11 Wodehouse, *Very Good, Jeeves* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), 59-70; cf. *The Code of the Woosters*, 72, and Wodehouse, *Jeeves in the Offing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), 11.
- 12 *Young Men in Spats*, 27-47.
- 13 Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), 130-2, 156-83, 214.
- 14 Wodehouse, *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), 127.
- 15 Wodehouse, *The Luck of the Bodkins* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), 9-12.
- 16 *The Code of the Woosters*, 29-30.
- 17 Wodehouse, *Galahad at Blandings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), 156.
- 18 Wodehouse, *Something Fresh* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), 185.
- 19 *Money in the Bank*, 93-4, 102-3, 114.
- 20 *The Code of the Woosters*, 39; cf. Wodehouse, *Bachelors Anonymous* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 80.
- 21 Wodehouse, *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (Sevenoaks: Coronet Books, 1977), 24; cf. Wodehouse, *Joy in the Morning* (Sevenoaks: Coronet Books, 1977), 25.
- 22 *Joy in the Morning*, 22-3, 25-7, 131.
- 23 *Joy in the Morning*, 13-17; cf. Wodehouse, *Carry On, Jeeves* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), 9-10, 31.
- 24 *Money in the Bank*, 65, 152, 214.
- 25 *Joy in the Morning*, 10-11.
- 26 Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, act II, scene i.
- 27 *Bachelors Anonymous*, 7.
- 28 Wodehouse, *Psmith in the City* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970).
- 29 *Something Fresh*, 22.
- 30 Wodehouse, *Leave It to Psmith* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 40-2.
- 31 *Money in the Bank*, 40.



- 32 *Money in the Bank*, 61.
- 33 Plato, *Symposium*, 189c2-191c1.
- 34 *Money in the Bank*, 47.
- 35 *Something Fresh*, 20-2.
- 36 *Money in the Bank*, 39-40, 51.
- 37 *Money in the Bank*, 58.
- 38 *Money in the Bank*, 101.
- 39 *Money in the Bank*, 55-6, 61, 107, 139, 174-83.
- 40 Euripides, frag. 49 (Nauck, 2nd edn); cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I. vi. 8.
- 41 *Money in the Bank*, 82; cf. *Bachelors Anonymous*, 114, and Wodehouse, *Cocktail Time* (London: Star Books, 1978), 79.
- 42 *Money in the Bank*, 84.
- 43 Aristotle, *Politics*, book III, 1277b17-25; cf. book I, 1259b18-1260b24.
- 44 *Money in the Bank*, 25.
- 45 In a BBC broadcast, quoted on the back covers of *Bachelors Anonymous* and many other Wodehouse books published by Penguin.

### CREDITS

The author is grateful to Helen Graham, who first landed him in hot water by lending him a book by P. G. Wodehouse; to his wife Judith, who applied her exceptional resources to making this essay ready to go to press; and to Mr A. C. L. Hall, MA, ALA, Librarian and Archivist at the P. G. Wodehouse Library, Dulwich College, for help in arranging the illustrations.

[Note: The present Librarian and Archivist at Dulwich College is Mr. Jan Piggott PhD —OM]

"The moment my fingers clutch [a pen," said Leila Yorke,] "a great change comes over me. I descend to depths of goo which you with your pure mind wouldn't believe possible. I write about stalwart men, strong but oh so gentle, and girls with wide grey eyes and hair the colour of ripe wheat, who are always having misunderstandings and going to Africa. The men, that is. The girls stay at home and marry the wrong bimbos. But there's a happy ending. The bimbos break their necks in the hunting field and the men come back in the last chapter and they and the girls get together in the twilight, and all around is the scent of English flowers and birds singing their evensong in the shrubbery. Makes me shudder to think of it."

*The Ice in the Bedroom*, 1961

## WHO'S WHO IN WODEHOUSE

Dan Garrison, our esteemed president, informs us that his *Who's Who in Wodehouse*—a tome that deserves a place on the bookshelves of Wodehousians everywhere—is once more in print and may be ordered from amazon.com, barnes&noble.com, or any self-respecting bookstore. (This is a reprint of the green edition of 1989, in which "Second Revised Edition" appears on the title page.)

If you do not have this essential resource in your collection, waste no time in ordering it now! It is, as the preface states, "a comprehensive guide to his characters," an alphabetical list of "characters who actually enter Wodehouse's stage and speak lines. A few others have found their way in: butlers, manservants, parlormaid, and other persons in domestic service are generally exempted from the requirement that they appear onstage and speak lines, as are a few other characters with interesting names or exploits. Besides these there are two moustaches, a bath sponge, a pig, assorted dogs and cats, and a beverage, chiefly because their omission seemed to do less than full justice to the joyful irrationality of Wodehouse's human world."

Following each character's name is a description of that person in Wodehouse's own words, and references to all the stories in which that character appeared.

This is an extremely useful book. It will reduce stress, frustration, and insomnia for the Wodehouse fan better than any other reference book we know. If you wake up at 3 o'clock some morning and lie there until daybreak wondering who Messmore Breamworthy was, don't blame us. Here and now, we tell you to buy this book. It will identify Messmore in a moment and let you get back to sleep by 3:05. It will be just as effective if you're wrestling with the name Stultitia Bodwin and any one of about 2,000 others.

Dan notes that "By any reasonable reckoning, there are over 2100 characters in Wodehouse, half again as many as in Dickens and more than double the number in Shakespeare. More than 300 of these ...reappear in at least one other Wodehouse title..."

The preparation of every issue of *Plum Lines* would be more onerous and time-consuming without this book. Murmurs of praise and thanks to Dan flow unbidden from our lips at all sorts of odd moments, causing raised eyebrows and questioning glances among our companions. They just don't know.

Get a copy.

—OM and AD

# 1999 GONE TO TEXAS TWS CONVENTION

## **THURSDAY**

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For early arrivals the hotel has many fine amenities. The Warwick is located in Houston's Museum district within walking distance of Hermann Park, The Rose Garden & Hermann Park Zoo, Rice University, The Texas Medical Center, Montrose Boulevard where many excellent restaurants are located, University Villiage (shopping and dining), and, of course, museums. Museums: Fine Arts, Modern Art, Museum of Medical History, Children's Museum, Holocaust Museum, Natural History Museum.

## **FRIDAY** beginning at 10:00 – Advance SIGNUP is encouraged

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Cricket: A la Wodehouse in the Rose Garden of Hermann park – all TWSrs may play or observe  
Catered food and beverages. Cash for beer and wine coolers.

Golf: The Sandy McHoots Golf Tournament at Hermann park golf links.  
Prizes include a golf umbrella. Note: you need to schedule in advance.

Special: Friday field-trip to NASA (really good for kids)  
Field trip - Civil War and Texas history buffs - The San Jacinto battleground, Bayou Bend, etc.

Games: From 10:00 'til 4:00 at the hotel. Gawlf, egg & spoon races, pot the top hat with a "hazel-nut"  
foozle ball, dance contest.

Booksellers & Chapters tables – individuals may bring books to sell. Continuous Wodehouse videos

Party: Cocktail party includes Good Gnus Challenge & Parrot music. Costumes are encouraged.  
**SKIT: Chicago Accident Syndicate** (35 minutes)

Play: Main Street Theater will stage a production of a Wodehouse play 8:30 p.m., Oct. 22, 1999.

## **SATURDAY TALKS (begin @9:30)**

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Tony Ring	Limp Lavender Leather
Elin Woodger	Lady Constance's Lover: Sex and Romance a la Wodehouse
Dan Cohen	Wodehouse at the bar, a lecture-demonstration of drinking in Wodehouse stories
Norman Murphy	Wodehouse Among the Animals

Break

Business Meeting

Mike Skupin Wodehouse Theater from his books

Darlene McNaughton Medicinal Marvels in Wodehouse

## **NEWTS SKIT** (35-40 minutes)

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## **SATURDAY EVENING:**

Party: 6:00 P.M. **Blandings Castle West skit** (35 minutes),  
Music & dance, costumes are encouraged.

Music: A sing-along using Wodehouse Parrot poems  
**Good Gnus Challenge** - Drone Rangers vs NEWTS vs the Swedes. All challenges  
accepted.

Banquet: From the top floor of the Warwick Park Plaza with its famous view

## **SUNDAY BRUNCH: 9:00**

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## A FEW QUICK ONES

Good news comes to us from England, where Penguin is about to launch twelve Jeeves and Wooster titles with brand new cover illustrations. Our understanding is that the artist used the cover art for the original American edition of *The Ice in the Bedroom* as his inspiration. From what we have seen, he has done a pippen of a job, as the covers are most colorful and cheery. Penguin is launching this series to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the first appearance of Bertie and Jeeves in print. The U.K. Wodehouse Society will be helping to promote the book, and Penguin is including a page at the back of each book providing information on how to join the U.K. Society. Hopes are that we can come to a similar arrangement when the books are published in the U.S.

Neil Midkiff recently reported that the November 26, 1998, episode of the TV series *Jeopardy!* had a question of interest to us Plummies. The category was "Men of Letters"—that is, authors who were known by their initials rather than their given names. The answers were:

- \$100: Herbert George...
- \$200: Pelham Grenville...
- \$300: Alan Alexander...
- \$400: Clive Staples...
- \$500: Howard Phillips...

Neil informs us that only the last answer went unquestioned. For all five names (and shame on you if you don't know the second one!), see the end of this column.

Jeeves of Belgravia, a caterer, has been around for some time. New to us is Bertie Wooster, a London clothing store for gentlemen and, I suppose in these degenerate latter days, what Jane Austen called near gentlemen. This bulletin has been brought to you by courtesy of *Wooster Sauce* of the UK society.

Jan Kaufman notes that *By Jeeves*, the Alan Ayckbourn/Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, very nearly made it to Broadway this April, but missed by a hair because of a scheduling problem. But the show must go on. Broadway, that is. Sometime or other.

In the meantime, it looks good for a cast recording of *Betting on Bertie*. Stay tuned for further details on both shows!

Pauline Graeber has a sizeable collection of PGW books that she would like to sell. The list of books she sent us is very long and extensive. Pauline writes: "As you may imag-

ine, I would like to sell this as a collection. I also have magazines, tapes and sheet music...I am open to offers."

In his March 7 column, "Readings" in *The Washington Post*, Michael Dirda mused: "...my heart goes out to scraps and remnants, to work done on the fly, to thoughts scribbled quickly in pocket notebooks. Truths, I suspect, come unbidden at odd moments. We tend to learn more from the sudden epiphany than from an elaborate summa." To this end, he offered a list of his top ten favorite books exemplifying the finest of this kind of fragmentary writing. Number 10 on the list, following such heavy hitters as Nietzsche and Proust, was *Wodehouse Nuggets*, compiled by Richard Usborne. Mike included the following nuggets—good choices all (of course): "Like so many substantial citizens of America, he had married young and kept on marrying, springing from blonde to blonde like the chamois of the Alps leaping from crag to crag." "He drank coffee with the air of a man who regretted it was not hemlock." "I attribute my whole success in life to a rigid observance of the fundamental rule—Never have yourself tattooed with any woman's name, not even her initials."

Bob Nissenbaum brought a passage in *The Duchess of Jermyn Street* by Daphne Fielding to our attention: "About this time, Rosa let one of her Duke Street flats to Lord Kimberly, who was Winston Churchill's private secretary. In the twenties, before he succeeded to the title, handsome Jack Wodehouse was renowned as a first-class polo player, and his family and friends used to refer to him as 'The Father of the Polo and the Bath', since he was also Chairman of the Bath Club. Here he could always be found playing bridge serenely in a gallery above the swimming pool, impervious to the splashes and shouts of the bodies disporting themselves in the water below. P. G. Wodehouse was his cousin and the character of Bertie Wooster was very probably based on him." Was this in fact the case? Does anybody have evidence to support (or refute) this statement?

*Jeopardy!* questions: Wells, Wodehouse, Milne, Lewis, Lovecraft. And yes, the contestant did pronounce Wodehouse correctly! (The first syllable rhymes with "wood," not "load.")

OM and QD

The Oldest Member and Aunt Dahlia

# REMSENBURG OR BUST!

By John Koenig, Jr.

John described his visit to the Wodehouse residence in Le Touquet, France, in our Summer-and-Autumn issue last year. Follow him now as he plunges into the heart of darkest Long Island. The above headline is mine, not John's. —OM

I suppose numerous Wodehousians visited the home of The Master when he lived at Remsenburg, Long Island, full time from 1955 until his death in 1975. Maybe they made their way east from New York City by train or auto before the highways became so clogged.

But to me, a Wodehousian from my boyhood days in Philadelphia in the 1930s on, the exact location of Plum's Long Island retreat remained a mystery through many years.

The very name, Remsenburg, appeared to be something taken from a mystery novel by S. S. Van Dine, featuring the great detective Philo Vance (played variously by William Powell, Basil Rathbone and Warren William in old movies). I wondered indeed whether it would take the astuteness of a Philo Vance to find the place. Not to mention the deductive powers of the inimitable Jeeves.

On my first serious attempt to find the Wodehouse house, a year ago, I could locate no Remsenburg at all on my road map of New York and Long Island. Halting in a town somewhere out on the island I found a small Suffolk County police station and asked how to get to Remsenburg.

"Remsenburg? Remsenburg?" replied a uniformed county cop. Gesticulating in the manner of the one-time TV comic star Sid Caesar, he snorted: "There is no Remsenburg, Long Island. Maybe you mean Rhode Island."

I assured him that Remsenburg, wherever it was, was certainly on Long Island. At this point a second county cop appeared and, less ruffled, went out to his police car, dug out a large detailed map and located Remsenburg on the south shore some miles to the east. He even provided me with a Xerox copy of that portion of the map showing the Remsenburg area. Thus supplied with this important intelligence I drove off and did indeed locate Remsenburg, next door to Speonk, another name worthy of note, and Westhampton Beach, some 75 miles from New York City.

It was a Sunday morning when I pursued my quest of the Wodehouse house. The streets of Remsenburg were deserted. I could find no shops or business establishments. I did not have the exact address of Plum's old home but thought I had read enough about its surroundings to be able to identify it—on a waterfront and in a wooded area

where Wodehouse was wont to take daily walks with his old buddy Guy Bolton.

On the empty streets there was no one to ask about the possible location. Finally, I spotted a woman jogger. I pulled over to the curb and explained to her how in two days I had been able to find no one who knew of Wodehouse and his home, and now, on Sunday morning, everyone was gone.

"Of course, I know of P. G. Wodehouse," she said. And mentioned the name of a friend who years before had known the great humorist's home. "Try Cedar Lane," she said. "I think that is where my friend used to see him."

I tried Cedar Lane, not far away. Hah! Great trees along the road, which may have been where The Master took his walks. And water nearby—perhaps an arm of Moriches Bay (on the map). But as for a house identifiable as the Wodehouse domicile, nothing doing. It all seemed to be a place where Uncle Fred would flit by.

I came across a group of six or so fairly new sizable homes. Could they have been built on P. G.'s old land holding, I wondered? I knocked on the front door of each of the six or so houses. No one appeared. No sign of life. I concluded that perhaps these were summer houses, and since this was autumn no one was there. I gave up.

That is, for the time being. Since I had seen the pre-World War II home of Wodehouse at Le Touquet, France, some time before, I had to see his more permanent abode at Remsenburg, Long Island (not Rhode Island)!

Armed with more exact information on the location of the house, I set out from home in Athens, Georgia, for New Haven, Connecticut, to attend an event at Yale and took additional time to drive out on Long Island, braving the traffic in Queens and other localities to once again reach Remsenburg.

With the foresight of a Jeeves planning a campaign for his young master I set out as a *prieux chevalier* to conquer Long Island and Remsenburg for good. It was the work of a moment to check in first with Reynolds Realty, Inc., in Westhampton Beach, at an address I picked up from our esteemed Wodehouse Society publication *Plum Lines*. Reynolds was, at least at the time of this writing, seeking a buyer for the Wodehouse house in neighboring Remsenburg.

Here I was provided with a small map indicating the exact location and instructions on how to get there. I set out, as Bertie Wooster would have done in his old two-

seater with Jeeves at his side, for the three or four mile drive to the house on Basket Neck Lane, a name that could have been devised by Wodehouse.

Turning from Remsenburg's main street into Basket Neck Lane, I looked to tall trees on each side of the road—again an area in which Wodehouse would be wont to walk. At the corner of Basket Neck Lane and Fish Kill Lane stood a shingled house with a Reynolds Realty sign out front. This had to be the place!

The scales fell from my eyes, and as the inimitable Plum would have put it, I felt, gazing upon the house, as the poet Wordsworth used to do when he beheld a rainbow in the sky. But again, as on my previous quest, no one in sight—neither at the house nor at neighboring properties. Summer places, I concluded, and this was October.

The location was solitude personified. If that was the way Wodehouse wanted it, he certainly got it here. Apart from the summer season, that is.

There were high hedges in front of the house, and a drive-in lane led to a two-car garage. Peering through windows I could discern some furniture, although the house was unoccupied. A piano was in the living room, and the kitchen and dining room could be identified. I was surprised to see a small swimming pool and patio on one side of the house, away from the road.

Contrary to what I had read, the house was not on the

waterfront at Moriches Bay, which is separated from the Atlantic Ocean by the miles-long sandbar-island strip of Westhampton Beach, lined with summer houses.

The asking price for the former Wodehouse house is \$750,000, but a new owner would have to extend more funds for needed repairs—painting, some shingle roof repairs, and cracked paving at the entrance to the garage. If a new owner turns up with an income like Plum's this would be no problem.

The Master bought the house in 1952 as a summer place, when he and wife Ethel and pets were living in an apartment on Park Avenue in Manhattan. They moved in year-round in 1955. The property is said to have included 12 acres but the real estate agent holds that it is now barely one acre. What happened with the other acreage remains a mystery difficult to fathom, for Wodehouse died 23 years ago.

His writing room in the form of his desk, his typewriter, and mementos exist in perpetuity, having been donated by wife Ethel to Plum's old school, Dulwich College, on the southern rim of London. Authorities there are delighted to show the room—behind glass—to visiting Wodehousians.



The Wodehouse home in Remsenburg: a view toward the front of the house and the front entrance. Photo by John Koenig, Jr. The house has been altered since Plum's day.

In her biography of Wodehouse published in 1982, seven years after his death, Frances Donaldson says, at the beginning of Chapter 17, "The Wodehouse estate at Remsenburg, on Long Island, consists of twelve acres, of which seven are wooded, and runs down to the sea." Thinking rapidly, she notes on the next page in a footnote that "Originally there were four acres, but Plum bought more land. Jasen [an earlier biographer] says it runs down to the sea, but I think it is a salt-water creek."

I have read, in a source I cannot remember, that most of the twelve acre property was sold off for housing sites after Plum's death. —OM



# ANYTHING GOES



W.C. Burdette



UM School of Music  
Musical Theatre Dept.

OCT. 15 - 18, 1998 MENDELSSOHN THEATRE

# Anything Goes

Donna Loyd attended a revival of the 1934 musical *Anything Goes* last October, presented by the Musical Theatre Department of the University of Michigan, and reports that it was received with "lots of audience appreciation... whistles and hollers, enthusiastic applause. The actors must have been enjoying our response—so we encouraged each other! It sure was a lot of fun! I can only imagine what Ethel Merman must have done with the role of Reno."

Donna also sent along the theater program, whose spectacular cover you see on the opposite page, and the following story of the origin of this musical. The story was printed in *Backstage at the School of Music* 98/99.

It was September 8, 1934, and the luxury liner *Morro Castle* lay adrift about six miles off the New Jersey shore. The ship was returning from a vacation cruise to sunny Cuba when a blaze broke out. With 40 mile per hour winds, the flames quickly became a huge conflagration. Every attempt to put the blaze out was hampered by an ever-widening spiral of disasters. One hundred and thirty seven people—twenty-five percent of passengers aboard the *Morro Castle*—were either dead or dying. It was clear to one and all that the luxury liner business in America was in big trouble.

Fifty miles further up the coast on the island of Manhattan, Vinton Freedly was also looking disaster straight in the face. The producer had just received the libretto for a screwball comedy which he believed could put his name back on the marquee. Problematically, Mr. Freedly's musical was set aboard a luxury cruise ship, and the action centered on the ship being wrecked at sea. Despairing that he'd ever find an audience with a plot like that, Freedly knew that a rewrite had to be done, and quickly. With tryouts in Boston scheduled in less than a month, he'd have to find someone to doctor the script right away. He was chin deep in debt and needed a hit.

Vinton Freedly had a reputation for being one of the best producers in the business. With his partner Alex Aarons, he had produced a long string of Ger-shwin triumphs during the late 1920s

and early 30s. In 1927 the two men opened a theatre on 52nd Street christened The Alvin. Business was excellent until the crash of 1929, and the partnership broke up. Vinton Freedly had to flee the country; he feared that creditors might take a contract out on his life. While in exile he had an epiphany.

Why not, he thought, build a show around talent and talent alone? Any story would do if you had the right people working on it. Freedly knew all the big names in the business. He could get P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton to write the book and Cole Porter to write the score. For actors, he'd hire the people he knew best, like the comedy team of Gaxton and Moore. For added spice, Freedly got a Broadway up-and-comer, the brassy, big-voiced diva Ethel Merman. With those folks, Freedly figured he could set his course to financial freedom.

The original script, with its sea-born disaster, was completed in mid-August, 1934. Writers Bolton and Wodehouse were out of the country when the *Morro Castle* disaster struck a few weeks later. So Freedly turned to the show's director, Howard Lindsay. Lindsay agreed to rework the script, but only with the assistance of Russel Crouse who was the head public relations man for the Theatre Guild. From that point on, the team of Cole Porter, Howard Lindsay, and Russel Crouse worked night and day altering the play. At first it was called *Hard to Get*, then it became *Bon Voyage*. Cole Porter said that the final title came out of an incident at one of the late rehearsals. William Gaxton came through the stage door one night and asked "the doorkeeper, 'What are we going to call this musical mishmash?' The doorkeeper shrugged and said, 'Well, you know, Mr. Gaxton, anything goes.'"

The show opened in Boston on November 5, 1934, with a new script, a big-time cast, and a string of show-stopping tunes such as "I Get a Kick Out of You," "All Through the Night," "You're the Top," and "Blow, Gabriel, Blow." Its Boston outing was successful and three weeks later *Anything Goes* opened at The Alvin where it ran for 420 consecutive performances and Vinton Freedly's ensign was once again flying smartly over Broadway.



A number of us have very happy memories of the evening during our 1989 Wodehouse Pilgrimage when the trustees of the Wodehouse estate treated us to an excellent performance of *Anything Goes* at a West End theater in London. —OM



William Gaxton and Ethel Merman, stars of the original 1934 show.



## JEEVES INCARNATE (SORT OF)

Should we call him Jeeves the Ubiquitous? He seems to be everywhere these days. As we told you in the last issue, he has been on the Internet for a few years, giving his name to an entity undreamed of when Plum was alive. Now Bob Molumby sheds more light on the operation.



The Jeeves search engine, provided by Ask Jeeves, Inc., tries to answer your questions in a more human-oriented way than that provided by previous engines. That's a commendable goal, but I think the name was ill chosen. The original Jeeves excelled at solving problems and would surely have disdained the much less demanding job of answering

questions like a walking encyclopedia.

By the way, that smug and far too self-satisfied figure above is the company's idea of his appearance. Sartorially most unacceptable, too. Who but a silver ring bookie would wear a suit with stripes that wide?

Pam Moriarty (no relation to the professor) tells us that there is also an Ask Jeeves site for children (<http://www.ajkids.com>). Both sites, she says, provide links to a reference base supplied by Information Please, makers of informational almanacs for over 50 years. We understand that both Ask Jeeves and Jeeves for Kids are being recommended by an increasing number of libraries as resources for adults and children searching for reference material over the Internet. And Jeeves has a cousin named Dudley (<http://www.support.dell.com/askdudley>), a site that specializes in answers to personal computer problems (i.e., "How do I delete and reinstall Windows 95?").

Meanwhile, in Aberdeen, Scotland, Jeeves transports information by the mundane public highways (see the photo to the right). Alekh Burke's friend Michela Cimatoribus didn't just happen upon this vehicle when she happened to be in Aberdeen. She went to Aberdeen at some trouble and expense expressly to get this picture for us, and we are indebted to her for further proof that Jeeves has become an icon of service. —OM

## OUR FAVORITE STORY FLITS BY

In our last issue of *Plum Lines* Susan Cohen reported the results of our TWS votes for our favorite Wodehouse stories. Our votes will be combined with those from other Wodehouse societies to guide Hutchinson, Wodehouse's publisher in London, in preparing its new Wodehouse collection, to be published in February of next year. Our favorite short story, you may remember, was "Uncle Fred Flits By."

Now Tony Ring confirms our collective wisdom by reporting that members of the Belgian and UK societies also picked that story as their favorite. Tony's report was published in *Wooster Sauce*, the journal of the UK society.

"A formidable document," writes Tony, "detailing the findings of societies in the UK, US, Belgium, Holland, Sweden, and India was presented to the publishers, Hutchinson,...and...Tony Whittome, their Editorial Director, expressed his delight at the initiative..." Whittome noted that Hutchinson expected to include "a number of extracts from novels...And I think there will be one or two pleasant surprises, including unpublished material."

All of us, even that man in the back row with the boa constrictor around his neck and the startled look on his face, can hardly wait. —OM



# WODEHOUSE AND CHICAGO JAZZ

By Katherine Lewis

In addition to being a devoted Wodehouse fan, Kathy is an enthusiastic and very well informed student of jazz who arranged for a good portion of the post-banquet music we danced to at the Chicago convention in 1997. For the following article, she provided a list of suggested jazz recordings and jazz books. I'll be happy to send her list to anybody who asks for it. -OM

No other writer seems to capture the joy and spirit of the Jazz Age as does P.G. Wodehouse. Behind all of his writings flows the sweet and hot jazz music of the times. As Benny Green says in his *P.G. Wodehouse, A Literary Biography*, the music is there, throughout all of the Wodehouse works. Since Bertie and his Drones Club friends frequented the best nightclubs, they heard some of the great jazz music of the day (with jazz lyrics considerably cleaned up for the respectable British upper classes). They danced to the music of the great hot bands—the Charleston, perhaps, or a toned-down version of the shimmy (both scandalous at the time)—and fox-trotted to the lovely romantic strains of some dance bands. Jazz was and is the music of delight, joy, passion, and vitality.

In *Leave it to Psmith*, what was it that made the droopy Miss Peavey shimmy with delight? Why was her favorite tune “The Beale Street Blues?” Because she was, in fact, “Smooth Lizzie,” a confidence trickster. Jazz and the underworld went hand-in-hand in the 1920s. And Chicago was the center of jazz and illegal activities during those years.

Great jazz bands, black and white, went to England in the late 'teens and early 1920s. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band and James Reese Europe's band were both in London as early as 1919. Wodehouse, with his wide knowledge of the times, was surely well acquainted with jazz and other music of the era. While he wrote on a sweet and romantic note for stage musicals, he also heard and understood the jazz idiom. He derived great fun from it, which he conveyed to his readers. You can almost hear echoes of Sophie Tucker, the original “Red Hot Momma,” singing “Aren't Women Wonderful?” in *Leave it to Psmith*. In *Service With a Smile*, Wodehouse plays on the jazz lyrics of “Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home?” He also knew the depth (or lack) of meaning that the jazz idiom conveyed. In “The Truth About George,” he quotes from “Yes Sir, That's My Baby,” a popular jazz tune of 1925. In that same story, George Mulliner tries to cure his stutter by singing such songs as “If You Knew Susie Like

I Knew Susie.” Wodehouse often poked fun at the intimate references in the jazz language—especially the double-entendres that the uninitiated did not understand. In “Tried in the Furnace,” the hilarious biblical juxtaposition about how “Abimilech begat Jazzbo and Jazzbo begat Zaccariah” takes the reader from the reverent to the outrageous as only Wodehouse can do. (Incidentally, “jazzbo” is a term thought to mean “jazz boy,” a complimentary name for a good “hot” black jazz musician.)

The fast upbeat tempos of hot jazz vividly convey joy, sorrow, blues, and sensuality. The music flourished on Chicago's South Side, having traveled north from New Orleans during the 'teens, 1920s, and 1930s. The best of the black New Orleans musicians found a home in Chicago, where they could play hot jazz in small bands and later in large groups. Some of these musicians had begun their careers as piano players in barrel houses and houses of ill repute. Departing from ragtime or syncopated rhythms, hot musicians gained fame via astonishing improvisations and faster tempos that seemed to speak directly to the listener's heart and soul, all within a few bars of music and brief, moving vocals. Among the black jazz greats of the 1920s was Joe “King” Oliver, who brought his protégé, Louis Armstrong, up from New Orleans. With his recordings, fantastic trumpet solos, and performances at such venues as the Dreamland Ballroom and the Sunset Café, Louis rapidly surpassed his mentor and helped make Chicagoans and an audience around the world jazz crazy. Armstrong's playing and that of other great black jazzmen, attracted young white high school musicians from the West and North sides of the city. This was seen as outrageous in Chicago, which was heavily segregated. The young white musicians came and sat at the feet of their idols, learning the music note-for-note, then went out and imitated their playing. Armstrong himself, considered the greatest jazz trumpeter ever, was an inspiration to other musicians and helped to produce a plethora of jazz bands (not to mention his own Hot Fives and Hot Sevens groups, composed of young black musicians like himself) that spread the new hot jazz to a receptive and eager dancing public world-wide. Meanwhile, Chicago's South Side flourished as the cradle of hot jazz creativity. Most jazz musicians lived impoverished lives, making just enough to feed themselves; but the excitement and passionate devotion that jazz inspired in them

never left them.

Among the earliest white musicians were Chicagoans known as The Austin High Gang, which was composed of a core group from Austin High School. Later Chicago-area musicians included Benny Goodman, Jimmy McPartland, and Eddie Condon, among many others, who went on to disseminate their own brand of red-hot jazz, playing and recording many of the songs that Wodehouse refers to in his stories. Among these musicians was the legendary Leon “Bix” Biederbecke, who was admired for creating the sweetest and most beautiful tones in jazz. Bix was also noted for his love of the works of Wodehouse. He memorized and recited whole pages of Plum’s stories to his friends, and eagerly awaited every new Wodehouse story. Bix, who also composed some serious music, lived a life that was devoted almost entirely to jazz, but he died tragically early. His loyal imitators continue to play in traditional bands to this day.

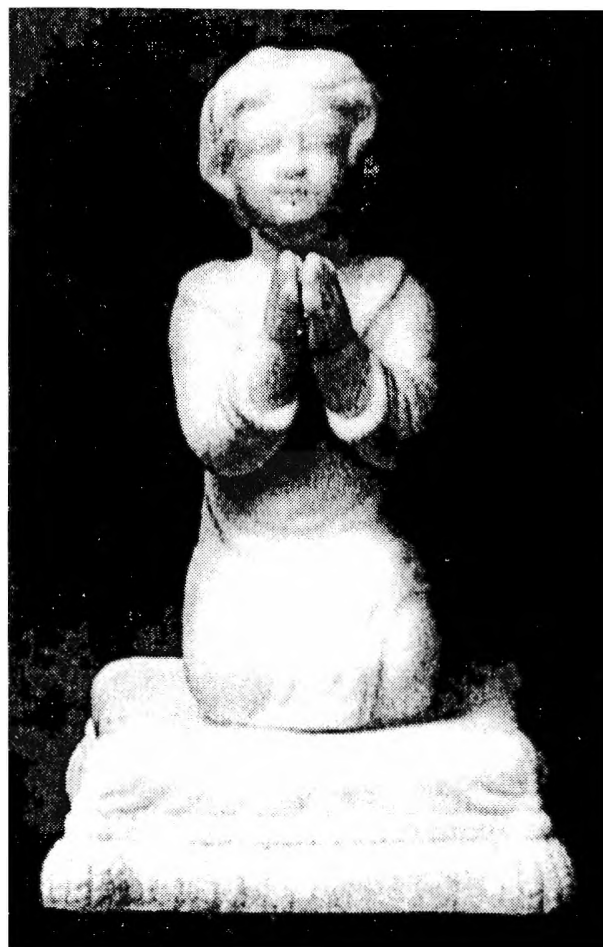
Jazz has endured for decades. Today the hottest music and lore of jazz is committed to memory and is preserved in traditional hot jazz bands, some of which play the original music almost note-for-note as it was played in the authentic New Orleans and Chicago styles of the earlier part of this century. Thus, we can still hear the very best hot rhythms of early jazz that Bertie and his friends so eagerly enjoyed—one needs only to listen. It will prove an adventure of musical discovery. Hearing the background music of Bertie’s world gives Wodehouse novels and stories greater depth, letting us in on the fun that jazz undoubtedly brought to the lives of our favorite characters.

On paper, Blair Eggleston was bold, cold, and ruthless. Like so many of our younger novelists, his whole tone was that of a disillusioned, sardonic philanderer who had drunk the winecup of illicit love to its dregs but was always ready to fill up again and have another. There were passages in some of his books, notably *Worm i’ the Root* and *Offal*, which simply made you shiver, so stark was their cynicism, so brutal the force with which they tore away the veils and revealed Woman as she is.

Deprived of his fountain-pen, however, Blair was rather timid with women. He 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.

*Hot Water*, 1932

## THE INFANT SAMUEL AT PRAYER



I’m sure we have all wondered just what the statuette of The Infant Samuel at Prayer looked like before it was hurled from the mantelpiece. **Elise Wright** takes pleasure in relieving us, at last, of this anxiety. You see before you The Infant Samuel at Prayer as rendered by Minton, the distinguished English potters. Minton was quite possibly the producer of all the doomed porcelain (“as hurled by the nobility”) in Wodehouse’s stories. Minton art porcelains were featured at The Great Exhibition of 1851 and pictured, with many a kind word, in the exhibition catalog, giving the potters such a shove that they roared along, spouting such things as *Babes in the Wood* and *Sleeping Children* (just as sentimental as your imagination pictures them), though whether they can be held responsible for the “statuette that had been on the mantelpiece, a thing about a foot long with no clothes on, Shakespeare it may have been, or Queen Victoria” which appeared in *The Girl in Blue* I am unable to say.

—OM

## TWS WEB SITE

In our last issue of *Plum Lines*, we asked for a volunteer to set up and maintain an official web site devoted to The Wodehouse Society. Quicker than you could say “Jeeves,” such a volunteer immediately stepped up to the plate and, in our humble opinion, firmly established himself as a candidate for sainthood. This wonderful soul is none other than Shamim Mohamed, known to his Plummie friends as Pongo Twistleton-Twistleton, and his gracious offer to be the Society’s official Webmaster comes on top of his having taken over the maintenance of the PGW-Net mailing list last year. Three cheers to Pongo!

The construction of the new web site will take a while as we make decisions about what to put into it and gradually set up the pages and the links to other Wodehouseian web pages around the globe. Auntie will be working closely with Pongo on this project, but any offers of help from other computer *literati* would be most welcome. If you have something you think would make a nifty contribution to the TWS web site, please send me a note about it, addressed to EWoodger@aol.com. In the meantime, if you would like to check out the work in progress, you may go to the following URL: [www.wodehouse.org/](http://www.wodehouse.org/)

Any and all ideas and suggestions for the web site are welcome. Please let us know what you think—and be sure to send an appreciative bread-roll in Pongo’s direction!

—AD

## BREAD-ROLLS AGAIN

Future historians of our time will find it necessary to include, under the broad heading “Bread-Roll Throwing in Love and War,” the sub-head “Its Influence on Intellectual Life in the Late Second Millennium.” And under this sub-head the interested student in that far distant time will surely discover the following contribution from Joseph Wilkinson.

—OM

*The Conquest of Peru* by William H. Prescott is one of the classics of historical writing. My New American Library paperback copy has a lengthy biographical account of the author. I quote:

“While in his junior year at Harvard, the students one day, while eating in the Commons, turned the room into pandemonium by bombarding each other with food; in the midst of it, Prescott, who turned at the call of his name, was struck by a crust of bread accurately thrown. It hit him in the open left eye, striking the unprotected pupil; it had the effect usually attending a brain concussion. When he recovered he was made instantly aware that he had lost the sight of his left eye.”

## NEWS FROM OVERSEAS

In addition to providing a regular Chapters Corner feature, we would also like to keep members updated on the doings of our sister Wodehouse societies outside the U.S., especially now that the Millfleet Charter has united us. To this end, we will post news from overseas on a regular basis, as we receive it.

The P.G. Wodehouse Society in the U.K. is undoubtedly the busiest group of Plummies on the planet. The latest issue of *Wooster Sauce* summarizes upcoming activities, including a visit to Emsworth on June 5; periodic walks through London led by The Man Who Knows All, Norman Murphy; and three events to take place at Dulwich College on June 18: A cricket match pitting Society members against the college staffroom; an event for younger members and children of members being organized by Helen Murphy; and the annual Society dinner, which is an event not to be missed if you happen to be in England then. Tickets are £35 to members, £40 to non-members and £25 to those playing in the cricket match. Dress will be lounge suits, and as a special treat *Jeeves of Belgravia* will be assisting with the dinner. There is a special application for tickets for this event.

*Wooster Sauce* has also provided details of events being planned in other countries. The Swedish Society is arranging an exhibition entitled *Bravo Jeeves* at the Sigtuna Museum in Greater Stockholm. This exhibition will run from May 8th to June 6th, and each Saturday will feature a special event starting at 3:00 p.m.

Meanwhile, the Dutch Society is planning a meeting to coincide with the World Cup cricket match between South Africa and Kenya, which will be held in Amsterdam.

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Subsequently, his right eye began to fail him. He had to quit the family law practice. He became a historian, but only through the readings of his secretary. By middle age he was almost blind.

As Jeeves might say: Verbum sat sapienti.

# THE DOWNSIZED DUFFER

In honor of his hero, P.G. Wodehouse, the writer takes a good walk, slightly willful

By David McDonough

David is a freelance writer who tries his level best to mention Wodehouse in one way or another in almost everything he writes. He outdoes himself in the following article, which was published in TWA's *Ambassador* magazine. —AD

That trophy up on the shelf over there? Oh, it's just a golf championship I once won. It seems like an awfully small trophy? Well, it should. It was a miniature golf tournament. Let me explain.

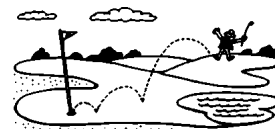
For years I have belonged to the P. G. Wodehouse Society, honoring the greatest humorist of the 20th century. Wodehouse was an enthusiastic golfer who wrote many comic stories on the subject. It was one of our newer members who pointed out the incongruity of a Wodehouse Society in which none of its members played golf.

His words stung us. The honor of the society was at stake, and we rushed into action, organizing a golf tournament—miniature golf, actually. We are rather sedentary, even by golfing standards.

Now, I had never really won anything. I don't count my Junior Yeoman archery medal from camp or the faux Oscar I got from my local video store for guessing that "Beauty and the Beast" would win best song. I'm talking about standing up and facing down the competition, mano a mano, and being able to say that for one day out of my life, I was the best at something. Besides, I was the youngest member of the group by 20 years, and this was the best chance I was ever going to have to be a winner. I had one week to become the best miniature golfer in the world, and I had a secret weapon, an ace in the 18th hole. I had my friend Joey.

Joey's father was once a golf pro, a man whose name would be familiar to those who study the PGA circuit. Joey had wanted to follow in his father's cleats, but an unfortunate allergy to polyester left him unable to compete. He became a car salesman instead, and he had renounced golf and all its sand trappings. But Joey still knew golf, regular or miniature, and if I could just get him out on the course, I knew he could make a winner of me.

I showed up at Joey's car lot, and induced him to take me for a test drive. I deliberately picked a sports model, put the top down and drove toward the Pine Cone, the finest miniature golf complex on the East Coast. It was a wedding-picture day in June. The sun shone and the birds sang and as we rounded a curve near the course, Joey



lifted his head and sniffed the air, and said "I smell neatly raked sand." As Wodehouse once said, "It was a morning when all nature shouted 'Fore.'"

I looked at Joey, and could see that although the golfing spirit might lie dormant within him, as with all ex-golfers, sooner or later it had to resurface. This was a man whose soul was saying, "To hell with the workaday world. There are more important things in life than trying to fit a family of nine into a HumVee. Let's play 18." He tossed his coat in the back and from somewhere, produced a white cap that said "Golfers Like It Rough." He strode through the entrance gate, with me trailing behind.

Now, when I spoke of the beauties of the Pine Cone, I was not exaggerating. Dismiss, please, from your mind, any notion of windmills, plastic shrink-wrap that has been painted to look like grass or the rubber alligators through which your ball must pass on the seventh, ninth and 14th holes. The Pine Cone was designed specifically to make you think you are playing real golf in a country club setting, and that any moment Tiger Woods and Greg Norman may come up behind you and ask if they can play through. The conceit works—when you finish your stroll through the two challenging 18-hole courses on acres of natural countryside, real groves of trees, flowers, ponds and streams, it comes as something of a shock to realize that all you've really done is work your way through a series of putting greens, albeit set on a breathtaking landscape. This is not your father's miniature golf course.

These are, however, your grandfather's putters, and handsome wood grain relics of a better day they are. In a matter of minutes we had paid our fees and were out at the first tee. Then I made my move. Ever so casually, I said to Joey, "My literary group is having a miniature golf tournament. It would be so nice if I could win it..."

He pondered. "Do you know what you're getting into?" he asked finally. "If I help you, it will mean work and more work. And serious training."

"It's just a game," I said defensively.

Joey stared at me in disgust. "We can quit right now if that's your attitude. Golf isn't just a game. It's a state of

mind. You have to be at one with the ball, and in harmony with the universe.”

He pointed to the first hole. “Look. Your ball has to carom off the side, up a slope, miss the water hazard, roll up the other side and drop through the replica of the Chunnel before even getting to the level. Like this.” He paused, and putted. The ball flew around the green as if it was on a string, coming to rest squarely in the hole. And par was two.

I bowed my head humbly. “Master,” I said. “Teach me.”

“Good,” he said. “Now we can begin.”

Before playing with Joey, I thought that miniature golf was just a matter of putting and cursing and blaming the uneven terrain. But during that first hour, I did nothing but sit in the lotus position and contemplate two buckets of balls, while Joey explained to me that bad shots gave off bad vibes for decades. I said I didn’t know that, and drew off to the side to brood on whether El Niño is our generation’s penance for an errant Ben Hogan chip shot 50 years ago.

By the middle of the day, I had graduated to holding the ball in my hand, perceiving its essence, trying to become one with its dimples. I was also given my mantra, private words that I cannot reveal, even to you. All right, here it is: “Jeeves and Bertie.” The names of Wodehouse’s most famous characters form the perfect number of syllables for a spiritual uplifting. And if you say, “Jeeves” as you lift your putter and “Bertie” as you nudge the ball, you will have timed your swing perfectly for those short putts that cause so much grief on the back nine.

Around 3 o’clock, I was finally allowed to play the course through, Joey correcting my grip and my karma on each hole. By 4:30, chanting my mantra, I was ready to solo. A score of 43 was par for the Pine Cone Course. I did it in 36. I came to grief only once, on the 17th hole, the Environmentalist’s Delight. The ball must bounce off of three sides of a rhomboid without disturbing any endangered species on the green, and I did nudge a Carolina Northern Flying Squirrel. Despite that, Joey said I was ready. He brushed off my profuse thanks for the good work he had done that day.

“When you win this tournament,” he said, “that will be reward enough for me. That, and the \$200 a day I get for coaching amateurs.”

We settled for \$150.

The following week, I approached the first annual Wodehouse Society tournament without a qualm. Also without a hat, which bothered me a little, as our contest was held in a seaside resort with a merciless sun. The opposition, I was sure, would fall before me like wheat before a sickle. The only player I felt might give me a run

for my money was Fred Widgeon, a retired commodities broker, who, it was rumored, had once played a round of real golf with a client in 1967.

We were playing on a course called The Sand Trap, and it had seen better, or at least higher maintenance, days. The toughest hole was the ninth, where a spirited ceramic elephant spits water at you every 20 seconds while you putt, but the course itself held no fears for me. It was only Widgeon that had me concerned.

We proved equally matched. I was playing brilliantly. I was one with the ball, had been doing my life’s-breath exercises perfectly and none of my shots could have disturbed the order of the universe in the slightest. Trouble was, Fred Widgeon had the best interests of the cosmos at heart as well. He made one sensational shot on the seventh hole that probably provided enough good karma to give health and happiness to generations of Widgeons well into the 21st century. We approached the 17th hole tied at 24.

The 17th hole is the second toughest hole at The Sand Trap. The green felt near the first turn ripped in 1973, and now you have to account for the rip when you putt, or your ball could roll out of the course and into traffic, which costs you a stroke, and if the traffic is heavy, possibly a limb.

As I got set to putt, the familiar “Jeeves and Bertie” was on my lips. I glanced over at Widgeon, and his mouth was moving too. “Lord Emsworth,” he was muttering to himself. And then I knew I had him. Lord Emsworth is another Wodehouse character, but he’s an absent-minded, dreamy sort—no match for the perspicacious Jeeves, and Bertie. Confidently, I putted, and the ball winged its way straight and true to its destination.

Widgeon was next. As he passed me, I murmured “orange futures.” He started visibly. It was the coup de grace. No commodities trader, even a retired one, can resist those juicy words. He went to putt muttering, “Lord Emsworth—orange futures.” Well, as anyone can tell you, never mix your mantras. His rhythm completely ruined, he took a nine on the hole, and retired, a broken man.

My victory was inevitable. I did have one scare—old Judge Parsloe Devine had been quietly playing a pretty good game, but when he dropped his iced-tea glass into his golf bag, he foozled his last shot and I beat him by two strokes.

So there’s the cup I won, up on the shelf, the



happy reminder of my one and only glory day.

Or was it? Now that the Wodehousians are eating my rough, I'm up for some new challenges. I understand that the Jack Kerouac Society is taking new members.

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*Postscript from the author:* There are many among you who are aware that the above essay is almost complete fiction. Well, I mean, the good end happily and the bad end unhappily—that is what fiction means. The sad truth is that Beany Blum won that tournament (without lists of Kings of Judah in his pockets, too) with McDonough simply nowhere. Why did I change the facts? Well, I could say that I was merely adding artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative. But that would be a further stretcher. Mainly, I made it come out the way I wanted because I'm the author, and it's my party, so I'll lie if I want to. After all, you can never trust an author to tell the truth, any more than you can trust him not to make an ass of himself.

## FINANCIAL STATEMENT, 1998

By Tom Wainwright, Treasurer

Balance as of December 31, 1997	\$5,628.80
Income: Dues and fees	11,864.00
Expenses:	
Plum Lines production and mailing	8,751.52
Correspondence	<u>598.43</u>
Total expenses	<u>9,349.95</u>
Balance as of December 31, 1998	\$8,142.85

Both the income and the expenses were depressed in 1998 because there were only two mailings of *Plum Lines* (Spring and the combined Summer-Autumn issue) and dues notices. We can expect an increase in both income and expense in 1999 because we will probably have 5 mailings.

## WODEHOUSE PLAYHOUSE

In response to an item concerning the TV series *Wodehouse Playhouse* in the last issue of *Plum Lines*, several accommodating readers, including **Jack Stewart**, **Brian Taves**, and **George and Margaret Colbran**, were good enough to send a list of the episodes that they knew about. Following are 20 known episodes—but are there more? If anybody else has episodes other than these on videotape, would you kindly let Auntie know? And don't forget to write the BBC (see *Plum Lines*, Winter 1998)! —AD

Anselm Gets His Chance	The Rise of Minna Nordstrom
Big Business	Rodney Fails to Qualify
The Code of the Mulliners	Romance at Droitgate Spa
The Editor Regrets	The Smile that Wins
Feet of Clay	Strychnine in the Soup
The Luck of the Stiffhams	Tangled Hearts
Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo	Trouble Down at Tudsleigh
The Nodder	The Truth About George
Portrait of a Disciplinarian	The Unpleasaantness at
Mr. Potter Takes a Rest Cure	Bludleigh Court
	The Voice from the Past

An additional note about *Wodehouse Playhouse*: in the last issue we mentioned what we thought was the strong possibility that video tapes from the series would be available for purchase from the BBC. This hopeful item evidently prompted so many inquiries to the BBC that a form letter was sent out in response. **William Thomas** sent me his copy of the letter, which reads in part as follows:

I must clarify that the series is "under consideration" only in the sense that we tally suggestions for it as we do for all BBC properties that the members of the public request to be released on video. Years may pass before a series clears the final hurdle and comes out on video.

Many astute Wodehouse fans—the tough, hard-boiled, spit-out-of-the-side-of-your-mouth kind, whom almost nothing can please—consider this 1975 series the best Wodehouse on television. But will we ever be able to buy the tapes? As the Hollywood tycoon is supposed to have said, "I'll give you a definite maybe."

A photograph of the two stars of the series is shown on page 28. —OM

It was a poetic drama, and the audience, though loath to do anybody an injustice, was beginning to suspect it was written in blank verse.

*Jill the Reckless*, 1921



# THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY CRICKET CLUB

## RISUS, VESTIMENTA, CONVIVIA

By Alekh “Gussie” Bhurke, Shamim “Pongo” Mohammed, Jean “Pighooey” Tillson

Note: The following article has been extracted from the TWS Cricket Club web site set up by the above three authors. Unfortunately, space considerations don't allow us to print all the information posted on this site, so I have edited it to suit the immediate purpose of letting readers know that (a) **there will be a cricket match at the Houston convention, with special rules to allow any and all to participate**, and (b) the web site is the place to go not only to learn about the match but also to learn about the sport itself. The URL is: <http://www.egr.msu.edu/~bhurkeal/twscc.htm>. Note, finally, the last section regarding the special TWSCC badges that Pighooey has specially designed for Society members. Gussie, Pongo, and Pighooey have outdone themselves in their preparations for this event, and deserve our kudos. —AD

TWS members playing cricket are something like dancing pigs. The wonder is not how well they dance, but that they dance at all. —“Pongo” Mohammed

**Preamble:** There is something very comforting about playing cricket with other Wodehousians. For one, the game is not played in a competitive spirit. It is more like a group of kindred souls having fun. Now, many of us who have never seen the game played are thinking “But I wouldn't know anything!” and that, my dear chaps and gels, is precisely the point. You ought to! It is a splendid game and one that was dear to the Master. The early school stories featured cricket in a big way. And it is precisely with the intention of exposing the unaware Wodehousian (especially in America) to this Gentleman's Game, while also having the time of one's life, that we decided to host cricket matches at Wodehouse Conventions.

**Background:** During the last convention in October 1997, a group of Wodehousians met in a small park in downtown Chicago to experience the wonders of cricket. Actually, when the cricket match was first proposed, the vast majority of us (possessing less than fond memories of our attempts at athletic competition in our school days) said, “Oh, splendid! I can't wait to watch you all play!” because we knew we should only make asses of ourselves and get in everyone else's way if we attempted to participate.

However, once upon the grounds we were instantly caught up in the excitement, enthusiasm and support of our fellow Plummies and our intrepid captains. Soon we were all cheering each other on as we collectively absorbed the fundamentals of the great game. The fact that most of us were equally bad helped, but it is primarily the memory of our surprise and joy at being encouraged and applauded in spite of our ignorance and awkwardness that

makes that wonderful afternoon live on in legend and song for the lucky few of us who were there. It is this spirit of uniquely Wodehousian camaraderie and fun which we hope to preserve by setting down a few rules (or anti-rules, as the case may be) which we think helped create the supportive, all-welcoming atmosphere of the cricket match at TWS Chicago—and will do the same for the next match, to be held on Friday, October 22, in Houston.

**Preparation:** Since most of the players in the game will be newcomers or beginners, there will be a session of instruction before the match where the basic concepts of the game will be explained. Everyone is welcome to participate: ladies, gents, oily private eyes, butlers, pigs, and children. No prior experience is necessary. During the last match in Chicago in 1997, there were several people who claimed they would only come and watch, but five minutes after arrival on the field they were raring to have a go at it.

This year, in Houston, the match has been organized with a lavish hand. Catered lunch and tea will be provided on the field just as in the real game. And for this, we need to have some idea about many people will be coming. We urge everyone interested in the Cricket Match to indicate this on their convention registration forms. The more the merrier!

**The Game:** (Note from AD: The web site includes a simplified explanation of the basics of cricket which is not being reprinted here. If you don't have access to the World Wide Web and would like a copy of this comprehensive and comprehensible description of cricket, write

to me and I'll be happy to send it on to you. I strongly recommend this, especially if you experience any sort of a swimming sensation in the head after reading the rules imparted below.)

**TWS Rules Cricket:** The Wodehouse Society Cricket Club (TWSCC) has made certain rules to keep the game enjoyable. Since TWSCC believes in having fun rather than competition, these rules are designed to keep the game from ever becoming too serious. Serious is not how we Wodehousians like things to be.

Thus, it is to be remembered that the most important elements of any TWS Rules Cricket match should always be laughter and clothing. Plumies turning up in proper whites will instantly be rewarded with the envy and admiration of their peers, regardless of how rotten their play. The Wodehousian spirit must prevail at all times (although complaining bitterly about lbw decisions and raising doubts about the fairness of umpires over the evening cocktails must also be allowed. This, after all, is an integral part of cricket, too). And most of all, don't ever forget that it isn't whether you win or lose, or even whether or not you hit the blasted ball that matters; it is being able to return from a TWS convention proudly proclaiming, "I have played cricket!"

**The Rules** are as follows:

1. In a "real" cricket match, there are two sides with eleven players each. In a TWS Rules Cricket match there may be as many sides as necessary to accommodate all who wish to participate, with up to 15 players on each side.

2. All TWS cricket matches shall be mixed. Ladies and gentlemen shall be part of the same team.

3. The length of a TWS Rules Cricket match shall be determined by the designated officials and will be based on the number of sides playing, making sure that each side will have time to play their innings (also remembering to allow for pre-match instruction and practice).

4. If there are more than two sides playing, each side will probably only have one innings. Also, the innings may need to be limited to a certain number of overs, again based on how many people wish to play. If the last side is having their innings and they surpass the other sides' run count, the game can end immediately (if time is short) or the side may finish their innings if time permits.

5. Due to the limited availability of regulation cricket grounds and equipment in this country (as well as the aforementioned time constraints), we will not change sides of the pitch after each over.

6. Captains for each side shall be chosen from among the most experienced and least competitive cricketers present. Captains will in turn choose Vice-Captains.

7. Teams shall be drawn by lots. Names of people wanting to play will be written on slips of paper and put into a hat (preferably a Bodmin's) and Captains will take turns drawing players' names for their side.

8. Scoring shall be the same as in "real" cricket, with the following exceptions:

- No Stumpings. In TWS Rules Cricket, batsmen will not be counted out for having their wicket knocked down by the wicket keeper while out of their ground. However, if they have got a hit and are trying to get a run they are still able to be got out since this counts as a "run-out" rather than a stumping (new players need not worry about these distinctions. They will be made by the umpires).

- No "extras" (extra runs) will be awarded, but wides and no-balls will not be counted as part of the over.

- Scoring will be kept by runs only. No individual player stats will be maintained.

- Umpires shall be designated by mutual consent. In the case of lack of specialist umpires, experienced players from the batting team will double as umpires. (Note: Although umpires

must be obeyed without question on the field, they will not be immune to bread-roll barrages over dinner in the evening. All batsmen not quite grunted about lbw decisions will refrain from exacting sweet revenge until this time. Correspondingly, the winning side may buy the umpires as many drinks as they like.)

9. TWSCC encourages bribery of umpires at any time except during the game. Since we won't know till the game begins who the umpires will be, this adds a sporting element to any modern-day Stegglesian endeavour. Furthermore, while prospective umpires will accept all bribes, they will not allow these gifts (or lack thereof) to affect the actual umpiring—that just wouldn't be cricket!

10. There shall be prizes awarded at the discretion of the organizers. Breaks for lunch and tea shall be scheduled and announced at the appropriate times.



Logo of The Wodehouse Society Cricket Club, designed by Jean Tillson and shown approximately life size. The real thing is in glorious colors. See the last paragraph of this article, on the next page.

**Cricket Attire** : Although TWSCC does not have a dress code, we must say that proper cricket attire is always a big hit with the crowds, and also one of the most charming aspects of the game. And it is simple. Proper cricket attire is nothing more than a white shirt and trousers (or skirts for ladies who prefer them to trousers.)

White flannel is almost always identified with Cricket. Hats and caps are recommended. The white canvas hat sometimes known as the "Tilley Hat" is a very good approximation of a cricket hat. Some players wear a billed cap, which is something like a baseball cap yet different; these are usually dark blue or green with the club's name on the front. Gents dress in white trousers and shirts (half or full sleeves). Ladies have a choice between skirts and trousers. The batsmen usually wear special hand gloves and pads on their legs (which will be provided if necessary during TWS games.)

All prospective players are encouraged to show up dressed like the real things. All it involves is getting a white shirt and trousers. Since the next match will be in October in Houston, members might not be too keen on flannels. In such a case, simple cotton wear may be safely substituted.

### **Announcement from Pongo Twistleton-Twistleton:**

I'd like to announce a prize anyone not previously a player who shows up in whites will absolutely get a free drink of his or her choice from me. "Not previously a player" means anyone that never has played cricket before, not including the TWS Chicago Convention game. Also, bonus points (i.e. another drink) for anyone who sports flannels and a white woolen vest sweater with a V-neck. A dark blue or dark green authentic cricket batting cap (must have the name of a club embroidered on it) is another drink. Prizes are not transferable, batteries not included, and taxes are the sole responsibility of the recipients.

**The cricket logo:** It is a pity that we cannot reproduce the logo in color, as the black and white photo reproduced on the previous page simply doesn't do it justice. Imagine, if you will, a dark purple background, with the letters "TWS Cricket Club" in bright scarlet and the motto "Risus, Vestimenta, Convivia" as well as the crossed bats, pig, and border done in a metallic gold thread. (By the way, a portrait of the Empress is included in the logo because, as three-time winner of the fat pigs' contest at the Shropshire Agricultural show, she is a universal symbol of excellence.) A more impressive-looking logo you will never see—and the best part is that you will be able to wear it proudly on your cricket-playing togs, or whatever vestment sets it off best. Jean "Pighoo-

ey" Tillson, who designed this brilliant logo, has arranged for the manufacture of TWSCC logo badges that can be sewn on and displayed proudly for years and years to come. The badge size will be 2 inches wide by 2 3/4 inches high, and the cost will be \$5 each or 3 for \$12 (postage paid). Jean should have the badges in stock by the middle of May. If you want to place an order, make your check out to Jean Tillson and send it to her at: 4 Fales Place, Foxboro, MA 02035. Allow 4 weeks for delivery. When you receive your order, you will also get some guidance on proper cricket attire and placement of the badge. If you have any questions about the logo or the badges, you can e-mail Jean at: pighooey@ici.net.

Final note: For those who were wondering, the motto "Risus, Vestimenta, Convivia" translates to "Laughter, Clothing, Feasting." With that in mind, why not sign up for the 1999 Wodehouse Society Convention in Houston right now?

## **TIES THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS**

In the Spring 1998 *Plum Lines*, we encouraged readers to purchase the sparkling Drones Club ties that were introduced before the Chicago convention and now are practically *de rigueur* for gentlemen attending Wodehousian functions. The tie design, broad diagonal stripes of brilliant plum and black separated by narrow strips of gold, was conceived after an Internet poll conducted by Shamim Mohamed, who arranged the first shipment of orders. Since then, he has relinquished the care and feeding of this task to Angus McAllister (David McKenzie) and Annabel Sprocket-Sprocket (Hope Gaines), who have been accumulating orders for several months now.

Angus and Annabel are now desperately seeking at least 25 hearty Plummies to make up an order for these beautiful neckties. The greedily profit-driven supplier has mandated that a minimum order of 25 ties is necessary to realize cost-effectiveness (Angus believes that cost-effectiveness means affordability). Because of the economic realities of international trade (the fabric supplier is, appropriately, in Great Britain), a minimum order of 25 is essential. So far, 13 fellow obsessives have indicated an interest in the ties (at about \$33 per; \$29 per with an order of 50).

## CHAPTERS CORNER

Yes, Virginia, there *is* a Chapters Corner! Apologies to all for not keeping up with this feature as faithfully as I should have done, especially as most of the various chapters have been very good about sending me newsletters and information about their ongoing activities. Keep it up, old beans, and so will I! News about chapter doings remains welcome—and in fact, we hope to make it possible for you to post such news on the TWS web site now in development. Stay tuned for further details on that score.

In the meantime, it has been busy going for chapters around the country. The **Drone Rangers** are, of course, deep in the heart of their preparations for this October's convention. Regular issues of the *Dronestar*, the D. Rangers' most excellent newsletter, have kept us up to date on their various other excursions, including theatre parties to see *Anything Goes* in Galveston last August and *Leave It to Jane* in Houston this past January. The former was apparently quite an adventure, as inclement weather in the form of a tropical storm caused the theatre to close the night the Rangers were there. A substantially reduced group returned the following week, only to suffer under a siege of mosquitoes—the worst such attack, apparently, in Galveston's history—forcing them to leave by intermission. *Leave It to Jane* was a much happier event, with a cheerful, tuneful production that was appreciated by a group of 30 or so Texan Plummies. In addition to this, the D. Rangers have continued to meet on a regular basis, sharing papers, playing games, discussing books and stories, and browsing and sluicing up a storm. The highlight, of course, has been their annual "Remember Plum" party, held on or about the anniversary of his death (St. Valentine's Day). This year's party of February 13 was hosted by Houston Councilman El Franco Lee. What with games, doggerel verse competitions, costumes, tons of food and drink, music galore, and much merry-making, the binge was a smashing success and great preparation for the convention. It is clear from the Drone Ranger reports that we are all in for one dashed great time in Houston, so let us waste no more time in registering for the meeting now!

Out in San Francisco and environs, **Blandings Castle**, our oldest established chapter, has been rolling along as faithfully as Ol' Man River. Jan Kaufman, the chapter's president as well as publisher of *The Argus Intelligencer & Wheat Growers Gazette*, has concluded her series on Blandings denizens who have also been leading lights of TWS for years. Her feature articles have included profiles of

Pauline Blanc, Marilyn MacGregor, Len & Shirley Lawson, Doug & Margaret Stow, Ed Ratcliffe, and Tom & Beth Wainwright—wonderful people all, to whom we TWSers owe much appreciation and gratitude, for our society would never have reached the point it has without them. Jan's profiles of these people make for excellent reading, and if you can pirate copies, I highly recommend them to you. In addition to this, Jan has reported on Blandings' regular meetings, which are held in a hosting member's home and feature an abundance of food and drink and good times. (I should know—I've had first-hand experience and can attest to their splendid hospitality!) The group also plans special excursions, the most recent being the outing at San Simeon that was reported in the last issue of *Plum Lines* (Winter 1998). Blandings Castle is now making plans to attend this October's convention in Houston, and to that end are preparing their traditional skit or reading—a must for any convention, as they always do such a smashing good job. The story selected, of course, is always from the Blandings series. In the past they have wowed us with readings of "Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!" and "The Crime Wave at Blandings," among others. Take Auntie's word for it—we will have much to look forward to in Houston with the Blandings crowd in attendance!

Moving to the other side of the country, we have word from **Capital! Capital!** that a change in leadership has occurred and Erik Quick has taken over the helm from Jon Lellenberg. We also hear that their favorite watering hole, Mrs. Simpson's, has closed, which is a shame because it was a delightful place for Plummies to gather in. However, the Capitalists are a hardy lot, and had been casting about for a change of venue in any event, so have been making themselves known at other establishments, meeting every two to three months or so. In addition to the required browsing and sluicing (at which this group excels—once again I speak from personal experience), there is also a great deal of Wodehousian discussion centering around a book, story, or question such as "What is your favorite Wodehouse story where an animal plays a prominent role and why?" This group is as jolly a bunch of Capitalists as any I have ever met, and they love to entertain visiting Plummies, so if you're planning to visit the D.C. area at any time, be sure to get in touch with Erik.

**Chapter One** is also good to visiting Plummies, as John Graham and I learned first-hand very recently. We joined the group for one of their bimonthly meetings this past March, and had a delightful afternoon at the Dickens Inn in Philadelphia. This wonderful restaurant boasts a very English menu (John was disappointed to learn that they no longer offered toad-in-the-hole and had to settle for

bangers and mash), a comfy, pleasant atmosphere that includes the oldest fireplace in Philadelphia, and an owner who is so appreciative of Chapter One's faithful patronage that he provided free champagne for our group of 22 happy souls. Not a bad way to spend an afternoon! Readings, distribution of various goodies, prizes, and laughter mark a typical ChOne meeting. They also continue to maintain an interest in and financial support for the exhibit of newts they sponsored at the Philadelphia Zoo. This chapter is apparently preparing to put in a bid to host the 2001 convention—and no, my presence at this meeting was *not* an attempt to bribe me for a vote in their favor. (However, all bribes will be seriously considered.)

Up in New England, the NEWTS have continued to meet on a quarterly basis, with attendance on the rise at every successive Nottle. Like Chapter One, the NEWTS are also continuing to support an exhibit of newts, on display at Boston's Franklin Park Zoo. In other news, this group is currently preparing an original skit (written by David Landman and Stephen Brown) that will be performed at the Houston convention, and I can assure you that it is humdinger that is sure to be appreciated by the masses.

That covers current chapter news that I have in hand. No word has been received from The Pdrone of St. Louis in quite a while—please let me know what you're up to! There were also several incipient chapters in the works last year, but I have not had any updates so I don't know whether they're thriving or not. In the next issue of *Plum Lines*, I would like to provide a current listing of chapters, including information about when and where each chapter meets, contact names, etc. If you could send this information to me sooner rather than later, you will receive an Auntie's undying gratitude.

Finally, since I have moved to New York, I have repeatedly heard, "Oh, goodie! Now you can organize a New York chapter!" Well, as a NEWT through and through, as well as an honorary member of Chapter One, I do wonder about the feasibility of getting myself involved in yet another chapter. But it seems too good to pass up, so with a little assistance, I just may get the ball rolling. If you live in or around New York City and its surrounding counties, not to mention Long Island, and would be interested joining a new chapter, please write and tell me this. Tally-ho!

—AD

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY, RICHARD!

**R**ichard Usborne will be 90 years old on May 16, 1999. He wrote *Wodehouse at Work* (1961, revised as *Wodehouse at Work to the End*, 1976), *A Wodehouse Companion* (1981), and conflated and updated those as *The Penguin Wodehouse Companion* in 1988. He edited *Vintage Wodehouse* (1977). He edited Plum's notes for *Sunset at Blandings* and provided much additional material with that last, unfinished book by the Master. Much earlier, he had written the widely admired *Clubland Heros*.

## A FOGGY DAY REVISITED

**W**ord comes to us from Carolyn Pokrivchak that the Shaw Festival in Ontario, Canada, is once again including *A Foggy Day* in their program of events. As reported in the Spring 1998 *Plum Lines*, this is George Gershwin's musical conception of Wodehouse's novel *A Damsel in Distress*—and a dashed good conception it is, apparently. From a Shaw Festival brochure: "It was around the end of June last year that *A Foggy Day* sold out for the season. We had to turn away so many people that we've brought this lovely musical back for another year."

"It's a real lost Gershwin musical that George and Ira began writing for RKO and Fred Astaire as *A Damsel in Distress*, but because of George's untimely death it was finished by other hands. Now we've gone back to the original novel and play by P. G. Wodehouse, and Norm Foster...has tightened up the book. There are glorious Gershwin melodies ("Love Walked Right In," "A Foggy Day in London Town," etc.), there's some spectacular dancing, and all in the tiny Royal George Theatre where we use no amplification. It's a musical like musicals used to be when you could tell who was singing."

So there you are. *A Foggy Day* will be running at the Shaw Festival from April 29 to October 31 (including a performance on Plum's birthday, October 15).

For tickets and information, call the Shaw Festival at 800-511-7429 or 905-468-217, or visit the web site at: <http://shawfest.sympatico.ca/>. Carolyn Pokrivchak would also be happy to provide any information about the festival or the production itself, which she has been lucky enough to see.

—AD

# WODEHOUSE PLAYHOUSE STARS

Just to your right—yes, that's it, about two points off the starboard bow—is a photograph of the two actors who made *Wodehouse Playhouse* such a great success. **George and Margaret Colbran**, in Wallabadah, New South Wales, Australia, provided this rare cover page of the BBC *Radio Times* of April 1975. Pauline Collins and John Alderton, wife and husband, clearly had great fun playing to each other on camera. They weren't just actors playing parts—for me, they were Minna Nordstrom and George Mulliner and Amelia Basset and Cyril Mulliner and several other pairs I hope you get to see some time or other.



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Tom Wainwright

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

Dues are \$20 per year.

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