



Plum Lines

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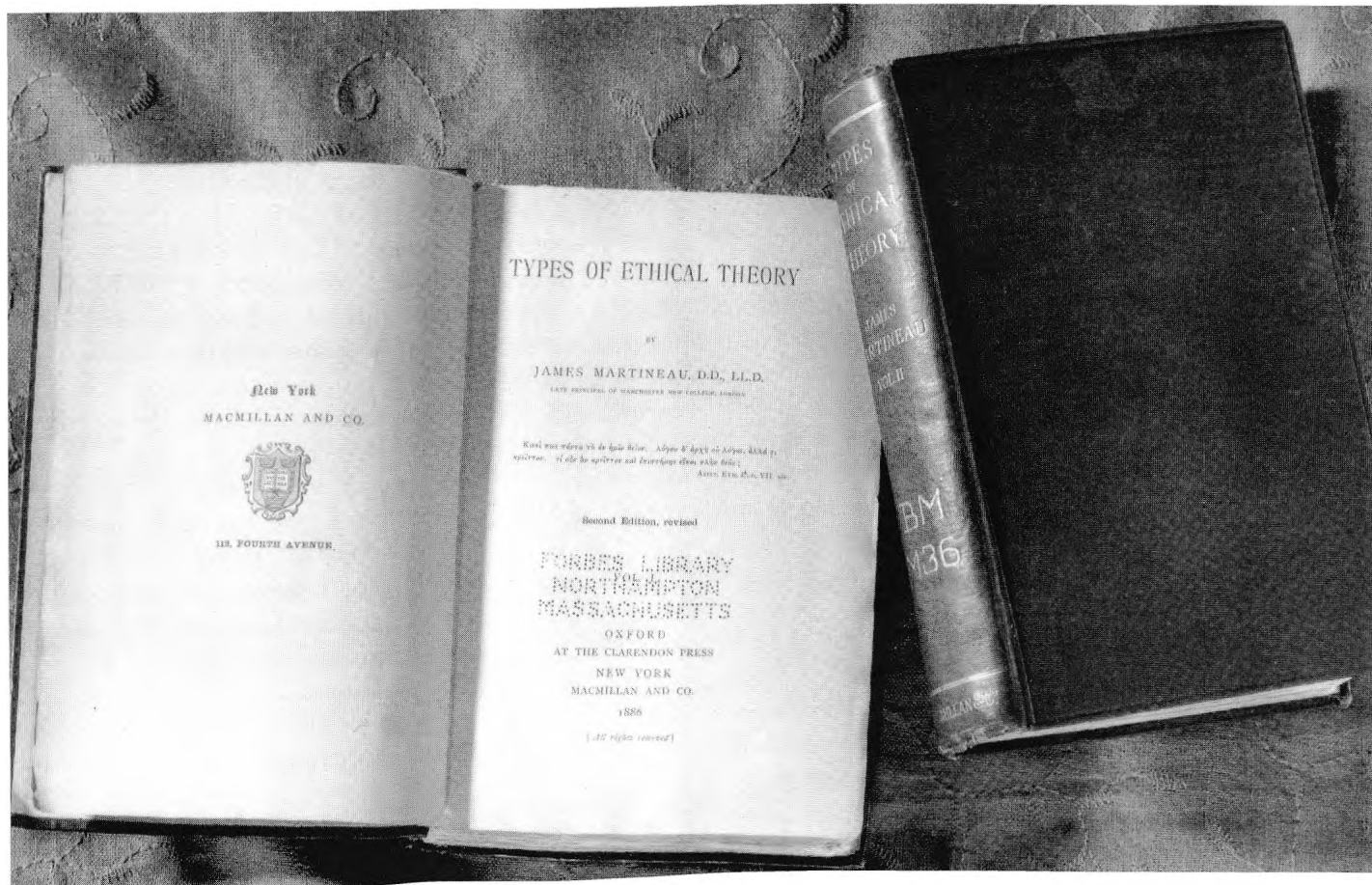
TYPES OF ETHICAL THEORY

By Jack Stewart

P. G. Wodehouse's short story "Jeeves Takes Charge," as everyone knows, deals with Bertie Wooster's engagement to marry Florence Craye, a girl with a terrific figure when seen sideways. It is also the story of Bertie's first meeting with Jeeves and the beginning of their relationship as employer and employee (or, as Aunt Agatha might have phrased it, their relationship as guardian and ward) but at the moment that is beside the point.

What we are concerned with here is the book Florence gave to Bertie with the hope that it would improve his mind.

Florence was a girl who, as Bertie says, "...was particularly keen on boosting me up a bit nearer her own plane of intellect. She was a girl with a wonderful profile, but steeped to the gills in serious purpose." Accordingly, she had given Bertie an uplifting book to read entitled *Types*



of *Ethical Theory* and when the story opens Bertie has just decided to take a whack at it despite the fact that he is suffering from a severe hangover owing to “a rather cheery little supper” which he had attended the previous night. Bertie tells us that “when I opened it at random I struck a page beginning:

‘The postulate or common understanding involved in speech is certainly co-extensive, in the obligation it carries, with the social organism of which language is the instrument, and the ends of which it is an effort to subserve.’”

“All perfectly true, no doubt,” Bertie says, “but not the sort of thing to spring on a lad with a morning head.”

As a devoted Wodehousian for many years I have read this particular story perhaps a dozen times—enough times at any rate so that the title of Bertie’s book was firmly implanted in my memory. I had always assumed that this title was invented by Wodehouse, like *Strychnine in the Soup*, *Whiffle On the Care of the Pig*, and so many others that appear in the Wodehouse canon. Consequently I was surprised recently to read in a bookseller’s catalogue that *Types of Ethical Theory* was offered for sale, and since I was curious about the apparent coincidence I bought the book. It is a two volume work by a fellow named James Martineau, who, it turns out, was a nineteenth century English philosopher and divine. There is a long article about Martineau in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (eleventh edition) and “philosopher” and “divine” are the appellations given to him by that august publication. More later about the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article.

I am satisfied that the “postulate or common understanding” passage actually exists somewhere in the eleven hundred or so pages which comprise the two volumes of *Types of Ethical Theory*. I am certain of this for several reasons, the first of which comes from the fact that, following Bertie’s example, I opened Volume One at random and found this sentence on page 201:

“The difficulty which has to be overcome in gaining clear apprehensions of things arises from two opposite infirmities of our nature, the one lying in the Senses and Imagination, the felt phenomena of which are modifications of our mind; the other in the Reason, cognisant of Ideas, which are objects of the mind.”

The man who wrote that sentence, I thought, must be the same fellow who composed the one read by Bertie, and it is surely a reasonable conjecture that Wodehouse actually read the “postulate or common understanding” passage in Martineau’s book and decided to use it in “Jeeves Takes Charge.” Perhaps it even inspired him to write the story.

There is further evidence tending to prove Wodehouse’s

familiarity with the real *Types of Ethical Theory*—the one actually written by James Martineau—and his use of portions of it in “Jeeves Takes Charge.” Later on in the story, after his hangover is cured by one of Jeeves’s powerful morning after remedies, Bertie says that he “took a stab at a chapter headed ‘Idiopsychological Ethics.’” Book One of Part Two of Martineau’s book is entitled “Idiopsychological Ethics.”

Stylistic considerations, too, confirm the conclusion that the “postulate or common understanding” passage could not have been composed by P. G. Wodehouse. He wrote plainly and clearly. His readers do not have to study and parse and analyze his sentences in order to gain a clear apprehension of what the hell he is talking about. Of course he did not write about deep philosophical or metaphysical concepts, so his subject matter is not difficult to begin with, but if Wodehouse had ever taken it upon himself to compose a metaphysical treatise I am sure he would have done a much better job of it than the Reverend Mr. James Martineau did.

But here is the clincher. If it falls a little short of mathematical proof that P. G. Wodehouse was familiar with Martineau’s book and borrowed some of it for “Jeeves Takes Charge,” I nevertheless believe that no reasonable person would deny that it is crushingly convincing. Toward the end of “Jeeves Takes Charge,” after Jeeves with his usual astuteness has contrived to extricate Bertie from his engagement to Florence Craye, Bertie takes one last look at *Types of Ethical Theory*. “I opened it,” he says, “and I give you my honest word this was what hit me:

‘Of the two antithetic terms in the Greek philosophy one only was real and selfsubsisting; and that one was Ideal Thought as opposed to that which it has to penetrate and mould. The other, corresponding to our nature, was in itself phenomenal, unreal, without any permanent footing, having no predicates that held true for two moments together; in short, redeemed from negation only by including indwelling realities appearing through.’

As Bertie says, “Well—I mean to say—what?” Bertie didn’t have the foggiest idea what these two sentences mean and I don’t either, but I give you my honest word that I found them in my copy of *Types of Ethical Theory*. They appear on page 124 of Volume One, and I found them by carefully reading the first 124 pages of the Reverend Mr. Martineau’s magnum opus, and damned dull work it was, too. The passage as quoted in “Jeeves Takes Charge” varies slightly in its punctuation from the sentences that Mr. Martineau printed, but the words are there, all of them. From “the two antithetic terms” to “indwelling realities appearing through” they are there in all their impenetrable obscurity.

I am not going to read any more of *Types of Ethical The-*

poetic and demiurgic power. The intention and significance therefore of the grand Cosmos was most distinctly reflected in this fair miniature ; and whoever would carry into nature the true idea by which to read off the lineaments must fetch it from the life of men. As this was the point to which the evolution of being tended, this gave the solution to the whole process ; and to read the universe backward from humanity was to apprehend its drift, and bring its thick and confused utterance into just the clear articulate music which lay ineffectually at its heart. Hence it was that the Greeks, instead of stripping Nature of all spiritual attributes, found its essence in these alone, and communed with it as a living being, replete with anthropomorphic gods. It was not because they took their stand on the human soul as any cardinal point of departure for their philosophy ; but because it was to them the nearest and most perfect form assumed by the one eternal thought beaming through the features of the world.

Of the two antithetic terms in the Greek philosophy, one only was *real and self-subsisting* ; and that one was *Ideal ; Thought* as opposed to that which it has to penetrate and mould. The other, corresponding to our 'Nature,' was in itself phenomenal, *unreal*, without any permanent footing, having no predicates that held true for two moments together ; in short, redeemed from negation only by indwelling realities appearing through. Nothing in itself, it was the mere condition of manifestation to that which alone is real, but else were latent. Hence, the Greek has no power of resting in the conception either of mind without visible organism, or of matter without mental expression. The one was to them only a logical abstraction,—reality construed back into its own empty possibility ; the other, a nonentity to which we resort when we want to *deny*, instead of to affirm, being. Their genius flew at once to *form*, as the indispensable means of fetching up reality into thought ; and had recourse to matter only as the medium of form ; and when it had served this purpose, they dismissed all else it

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nunderstanding” passage could be found by further reading, but just as Bertie did, I shall go on to more important things, like contemplating the way the sun comes in at the window and listening to the row the birds are kicking up in the ivy.

But I must not forget the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article. Here, I must confess, we are going off on a bit of a tangent, for the article has nothing directly to do with *Types of Ethical Theory* or “Jeeves Takes Charge.” But it does reinforce my belief that Wodehouse was so intrigued by the difficult writing in Martineau’s book that he decided not only to appropriate some of Martineau’s language in “Jeeves Takes Charge” but to investigate the man further, to find out what made him tick and so on. If he did read the article he found that the boy Martineau, too sensitive for the rigors of a public day school, was sent by his parents to a private academy and later to Manchester College where he met the teacher who awakened his interest in moral and metaphysical speculations. This teacher’s name was—are you ready for this?—WELLBELOVED! Not George Cyril Wellbeloved, admittedly—Martineau’s teacher was called Charles by his no doubt doting parents, but Wodehouse improved on what he read in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* by changing “Charles” to “George” and adding a second given name and a couple of syllables to adjust the cadence. But that surname! It cannot be a coincidence. I am satisfied that Wodehouse, curious about the man whose dark and convoluted sentences he had found in *Types of Ethical Theory*, looked him up in the encyclopedia, discovered the wonderful name of his teacher, gleefully pounced upon it and resolved ultimately to use it in his stories. Wellbeloved (the real one) may have inspired Martineau to indulge in metaphysical speculations, but far more importantly, his name inspired P. G. Wodehouse to create one of his most distinctive minor characters, Lord Emsworth’s odoriferous pig man, George Cyril Wellbeloved.

The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from all this is that P. G. Wodehouse read and was familiar with James Martineau’s book, was struck by the man’s peculiar prose style, and was shrewd enough to make use of it in one of his own masterful satires. In so doing he gave the Reverend Mr. James Martineau a higher and more certain place in the pantheon of authors than the author of *Types of Ethical Theory* could ever have achieved by himself.



The entire staff and management of *Plum Lines* take great pride in presenting Jack Stewart’s announcement of his momentous discovery. Jack, surely the most mod-

est resident of Wichita, Kansas, submitted this article with a letter that included this line: “...and if you think that readers of *Plum Lines* would be interested...” I assured him that readers would not be at all interested; they would be electrified. I asked if he could send a photocopy of The Page, and he responded with three photographs, two of which are reproduced here.

Details of the title page are hard to read in our reproduction, but an inspection of the original photograph reveals that the quotation is by Aristotle and is (of course) in Greek with no translation, that this is the “Second Edition, revised,” that it was published in 1886 by Oxford in England and by Macmillan in New York, and that all rights are reserved, thus thwarting the numerous publishers around the world who were eager to print pirated editions and reap enormous profits. Do you see the implications of those calm statements on that yellowing page? The first edition sold so well that it warranted a second edition, and a second revised edition, so popular that two publishers and who knows how many printing presses were required to meet the frenzied demand. There were giants on the earth in those days.

The title page also shows that this copy of the book came from the Forbes Library in Northampton, Massachusetts. There must be giants in Northampton this very minute. Do you suppose any of them could tell us what those quoted sentences *mean*? —OM

“The moment my fingers clutch [a pen...] 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.”

Ice in the Bedroom, 1961

1999 GONE TO TEXAS TWS CONVENTION

THURSDAY

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

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)

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)

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

A FEW QUICK ONES

Rhoda Robinson found this item by Thenie Pearsall in a recent *Pacific Horticulture* magazine:

A friend, inspired by a recent book on the subject, plans to take up the cultivation of mosses as his primary garden activity. Where, oh where, is P. G. Wodehouse? It is just the sort of Bertie Wooster-like enthusiasm about which Jeeves would comment with icy politeness; or a hobby that Bertie's friend Gussie Fink-Nottle might take up when tired of raising newts. When I am out in my bleak garden next February, crouched under a great 'Westerland' rose trying with numb fingers and a dull pruning saw to remove a tough dead cane from a circle of healthy ones, with thorns impaling me from all around and cold water dripping down my neck, I shall think of my friend in a warm and pleasant room, listening to string quartets, sipping tea, contemplating the mosses flourishing in rain beyond his window, and smiling to himself.

William Van Gelder, though loath to criticize the Master, feels constrained to point out a factual error in "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom." Near the end of the story Vera Prebble says, "I thought you would like to know that I've locked those cops in the coal cellar."

"As one who was born in Los Angeles and has lived all his life in Southern California," writes William, "I can tell you that there are no coal cellars in Hollywood. Sorry, P. G. — the cops should have been locked in the Mercedes."

And why are there no coal cellars? I would tell you that there is hardly a coal mine within a thousand miles of Hollywood and hardly a cellar in all of California, but any California chamber of commerce would tell you that the climate is so exceedingly pleasant that no one ever needs a fire.

William adds that a Bertie and Jeeves novel saved him from terminal boredom when he was posted in a highly inactive and remote station during World War II. Forbidden by regulations from sending a book, his mother cut the novel into "booklets" small enough to be legal. William read them, shared them with his buddies, and survived far into the postwar world.

Murray Wilson noted in this column last year that more than once that Plum used "adagio" to refer to rapid, even frantic, motion, although an adagio dance is slow. An example popped up for me recently in *Joy in the Morning*, Chapter 3, when Stilton Cheesewright "spun round with a sort of guilty bound, like an adagio dancer surprised

while watering the cat's milk."

Our announcement, in the last issue, of Richard Usborne's ninetieth birthday was exactly one year early, it turns out. Something got caught in the machinery and caused the error, but I'm sure Richard was pleased to be remembered anyway.

David Landman notes: "They said it couldn't be done, but the superior cultural climate of Lexington, Massachusetts (where feral Nobel laureates roam in herds upon the village green) was enhanced May 22nd last when Plummie Elizabeth Landman inserted two Wodehouse-Kern numbers from *Leave It to Jane* into the Broadway gala *Some Enchanted Evening* produced by Sacred Heart parish. Elizabeth soloed to ample guffaws and great applause in 'Poor Prune.' Later in the program she appeared in a beautiful line of well-preserved parish ladies (including Sister Mary) in glittering sequins and feather boas undulating through the 'Sirens' Song.' Though most of the men in the audience remained steadfast, one flimsy reed broke from the chair to which he was lashed and fell among the sirens, who seductively wound him in their boas and dragged him offstage. The unfortunate chap turned out to be Father Colletti, pastor of the parish. He was later to be seen as the gob who traces the curvy outline in 'Nothin' Like a Dame.' Lo the power of good music."

Rhoda Robinson found this quote from Plum in *Vanity Fair* for May, 1915: "Burlesque, like Worcestershire Sauce, is a condiment, not a fluid. Too much of it is more than enough." At that period PGW was providing a great deal of the magazine's editorial content under his own and several pen-names. A *Vanity Fair* cover of 1915 is shown here.



William Hardwick notes that at a recent service of remembrance for the English actress Joan Hickson ("Miss Marple," of course), a portion of "Pig Hoo-o-o-o-ey" was among the literary selections read. One of the lesser authors included was a fellow named Shakespeare.

A recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* on a new sense of Englishness among the English includes the following

heretical statement: "The reason people...find it difficult to define their Englishness, insists author Ian Sinclair, is because English culture is a myth, an idealized vision of the countryside and of a society that appeared only in the books of Agatha Christie or P. G. Wodehouse." *Of course* that countryside and that society existed. (Snort! Snort!) Next thing you know, they'll be telling us there is no Santa Claus.

Barbara Larkin found evidence that life imitates Wodehouse once again. Her local newspaper reported that a pig which had just lost a livestock show judging in Houston, Texas, was kidnapped by the man who had entered it and was taken to another show in San Angelo, where it won first place, worth \$4,000. Not a particularly newsworthy event, until you know that the kidnapped pig, as a loser in the Houston show, automatically became the property of a slaughterhouse. Lord Emsworth could find several reasons to become incensed.

Ben and Pauline Jenson have written to tell us about yet another reference to Plum: "We wanted to share with you and other Plum Liners the following from the introduction to a new edition of Sabatini's *Captain Blood*, as written by George MacDonald Fraser of Flashman fame and other adventure tales. It is published by Akadine Press for its Common Reader Editions. (1) '...it was simply the inexplicable gift for the opening sentence which is given to a few writers, and it was Rafael Sabatini's hallmark. Dickens has it, and Stevenson, and Wodehouse, and it defies analysis.' (2) '...he and his work have seldom, if ever, received more than a condescending nod from those mysterious judges who determine literary taste, decree what is worthy and what is merely popular, and set the vague bounds between what they consider intellectually respectable and likely to be of lasting value, and what is not. Their judgments have an awkward habit of being confounded by vulgarians and triflers like Bunyan, Dickens, Twain, Kipling, and Wodehouse (and we know what some of his contemporaries thought of Shakespeare)...' Grand company for sure. Missing are the Bible and Homer."

Murray Wilson, known to many as Honest Patch Perkins, has posed a question that has come up many a time on PGW-Net and alt.fan.wodehouse, but perhaps deserves an airing in *Plum Lines*. To wit: "What identifies or defines an Egg, a Bean, a Crumpet and, considerably rarer, a Pieface? I cannot find any clue in the stories. The word Crumpet in current English refers not only to the toasted yeasty bread popular in the colder seasons but connotes a desirable young woman. Knowing this, you

will see why the advertisement in my hometown newspaper some years ago that read, 'Now is the crumpet season. Are you getting yours regularly?' aroused so much ribald comment. Clearly neither of these is what PG had in mind." Indeed, we know that Plum was using forms of address that were common in his time—but where did such expressions as "Old Egg" and so forth come from in the first place? Let us have your theories, and we will print the best and/or most likely.

William Hardwick sent along an advertisement from the English *Daily Telegraph* of May 29, 1999, offering videotapes of part of the *Jeeves and Wooster* TV series. "Series 1 & 2," says the ad, meaning, I suppose, the first two seasons of the series. Phone (in the UK) 0541 557 111, or write (from anywhere) to Telegraph Entertainment/HMV Direct, 150 Oxford St., London, W1N 0DJ, UK.

In response to our photo of the Infant Samuel in the last *Plum Lines*, **Helen Murphy** notes: "In an age when the child was over-sentimentalized, the Infant Samuel was the pattern, as, unlike Jesus, we had a word-for-word quote or soundbite: 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.' This was a very popular motif. In fact, when my brother made his first Holy Communion, my grandmother presented him with a picture of the Infant Samuel. And there is a photo of my niece looking up, particularly angelically, that all members of the family, when shown it independently, called the Infant Samuel. So, a lasting cultural motif."



Jeff Peterson, stout fellow, writes that he has snakily spread the Wodehouse gospel by getting a goodish slab of "Tuppy Changes His Mind" reprinted in *Rugby* magazine—the issue of April 15, 1999, to be exact. Under the heading "Tuppy Glossop and the Village Rugby Match," Jeff spread before the eyes of the Unwashed six pages of pure, golden Wodehouse. What a man.

AD and OM

Aunt Dahlia and the Oldest Member

WODEHOUSE SAVED MY LIFE

By Hugh Laurie

Alex Hemming and William Hardwick found this article in the English *Sunday Telegraph* of May 23, 1999. Hugh Laurie was, of course, Bertie Wooster in the “Jeeves and Wooster” television series of several years back. The series got very mixed reviews among hard-core Wodehouse fans. Many of us feel that Wodehouse is almost untranslatable to another medium, and in this article Hugh Laurie seems to express a similar opinion. The article marked the republication of the English Penguin’s Wodehouse backlist: sixteen titles including *Code of the Woosters*, at £4.99 each, paperback. So far as I know, the books will not be available in America. Two of the new covers are shown below. —OM

To be able to write about P. G. Wodehouse is the sort of honour that comes rarely in any man’s life, let alone mine. This is rarity of a rare order. Halley’s comet seems like a blasted nuisance in comparison.

If you’d knocked on my head twenty years ago and told me that a time would come when I, Hugh Laurie — scraper-through of O-levels, mover of lips (own) in reading, loafer, scrounger, pettyfogger, and general berk of this parish — would be able to carve my initials in the broad bark of the Master’s oak, I’m pretty certain that I would have said “garn”, or something like that.

I was, in truth, a horrible child. Not much given to things of a bookery nature, I spent a large part of my youth smoking Number Six and cheating in French vocabulary tests. I wore platform boots with a brass skull and crossbones over the ankle, my hair was disgraceful, and I somehow contrived to pull off the gruesome trick of being both fat and thin at the same time. If you had passed me in the street during those pimply years, I am confident that you would, at the very least, have quickened your pace.

You think I exaggerate? I do not. Glancing over my school reports from the year 1972 I observe that the words “ghastly” and “desperate” feature strongly, while “no”, “not”, “never” and “again” also crop up more often than one would expect in a random sample. My history teacher’s report actually took the form of a postcard from Vancouver.

But this, you will be nauseated to learn, is a tale of redemption. In about my 13th year, it so happened that a copy of *Galahad at Blandings*

by P. G. Wodehouse entered my squalid universe, and things quickly began to change. From the very first sentence of my very first Wodehouse story, life appeared to grow somehow larger. There had always been height, depth, width, and time, and in these prosaic dimensions I had hitherto snarled, cursed, and not washed my hair. But now, suddenly, there was Wodehouse, and the discovery seemed to make me gentler every day. By the middle of the fifth chapter I was able to use a knife and fork, and I like to think that I have made reasonable strides since.

I spent the following couple of years meandering happily back and forth through Blandings Castle and its environs — learning how often the trains ran, at what times

the post was collected, how one could tell if the Empress was off-colour, why the Emsworth Arms was preferable to the Blue Boar — until the time came for me to roll up the map of adolescence and set forth into my first Jeeves novel. It was *The Code of the Woosters*, and things, as they used to say, would never be the same again.

The facts in this case, ladies and gentlemen, are simple. The first thing you should know, and probably the last, too, is that P. G. Wodehouse is still the funniest writer ever to have put words on paper. Fact number two: with the Jeeves stories, Wodehouse created the best of the best. I speak as one whose first love was Blandings, and who later took immense pleasure from Psmith, but Jeeves is the jewel, and anyone who tries to tell you different can be shown the door, the minicab, the train station, and Terminal



“From the very first sentence of my very first Wodehouse story, life somehow appeared to grow larger.”

4 at Heathrow with a clear conscience. The world of Jeeves is complete and integral, every bit as structured, layered, ordered, complex and self-contained as *King Lear*, and considerably funnier.

Now let the pages of the calendar tumble as autumn leaves, until ten years are understood to have passed. A man came to us — to me and my comedy partner, Stephen Fry — with a proposition. He asked me if I would like to play Bertram Wooster in twenty-three hours of televised drama, opposite the internationally tall Fry in the role of Jeeves.

“Fiddle,” said one of us. I forget which.

“Sticks,” said the other.

“Wodehouse on television? It’s lunacy. A disaster in kit form. Get a grip, man.”

The man, a television producer, pressed home his argument with skill and determination.

“All right,” he said, shrugging on his coat. “I’ll ask someone else.”

“Whoa, hold up,” said one of us, shooting a startled look at the other.

“Steady,” said the other, returning the S. L. with topspin. There was a pause.

“You’ll never get a cab in this weather,” we said, in unison.

And so it was that, a few months later, I found myself slipping into a double-breasted suit in a Prince of Wales check while my colleague made himself at home inside an enormous bowler hat and the two of us embarked on our separate disciplines. Him for the noiseless

opening of decanters, me for the twirling of the whangee.

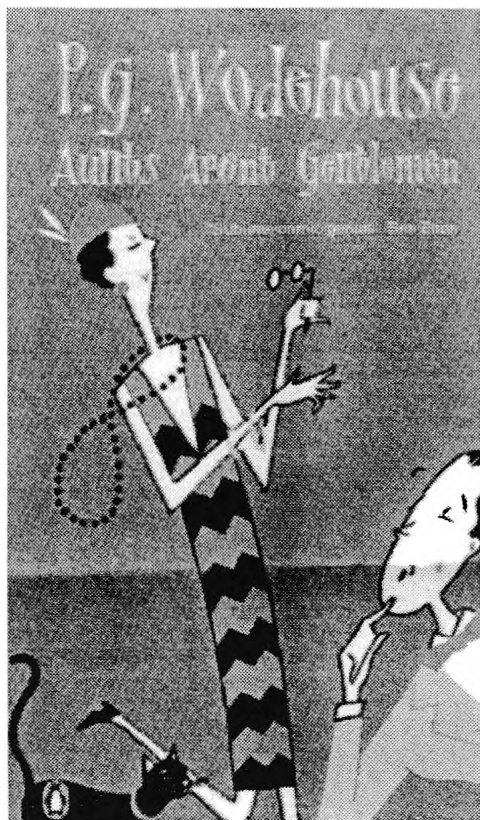
So the great P. G. was making his presence felt in my life once more. And I soon learnt that I still had much to learn. How to smoke plain cigarettes, how to drive a 1927 Aston Martin, how to mix a Martini with five parts water and one part water (for filming purposes only), how to attach a pair of spats in less than a day and a half, and so on.

But the thing that really worried us, that had us saying “crikey” for weeks on end, was this business of *The Words*. Let me give you an example. Bertie is leaving in a huff: “Tinkerty tonk,” I said, and I meant it to sting.” I ask you: how is one to do justice of even the roughest sort to a line like that? How can any human actor, with his clumsily attached ears, and his irritating voice, and his completely misguided hair, hope to deliver a line as pure as that? It cannot be done. You begin with a diamond on the page, and you end up with a blob of Pritt, the Non-Sticky Sticky Stuff, on the screen.

Wodehouse on the page can be taken in the reader’s own time; on the screen, the beautiful sentence often seems to whip by, like an attractive member of the opposite sex glimpsed from the back of a cab. You, as the viewer, try desperately to fix the image in your mind — but it is too late, because suddenly you’re into a commercial break and someone is letting you know your home may be at risk if you eat the wrong breakfast cereal.

Naturally one hopes there were compensations in watching Wodehouse on the screen — pleasant scenery, amusing clothes, a particular actor’s eyebrows — but it can never replicate the experience of reading him. If I may go slightly culinary for a moment: a dish of foie gras nestling on a bed of truffles, with a side-order of lobster and caviar may provide you with a wonderful sensation; but no matter how wonderful, you simply don’t want to be spoon-fed the stuff by a perfect stranger. You need to hold the spoon, and decide for yourself when to wolf and when to nibble.

And so I am back to reading, rather than playing Jeeves. And my Wodehousian redemption is, I hope, complete. Indeed, there is nothing left for me to say except to wish, as I fold away my penknife and gaze up at the huge oak towering overhead, that my history teacher could see me now.



CHAPTERS CORNER

Good news! Three chapters that we feared had fallen by the wayside have in fact been picking themselves up, dusting themselves off, and starting all over again. Well, perhaps we should say that one of these is an incipient new chapter. Once upon a time, there was a group in Minnesota calling themselves **Plum's Chum's**, and word has it that it was run by Bill Horn. It is unclear whether this chapter is now defunct (or, as an active chapter, funct), but now some Plum-minded individuals in the St. Paul area are calling out for a resurrection of sorts, although possibly not under the same name. This group was to meet in June at St. Thomas University to attend a talk on Wodehouse and G. K. Chesterton, and then to gather afterwards "for conversation and perhaps a spot," as Kris Fowler (aka Aurelia Cammerleigh) put it. Kris had high hopes that the gathering would provide an impetus for forming a new chapter in her area, but there is no word yet on how successful she was. If you live anywhere in the St. Paul area and are interested in joining a Minnesota chapter, do get in touch with Kris. You may find her address in the TWS membership list or e-mail her at fowleor13@tc.umn.edu. If and when a chapter is formed and given a name, it will be added to the TWS rolls. Meanwhile, Bill Horn, if you're out there—will you let us know the status of **Plum's Chums**?

We are happy to report that our Virginia chapter, **The Soup & Fish Club**, has succeeded in getting off the ground. Writes Deborah Dillard: "We are far from incipient! We are like Bertie on the morning after, having had one of Jeeves's healing tonics. We have had two meetings this year and will have an ice cream social next month." The month she refers to is July, and I doubt that this *Plum Lines* will reach members in time for potential **Soup & Fish-ers** to have adequate notice of the meeting. However, be it known that the ice cream social will take place on July 24 in Clifton, Virginia, and if you require more information about joining this chapter, see the information provided below.

We also hear that attempts are being made to revive the Seattle **Angler's Rest** chapter. See the list below for more contact information.

In other news, the last issue received of the *Argus Intelligencer and Wheat Growers Gazette*, from **Blandings Castle**, informs us that there will be a production of *Sitting Pretty* on Sunday, August 8, in San Francisco. Naturally a contingent of the Blandings crew will be there, and should other Plummies wish to join them, the time is 2 p.m. and the place is 25 Van Ness Avenue.

Newsletters have also been received from **Capital! Capital!**, **Chapter One**, and the **Drone Rangers**, all of which have kept themselves busy with meetings and Wodehousian activities. Rather than summarize their doings, however, I would like to devote the remainder of this column to providing the latest information regarding known chapters—where they are and whom to contact to join a chapter. Many thanks to Marilyn MacGregor for supplying the lion's share of this information. Should any of the following be inaccurate in any way, or if there is a chapter missing from the list, please let Auntie know. I would also like to fill in some blanks—i.e., how often do these chapters meet, and where? Expect to be hearing from me soon in this regard, as we intend to post chapter information on our new web site.

A happy and Plum-filled summer to all!

—AD

TWS Chapters

Angler's Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)

Contact: Susan Collicott

Blandings Castle

(Greater San Francisco Bay Area)

Newsletter: *The Argus Intelligencer and Wheat Grower's Gazette*

Contact: Jan Kaufman, president

Capital! Capital!

(Washington D.C. and vicinity)

Contact: Erik R. Quick, president

Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Susan and Daniel Cohen

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

UNABASHED WOOSTERISM

By David Sarasohn

Marilyn MacGregor sent along a story from the *Portland Oregonian* describing a recent outbreak of unabashed Woosterism in Portland, Oregon, by members of our very own society. Excerpts follow.

At first glance the small dining room in The Benson Hotel looked like a mass escape from "Masterpiece Theatre." Bill Carpenter, an otherwise blameless computer designer, sported the kind of formal wear suitable for welcoming George V, with a gleaming waistcoat positively polar in its whiteness. Kerry Jeffrey, president of the Multnomah Cricket Club, wore a cricket jacket with more stripes than a Rurutanian color guard, while several ladies looked ready for tea at any hotel favored by the viceroy of India.

Somehow, you can't celebrate P. G. Wodehouse in a Jimi Hendrix T-shirt. This is, after all, a comic novelist whose most famous character is a butler—a figure with all the modern significance of a whalebone corset. And yet, eighty-three years after his appearance, people still read about Jeeves and his employer, Bertie Wooster. In fact, they gather in groups, as at Saturday night's meeting of the Portland branch of the Wodehouse Society.

"I'm always giggling when I read him," explained Melissa Carpenter, citing Wodehouse's "unexpected use of metaphor." As Chuck O'Leary noted, Wodehouse always takes a paragraph somewhere you don't expect it to go.

In celebration, Portland Wodehousians listened to an account of the rules of cricket; a reading of the only Wodehouse story that anyone could remember that actually mentioned Portland, Oregon; and a paper outlining Wodehouse's multiple mentions of Welsh rarebit. On that subject, it was demonstrated, Wodehouse was far more definitive than Shakespeare, Robert Louis Stevenson, or Franklin Dixon, author of the Hardy Boys mysteries.

Still, most of those present felt that the key to Wodehouse's appeal was his language and the fact that Wodehouse offers an entertaining tunnel out of reality. There is no item ever brought up before the Supreme Court more lacking in socially redeeming significance than the average Wodehouse novel.

In honor of the occasion, Bill Carpenter ordered a drink prominently mentioned in one Wodehouse series, a hot scotch and lemon. On its arrival, he tasted it carefully, pursed his lips thoughtfully, and concluded judiciously, "Terrible."

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Marilyn MacGregor

The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Newsletter: *Dronestar*, edited by Toni and Bill Rudersdorf

Contact: Anne Bianchi

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and elsewhere in New England)

Contact: Anne Cotton, president

The Pdrones Club

(St. Louis, Missouri, area)

(Note: No recent information received; is this chapter still with us?)

Last known contact: Sandy Morris

The Soup & Fish Club

(Virginia area)

Contact: Deborah Dillard

The Wuckoos of the Palace

(Greater Portland, Oregon, area)

President: Maria Garner-Jeffrey

Contact: William Carpenter

WODEHOUSE IN TUNE

By C. A. Wolski

Chris Wolski, who lives Way Out West, went Way Back East to see this show in the tiny town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. The effort was not wasted.

P. G. Wodehouse once described his method of writing novels as "...making a sort of musical comedy without music..." The producers of the 1999 Shaw Festival have gone to the bother of adding music to the Master's work and have created an absolutely topping musical, *Foggy Day*.

The play, an adaptation of Plum's 1919 novel *Damsel in Distress*, follows the exploits of a hapless and lovelorn Canadian songwriter, Steve Riker (Larry Herbert), who is searching for a damsel in distress to sweep off her feet. In typical Wodehouse (and musical) fashion, the damsel, one Lady Jessica (Glynis Ranney), makes herself available just when things seem to be getting dull and revs up the plot. The addition of 15 or so Gershwin songs keeps things tuneful and amusing for the next two or so hours (and balances out the more conventional, and, gasp, non-Wodehouse elements that have crept in).

Foggy Day is somewhat of a departure for the Shaw Festival, which usually produces works written during the lifetime of G. B. Shaw. A film version of *Damsel in Distress* was in planning in 1937, with George Gershwin contributing the score, when G. G. had the great impertinence to cash in his ticket for the great hereafter. The film as produced bore little relationship to that envisioned by Gershwin. The producers of *Foggy Day* have recreated the play as Gershwin proposed it.

So with a great pedigree and with my indication that it's well worth the leg up to Canada, was it any good? Now, one would think, "Well, it's got all the elements—Wodehouse and Gershwin, how can it not be horrible?" Well, that's what one might think if one had never have sat through a modern musical—a monstrosity that usually consists of tuneless renderings of "music" and lead-footed "dancing." The musical, the bane of any hopeful theatre-goer, is a tricky thing to do well, and directors often seem to rely less on talent than on the hope that merely having bodies on stage will satisfy the audience.

Not so with *Foggy Day*. The cast is first rate—all of them can sing and dance in spectacular fashion. Leads Herbert and Ranney even had me thinking Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers during the second act number "Love Walked In" wherein a duet turned into a lovely dance number. The supporting players, who would be used as window



Front cover of the theater program: *In Vaudeville*, 1918, by Charles Delmuth (1883-1935). (Philadelphia Museum of Art: A. E. Gallatin Collection)

dressing in most musicals, were just as good as the leads, stealing scenes left and right with a larcenous streak not seen since the last weekend at Blandings Castle—my heart leapt up, like Freddie Threepwood's when he first laid eyes on Joan Valentine, when I espied the charming young women of the "ensemble." They played everything from train passengers to maids with equal aplomb.

The orchestrations are also quite good. The music is rendered with strength, but not in a way that overpowers the performers and makes them scream themselves hoarse. This is the second musical I've seen at the Shaw festival in the Royal George Theatre, and I must thank the chap who designed the acoustics. The music is present just to remind us why everyone breaks into song from time to time.

So the musical works as a musical, with a cast that can sing, dance, and act. But how are the Wodehousian ele-

ments?

Except for the leads, who resemble conventional musical-romantic leads, we're squarely in Wodehouse's universe. Conniving staff, doddering lords, bossy women, and disguised guests abound.

The play begins with Lord Marshmoreton's staff conducting a lottery wherein they are given the name of one of the "favorites" vying for the hand of Marshmoreton's daughter, Lady Jessica. The suitors include an American poet, Cousin Reggie (a good-natured dope of the Gussie Fink-Nottle school), a curate, an army officer, the local postmaster and "Mr. X" (anyone who may present themselves at any time). As with any Wodehouse story, the scheming and capering is more fun than the wooing.

The real scene stealer is Reggie, the most Wodehousian of all the characters, his first "What ho!" signaling that I had shown up at the right place. As played by Todd Waite, Reggie is both comic and silly, and always genuinely likeable. The big second act production number "Stiff Upper Lip" is all his.

Richard Farrell as Lord Marshmoreton brings a Lord Emsworth sensibility to the play, though he is made of much tougher stuff, putting his foot down when his sister, Lady Caroline, threatens to bring all the mayhem to a halt. Nora McLellan, as Marshmoreton's love interest the Ethel Mermansque Billie Dore, also keeps things light and frothy.

If there is any weakness in the musical it's the part of Lady Jessica. Ranney fits the part all right with hair the color of fine-spun gold and big blue eyes that hypnotically draw in all the men around her. But the part is too conventional and she's too level headed. Even Herbert's Steve Riker gets into the Wodehousian spirit, donning a false wig and moustache at one point. Lady Jessica aside (and, let me note, Ranney is extremely talented with a lovely voice and a good swift step), the musical is absolutely ripping and the songs and performance will be etched in your brain for weeks to come (I'm still humming the title tune, "Foggy Day," as I write this).

If you're interested in getting tickets for *Foggy Day* move fast. I absolutely lucked out because my aged relatives are members of the Shaw Festival grand poo-bah club or some such and they were able to muscle some tickets. I also recommend you sit fairly far back from the stage. Choreographer William Orlowski puts the entire stage to use during the big musical numbers, so, if you're too close, you're apt to miss snappy little bits. (I speak from experience: I was in the fourth row and constantly felt agog during the big numbers, particularly the first act finale "I

AND ANOTHER VIEW

By Jay Weiss

Here's another account of a pilgrimage to Niagara-on-the-Lake and its transient Wodehouse wonders. The little town, my atlas tells me, lies on the shore of Lake Ontario just a few miles downstream from Niagara Falls and periously close to the United States border—the slightest misstep could put an unwary Canadian into the hands of those *Americans* over there, with their strange tribal customs and inexplicable language. —OM

In the Ontario Shaw Festival's sparkling production of the Wodehouse-Gershwin musical, *A Foggy Day*, Ira Gershwin's delicious, delightful, de-lovely tribute to Plum, his mentor and friend, the song and dance number "Stiff Upper Lip" sparkled the most brightly of all.

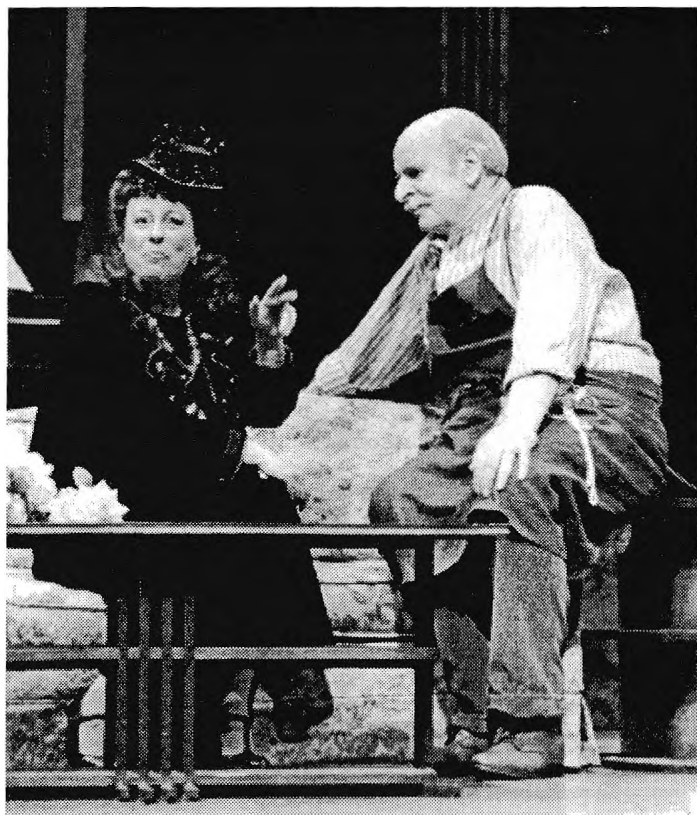
Seizing what might be a last opportunity to savor this tune in its Plum serving, five members of the Wodehouse Society flew up from Newark, New Jersey, to Buffalo, New York, and drove to Niagara-on-the-Lake on June 26. After this season, Dr. John Mueller and Norm Fos-



The conniving underservant (Karen Wood) chats with the female lead (Glynis Ranney). Both are radically transformed from their original manifestations in the Wodehouse novel, *Damsel in Distress*. Lady Maud has become Lady Jessica and Albert, in what must have been an even more difficult adjustment, has become Albertina. Photo by Andr  e Lanthier.

ter, who wrote the book for the show, must surrender the show to an uncertain future in the grasp of its copyright owners, the Gershwin estate.

To restore tissues severely depleted by a pre-dawn departure, the TWS adventurers, John Graham, Carolyn Pokrivchak, Tony Ring, editor of the UK Wodehouse Society's *Wooster Sauce*, and Joan and Jay Weiss sluiced and browsed at the oak-lined Olde Angel Pub, established in 1795 and rebuilt after the War of 1812. Its offerings of pints of ale, steak and kidney pies, and fish and chips seemed satisfactorily appropriate for a Wodehouse Weekend.



Billie Dore (Nora McLellan) discovering that the loveable old gardener, Dadda, is really Lord Marshmorton (Richard Farrell). Photo by Andr   Lanthier.

The descent into the Wodehouse world proceeded as the curtain rose to reveal George Bevan first setting eyes on Lady Jessica Marshmoreton and falling instantly in love with her. But the leading man wasn't George at all. Foster and Mueller had inexplicably changed the name of the character to Steve Reiker, citing what they call a need "to avoid biographical distractions."

Mueller writes in his program notes that "...stage musicals require more songs than film musicals" to explain why his production is packed with 16 Gershwin melodies. To accommodate them, Muller had to streamline the story, eliminating Lady Maud's foolish brother and transforming Albert into Albertina and Maud into Jessi-

ca. But, delightfully afloat in a sea of melodies by George and lyrics by Ira, not even the most diehard Plummie—Tony Ring—could complain. Mueller writes that two of the Gershwin tunes, "Put Me to the Test" and "Pay Some Attention to Me," excised from the 1937 Fred Astaire film *Damsel in Distress*, probably received their first professional performance in this production. They were worth the 60 year wait.

Nora McClellan as Billie Dore and Todd Waite as Reggie performed in commendably sprightly fashion. Richard Farrell played his first musical comedy role of Lord Marshmoreton as if he'd been studying Wodehouse all his life instead of what he'd actually been doing, concentrating on Shavian drama at the festival for the last 17 years.

After removing their make-up McClellan and Farrell, together with the artistic director of the Shaw Festival, Christopher Newton, chatted amiably with their Plummie visitors. *A Foggy Day* has been a huge success, Nora said. "We loved doing it."

We loved watching her.

SITTING PRETTY TAKES OFF!

The San Francisco theatrical group known as 42nd St. Moon will present *Sitting Pretty* this summer: August 5–22. If you know what's good for you, you will attend a performance without fail. I saw a couple of their shows last year—the group is good.

The advance announcement describes the musical thus: "The last of the great 'Princess Theatre' Musicals which set the standard for modern musical comedy! Kern & Wodehouse's great score includes 'A Year from Today,' 'All You Need is a Girl,' 'On a Desert Island,' and the delightful title song."

My instructions to you, if you are anywhere near San Francisco in August, are to buy a ticket and go see this musical. Afterward you will thank me brokenly, sobbing with gratitude. Lots of us Blandings Castlers are going. As Neil Midkiff remarked at a recent chapter meeting, "Anyone who thinks musicals have improved in the last 75 years hasn't heard these songs."]

This production is part of 42nd St Moon's presentation this year of "one musical from each decade of the Broadway Musical's 'Golden Age,' the 20s through the 70s!" Also included are "Babes in Arms," "Fiorello!" and other shows.

—OM

RIGHT HO, ROBERT!

By Aunt Dahlia

It isn't often that we Plummies get the treat of seeing Wodehouse performed on stage, so imagine the delight of certain PGW-Netters when the following transmission was received across the wires:

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Robert Goodale, I'm an actor, and I'm English. A few years ago, I moved to a house in Dulwich, South London, and whilst rummaging through the attic, I chanced upon an old newspaper cutting about P. G. Wodehouse. Only then did it dawn on me that I was now in the area where the great master spent his boyhood days.

"Some time later, while immersed in the world of Jeeves and Wooster, I was asked to devise a one man show for the Edinburgh Festival. With the permission of the Wodehouse estate, I decided to adapt *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* for this purpose. It all went rather well, and I soon found myself touring the country with this self same show and subsequently recording a radio version for the BBC. I was then invited to adapt two further shows from the Jeeves and Wooster canon to be performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival's premier venue, the Assembly Rooms."

Mr. Goodale went on to explain that he was putting on a one-night-only show at the Lamb's Manhattan Church of the Nazarene in New York City for the benefit of a producer interested in his show, that the chosen night for this performance was Thursday, June 24, and that all interested Plummies were invited to attend.

Not surprisingly, a small but enthusiastic group was quickly formed, and we made the usual plans for a spot of browsing and sluicing prior to the performance. Accordingly, 12 of us (including Tony Ring from England, who just happened to be in New York at the opportune moment) assembled at the Senior Conservative Club—that is, the Harvard Club on 44th Street, for which we had our host, Jay Weiss, to thank. From there we proceeded down the street to the Lamb's Church of the Nazarene, made our way to a jolly little theatre on the third floor, and waited expectantly for Mr. Goodale to do his stuff.

The stage was nearly bare, save for

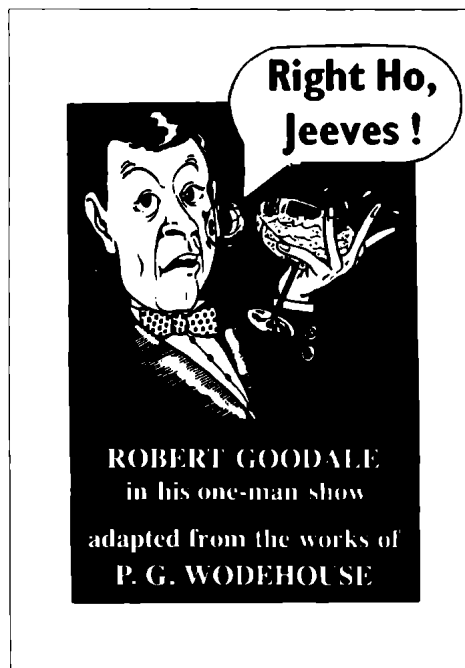
two narrow platforms on either side and a two-step riser in the middle flanked by a couple of narrow curtains. A pitcher of water and a tumbler rested atop the platform on the left. These, then, comprised the setting and the props; the rest was left to our imaginations, as any good Wodehouse story should be.

After a short delay, Mr. Goodale appeared, attired in smart evening dress sparked by a bright red waistcoat, and proceeded to speak the words we know and love so well. The book that he had chosen to adapt and perform was *Right Ho, Jeeves*. We later learned that he has two versions of this story—one that stretches a full two hours and another that lasts 75 minutes. It was the shorter version that he was presenting this night. By necessity, he had to make large leaps over sections of the book, creating gaps which he filled with his own narrative in the Wodehouse style. He did an excellent job of substituting for Plum in this regard; it was hard to tell where Plum left off and Robert took up.

Because we got the shorter version, however, there were certain gaps that jarred upon us. In particular, we had been anticipating with bated breath the arrival of the school prize-giving scene. So imagine our disappointment when no such scene ensued—it was skipped over for the sake of brevity. Alas!

Another quibble: The actor's interpretation of Madeline Bassett left a little something to be desired; it was difficult to distinguish her voice from others, as he maintained a low, husky register, instead of something high and trilly, as we would expect Madeline to sound.

However, on the plus side, he did quite well by the other characters in the story—most especially Gussie Fink-Nottle, who was rendered in voice and appearance quite nebbishly, complete with glasses (which made the loss of the prize-giving speech that much more heart-rending). Mr. Goodale's affection and respect for Wodehouse shone throughout his performance—a big point in his favor. *Right Ho, Jeeves* is not his only adaptation; he apparently has also performed a version of *The Code of the Woosters*. We hope he succeeds in bringing his one-man show to the States, for we Plummies have been longing for just such a production since the days of the late, great Edward Duke. Thank you, Robert!



SPOTTED ON THE INTERNET

By Aunt Dahlia

For those new to the Internet, PGW-Net is an automated mailing list that provides an instant connection to other electronically-minded Plummers. Most list members take on aliases, known as “noms de Plum” (although this is not a requirement for joining the list) and then either actively engage in ongoing discussions or content themselves to “lurk” and enjoy the messages generated by others.

PGW-Net communications can range from brief comments to full-blown discussions. Some messages can be informational, such as this one recently received from “Mr. Mulliner,” who writes: “Web-enhanced list members might enjoy a perusal of <http://www.butlersguild.com>, the website of the International Guild of Professional Butlers. Highlights include the guild’s Code of Honor (which could serve as a model of the Junior Ganymede Handbook), “The Butler Did It!” (which could serve as a model of the Junior Ganymede club book, reporting on employers’ deeds), the etiquette Q&A (what do you call your nanny when she is titled?), and the P. G. Wodehouse page, hawking the Jeeves novels (though not, curiously, *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?*; perhaps even entertaining the question violates the Code of Honor). Membership, incidentally, is free to those with experience as a butler, estate manager, major domo, estate caretaker, and/or personal assistant.”

In May, a rather heated discussion erupted after “Jeeves” (aka Jay Weiss) reported on Priestly’s comments with regard to Wodehouse in his 1976 book *English Humour* (Chapter 10). In part, Priestly wrote that “In my book—this one, in fact—he is not a great humorist at all. He cannot be squeezed into the company of great humorists, alongside Fielding, Sterne, Lamb, Dickens. He is simply not that kind of writer. He has not their irony, their affection, their contact with reality. He does not begin to make us think about life or feel deeply about it. If humour once again is ‘thinking in fun while feeling earnest,’ he is not a humourist at all, let alone a great one.” (The quote continues, but is too long to reproduce here, and one gets the gist. I might add that Priestly includes some very complimentary things about Plum’s writing, but also attributes his success to being nothing more than “a brilliant super-de-luxe schoolboy.”)

Well! To get an idea of how some PGW-Netters reacted to this, read on:

A Thoughtful Bean: “I mean to say, what! Priestly was, and here I quote verbatim, ‘steeped to the gills in serious

purpose.’ He is not to be trusted. Especially when it comes to his comments on humor. He wouldn’t know humor if it walked up to him and threw a pie in his face. And I wish it would.”

A. Keggs, butler (retired): “Mr. Priestly is probably more to be pitied than censured. He preddefines humour as ‘thinking in fun while feeling earnest,’ and how he managed to get ‘earnest’ into a definition of ‘humour’ defies my understanding. It was never (apart from maybe a few of his early works) Wodehouse’s intention to do anything more than entertain, or to impart any wisdom, other than that, given a choice, it is always better to laugh than cry.”

Cyril Waddesley-Davenport: “The problem, I think, is Priestley’s definition of humorist. For example, I would never regard Lamb or Dickens as humorists. But Priestly is right on the mark in describing Plum as a super schoolboy. It is his pure ‘schoolboy vision’ untainted by any hint of serious purpose that is the essence of Wodehouse’s greatness... If you want human sympathy, you can read Dickens. But if you want to laugh out loud, read Wodehouse. If that isn’t a ‘great humorist,’ I don’t know what is.”

There you are. There’s plenty more besides, but for space reasons we must give you the abbreviated form. So do you want to subscribe to PGW-Net? It’s simple! Just send a message to: pgwnet-request@lists.best.com with the word “subscribe” (without the quotes) in the body of your message. To unsubscribe, do the same thing, only with “unsubscribe” in your message.



Another example of what you can find on PGWnet is this recent communication:

For those of you who don’t already have Joseph Connolly’s *P. G. Wodehouse: An Illustrated Biography*, on your shelves, now’s your chance! Edward R. Hamilton, Bookseller, Falls Village, CT 06031-5000 lists the Thames and Hudson paperback version at \$6.95, item 221066. They ship only to USA addresses, prepaid orders only (check or money order), \$3 shipping per order. You can visit their Web site at hamiltonbook.com to see many other close-outs, remainders, and discounted books.

I’m just a satisfied customer.

I assume the contents of the paperback are identical to

the hardbound edition I have, originally published 1979 — at least they both have 160 pages.

Connolly's biography is not deep, but it's congenial and interesting. The photographs are lavish, including family, friends, and colleagues, as well as stills from film and TV adaptations and depictions of first-edition covers and dust jackets. There's a bibliography of the first editions as well, though not up to the standards later set by MacIlvaine or Jasen. Still, I think the photos alone are well worth the price, and the text can be considered a welcome bonus.

Neil Midkiff

And still another example of what's on the Internet is this communication of last April, just arrived in my hands:

Dear alt.fan.wodehouse participants:

I hope this isn't an unwelcome intrusion. I wanted to let all of you know that stage adaptations of *The Code of the Woosters* and *Thank You, Jeeves* are available on audio tape from L.A. Theatre Works (the company for which I work). Both were adapted for the stage by Mark Richard. *Code* stars Rosalind Ayres, Martin Jarvis and Kenneth Northcott. *Thank You, Jeeves* stars Simon Templeman, Paxton Whitehead, Jennifer Tilly, and L.A. Mayor Richard Riordan.

L.A. Theatre Works is the nation's leading producer of audio theatre. Our soon-to-be updated website is www.latw.org. Our toll-free number is (800) 708-8863. Please call me (Marianne Eismann) if you would to receive our audio theatre catalog, to order Wodehouse tapes, or if you have any questions.

Code is \$18.95, *Jeeves* is \$15.95. S/H is \$3 for the first tape, 50 cents for each additional tape. You can also e-mail us at latworks@aol.com.

Thanks, and regards,
Marianne Eismann

I watched one of the recording sessions for these books some time ago, and was struck with the excellence of the readers, though I haven't heard the productions as they are meant to be heard, on tape.

Incidentally, Mark Richards, who adapted these books for the stage, is the Artistic Director of City Lit Theater in Chicago, and a Wodehouse fan, and knows his business!
—OM

WODEHOUSE PLAYHOUSE REVISITED

As we noted in the last issue, there is a possibility (a lean, skinny, bare possibility) that the BBC will release on videotape the excellent *Wodehouse Playhouse* television shows made way back in the mid 70s. Readers were asked to urge BBC onward and upward in the matter — we gotta show 'em there's a market!

Len Brand, who started this project rolling some time ago, recently wrote "another long letter to Laura Palmer at BBC to see how they were coming along with the project. Her response was rather short, and I quote: 'We have been steadily receiving and logging requests for *Wodehouse Playhouse*, but at this time no decision has been taken to add them to the release schedule.' I don't know how many letters they need to make a decision, but evidently a lot of Wodehouse fans have been writing in. Keep up the good work."

To keep up the good work, write to:

Ms. Laura Palmer
BBC Worldwide Americas
747 3rd Avenue
New York NY 10017

and assure her of your interest in the release of those videotapes.

By the way, Len has confirmed, with the kind assistance of Ms. Palmer, that there were indeed only 20 episodes in the series.
—OM

I took my place among the standees at the back of the concert hall. I devoted my time to studying the faces of my neighbours, hoping to detect in them some traces of ruth and pity and what is known as kind indulgence. But not a glimmer. Like all rustic standees, these were stern, implacable men, utterly incapable of taking the broad, charitable view and realising that a fellow who comes on a platform and starts reciting about Christopher Robin going hoppity-hoppity-hop (or, alternatively, saying his prayers) does not do so from sheer wantonness but because he is a helpless victim of circumstances beyond his control.

The Mating Season, 1949

TEA, SYMPATHY, AND CONTRIBUTIONS

As a great philosopher (whose name escapes us) once put it: Things happen. One of the things that happened to your red-faced editors during the course of 1998 was that a wealth of articles and contributions for these *Plum Lines* pages became inadvertently (and, apparently, irrevocably) lost. How this happened would take too long to explain—well, the truth is we simply don't want to explain it—but you may safely ascribe it to a concatenation of circumstances involving computer crashes, postal exchanges, and frequent travels on the parts of both editors last year.

Be that as it may, the fact is that at one time we had a large number of jolly articles and whatnot overflowing the in-tray, and now we have a paucity of contributions for future issues. These leaves us squarely on the horns of two dilemmas: First of all, we would very much like to retrieve as much as possible of the lost material. It has tried our souls greatly to think of the contributors out there who sent in something they thought would make a dandy addition to these hallowed pages, only to wait in vain for publication. No doubt this has resulted in a certain whatsit of the soul if not a marked peevishness on the part of those who have waited so patiently all this time to see their names in print. "Well, really!" we can hear them saying. "If the OM and Auntie think we'll grace them with future contributions after this, they have another think coming!" And we don't blame 'em for that!

Nevertheless, we are issuing an appeal in the hope that all might be forgiven and forgotten. If you are among those who have sent something that has never been published or acknowledged, would you do us the honor of trying again? Please re-send your contribution(s) to the OM or Aunt Dahlia, and we will assure you of a place in a future issue of *Plum Lines*, along with our apologies.

Our second dilemma is that with or without the old lost contributions, our mailboxes are not filling up fast enough with new material, and for the first time in our editorial careers, we are faced with the possibility of not having enough to publish. How this could happen is a bit of a mystery, but one that is easily solved by a call for new offerings to *Plum Lines*. Please, old beans, send us stuff to print—do! We are remarkably open-minded about what we will accept for contributions (well, within limits, of course). Do you have a rather nifty article you've written about some aspect of Wodehouse you'd like to share with other members of the society? Have you read a funny or scholarly article in another publication that

you think would be appropriate for our pages? Did you spot a mention of Wodehouse somewhere, or do you have a question you need answered? Is there a photo or drawing you think we should publish? Send it to us! Rejection is a rare occurrence with this editorial staff, and we always welcome new and interesting insights into the World of Wodehouse.

By the way, any contributions that can be sent on disk would be greatly appreciated. Just let us know what format you are using when you submit the disk.

The editors thank any and all contributors, new and old, for indulging us in our little whims.

—AD and OM

18TH CENTURY HUMOR

Marilyn MacGregor found this in *A Kentish Lad*, the autobiography of Frank Muir, paperback, Corgi Books, 1998, pp 345-46.

"...letters from his friends showed that Sam Johnson was a much funnier and jollier man than Boswell's biography allowed him to be, and he had a nice touch of irony....

"But a sense of humour only became a desirable quality in modern times. In Johnson's eighteenth century a gentleman could pee on the lawn, salute a gentleman friend with a kiss, cry in public, but it was vulgar and simply not done to be seen laughing heartily. Swift proudly stated he had only laughed twice in his life, Lord Chesterfield warned his son, 'Frequent laughter is the characteristic of folly and ill-manners,' and Alexander Pope claimed he had never laughed in his life. Plays and books of the time went in for 'sentimental comedy,' which was genteel and called not for a healthy guffaw, but for what the poet Robert Southey called 'a silent and transient simper'.

"Boswell almost certainly suppressed the playful joking side of Johnson's nature because he knew his hero would be regarded by eighteenth-century society as having a serious character defect."

Marilyn adds, "Now aren't you glad neither we nor Wodehouse lived in the eighteenth century?"

THE PLUMS OF P. G. WODEHOUSE

We mentioned an issue or two ago that The Folio Society of London was offering six Wodehouse books free to new members. We did not mention that the society has recently published a new Wodehouse collection whose title forms the headline of this article. It contains, we are told,

(1) "Nine of his most cherished short stories. Two golf, two Mulliner, and one each of the Drones, Ukridge, Uncle Fred, Lord Emsworth, and Jeeves."

(2) "Sixty 'Plums'—short extracts from other works that are truly gems."

(3) "Approximately fifty delightful illustrations by Paul Cox." One is just below. A solid gold umbrella ferrule to the first member who can recall what character, in which story, and for what reason, balances an umbrella on his nose, exuberates while doing so, astonishes a neighbor, and fascinates a dog. I'd guess it's a man who has just become engaged to an utterly irresistible half-pint.

The book is a hard cover ("cased" in English), available from the Folio Society and from Books Systems Plus, 2B Priors Hall Farm, Widdington, Essex CB11 3SB, UK. E-mail BSP2B@aol.com.



ARBMISHEL

I confess—that odd headline is just a cheap trick to get your attention for a chunk of poetry that is, like Raymond Parsloe Devine, "more spiritual, more intellectual" than the average golfer. **Bill Serjeant** found the poem in a little book entitled *Meet These People*, published in 1928 by Herbert Jenkins. (Herbert, by the way, was Plum's long-time English publisher.) Now—are you still with me?—here's the real title and the poem (by Reginald Arkell) :

ABE MITCHELL

(Who "has stumbled on a secret of the game")

New secrets each succeeding day
Hover around us as we play,
How can I hope to learn them all?
I keep my eye upon the ball;
I make the club-head follow through
Exactly as you told me to.
I take my mashie in the rough
And hit the ball just hard enough,
Yet not too hard—I reach the green
In something over seventeen;
I stand, serene and undismayed
By stymies, well and truly laid,
And now just when my task is done,
You go and find another one!

But wait—there's more! I can't resist the urge to reprint, from the same book, this wonderful sketch of someone who in this world or any other could only be the future Edward VIII. Sketch by Bert Thomas. —OM



MORE SEX, PLEASE, WE'RE BRITISH

By Calvin Trillin

This article appeared in *Time*, January 26, 1998, and arrived at *Plum Lines* from an unknown source. Excerpts follow. —OM

I am not enthusiastic about Tony Blair's plans to create a youthful and stylish New Britain, where people are less formal and more willing to express their emotions. I've always been fond of the stodgy and overly formal Old Britain, where people don't have any emotions to express.

Unlike the Prime Minister, I treasure the image of English men's clubs, full of dozing old gents who have names like Trevor and refer to their wives in tender moments as "old thing." I would be unhappy to see Jeeves and Bertie Wooster get on a first-name basis. I don't even want to think about the possibility that Jeeves, given the new atmosphere, may feel it necessary to confess tearfully that beneath his awesomely capable exterior he often feels himself lacking in self-esteem.

If Jeeves and Bertie Wooster did get on a first-name basis these days, Jeeves probably wouldn't call his employer Bertie, the diminutive of Bertram. That name is

strictly Old Britain. He might call him Scott. According to a recent *Washington Post* article by Dan Balz, the Prime Minister's advisers asked a chef from Cambridge to cook for an English-French summit meeting and then asked if he could change his first name from Anton to Tony for the day, presumably because it sounds zippier.

Blair himself insists that his aides call him Tony. Will English schoolchildren in history classes now be referring to one of his predecessors as Sir Tony Eden? I hope not. Sir Anthony Eden was my idea of a proper British Prime Minister. The same was true of Harold Macmillan, another stiff old bird who mumbled through his mustache and never heard of anyone getting in touch with his inner self. Any aide who referred to that Prime Minister as Hal would presumably have found himself transferred to a social-services suboffice in Leeds.

I don't think I should have to concoct a whole new stereotype of England at this stage of the game. Remember, we helped all these people out during the war. The least they can do is conform to our prejudices.

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VOLUNTEER OFFICERS

Information and new memberships
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Dues payments and address changes
Tom Wainwright

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

Dues are \$20 per year.

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