



# Plum Lines

The quarterly newsletter of The Wodehouse Society Vol. 21 No. 3 Autumn 2000

## IN SEARCH OF BLANDINGS REDUX: THE WODEHOUSE MILLENNIUM TOUR

By Robert Bruce, John Fletcher, Murray Hedgcock, and Elin Woodger (AD)

*Plum Lines, August 1989 (Vol. 10, No. 3): "Pilgrimage is an apt description of the trip that twenty-four members of the Wodehouse Society made to Dulwich College, to Wodehouse's London, and to Wodehouse sites in the west of England. It was not a religious journey of devotion, but a happy tribute to a man who won our devotion with the greatest of gifts: joy."*

Eleven years later, our devotion unabated, and as we tottered on the brink of a new millennium, Wodehousians gathered anew in England to recreate the legendary tour of 1989. At that time 24 pilgrims from the U.S., Netherlands, and England were led through Wodehouse country by the redoubtable Norman Murphy, whose book, *In Search of Blandings*, had provided the theme for the tour. Now we were 47 strong from nine countries—and again we had Norman to take us to many of the places our beloved Plum had lived in and written about.

It would take a book to do justice to the week-long, once-in-a-lifetime, action-packed tour of July 17-23. Should you therefore find yourself panting for more details after reading this abbreviated account, go to the UK Society's web site ([www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse](http://www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse)), where Robert Bruce, John Fletcher, and Murray Hedgcock have expended themselves even further.

That said, let us begin at the beginning—

### Monday, July 17

AD: A week prior to our arrival, there were reports of cold, wet weather blanketing the country. But as the

pilgrims checked in at The Plaza on Hyde Park Hotel near Kensington Gardens, the sun shone, birds twittered in the trees, and the warm air embraced us reassuringly. It was going to be a good week. Somehow there was the feeling that Plum had seen to that.

In the lobby of the hotel, a long table with a banner proclaiming "In Search of Blandings" awaited all arriving Wodehousians. Behind this table sat a beaming Hilary Bruce, who had organized and managed nearly every aspect of the tour, handling endless queries, last-minute cancellations, near-disasters, and a wealth of detail with cheerful aplomb. Before her, spread out like a deck of cards, were 47 individually labeled Tour Companions. In each Companion was a letter of welcome from Norman Murphy, brochures and postcards, maps and guides, a complete schedule of events, details of the upcoming itinerary, and several special

goodies, including a reproduction of a color caricature of Wodehouse by artist James Ferguson (Murray Hedgcock owns the original). We also received souvenir whiskey glasses etched with the tour logo: the Plum caricature that adorns every issue of *Plum Lines*, surrounded by the words "In Search of Blandings."

Joining Hilary in welcoming the arriving pilgrims was our chairman and leader, Norman Murphy, who would



Logo of the Millennium Tour

be responsible for the intellectual welfare of his charges, tirelessly shepherding them through London and the English countryside that Wodehouse knew. It was Norman who opened the proceedings Monday night, as members of the UK Society—including Sir Edward Cazalet, Wodehouse's step-grandson, and Patrick Wodehouse, Plum's nephew—joined the pilgrims for a reception, book-buying, and talks.

Sir Edward was poignant as he reminisced about his periodic visits with his grandfather during the last ten years of Plum's life. He encouraged us to attend the pageant for the Queen Mother on the coming Wednesday, and informed us that he would be among the jockeys riding in the parade. Laughter greeted his remark that he would be easy to pick out, not only because he was larger than the average jockey, but also because he would, out of necessity, be wearing his spectacles.

Sir Edward was followed by Norman, who titillated pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike with a preview of the upcoming tour. With slides, a hand-drawn map, and numerous entertaining stories, he gave us a brief run-down of Wodehouse's life and the places that had figured so largely in his books, from Dulwich College to Weston Park to Sudeley Castle.

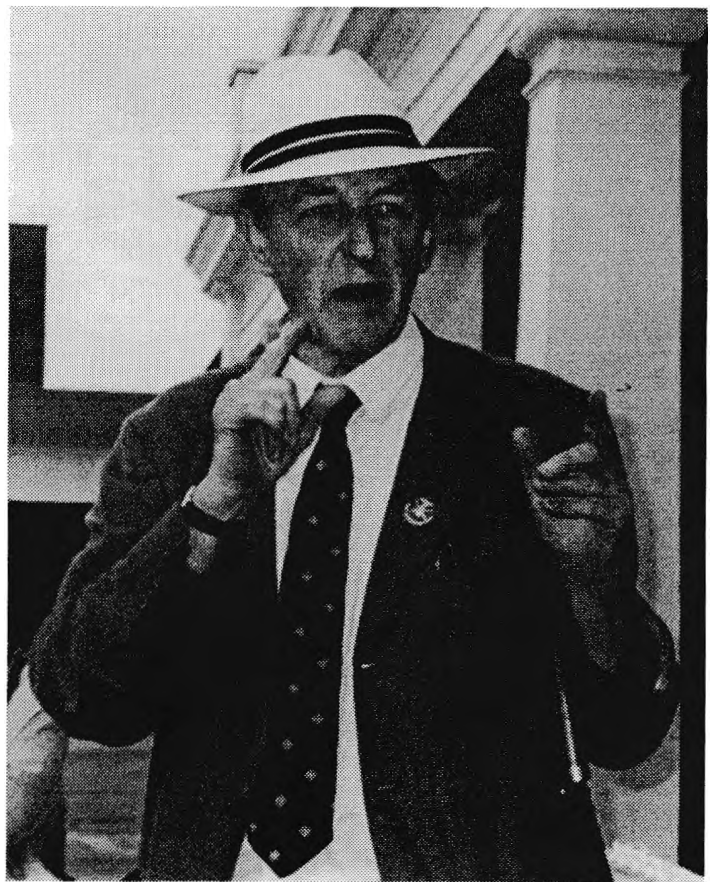
Afterwards many of us drifted off to dinner, while others stayed behind to buy books (Penguin's new edition of *Sunset at Blandings* being of particular interest) and the official Millennium Tour tie. The latter consisted of the Blandings crest against a purplish color that women generally loved, but men might have preferred to be a little less startling. Nevertheless, it wasn't long before the tie had become *de rigueur* and was seen adorning male chests everywhere on the tour.

Next up: The famed Murphy Wodehouse Walk, for which the pilgrims were split into morning and afternoon groups. Norman's endurance was about to be tested.

## Tuesday, July 18

*Robert:* The unstoppable Colonel NTP Murphy's brisk pace and speed of delivery of all known, and many unknown, facts about Wodehouse and London carried him through a total of five unprecedented hours of unburdening of his knowledge and detective work. There was but one snag. London conspired at every corner and at every street crossing to sabotage his efforts. There seemed to be no Wodehouse haunt outside of which a pneumatic drill was not hammering or a team of macadamizing ruffians were not re-laying the road. The noise and the chaos were tremendous.

The afternoon walk started with a ceremony in which Clay Wonnell of Cincinnati, the youngest member of the party, presented the chairman with a plastic instrument



*Norman Murphy, doing what he did superbly well—explaining London and Wodehouse matters to a breathless band of followers scurrying to keep up with him.*

emblazoned with the words "Hog Call." Everyone in the booking hall of Green Park underground station froze as the redoubtable NTP tried to bring us to order by blowing through this curious piece of tubing. The noise was interesting. But as he said after regaining his breath: "What sort of pigs do you have in Cincinnati?"

There was no time to find out. We were off down Berkeley Street for our first port of call: the house where Wodehouse lived for a short time, and which was the prototype for Bertie Wooster's abode. Then we headed to Charles Street, where Aunt Dahlia's house was identified—in fact the house of playwright Ian Hay—and opposite it the pub that had served as the model for the Junior Ganyমেদে.

We plunged eastward and viewed the site of the Bath Club, whose swimming bath was the original of the one Bertie fell into in correct evening costume. We stood crammed in a doorway opposite Buck's Club, another model for the Drones Club, then sped on to Burlington Arcade and stormed down St. James's Street, where we heard anecdotes about White's and Boodle's clubs—in particular the tale of members spying a man collapsed on the club steps and immediately starting to bet on his chances of survival! A passing surgeon was, we were told,

discouraged from assisting the sick man on the grounds that such assistance would amount to foul play.

More non-Wodehousian sights and stories followed as our flock struggled to keep up with their shepherd, who was fighting a valiant battle with the roaring traffic. Finally we stood in the shade of Northumberland Avenue and gazed across the road at the site of the old Constitutional Club. This had been Lord Emsworth's club, under the guise of the Senior Conservative Club, and was also, as our chairman had discovered, that of the chairman of the bank in which Wodehouse had toiled during the only unhappy period of his working life.

Next door, by happy chance, stood a welcoming pub called the Sherlock Holmes. An alley beside the pub led us to a piece of Moorish tilework around what was once the door to the Turkish baths, frequented not only by Wodehouse and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle but also, in the books, by young Psmith. At this point our chairman released us from our task and exhorted us to buy him large quantities of gin and tonic in the pub, which we did. As evening approached we made our way across the road to the Savage Club, where more revelry and libations awaited us.

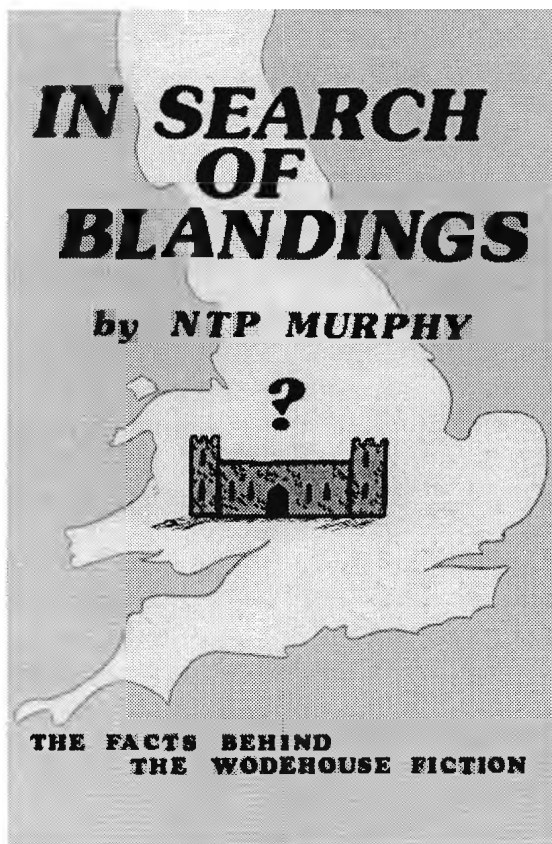
*AD:* More UK society members joined the group for an evening reception at the Savage Club, where Wodehouse had been a member in the 1920s. In fact, it was in an old volume of candidates proposed for membership that Norman (a current member himself) found the page where Plum had given his address as 15, Berkeley Street—thus giving our favorite sleuth the source of Bertie Wooster's address in the early stories. (A reproduction of this page had been included in all the Tour Companions. See also *Plum Lines*, Winter 1996, page 7.) The evening passed too quickly as we sluiced liberally, toured the building with the chairman, and listened to Oliver Wise's brilliantly funny talk on the subject of "Sex and Violence in Wodehouse" before finally tottering off to dinner.

Wednesday, July 19

*Murray:* Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, freelance journalist and rising author, at the tenderish age of 23, walked on to the sacred

turf of Lord's cricket ground to play for The Authors v. The Actors on June 29, 1905. It took 95 years for a Plummy pilgrimage to be made to the same sacred spot, in memory of the Master and his love of cricket. [This visit was arranged by Tony Ring, a member of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). —AD]

We were greeted in the fabled Long Room by the secretary of the MCC himself. Roger Knight is not only a man of power in the game of cricket; he also happens to be an Old Alleynian, and so had a special feeling for the doings of Old Alleynian Wodehouse. Roger explained the special role of the MCC in the game of cricket and the history of Lord's, whose stands seat a mere 30,000 spectators but have a cosy and intimate feeling. Tour guide Irving Bernard took the group up to the home dressing room, where the great England players of the past century and more had relaxed, rejoiced, or mourned. There followed a visit to Lord's museum, full of pictures and trophies and caps and ties and bats and balls from famous matches and players. A copy of *Mike* was in a display case alongside the book *Wodehouse at the Wicket* [Murray is the author —AD]. We moved on to the new Grandstand, where Irving dispensed more anecdotes, and thence to the revolutionary (and award-winning) new Media Centre.



*The first edition of the little book that started it all. My copy (said the Great Editor proudly) is number 292 of 500.*

It is necessary, in the interests of scrupulous reporting, to record one vital difference between Plum's adventures at Lord's in 1905 and ours of recent date. He got to tread on the famous turf (necessary, to play there). We, on the other hand, were enjoined amiably but most sternly and purposefully by our guide: "By all means take pictures of your group in front of the Media Centre, with the famous Pavilion framing you in the background. But whatever you do—*don't step on the grass.*"

We kept off the grass, took our pictures, and left quietly. Some went on with Tony Ring to visit his beloved Real Tennis court at the far end of the ground, while a breakaway group stopped at the Lord's Shop, buying everything from cricket balls made of chocolate to cricket-themed Christmas cards to ties and keyrings.

The old Tavern of Plum's

AD: Although the Queen Mother would not turn 100 until August 4, London was already in the midst of elaborate celebrations for her centenary. On this day there was to be a parade down Pall Mall, followed by a bit of pageantry as only the English can do it. There, late in the afternoon, Plummies found each other, gamely bought miniature Union Jacks to wave, and waited impatiently amongst the thick and noisy masses along Pall Mall.

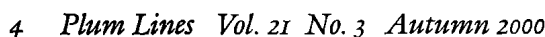
Thursday, July 20

The sun shone on Dulwich, and as we descended the steps from the station we imagined the long-ago days

He launched into the tale of the Wodehouse family home, long since demolished, on a nearby corner. Where a block of flats now stood there had been a pond with two swans: Edgar and Percy in *Big Money*. "Follow me carefully," Norman exhorted, and soon we were walking past a house similar to the one the Wodehouse family had lived in.

From there we straggled into

Then we arrived in the real Peacehaven of Mulberry Grove, the house from which Mike Jackson started out on his first day at work. Wodehouse had described the sphinxes as looking as though they were recovering from a bad attack of jaundice. To us it looked as though some-



one had just painted them a new coat of startling white.

We set out down the road, following in Mike Jackson's footsteps under the railway bridge and through the little black gate into the grounds of Dulwich College. "This," said Norman, gesturing at the school buildings in the distance, "was the view that Wodehouse never forgot. This was his real home. It was the most important thing in his life." Thrilled Wodehousians swarmed through the grove of trees where Mike Jackson had mused sadly about his lot.

On the steps of the pavilion, Norman told the assembled group the stirring deeds of the P G Wodehouse Society's cricket team, the Gold Bats, in the annual match against the masters' team, the Dulwich Dusters. We streamed across the cricket field to the main buildings, Norman entertaining us all the way with Dulwich College stories.

We toured the Wodehouse Library in the college and lingered, noses pressed against the glass, at the replica of Wodehouse's study, which Lady Wodehouse had presented to the school. We gazed at the sturdy typewriter whose simple mechanism had produced plots of such intricacy and language of such clarity and humour. We looked at the pipes standing ready for moments of mus-ing. And we saw the fragment of the school honours board emblazoned with the Wodehouse name and those of his fellow members of the First XI of a distant cricketing summer.

Some of the library's treasures were brought out for us: Manuscripts of his postwar troubles, first editions of the school stories, and his cash book. The entry for September 9, 1902— "Chuck bank. This month I start my journalistic career"—was saluted as the great portent of joy to come.

We posed for photographs as the Dulwich cricketers of long ago had done, outside the school's main doors. Then we made our way out of the grounds and passed the school "house" where Wodehouse had lived during part of his schooldays. This was the place where he had invented "Po," a jape involving windows, string, and chamber pots, which—so Norman told us—was why the school changed from porcelain to metal chamber pots the following term.

With that fact ringing in our ears, we trekked back to



*Elm Lawn, Plum's school "house" in 1896.  
Drawing by Pauline Blanc, 1989*

the station, pretended to buy copies of *The Strand*, took a last look at where the beehives might have been, and boarded the train back into the centre of London.

*AD:* The last London event of the tour took place Thursday night and gathered together pilgrims, UK society members, and special guests for a rousing celebration that was brilliantly planned and executed by Master of Ceremonies (Call Me for a Good Time)

Tony Ring. The place: A hotel aptly named Crocker's Folly.

*Murray:* Crocker's Folly, forsooth! Let us have no more of this loose talk about Frank Crocker, that visionary Victorian entrepreneur. He knew what he was doing. He understood that on the night of July 20, 2000, his eclectic edifice would be precisely what was required for a joyous celebration. So it was a rare moment of solemnity in the evening of frolicsome fun when Colonel Murphy reminded us of the imagination of this splendid man, building his long-scorned hostelry with every possible bit of decorative superstructure and trimming he could find, only to be mocked by the world.

We may indeed have come to mock, but we stayed to cheer, as the setting proved exactly what a Wodehouse evening needed

*AD:* Tony Ring's apparent aim was to ensure that everybody in the room took part in the fun, and he succeeded admirably. Tony had enlisted certain individuals to read short Wodehouse poems at intervals during the evening, and each table was given the task of enacting a



*Crocker's Folly. Is this what Wodehouse had in mind when he wrote that a Victorian Englishman couldn't be trusted with a trowel in his hand near a pile of bricks?*





*Lara Cazalet of the Wodehouse family, whose rendition of "Bill" left hardly a dry eye at Crocker's Folly.*

short scene from a Wodehouse work, a duty entered into with enthusiasm by a rash of closet thespians. Add to this the songs—scads of songs, with everybody encouraged to join in the choruses—and some surprises, and we had an evening that was positively replete with fun.

*M u r r a y :* Norman Murphy rendered his distinctive—one might almost say idiosyncratic—version of "Maybe It's Because I'm a Londoner."

Our American guests perhaps sang the required choruses with the most feeling, but then we genuine Londoners are a mite shy about showing our emotions about our city.

The professional quality part of the festivities came from that well-loved brother and sister act, Hal and Lara Cazalet, whose presence and contribution are required elements of such Wodehouse celebrations. They began with "Till the Clouds Roll By," a lovely melody with true PGW lyrics, their voices blending in delightful harmony. [More songs, from Hal and American soprano Sylvia McNair, would come later in the evening, courtesy of an as yet uncompleted CD. —AD]

The Loyal Toast, proposed by Tony Ring, was followed by another toast traditional to our society—to our most splendid member, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. This was proposed by Sir Edward Cazalet, who admitted he had such tears in his eyes as he rode in the birthday pageant the previous day that he could barely see a thing; it was a matter of feeling unashamedly emotional about a day recalling Britain's yesterday, and that of a gracious lady.

Elin Woodger, TWS President, proposed an all-embracing toast to the world of Wodehouse—the man, the master writer, and the oeuvre he had spawned so lavishly and rewardingly. We drank to that with unstinted pleasure and approval.

Emily Fletcher, billed on the excellent souvenir programme as "A Special Guest," was indeed special: she

was introduced by Sir Edward as a friend of his family—which was a good start—and also as the granddaughter of Irving Berlin. She reminded us that Plum and Irving B had hoped to collaborate on the musical *Sitting Pretty*; sadly, it did not eventuate, but Ms. Fletcher's memories of the pair, helped by reading an appropriate selection from the Wodehouse letters, provided a tasty extra dimension to the evening.

Neil Midkiff, who can tickle the old-fashioned piano to great effect, repeated by special request his "Animal Love Song: Good Gnus," which uses Wodehousian lyrics of a bloodthirsty nature, adapted to a group of stand-out melodies. It has to be heard to be believed.

Elin Woodger provided another reminder of American talent with her "Cautionary Tale From the White House: The Story of Prinderella and her Cince." Owing most to the legendary Dr. Spooner, with strong overtones of Professor Stanley Unwin—poor Prinder's problems were all "a shirty dame"—this was a tour de force of lip-quivering dexterity, followed by a Wodehousian essay based on the same principles.

The song highlights at such occasions, of course, are the Hal Cazalet rendition of "Sonny Boy," an emotional experience to leave you sobbing into your table napkin, and Lara's tender "Bill," whose soft warmth could bring a tear to the eye. [Helen Murphy noted: "They may have bigger audiences, they may have smarter audiences, but they'll never have more appreciative audiences than that."]

Presentations to all the splendid people who had been prime activists in ensuring the success not just of the evening but also the whole week were loudly applauded—and then most of the recipients quite undid the good work by presenting themselves, with all other officials, as a chorus line to sing "The Lambeth Walk." The singing was, well, passable—but the chaotic choreography suggested they had overlooked the need for a stiff month working out with Hermes Pan or perhaps Diaghilev. No matter: we ordinary folk all sang "The Lambeth Walk" ourselves, and made a much better go of it.

Crocker's Folly is no more; from henceforth it must surely be Crocker's Pride, home to the world of Wodehouse.

*To be completed in the next issue*

From the fact that he spoke as if he had a hot potato in his mouth without getting the raspberry from the lads in the ringside seats, I deduced that he must be the headmaster.

*Right Ho, Jeeves, 1934*

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY, QUEEN MUM

Sir Alistair Aird, KCVO  
Clarence House  
St James's  
London SW1

Sir,

I write on behalf of The Wodehouse Society (of America) to tender our respectful and heartiest congratulations to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother on the occasion of her hundredth birthday.

We have always regarded Her Majesty's gracious acceptance of membership of our Society as a great honour of which we are very proud.

Every member of our Society joins me in expressing the sincere hope that her Majesty will enjoy further years of health and happiness.

With deepest respect and admiration,  
Elin Woodger  
President, The Wodehouse Society

30<sup>th</sup> July 2000

*Received in reply:*

THE PRESIDENT  
THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

QUEEN ELIZABETH THE QUEEN MOTHER MUCH APPRECIATED YOUR KIND MESSAGE ON HER 100TH BIRTHDAY AND SENDS HER VERY SINCERE THANKS TO YOU AND TO ALL THOSE WHO JOINED IN THESE GOOD WISHES.

PRIVATE SECRETARY  
August 3, 2000

# WODEHOUSE AT THE BAR

By Dan Cohen

A talk delivered at the Houston convention of the Wodehouse Society, October 1999. To understand Dan's opening remarks you should know that before he began his talk he set out on a table by the podium an impressive array of bottles of alcoholic beverages, and proceeded to speak with the careful deliberation of a man who knows he has had far too much to drink and who also knows that any misstep could be a *faux pas*. Several times during his talk he paused for refreshment from some of those bottles—which contained, like Dan, alas, nothing but water. —OM

Gentlemen—I mean ladies and gentlemen—and of course boys. What a wonderful day this is . . . I had intended to deliver this talk at the last convention—but I became too involved in my research.

In these lax post-war times of Perrier water and lite beer, when we are all co-dependent and in recovery from something, and when practically everyone we ever heard of and admire is checking in or out of the Betty Ford Clinic, claiming they are now clean and sober, it is useful to reflect on drinking in the world of P.G. Wodehouse.

Early in his career Plum wrote an article entitled “My Battle with Drink.” He confesses to having been a “confirmed soda-fiend” who knew all the drugstore clerks in New York by their first name. He recalls drinking “two pin-ap-o-lades, three grapefruitolas and an egg-zoolak, before pausing to take a breath.” But he was reformed by the love of a good woman who introduced him to alcohol.

“I gradually acquired a taste for alcohol. And suddenly, one evening, like a flash, it came upon me that I had shaken off the cursed yoke that held me down: that I never wanted to see the inside of a drugstore again. Cocktails, at first repellent, have at last become palatable to me. I drink highballs for breakfast. I am saved.”

Much of Wodehouse's humor floats on a sea of alcohol. In Richard Osborne's thirty postulates for the relaxed reading of Wodehouse, number nine is “Drunk men can be very funny.”

Wodehouse was absolutely unselfconscious and unapologetic about drinking—he could write:

“He died of cirrhosis of the liver. It costs money to die of cirrhosis of the liver.”

In Wodehouse's world drinking was fun:

“The thirst of which he was dying was one of those lively young thirsts which seem to start at the soles of the feet and get worse all the way up.”

According to Osborne, Plum's first good drunk scene appears in *The Small Bachelor*, published in 1927. But he was writing about drunks long before that. Some of the very best episodes in Wodehouse are essentially drunk scenes. The prize-giving at Market Snodsberry Grammar School would, I think, rank right up at the top of everybody's list of Wodehouse favorites. Here Plum em-

ploys a familiar device, the teetotaler suddenly introduced to the stuff.

Gussie Fink-Nottle, “Whether from some hereditary taint, or because he promised his mother he wouldn't, or simply because he does not like the taste of the stuff...has never in the whole course of his career pushed so much as the simplest gin and tonic over the larynx.”

In preparation for his speech Gussie downs a full decanter of whisky straight, and a jug of orange juice laced with at least two tumblers of gin. Bertie observes, “the old familiar juice was splashing up against the back of his front teeth.”

Another wonderful drunk scene occurs in *Joy in the Morning*. Lord Worplesdon, after doing down J. Chichester Clam in a secret business deal at a fancy dress ball celebrates by “lowering the stuff by the pailful.” The stuff is “disgusting champagne.”

Says Bertie: “The spectacle of an uncle, even if only an uncle by marriage, going down for the third time in a sea of dance champagne can never be an agreeable one.”

Lord Worplesdon, at least when not actually facing Aunt Agatha-Lady Worplesdon, is an unrepentant drunk.

“If you mean by that question, am I stinko . . . in a broad general sense you are right. I *am* stinko. But everything is relative, Bertie . . . you for instance, are my relative and I am your relative, and the point I want to make is that I am not one bit as stinko as I'm going to be.”

By the way, Plum must have downed some pretty bad champagne in his time, because there are several slighting references to the bubbly. In *Ukridge* we hear:

“What was actually in the champagne supplied by Barolini and purveyed by him to the public, such as were reckless enough to drink it, at eight shillings a bottle, remains a secret between its maker and his Maker.”

Another wonderful drunk scene can be found in *Thank You, Jeeves* where the drunken Brinkley returns to the cottage and Bertie finds him wrestling the grandfather clock.

“It was difficult to say with any certainty which of the pair was getting the better of it. If in sporting vein, I think I should have been inclined to put my money on the clock.”

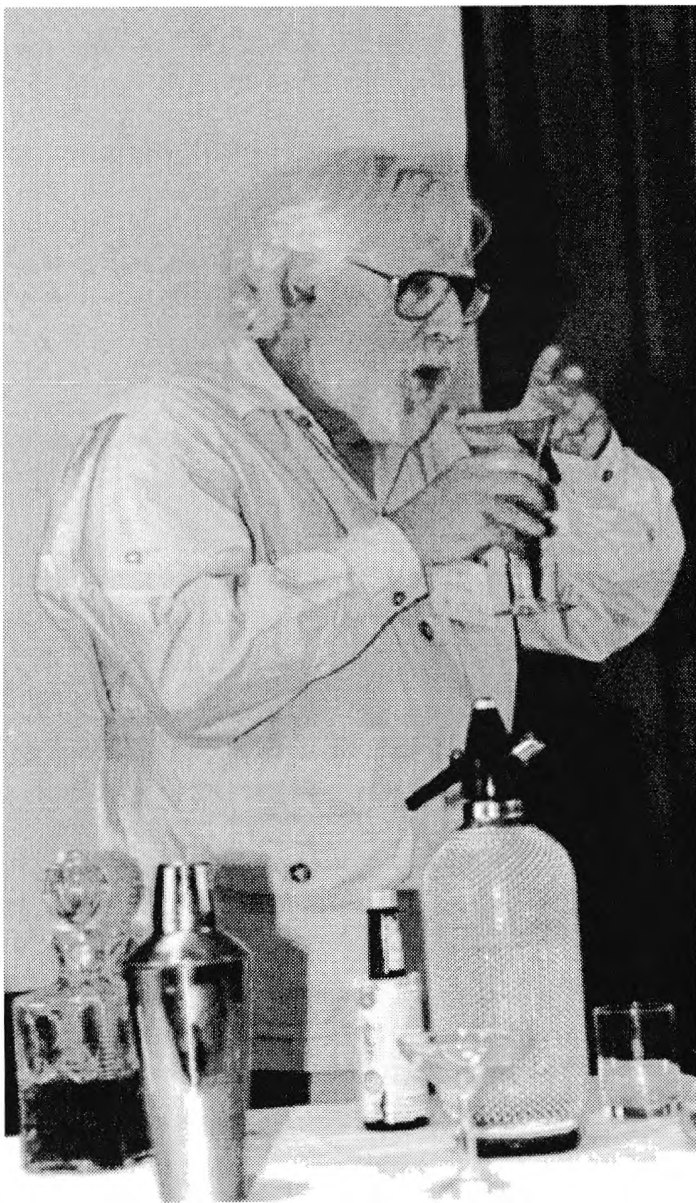
Brinkley is a most unusual drunk.



"I give you my honest word that, if I hadn't had authoritative information to the contrary, I should have said that this extraordinary bird, Brinkley, was as sober as a teetotal Girl Guide. All that one of the biggest toots in history had done to him was to put a sort of precise edge on his speech and cause him to articulate with a crystal clearness which was more like a silver bell than anything."

Another reformed non-drinker like Gussie Fink-Nottle is Lord Wilmot in "Jeeves and the Unbidden Guest." He tells Bertie:

"I drank too much. Much too much. Lots and lots too much. And what's more, I'm going to do it again. I'm going to do it every night. If you ever see me sober old top . . . tap me on the shoulder and say, 'Tut! Tut!' and I'll apologize and remedy the defect"



Dan Cohen sacrifices all in the interests of science. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

Many of our favorite characters would today be classed as problem drinkers—or worse. Chief among them is the Hon. Galahad Threepwood, who drew three sober breaths in the year '97 and decided that was enough. He reacts to an offer of a cup of tea with the same horror Dracula would have shown toward a plate of garlic. He should have "the liver of the century." Yet he remains in robust good health.

A famously drunken occasional visitor to Blandings is the repellent Percy Frobisher Pilbeam. In *Summer Lightning* he becomes blotto after downing four, or is it six, of Beach's cocktails. Having learned nothing from his previous experience he repeats the performance in *Heavy Weather*.

Like Gussie and Lord Wilmot, William Mulliner is one of those recovering teetotalers. His entire life is turned around for the better when he becomes so drunk that he sleeps through the San Francisco earthquake.

George Cyril Wellbeloved, on the other hand, seems never to have passed through the non-drinking stage.

Cousin Eggy in *Laughing Gas* would certainly be a prime candidate for Betty Ford. When confronted by a temperance lass and told that California is a "swamp of alcohol" he replies, "Good God! Is there a swamp of alcohol in these parts? What an amazing country America is. Talk about every modern convenience. Do you mean you can go there and simply lap?"

We know that Bertie drinks, and not just on Boat Race night either. There was Pongo Twistelton's birthday bash and any number of other celebratory occasions at the Drones. Jeeves is always at his elbow with the whisky and siphon. There is usually at least a half bot of something to go with lunch, and a good deal more with dinner. Preceded of course, by the "strengthening cocktail."

Though we hear a lot about drunken revels—even orgies—so described by Aunt Dahlia—we rarely see Bertie drunk on stage, so to speak. We don't often hear his drunken voice.

The notable—and hilarious exception—comes in *The Mating Season*. Bertie and Esmond Haddock kill off a decanter full of "fine old port, full of buck and body." They then begin practicing a hunting song. Bertie is on a chair using the decanter as a baton and Esmond is on the table and instead of a hunting-crop he is waving a banana. This creates the "false impression" of drunken revels.

Mostly, though, we see Bertie suffering from the effects of the night before.

At that historic first meeting between Bertie and Jeeves, Bertie admits, "I had been present at a rather cheery little supper, and I was feeling pretty rocky."

He is impressed by Jeeves: "He had a grave, sympathetic face, as if he too knew what it was to sup with the

lads.” Jeeves was certainly not opposed to drinking. One can easily see him sipping port or taking a well-earned whisky and s. But whether he had actually “supped with the lads” as Bertie meant it is doubtful. One can not imagine Jeeves either drunk or hung over.

Crooks drink. The felonious J.B. Hoke of *Big Money* subsisted on “...a diet of large whiskies and small sodas through the whole of a long afternoon and evening and augmented by an occasional neat brandy....”

This had left him “in a state of uncertainty on three cardinal points. These were:

- (a) Who was he?
- (b) Where was he?
- (c) Why was he?”

Americans drink: In *Full Moon* the American millionaire Tipton Plimsoll consults that Harley Street quack E. Jimpson Murgatroyd, who tells him he must give up drinking.

Plimsoll’s manly response is to head straight for Barribault’s bar and tell the man behind the counter “to limber up his wrists and start pouring, for a big cash customer had arrived.”

“Try that on your bazooka, E. Jimpson.”

Frenchmen drink. This from *Hot Water*:

There was good stuff in the Vicomte de Blissac. Many men in his condition would have remained where they had been dumped, inert until the following morning. But it was scarcely an hour after the pall bearers had laid him on the bed in his room at the Hotel des Etrangers before he was, in a manner of speaking, up and about. That is to say, he had so far regained the mastery of his faculties as to be able to totter to the washand stand, drink perhaps a pint and a half of water out of the pitcher which stood thereon, and fill a sponge and press it to his burning head.

Children drink: At least little Joey Cooley the Idol of American Motherhood in *Laughing Gas* does. He mixes himself a whisky and soda and then unwisely offers one to the reporter Pomona Wycherley.

“It’s so early in the evening, isn’t it?”

“Is it?” I said surprised. “The usual hour for a snort, surely?”

“You seem to speak as an expert. Do you often take what you call a snort at this time?”

“Oh rather.”

“Fancy that. Whisky?”

“Whisky invariably.”

Of course Little Joey’s body is temporarily being inhabited by the soul of the Earl of Havershot—but it is still Little Joey doing the drinking. It ruins his career with American motherhood.

Cats drink. Who can forget the lyrical description of Webster’s first snort?

Webster crouched on the floor beside the widening pool of whisky. But it was not horror and disgust that had caused him to crouch. He was crouched because, crouching, he could get nearer the stuff and obtain crisper action. His tongue was moving in and out like a piston.

And then abruptly, for one fleeting instant, he stopped lapping and glanced up at Lancelot, and across his face there flitted a quick smile . . .

Clerical cats may drink, though clergymen do not, unless, course, it’s Mulliner’s Buck-You-Uppo, which causes bishops to paint statues pink.

Do Wodehouse women drink? While drunk men may be funny, the subject of drinking among the delicately nurtured is handled—well—delicately. One simply assumes that the ladies of the Junior Lipstick have their afternoon cocktails. But the only female character that we see mopping the stuff up with any real gusto is that best and wisest of all aunts—Dahlia Travers.

In *Code of the Woosters* when Bertie offers her breakfast she responds: “Eggs! Kippers! What I want is a brandy and soda. Tell Jeeves to mix me one. And if he forgets to put in the soda it will be all right with me.”

Her celebrated tomato-red complexion is not the result of windburn from riding across the fields in pursuit of the fox. It’s the result of downing pailfuls of the stuff at those hunt dinners.

Barmaids like Miss Postlethwaite and a couple of Maudies are models of moderation.

With the possible exception of Mrs. Emily Post, a few of the haughtier Duchesses and the late Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, the British barmaid, trained from earliest years to behave with queenly dignity under the most testing conditions, stands alone in the matter of poise . . . In her professional capacity Maudie Montrose had seen far too many members of the Peerage thrown out of the bar over which she presided for blue blood to mean anything to her.

Generally speaking Plum paid absolutely no attention to what was going on in the real world. Two World Wars and a Depression are barely mentioned. But between

1920 and 1934 the U.S. was in the grip of a form of madness called Prohibition. Wodehouse spent much time in America during the Prohibition era, it's mentioned frequently, and is central to at least one of his stories—one of the very best—"The Rise of Minna Nordstrom." In this tale the clever, talented, and totally unscrupulous Vera Prebble, later known to millions of adoring fans as Minna Nordstrom, informs the police of the illegal liquor stocks of movie moguls Jacob Z. Schnellenhamer of Colossal-Exquisite, Isadore Fishbein of Perfecto-Fishbein, and Ben Zizzbaum of Zizzbaum-Celluloid. Their illegal liquor is carted off by the law, and since the bootleggers are all out making movies no other liquor is available until Vera locks the cops in the cellar in return for a film contract.

What do Wodehouse characters drink? The answer is anything and everything. I was once much taken with the idea of trying every drink mentioned in Wodehouse. After working at it for a while I was uncertain whether my bank account or my liver would give out first.

There is of course, champagne, disgusting or otherwise, the ever-popular port, sherry and in an emergency cooking sherry, whisky and soda, brandy and soda, whisky without soda, and brandy without soda. G. Ovens's home brew at the Emsworth Arms is a beverage I am sure many of us have dreamed of.

At the bar parlor of the Angler's Rest most of the customers don't even have names; they are known only by their favorite drink. Mr. Mulliner favors a hot scotch with lemon—and occasionally urges the estimable Miss Postlewaithe to add a bit more scotch.

Around the bar there is Stout and Mild, Gin and Ginger Ale, Draught Stout, Tankard of Ale, Mild and Bitter, Whiskey Sour, Pint of Stout, Pint of Bitter, Rum and Milk (sounds awful but it's just a variation of Milk Punch and is really quite good).

Whisky and Splash, Small Port, Ninepenny of Sherry, Sherry and Bitters or alternately Sherry and Angostora (a drink I can not recommend), Gin and Angostora (popularly known as a Pink Gin, but don't let the name fool you, it'll knock you flat), Small Bass, Gin Fizz, Pint of Half and Half, Port from the Wood, Dry Martini (actually referred to as a "cynical dry martini," can you imagine a "gullible dry martini?"), Light Lager, a "thoughtful" Eggnog, Half of Stout, Gin and Italian Vermouth (isn't that a Martini?), Gin and Tonic, and Scotch on the Rocks.

Among the teetotalers at the bar are Lemon Squash, Lemon Sour, and Lemonade and Angostora.

Wodehouse lavishes some of his very best prose on describing drinks. Here is the Mint Julep:

You'd remember all right if you had a mint julep in America. Insidious things. They creep up on you like a baby sister and slide their little hand into yours and the next thing you know the judge is telling you to pay the clerk of the court fifty dollars.

All of the drinks mentioned so far are fairly standard with known ingredients. There are, however, some more exotic and mysterious libations. There is Uncle Fred's legendary May Queen, or to give its full name, "tomorrow'll be of all the year the maddest, merriest day, for I'm to be the Queen of the May, mother, I'm to be Queen of the May."

May Queen consists of "a good dry champagne, liquor brandy, armagnac, kummel, yellow chartreuse, and old stout to taste." I've tried it and I'm sorry to report it isn't worth the effort. Perhaps I had the proportions wrong.

Mike's Place in San Francisco serves the Dynamite Dewdrop, the Dreamland Special, and the Undertaker's Joy. These are the sort of drinks that produced the following effect on William Mulliner:

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

William followed this up with a bottle of straight rye. In "The Man With Two Left Feet" we hear of a drink of unknown ingredients called the Lightning Whizzer.

In "The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy" Bertie encounters a West Indian concoction made up of at least seven different liquors called The Green Swizzle. He is so impressed that he vows:

"If ever I marry and have a son, Green Swizzle Wooster is the name that will go down in the register."

Among the Barmys, Biffys, and Oofys, Green Swizzle wouldn't sound too out of place.

While the Green Swizzle may be imaginary, the Lizard's Breath being downed by Freddie Widgeon at the Drone's Club bar is, I suspect, a real drink, though I have never been able to locate a recipe. Nor have I been able to discover the ingredients of "Anne's Night Out," another Drones Club specialty.



All this drinking has its consequences. There are, Plum informs us, six varieties of hangover: the Broken Compass, the Sewing Machine, the Comet, the Atomic, the Cement Mixer, and the Gremlin Boogie.

He was in the sort of overwrought state when a fly treading a little too heavily on the carpet is enough to make a man think he's one of the extras in *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

I had been dreaming that some bounder was driving spikes through my head—not just ordinary spikes, as used by Jael the wife of Heber, but red hot spikes.

Or my favorite description, "I sat up in bed with that rather unpleasant feeling you get sometimes that you're going to die in about five minutes."

But this is the wonderful world of P.G. Wodehouse. For every hangover there is one of Jeeves's morning bracers.

Drink it down, and after you secure the top of your head, and retrieve your eyeballs from the other side of the room, suddenly "the snail is on the wing, the bird is on the thorn, God's in his heaven, and once again all's right with the world."

## PIG-HOO-OO-OO-EY ORIGIN?

David Landman writes:

In my essay "Fred Patzel: Pavarotti of the piglot" (Summer 2000), while remarking that Patzel's master-call was a repeated "Poo-ee," I neglected to mention that the cry "Pig-hoo-oo-oo-ey!" which Wodehouse immortalized was probably derived from a letter sent to the *New York World* by John Cabaniss and later reprinted in the *Literary Digest* of October 9, 1926. (This was the issue in which Fred Patzel's triumph was described.) Mr. Cabaniss wrote that "in the Southwest (my native heath), the farmer would take a basket of corn and, going out into the feeding-place, would begin a stentorian call of 'Pig-oo-ee, pig-oo-ee!' and in a few moments the guests would arrive at full speed, ready for the banquet."

Let us give credit where credit is due.



David, our newest editor, has chosen for his nom de Plum Society Spice, the name of the sleazy gossip sheet edited by the reptilian Percy Pilbeam and published by the Mammoth Publishing Co., Sir George Tilbury, Prop.

## FROM TONY RING

Tony, way over yonder in England, sends a few items way over here:

### *Cannes Bertie Speak Nice French?*

Tony's poem by that title in the last issue included a number of French words that Bertie Wooster used, and just one that he did *not* use. Readers were challenged to find that word, and apparently no one did—we received not a single response to the challenge. Tony writes that the word was *chambre*, in verse 5. (The word *gents* in verse 4 was a typo. It should have been *gants*, meaning gloves).

### Correction to "Plum Delivers the Goods"

The editor's note at the end of that article (page 23 of the last issue) was incorrect in stating that *Phipps to the Rescue* "was based on a play, never produced . . ."

Tony states that the play *was* produced—its premier was on August 25, 1954, at the Studio Theatre, Ashburnham, Devon, and the run was exactly four nights. It was performed by a local amateur or semi-professional troupe, the Buckfast Players. Writes Tony, "The unpublished script had been a gift from Plum to Mr. Arthur Thompson, a retired solicitor from Teignmouth, who had corresponded with Plum since 1910. The object of the performance was to find cash to line the roof and improve the heating system" of the theatre where the play was presented. The title of the play as produced in Ashburnham was, most improbably, *Joy in the Morning*.

### Odds and Ends

Last year's radio play, *Plum's War*, won a Sony Award for best radio play of the year. It was broadcast only in England, I believe.

The audiotape *Carry On Jeeves*, read by Martin Jarvis, won an Audie award.

The foundation of the beverage manufactured by Mr. Silvers seemed to be neat vitriol, but, once you had got used to the top of your head going up and down like the lid of a kettle with boiling water in it, the effects were far from unpleasant. Mr. Silvers may not have had ideals, but he unquestionably knew what to do when you handed him a still and a potato. "Fate," *Young Men in Spats*, 1936

# CHAPTERS CORNER

By Sandy Morris

A thousand blessings on Sandy for taking over this column! Chapters who would like information about their activities posted in future issues of *Plum Lines* are hereby encouraged to inundate Sandy with all appropriate details (see end of the column).

—AD

In the spirit of the Code, Plummies in local chapters are sharing their imaginative and scintillating program ideas with each other via the Chapters Corner. In reading over the newsletters and e-mails from several chapters, the following generalities about Plummies in groups have emerged: (1) Plummies eat; (2) Plummies read; (3) Plummies talk. Sometimes one, sometimes two, sometimes all three at once. Call it dining with a discussion of a Wodehouse novel if you wish, but Plummies seem to love sharing Wodehouse over a meal.

**Capital! Capital!**, based in and around Washington, D.C., gathered in February at the Guards Restaurant for a brunch and a discussion of engagements and fiancées in Wodehouse. The center of the discussion was, of course, Bertram's situation. In April, the group discussed political passages in Wodehouse, appropriately enough meeting at the Occidental Grill, just a few blocks down Pennsylvania Avenue from a well-known political address. Another brunch in June, this time at the Old Ebbit Grill, focused on short story reading.

The **Chapter One Theatre Company**, based in Philadelphia, gathered in March at the Dickens Inn, Headhouse Square, to stage a splendid group reading of "Strychnine in the Soup."

The **Drone Rangers**, Houston, met in May to discuss *Pigs Have Wings*, led by Kathy Smith. In July, they had dinner and a jolly sing-along of the "Ballad of August" from the TWS convention song book at the elegant Basils in Houston. In August, they viewed a Wodehouse video.

Three stalwart Texas oysters plus friends met in San Antonio, Texas, in April, at a restaurant called The Pig Stands, to formally establish **The Mottled Oyster Club**. No doubt we will be hearing more from this group. Their founder is the Reverend Richard ("Stinker Pinker") Libby.

The **Northwodes** of the far north (Minnesota) planned, for obvious reasons, a nice indoor activity for January: a showing of the BBC biography of Plum, the video that Norman Murphy kindly provided for circulation around the continent. In March they read "baby" stories—"Sonny Boy," "Fixing It for Freddie," and "The Artistic Career of Corky"—in honor of a member's new scion, and also watched a couple of Wodehouse Playhouse videos. The next meeting coincided with the Kentucky

Derby, where they emulated Bingo and lost their entire club funds, i.e. the fiver provided by a generous patron, through having backed Captain Steve, rather than one of the horses that finished near the front. An ongoing project is the Great Northwodes Lending Library, which has succeeded in putting some hard-to-get pieces of the canon into readers' hands, as, for instance, *The Prince and Betty*, generously provided by our Swedish contact, Sven Sahlin. A worthy and generous effort.

The **Pdrones Club** (the P is silent), St. Louis, met for their annual afternoon tea at the Ritz-Carlton in Clayton. Surrounded by acres of ambience, members brought favorite passages from Wodehouse to read aloud.

The revived **Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Company** of Pasadena, California, has met thrice at the Pasadena Borders bookstore on Lake Street—always the second Sunday of the month at 12:30 PM. Coming up in the near future, discussions of *Leave It to Psmith* (October), "The Castaways" and "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom" (November), and "Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit" (December, naturally). The Borders store has been very accommodating, especially since its community relations coordinator is a huge Wodehouse fan. Members of Perfecto-Zizzbaum get a 15% discount on all Wodehouse titles bought at the store. The group is growing by leaps and bounds, is planning a couple of outings, and hopes to arrange a screening of *A Damsel in Distress* at L.A.'s Silent Movie Theatre.

Well, there you have it—the latest creative gatherings of Plummies on the planet, offering plenty of ideas for your chapter if you're running low on them.

## *Chapters calendar*

If you're in the neighborhood at the appropriate day and time, feel free to contact the chapter representative and attend one of the meetings listed below.

**Capital! Capital!** (Washington, DC)

Sunday, October 8, 2000, brunch, 12:30 PM, The Guards Restaurant, 2915 M Street, N.W. Topic: Wodehouse and Music, songs in Wodehouse works.

Saturday, November 18, 2000, lunch, 12:00 noon, Old Ebbit Grill, 6745 15th Street, N.W. Topic: Wodehouse and

the Holiday Spirit, readings from holiday passages in Wodehouse.

Contact: Eric R. Quick

**Chapter One** (Philadelphia, PA)

The fall meeting will be held on Sunday, October 1, at the Dickens Inn, Philadelphia.

Contact: Susan Cohen

**Drone Rangers** (Houston, TX))

Friday, December 1, 2000, discussion of *The Purloined Paperweight*.

Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

**Mottled Oyster Club** (San Antonio, TX))

Contact: James P. Robinson, III

**New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society** (NEWTs, Boston, MA)

A miniature golf outing is planned for October 15, and the annual holiday party will take place on December 16.

Contact: Anne Cotton

**Northwodes** (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN)

Contact: Kris Fowler

**The Pdrone Club** (St. Louis, MO)

Saturday, October 7, noon, lunch at the Tap Room, discussion of *The Code of the Woosters*.

Tuesday, November 14, 6:30 PM, Anniversary Dinner, Café De France (reservations required).

Contact: Sandy Morris

**The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation** (Pasadena, CA)

Sunday, October 8, Pasadena Borders bookstore on Lake Street, 12:30 PM, discussion of *Leave It to Psmith*.

Contact: Melissa D. Aron

All chapters are encouraged—nay, urged—to contact me via snail mail, newsletters, telephone, or e-mail with current and planned chapter events for Chapters Corner. The winter issue deadline is November 15. Please send information to: Sandy Morris

## EVERYMAN UPDATE

Are you looking for a U.S. source of the new series of Wodehouse reprints being published by Everyman Library? **Shamim ("Pongo") Mohamed** informs us that they can be obtained in the U.S. through Overlook Press. Overlook will provide the same 25% discount to all Wodehouse Society members that Everyman currently offers.

Eric Waldemar of Overlook told Pongo: "Our new Wodehouse re-releases are in fact the same volumes published by Everyman in the U.K. All you need to do to get the discount is call us at (800) 473-1312, fax us your credit card number at (914) 679-8571, or send a check to The Overlook Press, 2568 Route 212, Woodstock, NY 12498. Say you are a member of the society and we will likely take your word for it. I look forward to hearing from you."

## ZAREBAS, PI-DOGS, AND ACTS OF GOD

David Landman, in his essay "Fred Patzel: Pavarotti of the piglot" (Summer 2000), described Norman Murphy thus: "They are a crafty lot, these British brass hats. Tempered in kopjes and zarebas at the far-flung corners of Empire, they are past-masters in the stealthy art of commando warfare . . . . The reader will, of course, have recognized that I speak of Col. N.T.P. Murphy, Ret."

Norman's response:

Yes, I HAVE actually been tempered in a zareba in a far-flung corner of Empire. We still had the mandate in Egypt in 1953 and I had to take my little lot out on a long foot-patrol across the desert. Direction was easy, tricky thing was trying to work out how far you'd gone—no roads. And yes, at night, we erected a zareba of thorn bushes against pi-dogs who'd eat anything.

His response to Jan Kaufman's description of him as "an Act of God":

Now I've got to drop a quick note to Jan Kaufman thanking her for the kind comment but pointing out that in English law, an Act of God is a disaster or natural cataclysm of such magnitude that one cannot insure against it.

And the kopjes? Just small hills in South Africa—but you knew that already. —OM



# A VISIT WITH PLUM

By Basil Boothroyd

Peter Barnsley found this description of a visit to Plum, on his ninetieth birthday in 1971, by a fellow English writer. Boothroyd made the visit on the spur of the moment during a promotional tour of America for his latest book. It's in Boothroyd's *A Shoulder to Laugh On*, Robson Books, 1987.

—OM

Before leaving New York for Philadelphia I left it, on my own initiative, for Basketneck Lane, [Remsenburg,] Long Island, by chauffeured limousine. As a public relations exercise, a visit to the Wodehouse residence was hardly a legitimate charge on even the most amenable of publishers. I charged it. The round trip was something like two hundred miles. It took place on a Sunday, blessedly marked "Nothing Scheduled" in the day's itinerary sheet. I could have stayed in bed. Looking back, I take credit, if not of a financial nature, for putting the day to better use. The chance would never come again.

I had invited myself, by telephone: Ethel Wodehouse answered, in the practiced role of guardian dragon. "Oh, no, that would be quite impossible. No, no. He never comes to New York." It took quick thinking to make my identity and intentions clearer before she hung up. All was then changed. But how wonderful. Of course I must come to lunch. Plum would be delighted. They would both be delighted. She had always, I imagine, stood between his old manual typewriter (two-finger operated, very black ribbon) and the real or outside world, and at this time with particular vigilance. His ninetieth birthday, only a week earlier, had been a fearful interruption in routine, work suspended as cameras and crews invaded all privacy—with the declared and self-defeating aim of capturing "an ordinary day" in the life of P. G. Wodehouse. He pondered the absurdity of this, over his single statutory martini before lunch, and was honestly perplexed by the general fuss and commotion triggered by the birthday. He must have felt somewhat the same, I thought, about that equally intense, though less agreeable, uproar over his German broadcasts thirty years before, and the witch-hunting cries of "Traitor!" None of this, of course, came up at our meeting. He was chiefly eager for news from home. How, for instance, was *Punch*? (He was writing for it eight years before I was born.) What was William Davis like? I did my best there.

He could no doubt have lived palatially. I remember the house as small. That could be an over-dwindling against vague but different expectations. Other houses were visibly dotted about beyond the garden. "I should have bought that piece of land," said Ethel, looking out of the window at another house. She seemed to manage

everything. This included her Bide-a-Wee animal shelter, for which the Wodehouses were probably better known locally than for any wider distinction. "Plum was very good about that," she said. "He gave me five thousand pounds towards it." Plum fondly stroked his favourite birthday present, I forget from whom, a large brown pig beside his armchair, the Empress of Blandings to perhaps a one-third scale. "Dollars," he corrected. Ethel said, "Turn your toes out, Plum." The atmosphere was very settled. They had been married for fifty-seven years. Great age was not a thing to be associated with either of them. He was still large and bald and beaming, as in photographs remembered from years before. He seemed, he said, to be writing more slowly just at the moment. He mused. It must be something to do with the weather. She differed little from Muggeridge's picture of their first meeting, decades ago. "A mixture of Mistress Quickly and Florence Nightingale, with a dash of Lady Macbeth added." At lunch there was a maid, not young and of glum aspect, to hand round the boiled potatoes. There appeared some urgency about getting the meal over, so that she could get off home.

He talked of plans to visit England. Ethel gave me a small private shake of the head. He never would. He said to me, a sudden thought breaking through misty visions of staterooms and captain's tables, "I suppose you flew?" and received my affirmation with a nod; accepted that the world beyond the typewriter was changing. As he had never really been in it, no comment was called for. That was how, as Wooster would have said, the ball rolled.

After our farewells, which were almost affectionately demonstrative, I felt, back in my limousine, that something had been missing. For me, if not for my American publisher, it had been a rewarding pilgrimage. But the absent element, I concluded uncertainly, had been any ability on my part to equate the man with the works. I told my chauffeur whose guest I had been. He thought he had heard the name.

# WODEHOUSE AND THE GANGSTERS

By Stu Shiffman

Stu might be called an investigative reporter here, showing just how accurate Wodehouse was in his introduction to *Psmith Journalist*. A most interesting slab of background information. Incidentally, Stu describes himself as a “consulting cartoonist.” He drew the appallingly apt illustration on the opposite page. —OM

*Psmith Journalist*, that peerless and gritty chronicle of New York’s gangland, includes a few references to a world outside that usually covered by Wodehouse’s tales. In the introduction to the book, first serialized in 1909-10 and published as a book in 1915, Wodehouse wrote:

The conditions of life in New York are so different from those of London that a story of this kind calls for a little explanation. There are several million inhabitants of New York. Not all of them eke out a precarious livelihood by murdering one another, but there is a definite section of the population which murders—not casually, on the spur of the moment, but on definitely commercial lines at so many dollars per murder. The “gangs” of New York exist in fact. I have not invented them. Most of the incidents in this story are based on actual happenings. The Rosenthal case, where four men, headed by a genial individual calling himself “Gyp the Blood” shot a fellow-citizen in cold blood in a spot as public and fashionable as Piccadilly Circus and escaped in a motor-car, made such a stir a few years ago that the noise of it was heard all over the world and not, as is generally the case with the doings of the gangs, in New York only. Rosenthal cases on a smaller and less sensational scale are frequent occurrences on Manhattan Island. It was the prominence of the victim rather than the unusual nature of the occurrence that excited the New York press. Most gang victims get a quarter of a column in small type.

The story takes place in the days when every major city had dozens of newspapers embracing variant political positions. Psmith finds himself the editor of a rag called *Cosy Moments*, which had found its niche by doing nothing to disturb the self-satisfied lives of its genteel readers. It certainly did not have a reputation for being controversial. In fact, packed as it is with gut-churning items like “Moments in the Nursery” and the humor-free “Moments of Mirth,” it reconciles Psmith to toothache. Psmith, with the connivance of its deputy editor,

Montana-born Billy Windsor, finds his metier, and soon the sheet is not cosy at all. Its biting attacks on the New York slum problem draw the attention of corrupt politicians and the gangs, while Psmith coins the ringing phrase, “*Cosy Moments* cannot be muzzled.”

It was about this time (1911) that the *New York World* got entangled in a federal indictment for criminal libel. The newspaper charged that Theodore Roosevelt’s government had paid \$40 million for the Panama Canal and an additional \$10 million (for the newly created Republic of Panama) to J.P. Morgan for his part in the transaction.

The *World* also claimed that the president had lied about the financing to protect members of his administration. Roosevelt ordered a federal indictment. The *World’s* reply to the indictment was “Mr. Roosevelt is mistaken. He cannot muzzle the *World*.”

It is a curious fact that *Psmith Journalist*, despite the inclusion of the outrageous figure of Psmith, remains the grittiest of all of Wodehouse’s novels. Was it because of his youth and familiarity with the type of Broadway milieu later to be immortalized by boulevardier Damon Runyon? Or is the answer that it was written in the days when Wodehouse was less isolated from the seamy side of life in the city? His later flim-flam men and comic gangsters, as in *Laughing Gas*, are more Runyonesque than are those portrayed in this novel. Chimp Twist may have got his last name from the notorious Kid Twist (and perhaps his nickname from Monk Eastman), but he was a totally different kettle of fish.

It seems there have always been gangs in New York. They boil out of the ethnic stews and rookeries and slums, Five Points and the Lower East Side and Hell’s Kitchen and Harlem. They were Anglo-American, Irish, Chinese, Italian, African-American, or Jewish. Now there are the new waves of immigrants and others looking for their criminal route out of the poverty of the ethnic settlements. The big shots, glamorous and wealthy denizens of the underworld, were and are often heroes to the youngsters in their old neighborhoods.

These underworld cultures have their own rules and hierarchies. It was from the Jewish ghetto of New York City’s Lower East Side that some of the best-known criminals emerged in the period from 1880 to 1914. The names

pack a wallop in the criminal history of the city: Monk Eastman, Kid Twist, Gyp the Blood, Big Jack Zelig, Dopey Benny, Yoski Nigger, Kid Dropper, Little Augie, and Arnold Rothstein. Wodehouse isn't kidding in his introduction. These were nasty characters, and the Rosenthal case was a complicated one that involved corrupt police and desperate characters. It was Runyon who took Rothstein and combined him with Herman Rosenthal to become "Armand Rosenthal," the Brain (also see "Meyer Wolfsheim" in *The Great Gatsby*). Rothstein was the one often blamed for fixing the World Series in the famous Black Sox scandal. Rothstein was knocked off coming out of Lindy's (immortalized as "Mindy's" by Runyon) in 1928 for being a mite slow paying off his gambling bets. This never happened to the Greasy Bird or the Molloyes.

Those were the days when Joseph Pulitzer was still the mastermind behind the *New York World* (though he died in 1911), and Arthur Brisbane presided over Hearst's papers. Some claim that Herbert Bayard Swope of the *World* almost single-handedly cracked the Rosenthal murder case and sent a corrupt New York Police Department lieutenant to the chair. It was a grand time to be a newspaperman in New York.

Charles Becker was a lieutenant for the New York City Police Department during the Tammany Hall heyday. Only a new revival of reform caught him up in one of those Trials of the Century that you've heard so much about. This one was in 1912 and dominated the frenzied headlines of the press for three years. It was all very *Front Page*: a dirty cop with ties to the underworld; an ambitious district attorney with his eye on the Governor's Mansion; a hostile press that loved the story; and three murderers in New York's vile jail, the Tombs, who sought to trade Becker's life for their own.

There was graft everywhere, and payoffs to the police were part of it. This was the Broadway that Wodehouse saw in his early days in New York. The area around what is now Times Square (and earlier named Longacre Square) was then called the Tenderloin, centered at 42nd Street and Broadway. Besides the many legitimate and vaudeville theaters, there were hundreds of gambling casinos and a horde of prostitutes. It was com-

mon practice for casino owners and pimps to seek protection from prosecution by paying off the police, who were in business with their political masters at City Hall. Casino owners who refused to pay found their venues promptly raided and put out of business.

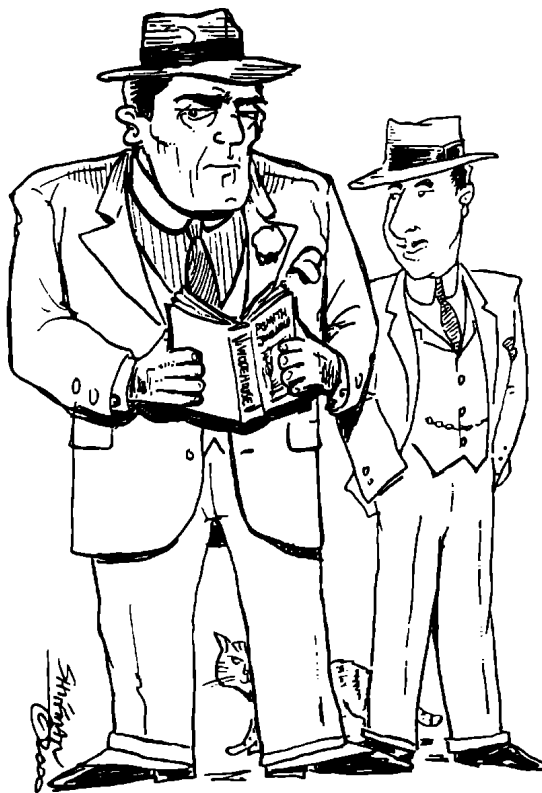
Charles Becker came from Sullivan County in upstate New York and got his first job as a bartender on the Bowery in 1888. Soon he was working as a bouncer, a tall handsome man with a reputation as a tough guy. It was then that he first got mixed up with Monk Eastman, a deranged killer who reigned over a decidedly dangerous gang of murderers and outlaws. Eastman's weapon of choice was a sawed-off baseball bat that he used on the skulls of his adversaries. Could this be the source of Wodehouse's Bat

Jarvis, or was that just a tip of the hat to New York sportswriter and former western gunslinger William Barclay "Bat" Masterson, who lent his last name to Runyon's Sky Masterson? Through Eastman, Becker met New York State Senator Big Tim Sullivan, who was regarded as the King of the Tenderloin and the boss of all graft and bribery in Manhattan. Sullivan liked Becker and thought he could be of use. In 1893, Sullivan arranged for Becker's entry into the Police Department. How Becker managed to survive the reforms of Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt (1895-1897) is not known.

In 1910, Police Commissioner Rhinelander Waldo formed special "brute" squads to break up the street gangs ruling lower Manhattan. Becker was made commander of one of those teams. Waldo was satisfied with

their work and expanded their duties to include crack-downs on the West Side gambling dens. This was perfect for Becker, who used his anti-vice squad as a tool to extort protection payoffs from the casino owners. Those who defied him found that his vengeance was swift and frequently terminal.

Becker soon needed to expand his operation and hired the murderous Big Jack Zelig, who had taken over part of the Monk Eastman gang after Eastman's murder. Zelig used his gang foot soldiers to make the collections for Becker. One of these gentle souls was a fellow known as Harry "Gyp the Blood" Horowitz. His showpiece turn was to place a recalcitrant subject in his lap and promptly



Are these honest fellows reading about themselves in *Psmith Journalist*?

break the man's back. It was a specialty that Gyp the Blood, accompanied by sidekicks Lefty Louie, Dago Frank, and Whitey Lewis, often put on display in East Side saloons.

In the summer of 1912, a low-level underworld gambler named Herman "Beansey" Rosenthal was given permission by New York State Senator Big Tim Sullivan to open a new casino named the Hesper Club at 104 W. 45th St. Becker called on Rosenthal on opening night, in order to lay the groundwork for future payoffs. Rosenthal demurred, telling Becker that this was Big Tim's territory. Rosenthal was beholden to a higher power and would make no payments to Becker. However, when Sullivan became gravely ill, Becker quickly took the reins himself. Rosenthal still refused to pay, so Becker sent Bald Jack Rose, a well-known gangster and murderer, to station himself inside the Hesper Club and skim off 20 percent of the casino's take. Rosenthal began to complain loudly to Tammany Hall politicians, saying he would not stand for such shoddy treatment at the hands of a renegade cop. This could not be tolerated. Becker was pressured by Police Commissioner Waldo to raid The Hesper, about which he had received many complaints.

Waldo couldn't understand how it stayed in business without Becker being aware of it. Becker had to give in and raided the joint. He stationed a uniformed police officer inside 24 hours a day to see that it remained closed. Rosenthal was sorely vexed, and met with District Attorney Charles Whitman, about whom Felix Frankfurter once wrote, "He was a politically minded district attorney, one of the great curses of America." Rosenthal went to the D.A.'s office to meet with Whitman on the night of July 15, 1912. Whitman was elated that an underworld figure had at last come forward. This was hot stuff, sure to result in big headlines!

Whitman told Rosenthal he would convene a Grand Jury to hear the case and would allow Rosenthal to testify on police underworld connections. After his meeting with Whitman, Rosenthal left the Criminal Courts building at 11 PM and headed to the Cafe Metropole on W. 43rd St, then a local hangout for gamblers. The news of Rosenthal's meeting with the D.A. had already spread through gangland. Rosenthal walked into the Metropole and took a seat alone in the back of the room and began to read his newspaper. No one would talk to him. Just before 2 AM, one of the waiters came over to him with a message.

"There's someone in front to see you, Beansey," the waiter said. Rosenthal walked to the entrance and spotted several men lurking in the shadows to his left. One called to him, "Over here, Beansey!" and he walked closer. Four shots were fired rapidly and Rosenthal collapsed on the sidewalk. One of the murderers casually walked over

to him as he lay there and fired another shot into his head. The gunmen then ran across the street, jumped into their getaway car, and drove off down 43rd Street.

It was a sensation. Whitman and the newspapers insisted that the police had only made a pretense of pursuing the killers. Whitman's own investigation revealed the license number of the getaway car, a Packard traced to Boulevard Taxi Service at 2nd Avenue and 10th Street. There the records showed that the car had been leased to Bald Jack Rose, Becker's collection man. Bald Jack surrendered to the D.A. and gave up the driver of the Packard. Whitman gave immunity to Rose and associates Shapiro, Webber, and Vallon. Shapiro admitted that he drove the Packard that carried the killers to the Metropole and identified his companions in the car as Louis "Lefty Louie" Rosenzweig, Frank "Dago Frank" Cirofici, Jacob "Whitey Lewis" Seidenschner and Harry "Gyp the Blood" Horowitz. They were rounded up and imprisoned in the Tombs. Vallon, Webber, and Rose were locked together in a separate part of the Tombs, which allowed the three to develop a new, consistent story. Based on this and a written statement by Rose, Lt. Charles Becker was indicted for the murder on July 29, 1912. Later that day Becker was picked up while on duty at the Bathgate Avenue Station in the Bronx. The newspapers and the populace were in an uproar. The Jewish press was especially concerned about the large number of Jewish criminals involved in the case.

During the trial, the natty Bald Jack Rose testified to Becker's ties with the West Side underworld, saying that Becker had told him, "He (Rosenthal) ought to be put off this earth. There is a fellow I would like to have croaked! Have him murdered! Cut his throat, dynamite him, or anything!" as well as, "There is no danger to anybody that has any hand in the murder of Rosenthal. There can't be anything happen to anyone . . . and you know the feeling over at police headquarters is so strong that the man or men that croak him would have a medal pinned on them!" This is not exactly on the level of "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" Rose's testimony was uncorroborated. Supposedly Rose had recruited Gyp the Blood and Whitey Lewis after Zelig had refused the job. Rose said that they, in turn, recruited Lefty Louie and Dago Frank and all accepted the contract for \$1,000.

Becker was condemned to death, as were Gyp the Blood, Lefty Rosenzweig, Dago Frank, and Whitey Lewis in a later trial. The three-ring circuses continued with a re-trial for Becker, where he was again found guilty of murder.

As before, he accepted the verdict without reaction. Appeals were filed for Becker, the gangsters were executed, and Whitman became governor of New York. Governor Whitman was not about to commute Becker's sentence

of death. After much more hullabaloo in the press, Charles Becker was executed on July 30, 1915 by electric chair in Sing Sing.

This was all very fresh and in the public eye when Wodehouse sat down to write his introduction.

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## MURPHY'S PRIDE

The following item, with the above headline, appeared in a London newspaper of July 18, 2000.

P.G. Wodehouse has always been a firm favourite with the Queen Mother, according to Norman Murphy, chair of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK), who was at the launch of the organisation's millennium tour, *In Search of Blandings*, at The Plaza in Lancaster Gate last night.

Indeed her enthusiasm more than doubled when she read Murphy's book, also titled *In Search of Blandings*, which was published in 1981. "I met her at a lunch some years after and she came up to me and thanked me as until she read the book she didn't know that P G Wodehouse had dedicated one of his books to two of her first cousins. It made her feel very proud." So taken is she that the Queen Mother is an honorary member of The Wodehouse Society (USA). "Our branch didn't start until years later," explains Murphy.



The book dedicated to "two [actually three] of her first cousins" was *The Pothunters*, Plum's first, published in 1902 when he was all of 20 years old. The dedication reads, "To Joan, Effie and Ernestine Bowes-Lyon," three little girls with whom the shy Wodehouse was less shy.

## THANK YOU, JEEVES AUDIOTAPE

Mark Richard, Artistic Director of Chicago's City Lit Theatre, sent this reply to a recent question in *Plum Lines* about the *Thank You, Jeeves* tape, offered in a recent Audio Editions catalog.

This performance is probably more of a novelty (or oddity) than an indispensable addition. Nevertheless, I think it's worth a listen.

The adaptation was created (by me) for L.A. Theatre Works (L.A.T.W.), based on our Chicago staging (also by yours truly) of 1997. L.A.T.W. tapes live radio performances and then markets the tapes both for radio broadcast and to the audio book market.

*Thank You, Jeeves* comes with certain caveats: The producer insisted that the script come in at 90 min. Our adaptations are generally quite faithful and therefore tend to run about 2 hrs. 15 min. Consequently, more of the master's sublime prose has been edited than is customary in City Lit's performances.

Also, this particular title was chosen in order to provide a cameo role for the mayor of Los Angeles, who is an avid amateur performer. Hence, we have Mayor Richard Riordan in the role of J. Washburn Stoker.

Finally (purists take note), the sub-plot involving a minstrel show and gags about Bertie in blackface was rewritten to involve Appalachian bluegrass musicians and Bertie stuck in a hideous false beard. I trust no explanation is necessary.

While I haven't heard the tape in years, I believe it's a very good cast.

And a separate bit of Chicago news: City Lit Theatre, after a one year hiatus, will be back in the spring of 2001 with a new Wodehouse production, *The Mating Season*. It promises to be the biggest and wildest of the Bertie and Jeeves novels we've done so far. I hope Plummies within a bread roll's throw of Chicago (and beyond) will join us.



The City Lit Theatre is a corporate member of our society. Mark and his merry crew produce stage adaptations of Wodehouse works once a year as a rule, works that get rave reviews even from fanatical Wodehouse fans. There are no sterner critics than fanatical fans—we're way off the back of the boat.

The toll-free number of Audio Editions is (800) 231-4261, and the item number is C1X119u. —OM

# JOHN FLETCHER IN THE SPRINGTIME

By Jan Wilson Kaufman

Jan's essay on John Fletcher was first published in the April 2000 issue of *The Argus Intelligencer*, the quarterly journal of our Blandings Castle (San Francisco) chapter. It is reprinted here by permission. Incidentally, John will be speaking at our Philadelphia convention next year on publishing Wodehouse.

—OM

John Fletcher is one of the English Wodehousians, along with Norman Murphy and Tony Ring, best known to Americans. All three are distinguished by their light-hearted and impeccable scholarship. John has so far published eight Wodehouse-related books through his own Porpoise Books imprint, with more to come. His writing for the UK web site is characterized by a very sure and graceful good humor. He proved his own formidable credentials as a Wodehouse scholar by being on the winning Scripture Knowledge team at the Chicago convention, in addition to being in charge of the fiendish weekly quiz on the UK web site.

John started reading Wodehouse in the blissful days when there was at least one new Wodehouse a year. As a result, he associates them always with Christmas and chocolates. When *The Code of the Woosters* first came out, he can remember his mother laughing at, and explaining to him at age eight, Madeline Bassett's remark, "You know your Shelley, Bertie," and Bertie's answer, "Oh, am I?"

He started collecting around the 1970s, when he wrote to Wodehouse biographer Oliver Dudley Edwards, "I am a Wodehouse-reader, handicapped at present by only having about 65 of his books, but I hope to catch up in the next year or two. I have also got Geoffrey Jaggard's two concordances, Usborne's *Wodehouse at Work to the End . . .* And I was coming to the (angry) conviction that these people misunderstood PGW; that they did not read him seriously enough, or even write about him seriously enough, and I began to wonder what I could do about it." John said it seemed important to demolish the idea that the novels were set in the year they were published—an idea curiously prevalent then and now. (For example, do people imagine *King Lear* was set in 1608)? He tried to establish the year in which each Blandings novel and each Wooster book and short story was set. There are a

lot of clues and links between books, so to do that properly you have to collect; but in the sense of collecting first editions, he was never a collector. Only one reading copy of every book was necessary.

In 1991 John began publishing Wodehouse books through Porpoise Books, starting with *A Man of Means*, which PGW co-authored with C.H. Bovill around 1914 (Bovill mostly supplied the plot). In 1995 he published Tony Ring's amusing account of Wodehouse's tax tribulations, *You Simply Hit Them With an Axe*. The ambitious idea of publishing the Wodehouse Millennium Concordance was mooted after Tony bought the original Geoffrey Jaggard typescript in the early 1990s. Jaggard had published two books, *Blandings the Blest* and *Wooster's World*. Tony bought the Jaggard text but the copyright

didn't go with it. So John needed to get the copyright agreement of Geoffrey Jaggard's heirs; it took two years to find them. "It was great fun, going to Brockworth in Gloucestershire where his widow had written to me years earlier; but now she had died too. I had to ask people who had known them. In hindsight it would have been quicker, but much less amusing, to ring up the six Jaggards in the London telephone directory. One, as it turned out, was his son."

The first Millennium Concordance volume, *Wodehouse in the Clubhouse*, was published in 1994, followed by *Wodehouse at the Angler's Rest*, *Wodehouse Goes*

*to School*, *Wodehouse Among the Chickens*, and *Wodehouse at Blandings*. *Wodehouse in Woostershire* was published this year and contains such gems as Bertie's musical repertoire; a list of both Bertie and Jeeves' relations; and a short draft of an unrealized novel, *Very Foxy, Jeeves*, in which PGW proposed to bring Jeeves and Bertie to Blandings Castle. Covered with handsome brightly-colored dust jackets, these books are filled with original illustrations by Bernard Canavan, and an interesting range of period draw-



John Fletcher, on the left, with Peter Schwed, Plum's long-time American editor and publisher, at the Boston convention in 1995. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.



ings. Two volumes are still to come.

What John enjoys most is checking the text that Tony sends, and later arguing with him about any of his amendments which he won't accept. The joy is that Tony has just about every edition of everything and John has one edition of everything, scribbled over with comments and queries. This game of tennis goes on for some time.

John is surprised when people address junk mail to the Purchasing Department of Porpoise Books, as though it were a vast organization. He says they sometimes "Ring and ask for the Human Resources Manager. I vary the response to this. Perhaps I should invent a Mr. Wilberfloss, but usually I say something like 'If I worked twice as hard as I do, it would be a one-man firm.' And letters from people asking for jobs. If they begin 'I am interested in being . . .' and spell 'interested' wrong, I know that what they are interested in being is a proof-reader."

Is it profitable being the publisher of Porpoise Books? "No. I earn nothing. On the contrary, I spend what others spend on sailing or golf. What I can afford goes into the next book. On the other hand, the good thing about publishing is that all the expenses come first, in making the book. Distributing costs are a percentage of sales, so if you forget what it cost to print, for ever afterwards the receipts on that book look like profit. If I stopped producing new books it would be profitable." He doesn't enjoy keeping serious accounts. With a larger budget he would like to experiment more widely with typefaces and bindings. He would also pay more to artists, as they seem to be the most exploited members of the book-producing fraternity. He doesn't advertise. Free publicity comes in *Wooster Sauce*, *Plum Lines*, at Wodehouse society conventions, and from the UK web site.

Asked how and when he met Norman Murphy, John responded: "At the college where I was a lecturer, four or five of us were keen on Wodehouse. We convened for coffee after lunch (we still do) and called ourselves the Drones. One day in 1981, one of us produced a small volume called *In Search of Blandings* by N.T.P. Murphy. I was fascinated to find someone else going "behind" the Wodehouse stories, so to speak, in the way I had. In January 1982, I received

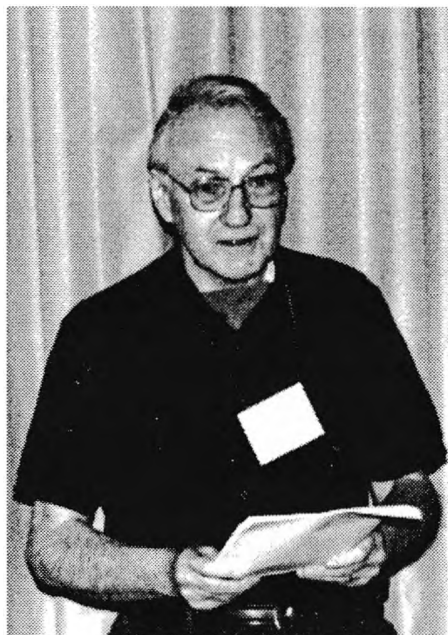
my copy, no. 50 out of 500. Three of us, including me, decided we should invite this remarkable man to lunch in London. I stipulated Rules, my favorite restaurant, with terrific Edwardian atmosphere. Its most distinguished customer had been Edward VII himself. I asked Norman questions about his research, and other things that interested me, such as how did he find all that out. And many detailed questions like why he seemed not to have connected the Rudge Hall in *Money for Nothing* with the real Rudge Hall in Shropshire. And if Severn End in Worcestershire was as he claimed the original of Brinkley Court, whether it had french windows, a pond, and a boathouse. And so on, endlessly."

John joined the TWS pilgrimage to England in July 1989, which went first to Dulwich and then round the countryside. He had not heard about TWS before, and could not separate himself from it afterwards. "Norman asked me to help get us to Cheney Court in Wiltshire, and we promptly lost our way."

John has faithfully attended all the American conventions since that 1989 pilgrimage: San Francisco, New York, Boston, Chicago, and Houston. He liked the surprise present at New York of silver-looking cuff links, Wooster on one side, Blandings on the other. He still wears them to conventions. He thought Charles Gould's talk in New York was brilliant. He remembers Charles Gould, on the panel of sages, when asked the question "What is the meaning of 'Across the pale parabola of joy?'" answering "Which of the words don't you understand?" which has made him laugh ever since. "And Norman's talk at Houston was not only an epoch-maker, but was carefully constructed and beautifully written in every detail. Wodehousian company is continuously exhilarating, but you can't pin down why so easily. Just as you can't pin down why Wodehouse is so good, or what is the particular flavor of Blandings which makes it different from Wooster-Jeeves. It just is."

As to his favorite Wodehouse characters, John said, "Jeeves has the unemotional self-possession that I aim at. I wish I could talk like Psmith. Other characters provoke questions. Could Mr. Mulliner's stories be true or not? How can Ukridge be so attractive without any redeeming features? And what has Psmith's patter got that Uncle Fred's (for instance) hasn't? These questions I am still working on."

He wrote an ingenious article for the spring 1990 issue of *Plum Lines*, titled "Disentangling the Wooster Rela-



And here is John reading at the Houston convention in 1999. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

tions,” sorting out the intricacies of Bertie’s genealogy.

Regarding the UK web site, Webmaster Chris Reece does all the programming, and John is responsible for writing the news and overseeing the quiz. To his disappointment no UK member has ever entered the quiz, but the UK members do read the news, find out about regional gatherings and download application forms. He spends about an hour a week working on the web site.

Asked about his other literary enthusiasms, he says, “I have collected Enid Blyton (who published my first poem when I was eight and I won’t hear a word against her), Walter de la Mare, and G.K. Chesterton. I belong to two other literary societies, the Chesterton and the Thomas Lovell Beddoes societies. My wife inherited a lot of Beddoes material and is therefore popular in that society.” [Beddoes (1803-1849) is best known today for his poem “Dream Pedlary”: “If there were dreams to sell, what would you buy?”]

“I make a point of collecting sagas, by authors who recycle people and places,” John says. “Trollope above all, because he is a remarkable parallel to Wodehouse. As Wodehouse had the Blandings and the Jeeves-Wooster sagas, Trollope had Barsetshire and the political novels. Then Osbert Sitwell, Lawrence Durrell, Anthony Powell, all writing several volumes with the same people. I read all manner of stuff without collecting it. I take the *Times Literary Supplement* which makes me want to read loads of books I couldn’t possibly afford. So I have joined the London Library so as to get what I want just for a read. At present I have just finished a collection of John Betjeman’s articles and a book on Shakespeare’s lost years.

“I was born in Holt, Norfolk, a county with many Wodehouse connections, as Norman’s Houston talk demonstrated. Schools: Wiltshire; Halifax in Canada; then an English prep school rather like the one in *The Little Nugget* except that the Headmaster read Wodehouse to us in the evenings; then Wellington College, like Wrykyn, or like Dulwich but more military and less literary; then Oxford University.”

Now retired, John briefly describes his career as “after eighteen months in Singapore shipping rubber, half my life in industry (ICI) and half in teaching.” His interests include “The English language; writing skills; riding horses; walking; maps; codes; how the Internet will develop; philosophy; plays: Pinter, Stoppard, and Shakespeare; and I am a practicing Catholic.” He wrote a book, *The Interview at Work*, published by Duckworth in 1986. His wife, Tana, makes animated children’s films in her garden studio, using puppets based on *Punch* stories written by Archibald Marshall 100 years ago. Some of her films have been produced on television. They have a son, three daughters, and five grandchildren.

## A FEW QUICK ONES

Murray “Honest Patch Perkins” Wilson noted an error in the encyclopedia entry written by Tom Smith that was reproduced in the last issue of *Plum Lines*. Murray writes: “In the proposed entry ‘Cassandra’ is described as being a BBC radio personality, whereas he in fact was a featured columnist of the *Daily Mirror* newspaper. His infamous attack on Wodehouse was made over BBC radio, but that was an aberration. He was a newspaper journalist. It is important that anything that is recorded and may be quoted by others is as correct as it can be made, and I hope that Mr. Smith will not think this a hairsplitting detail.”

Marilyn MacGregor passed on an item about London Mayor Ken Livingstone’s efforts to better the lives of newts and frogs. It seems he has hired a “pond doctor,” whose job will be to educate London’s pond owners (approximately 150,000 of them) on ways to make their ponds into havens for our web-footed friends. The newspaper article also made note of Mr. Livingstone’s previous quest for the rare great crested newt, a search through London ponds that he funded. All in all, the mayor has made Gussie Fink-Nottle a very happy man.

Word is that Oneword Radio, “the world’s first Commercial Radio station dedicated to plays, books, and comedy,” has been broadcasting readings of Wodehouse. How good these readings are we cannot say, but more information can be obtained by going to [www.oneword.co.uk](http://www.oneword.co.uk) and having a listen. *Jeeves in the Offing* was broadcast in July; no word on what might be on the current menu.

By way of alt.fan.wodehouse, Bill Deeck (Constable Eustace Oates) tells us: “In the recently published anthology *A Century of British Mystery and Suspense*, edited by Anne Perry, is Wodehouse’s ‘Jeeves and the Stolen Venus.’”

Even the *Wall Street Journal* cannot resist quoting Wodehouse. Tom Thomas sent along an article from the August 22 issue citing the use of analogies. The article ends as follows: “Perhaps now you feel more like the man whose intelligence P.G. Wodehouse once described as ‘somewhat lower than that of a backward clam—a clam, let us say, which has been dropped on its head when a baby.’”

OM, a D, 11

The Oldest Member, Aunt Dahlia, and Society Spice

## BEYOND A JOKE

*Beyond a Joke* is the title of a new play about Wodehouse's experiences with British authorities at the end of World War II. It opened in London on August 30. All of us who had heard of it wondered whether it would represent Wodehouse fairly in those difficult times. I haven't heard from any member of our society who has seen it, so I'm taking the liberty of swiping a few quotes from a review provided by **Tony Ring**, editor of our sister publication, *Wooster Sauce* (UK).

The group of fifteen members [of the UK Wodehouse society] who attended the first night had disparate views of the production. One called it "The best play I have seen for years"; another referred to it as "brilliant." A member with relatively little knowledge of Plum's life felt that as a piece of drama it was very effective, and never implied that he was guilty of anything beyond naivety. Other members, less enthusiastic overall, could not agree why they felt that way . . . . It is clear . . . that the reaction to the play is very much a personal one . . . . [Wodehouse] came over as more wily, more worldly-wise, than the reality . . . . There were . . . two or three misrepresentations which are harmful to Plum as far as the audience reaction might be concerned, and which could cause the less well-informed to arrive at the wrong conclusion.

The guarded conclusion is the playwright had avoided the worst of the potential traps, but had still felt it necessary to distort certain events to provide what he saw as adequate dramatic tension . . . . It is clear that there is no intention to try Plum and find him guilty.

It's good to hear that the play is a relatively well-balanced representation, in contrast to the tired old charges revived by some of the British papers last year.

**Ken Clevenger**, a TWS member on vacation in England, found an item about the play in a Malvern newspaper. *Beyond a Joke* is scheduled to open in Malvern Theatres in October. Whether this will be the London company or another is not stated. —OM

There was a howl of fury which caused the local policeman, who had just been about to turn into the street, to stop and tie his bootlace.

*Summer Moonshine, 1938*

## CONVENTION 2001

Philadelphia, October 12-14

If it was held in pale Passaic  
this report would be prosaic,  
but lovely Philly is our venue  
and thus in verse we pen our menu.  
If life has made you gross and surly,  
why not consider coming early  
and staying late, for as I'm sober,  
the Delaware Valley in October  
is beautiful and what's more,  
convenient to the Jersey shore.  
Arriving early and staying late  
will not affect your hotel rate.  
Convention hotel fees (no laughter)  
last three days before and three days after.  
So if you come eleven Oct,  
you will find the zoo unlocked  
where reside in speckled suits  
Chapter One's endearing newts.  
Later on reap your reward  
in Herb Moscovitz and Gretchen Word-  
en's tour of old Society Hill,  
of architecture to drink your fill.  
After dinner if drink's your hobby  
the Angler's Rest in hotel lobby  
in honor of beloved Plum's  
awash with drinks of Bennett Blum's  
and Daniel Cohen's shrewd invention,  
among which, deserving mention,  
this fertile alcoholic team  
has perfected the true May Queen.

On Friday next the twelfth (do pick it)  
an invigorating game of cricket  
followed by a Cricket Tea  
and visit to the library  
upon whose hallowed shelves there boards  
the best collection this side of Lords  
of cricket memorabilia  
which is sure to appear t'ya.  
C.C. Morris amassed this knowledge  
and willed it to Haverford College.

Plan to come early and stay late,  
for Plummy pleasures consummate.  
Mark your date book! The great day looms!  
Press tux and gown! Reserve your rooms!

(See enclosed insert for registration information.)

# FROM A WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

By P. G. Wodehouse

Francine Swift found this introduction (untitled) in an edition of Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* published by Ballantine Books, New York, 1975. The piece will seem strangely familiar to readers of the Mulliner stories, and that surely includes all of us. The material first appeared, as a short story, in *Punch*, May 20, 1959, entitled "Baker Street, W.I., From a Detective's Notebook." It was collected in *The World of Mr. Mulliner*, 1972 and 1975, and was reprinted in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* as "Adrian Mulliner's Greatest Triumph" in 1975. Ballantine probably asked Wodehouse for an introduction in 1974 or very early 1975. Plum reached back to his excellent short story of 15 years earlier, rewrote it, and—presto!—an excellent introduction. More evidence that Wodehouse made utmost use of his material. (Thanks to Len Lawson for much of this information.) —OM

When I was starting out as a writer—this would be about the time Caxton invented the printing press—Conan Doyle was my hero. Others might revere Hardy and Meredith. I was a Doyle man, and I still am. Usually we tend to discard the idols of our youth as we grow older, but I have not had this experience with A.C.D. I thought him swell then, and I think him swell now. We were great friends in those days, our friendship interrupted only when I went to live in America. He was an enthusiastic cricketer—he could have played for any first-class county—and he used to have cricket weeks at his place in the country, to which I was nearly always invited. After a day's cricket and a big dinner he and I would discuss literature. The odd thing was that though he could be expansive about his least known short stories—those in *Round the Red Lamp*, for instance—I could never get him to talk of Sherlock Holmes, and I think the legend that he disliked Sherlock must be true. It is with the feeling that he would not object that I have sometimes amused myself by throwing custard pies at that great man. Recently I have taken up the matter of Holmes's finances. Let me go into the matter in depth, as they say. I find myself arriving at a curious conclusion. Have you ever considered the nature of Holmes's financial affairs? Here we have a man who evidently was obliged to watch the pennies, for when we are introduced to him he is, according to Doctor Watson's friend Stamford, "bemoaning himself because he could not find someone to go halves in some nice rooms which he had found and which were too much for his purse." Watson offers himself as a fellow lodger, and they settle down in—I quote—a couple of comfortable bedrooms and a large sitting-room at 221B Baker Street.

Now I lived in similar rooms at the turn of the century, and I paid twenty-one shillings a week for bed, breakfast, and dinner. An extra bedroom no doubt made the thing come higher for Holmes and

Watson, but thirty shillings must have covered the rent and vittles, and there was never any question of a man as honest as Watson failing to come up with his fifteen bob each Saturday. It follows, then, that allowing for expenditures in the way of Persian slippers, tobacco, disguises, revolver cartridges, cocaine, and spare violin strings Holmes would have been getting by on a couple of pounds or so weekly. And with this modest state of life he appeared to be perfectly content. Let us take a few instances at random and see what he made as a "consulting detective."

In the very early days of their association, using it as his "place of business," he interviewed in the sitting-room "a gray-headed seedy visitor, who was followed by a slipshod elderly woman, and after that a railway porter in his velveteen uniform." Not much cash in that lot, and things did not noticeably improve later, for we find his services engaged by a stenographer, a city clerk, a Greek interpreter, a landlady, and a Cambridge undergraduate. So far from making money as a consulting detective, he must have been a good deal out of pocket most of the time. In *A Study in Scarlet* Inspector Gregson asks him to come to 3 Lauriston Gardens in the Brixton neighbourhood, because there has been "a bad business" there during the night. Off goes Holmes in a hansom from Baker Street to Brixton, a fare of several shillings, dispatches a long telegram (another two or three bob to the bad), summons "half a dozen of the dirtiest and most ragged street Arabs I ever clapped eyes on," gives each of them a shilling, and tips a policeman half a sovereign.

The whole affair must have cost him considerably more than a week's rent at Baker Street, and no hope of getting any of it back from Inspector Gregson, for Gregson, according to Holmes himself, was "one of the smartest of all the Scotland Yarders."

Inspector Gregson! Inspector Lestrade! Those clients! I found myself thinking a good deal about them, and it was not long before



the truth dawned upon me, that they were merely cheap actors, hired to deceive Doctor Watson, who had to be deceived because he had the job of writing the stories. For what would the ordinary private investigator have said to himself when starting out in business? He would have said, "Before I take on work for a client I must be sure that the client has the stuff. The daily sweetener and the little something down in advance are of the essence," and he would have had those landladies and those Greek interpreters out of his sitting-room before you could say "bloodstain." Yet Holmes, who could not afford a pound a week for lodgings, never bothered.

Significant! Later the thing became absolutely farcical, for all pretence that he was engaged in gainful occupation was dropped by himself and the clients. I quote Doctor Watson. "He tossed a crumpled letter across the table to me. It was dated from Montague Place upon the preceding evening and ran thus: Dear Mr. Holmes, I am anxious to consult you as to whether or not I should accept a situation which has been offered to me as a governess. I shall call at half-past ten tomorrow, if I do not inconvenience you. Yours faithfully, Violet Hunter."

Now, the fee an investigator could expect from a governess, even one in full employment, could scarcely be more than a few shillings, yet when two weeks later Miss Hunter wired "Please be at the Black Swan at Winchester at mid-day tomorrow," Holmes dropped everything and sprang into the 9:30 train.

It all boils down to one question—Why is a man casual about money? The answer is—Because he has a lot of it. Had Holmes? He pretended he hadn't, but that was merely the illusion he was trying to create because he needed a front for his true activities. He was pulling the stuff in from another source. Where is the big money? Where it has always been, in crime. Bags of it and no income tax. If you want to salt away a few million for a rainy day, you don't spring into 9:30 trains to go and talk to governesses, you become a Master Criminal, sitting like a spider in the center of its web and egging your corps of assistants on to steal jewels and naval Treaties.

I saw daylight, and all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fell into place. Holmes was Professor Moriarty. What was that name again? Professor Moriarty. Do you mean the fellow who was forever oscillating his face from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion? That's the one. But Holmes's face didn't forever oscillate from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion. Nor did Professor Moriarty's. Holmes said it did. And to whom? To Doctor Watson, in order to ensure that the misleading description got publicity. Watson never saw Moriarty. All he knew about him was what Holmes told him on the evening of April 24, 1891. And Holmes made a little slip on the occasion. He said that on his way to see Watson

he had been attacked by a rough with a bludgeon. A face-oscillating Napoleon of Crime, anxious to eliminate someone he disliked, would have thought up something better than roughs with bludgeons. Dropping cobras down the chimney is the mildest thing that would have occurred to him.

P.S. Just kidding, boys. Actually, like all the rest of you, I am never happier than when curled up with Sherlock Holmes, and I hope Messrs Ballantine will sell several million of him. As the fellow said, there's no police like Holmes.

P.G. Wodehouse

## ANOTHER JEEVES SOURCE!

Stephen Brown found this item in *The Doctor and the Detective*, a biography of Conan Doyle, by Martin Booth (St. Martin's Press, 2000). It involves a Doyle character named Challenger, who first appeared in 1913.

As a result of his [Conan Doyle's] involvement with the theatre, he had learnt to write more tersely, more dramatically and with a certain direct punchiness that was to be much imitated in the future and set a trend in English fiction. The long-winded descriptions of the nineteenth century were, through Conan Doyle, transformed into the concise, exact diction of the twentieth, with direct speech becoming far more realistic. Also loosely imitated was Austin, Challenger's manservant, who was the foundation for P.G. Wodehouse's famous butler, Jeeves.

Stephen responds: "I would estimate that this is the 231st claimed inspiration for Jeeves."

But one thing I have never failed to hand [Jeeves]. He is magnetic. There is something about him that seems to soothe and hypnotize. To the best of my knowledge he has never encountered a charging rhinoceros, but should the contingency occur, I have no doubt that the animal, meeting his eye, would check itself in mid-stride, roll over and lie purring with its legs in the air.

*Right Ho, Jeeves*, 1934

# A MAINLY TRUE SOCIO-HISTORICO SURVEY OF BREAD-THROWING (PANIS IACTUS) THREW\* THE AGES: FROM ANTIQUITY TO HOUSTON 1999

By David Landman

## Part I Bread-Throwing in the Ancient World

It is a false etymology which derives the noble art of bread-throwing (BT) from the orgies of the ancient Pan religion. In truth, the practice of bread-throwing was practically unknown in high antiquity. When a jolly Akhaian wished to attract the attention of another jolly Akhaian in the combustible atmosphere of a symposium, a three-legged stool or cloven hoof was the socially acceptable missile. We read in the *Odyssey* that at the stag party catered for Odysseus on his return to Ithaca, he was first hit in the shoulder by a stool and later barely managed to duck a less well-aimed cow's hoof. A good laugh was had by all, and there the matter rested. It is a curious and little-known fact that it was customary in ancient Greece to provide each party-goer with a basket of hoofs, much as today's revelers are provided paper hats and blow-ticklers.

Today you cannot have stool and hoof throwing on anything like its former scale. For one thing, furniture has grown heavier and bulkier. You cannot well expect Uncle George to hurl an E-Z Boy Lounger at Aunt Ethel with anything near the accuracy he could achieve with a three-legged stool. And what is the upshot? A once happy union based on the cheerful exchange of hurtling stools (the wooden kind) and the occasional misericord has become poisoned by the aspect of errant Morris chairs and Barcaloungers. There would be far less need for marriage counsellors if the satisfaction of occasionally braining one's spouse with an oaken stool remained a possibility.

For another, the supply of cow's hoofs has dried up. Am I right in suspecting that the number of friendly neighborhood abattoirs is on the wane in America? Time was when your corner abattoir would have provided plenty of hoofs. And not only cows. Sheep, pig, and horses' hoofs were yours for the asking. "Morning, sir. What do you lack?" the cheerful tradesman would say. "Slaughter Bossy, Ludwig," you would reply to the obliging knacker, "and save the feet. I'm entertaining an important client and

want to make a good impression." But nowadays you have to search far and wide to find a decent neighborhood abattoir. Once plentiful, their passing is mourned by all. It's all butchery dot com now.

The Romans are equally mum on bread-throwing. There is a legend that in 390 B.C. when the starving Romans were besieged by the Gauls, Jupiter appeared to General Camillus and advised him to bake what little flour was left into loaves and chuck them at their besiegers, a maneuver designed to convince their attackers that abundance reigned and the people were not starving. The Gauls found themselves hopelessly outgunned. While the Romans rained lethal panettoni upon them, they could only muster a return fire of fleecy brioches. They retired to formulate a Strategic Defense Initiative, and that, my children, is how the baguette was born. This legend does not say much for the intelligence of the Gauls or, for that matter, of Jupiter. For when the defenders began throwing bread, might not the brainier sort of Gaul have reasoned that the Romans were out of weapons and redoubled his efforts? Be that as it may, the ruse *did* work. But it is not something that can work twice, and, consequently, the Romans abandoned bread-throwing in war and peace. In Virgil's *Aeneid* many things are thrown, weapons (tela) and firebrands (flammas) chief among them, but not bread. (This, by the way, is the source of the old Roman vaudeville cross-talk turn: Patius says, "How do you tela flammas he is standing on your foot?" and Micius answers, "Very politely, very politely." I am told it loses in the translation.)

It is one of those remarkable quirks of history, as when a kingdom is lost for want of a nail or the banking industry loses a financial wizard for want of a ledger page, that the Romans were a gimme putt away from inventing bread throwing, but failed to hole out. It is reported in the *Satyricon* that during a lavish feast, the host, Trimalchio, threw a lump of aristocratic white bread to his watch-dog. And here some scholars have detected the Ur-bread-throw, the fount of all we hold dear. Crude and unpolished as the gesture was, it nevertheless appears to fulfill the basic requirements: a banquet, bread thrown,

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\* The reader will note with gratitude that I have used the bad pun on "threw-through" as soon as possible in this essay. You may read on with mind at ease.



and thrown in that generous and sincere manner which is the purist's hallmark. For a brief moment, Rome stood on the brink of its greatest gift to civilization. Paved highways? Urban sewers? Steam baths? Fascism? Rudolph Giuliani? None of these could have outshone the gift of bread-throwing. But, alas, it was not to be. As the Romans, themselves, would say, *sic transit gloria mundi*.\*\* After much heated debate and soul searching, a committee appointed for the purpose have concluded that Trimalchio's act does not constitute prototypal bread-throwing. The flaw lies in the dog's incapacity to respond in the proper spirit\*\*\* *by throwing a bread-pill of its own making back at its master*. Instead, the dog ate it. There is a tide in the affairs of dogs as well as of men, which if not taken at the flood . . . well, you know the rest. Many reasons have been advanced for the fall of the Roman Empire, but could we not locate its sordid root here? The dog ate the bread. A civilization cannot stand if it is going to eat the bread thrown at it in sport.

Yet, there is a bright side. Reflect what life would be like if the dog *had* been able to throw and drilled a Milk Bone or two back in Trimalchio's direction. What if our Lassies and Rexes could throw things at us? The ancient mystery of fetch in which our respective roles in society as master and dog are so clearly defined, would collapse in anarchy if half the time it was we who had to retrieve the frothy stick. Even worse, imagine yourself at candle's-end coming home from some blameless diversion. Charon deposits you at your doorstep. You deliquesce into your favorite armchair, but instead of bringing your slippers and staring up at you with trusting brown eyes, Fido (or Spot or Rover as the case may be) commences to pelt you with pantofles. This is an image from which it is best to avert the eyes.

## Part II

### Bread-Throwing Among the Hebrews and Early Christians

Beyond a doubt, the art of bunging baked goods in the high-jinx spirit originated in the manna shied at the Hebrew children in the desert. Of course, being Hebrew children, some of it was sent back as being too hot or too cold, and one carper is reported as saying he knew a little place in the Gobi Desert where they threw better manna, but, by and large, bread-throwing found its ar-

chetype and divine sanction at this historic moment. The critics gave it rave notices. *Variety's* headline read, HO-SANNA! MANNA TOP BANANA. True, the Hebrew children, like Trimalchio's dog, ate the manna thrown at them, but the crucial difference is that *they could have thrown it back* had they wanted.

Thereafter, bread-throwing was indelibly part of Hebrew culture and ritual. Bread was thrown into rivers during Rosh Hashana as a symbolic purging of sins from the year past. Wheat was rained on the heads of Jewish brides to ensure fertility. But what began as a gentle drizzle of manna-flakes developed as the nation prospered into the heaving of vaster and weightier missiles. A conservative anti-big-bread-throwing faction (ABBT) arose to challenge the excesses of the Latter Day Bread-Throwers (LDBT). The Old Testament prophet Zecharia, a passionate anti-big-breadite, storms against the abomination (5:1):

1. Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll.
2. And he said unto me, what seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits.
3. Then said he unto me, this is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth . . .

When you consider that a bread-roll ten cubits by twenty cubits measures approximately 15 by 30 feet or about the size of Rosie O'Donnell's head, you gain an idea of how pitifully feeble are our modern-day efforts. There were giants in those days.

Yet for all their success in combatting excess, the anti-big-breadites could not extinguish the Hebrew children's love for bread-throwing. The tradition flourished and was eagerly embraced by the early Christians, who, in the New Testament, were exhorted to "cast thy bread."

*To be continued*

She spoke so quietly, so meekly, her whole air so like that of a good little girl remorseful for having been naughty, that a wiser and more experienced man than Lionel Green would have climbed the wall and pulled it up after him.

*Money in the Bank, 1946*

\*\* I translate for those unable to read Latin: "Monday, Gloria, feeling indisposed, took the crosstown bus."

\*\*\* And here I have, at no small cost to the nerves, eschewed the obvious *infra dog* pun.

# VIDEO OFFER

Dan Garrison sent along the following, which was also received by several other TWS members via the Internet:

What ho! Came across your wonderful site whilst browsing all things Wodehouse. My stepfather is Patrick Armine Wodehouse, who lives in Wimbledon, London. We are a broadcast video production company that specializes in films about artists and literary people. While on a recent visit to the States, Nancy Kominsky (mum) and Patrick, who is now 80, spent six weeks with us. I have taped an interview of the recollections of Patrick, the nephew of P.G., and intend to cut a 60 minute (+/-) film from it, sort of a "P.G. and Me." He's delightful and has many fond recollections. Additionally I have a PAL VHS version of an interview with Patrick and his then 90-something mum, Helen, known affectionately as Nel, done by the BBC, which I intend to intercut. Nel was

the housekeeper for many years for P.G. when he lived in New York. I will be making VHS copies available at \$19.95 + shipping and handling. If you and/or some of the many P.G. acolytes that frequent your site are interested, let me know.

Michael Alonzo Kominsky  
MetaMEDIA Communications  
e-mail: mak@MetaMedia.com



Lots of us will be interested. Let's encourage Michael by word and gesture!  
—OM

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## VOLUNTEER OFFICERS

Information and new memberships  
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues payments, changes in name, address, phone, and e-mail information  
Neil Midkiff

Original contributions to *Plum Lines*  
David Landman, SS

Other contributions to *Plum Lines*  
Ed Ratcliffe, OM      Elin Woodger, AD

Dues are \$20 per year, payable to the Wodehouse Society.

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