



Plum Lines

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Stanley Featherstonehaugh Utridge: Hidden Values and Frozen Assets

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

A talk delivered at the Philadelphia convention of The Wodehouse Society, October 2001.

A few days ago I came upon an illuminating paragraph in a Sunday newspaper. It was in a column where a lady of fashion dispenses advice to those who consult her about their private concerns. A correspondent wrote "...I am not outstandingly brilliant at anything. I can't leave home as my mother is delicate, but I want to do something to earn not less than three pounds a week. I've tried chicken farming but it doesn't pay." The answer was "You might get a job as a reader to a publisher...that or book reviewing."

That explains everything about our literary critics; they are young ladies, not outstandingly brilliant at anything, who have failed to make a success with poultry.

I BEGIN my talk today with the opening of Evelyn Waugh's 1930 book review of a Henry Green novel, not just because I happen to like it and enjoy sharing such things with friends, but also because it shows that Stanley Featherstonehaugh Utridge is not the only person to have discovered that chicken farming is a very difficult business.

Like Waugh, P. G. Wodehouse was not overly fond of book reviewers (even though he was, as he admitted in *Over Seventy*, "on the whole rather well treated by them"). But he did not feel that critical analysis of his early work was appropriate. "Dash it all," he complained, "in 1907 I was practically in swaddling clothes and it was extremely creditable that I was able to write at all." While his Early Period does have some immature stuff in it, this is, nonetheless, self-effacing nonsense and much of his work at that time repays inspection.

By 1905, Wodehouse had established himself as a

writer of superb boys' school fiction. He had published over a dozen short stories and six books in the genre. He was making quite a decent income out of it too, but the market was limited and he wanted to extend his franchise into the much larger and more lucrative adult market. His breakthrough product for this market penetration strategy was the comic romance, *Love Among the Chickens*. The romance involves one Jeremy Garnet, and the comic subplot is formed from the adventures of his friend trying to start a chicken farm.



Our
man
Stanley

as seen by Peter van Straaten

The illustrious Norman Murphy would have us believe that every character inhabiting the Wodehouse world has some sort of Platonic ideal in this one, and he makes a compelling case for the likes of Uncle Fred, Aunt Agatha and the Empress of Blandings. But there needs no Colonel come from Cumbria to tell us that Ukridge is drawn from a real-life individual. Every Wodehouse scholar, at some point, tells us how friend Bill Townend wrote Wodehouse a letter about (as R. B. D. French puts it) “an eccentric and impecunious acquaintance who started a poultry farm without capital or experience but with every expectation of making a stupendous fortune.” David Jasen tells us that much of the character is drawn from another friend, Herbert Westbrook. Murphy adds a pinch of Townend and a dash of “Shifter” Goldberg, from the old Pelican Club, while Richard Osborne sees the outline of James Cullingworth from Conan Doyle’s *Stark Munro Letters*. But we have Wodehouse’s own words, in his introduction to the 1921 version of *Love Among the Chickens* that cleaned up and modernized the earlier work. It is an open letter to Bill Townend that says, in part:

I received from you one morning about thirty closely written foolscap pages, giving me the details of your friend —’s adventures on his Devonshire chicken farm. Round these I wove as funny a plot as I could, but the book stands or falls by the stuff you gave me about “Ukridge.”

And Townend re-tells the story in his introduction to *Performing Flea*.

STANLEY UKRIDGE makes his entrance in Chapter Two as a newly married man with a business scheme. Here is his, shall I say, business plan, in his own words:

“You buy your hen. It lays an egg every day of the week. You sell the eggs, say six for fivepence. Keep of hen costs nothing. Profit—at least four pence three farthings for every half dozen eggs. What do you think of that, Bartholomew?”

Garnet admitted that it sounded like an attractive scheme, but, like any cautious investor, expressed a wish to overhaul the figures in case of error.

“Error!” shouted Ukridge, pounding the table with such energy that it groaned beneath him. “Error? Not a bit of it. Can’t you follow a simple calculation like that? The thing is, you see, you get your original hen for next to nothing. That is to say, on tick. Anybody will gladly let you have a hen on tick. Now listen to me for a moment. You let your hen set and hatch chickens. Suppose you have a dozen hens. Very well then. When each of the dozen has a dozen chickens, you send the old hens back with thanks for the kind loan; and there you are, starting business with a hundred and forty-four free chickens to

your name. And after a bit, when the chickens grow up and begin to lay, all you have to do is to sit back in your chair and endorse the big checks.”

Of course, as we all know, the entire scheme comes a cropper, not, as Ukridge contends, because the tradesmen who let him have supplies on tick (or “scoundrels,” as he prefers to call them) failed to have “the big, broad, flexible outlook” and demanded payment (or, again, in Ukridge’s words “worrying me with bills when I need to concentrate”); neither was it because he was “crushed through lack of capital”; no, it wasn’t from a surplus of creditors nor a shortage of investors, but rather due to a series of mishaps, including run-away chickens, mad dogs, and epidemic, not to mention the hired help’s habit of eating the inventory and Ukridge’s uxorious excesses. So the question is left open at the end of the book, was it a good plan that went wrong, or, was there some error with the figures? Let’s take Garny’s advice and overhaul them a little.

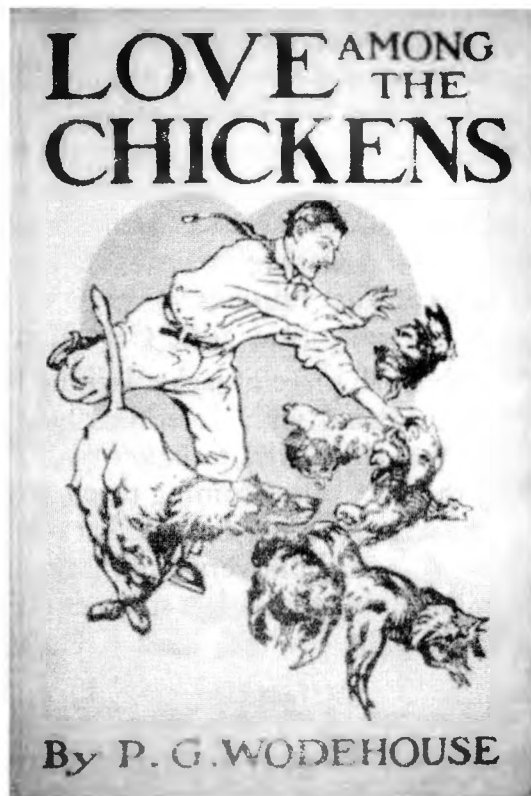
Let us begin with the issue of capital outlay. Can one, in fact, can get chickens on tick? Most new enterprises today require payment in advance, or, if you are lucky, net 30 day terms. Usual cost of unpaid invoices runs anywhere from 1% to 2½% per month. But things were looser in 1905 and, as it turns out in the story, Ukridge has no problems getting his hens with no money down and no declared interest rate. Mark one for “the big, broad, flexible outlook.”

Next, production. Ukridge makes a small error in his estimate of output. Chickens do not lay one egg per day every day of the year. They often miss a day and they do not lay while molting. On average, they actually lay about 200 times a year. So let us say we are able to establish our egg factory more or less as Ukridge lays out in his business plan: we are able to create 144 hens each churning out 200 eggs a year, all with no expenditure of working capital.

Now let us look at the revenue side. Ukridge says that 6 eggs bring 5 pence in revenue. (By the way, I checked it out, and that indeed was the retail price of eggs in 1905.) With 144 hens churning out 28,800 eggs a year total, that would yield £100 a year. In 1905, £1 had the purchasing power of £61 today, so that £100 would be about £6,100 today, or about \$8,750 at current exchange rates. Not bad, but hardly the big checks Ukridge was looking forward to. But even this meager sum is more than could be reasonably expected.

The heart of any business plan is the marketing plan and Ukridge has none. Without a distribution network or means of gaining a retail trade, Ukridge would actually have to sell his eggs at a wholesale price. Since the five pence price is the retail price of eggs and wholesale is usually little more than one-half retail, Ukridge would, in fact, clear only about \$4,500 before expenses.

Ukridge makes light of his expense side. His exact words are “no expenses” though he seems to expect the cost of a farthing per 6 eggs or about £5 a year. It seems unlikely that one can maintain a chicken farm for so little. While chicken feed is notoriously inexpensive, still it must be purchased. At 2 farthings the dozen and 200 eggs per year, Ukridge is estimating a cost of $8\frac{1}{3}$ pence per year per chicken. This seems a little low, but as I was unable to locate a price of chicken feed in 1905, we’ll give Ukridge the benefit of the doubt. There are, however, other expenses to running a chicken farm.



It is not uncommon for excessive overhead to sink a new venture. To Ukridge’s credit, it seems that the chicken farm itself did come rent-free (they were borrowing it from a friend of his wife’s), at least for a time. But one can hardly count on that continuing indefinitely. Also, the conditions under which the handyman, Beale, and his wife worked are a little mysterious, but there is mention in the book that they were expecting wages. Then there is the cost of getting the eggs to market, not to mention loss from damages FOB. The most conservative estimate for total annual expenses would be about £20. This would leave Mr. and Mrs. Ukridge with about \$2,500 in today’s money to live on. One can see why chicken farmers are encouraged to become book reviewers. There is, sadly, no money in chicken farming. Ukridge’s first great business never had a chance.

So what ventures follow the doomed chicken farm? After all, Stanley Ukridge would not be the first person in history to wind up a success after an initial flop. Henry Ford, Alfred Nobel, and Walt Disney spring to mind as examples of financial titans who began with failure.

It’s hard to say what Wodehouse had in mind for Ukridge at this point—no Ukridge stories immediately followed *Love Among the Chickens*—but Wodehouse was developing a business sense, as this was the first time he used a literary agent. In economic theory, agents provide added value by increasing the market value of the person they represent by an amount greater than their commissions. For Wodehouse, in this particular case, it did not quite work out that way; his American agent stole the copyright from him. Perhaps that is why fifteen years pass before Ukridge makes another appearance.

IN 1923, Wodehouse began work on a new series of short stories based on the earlier character. Jasen says that in writing “Ukridge’s Dog College” “the going had not been easy.” We can see this in a letter Wodehouse wrote to Bill Townsend in May, 1923:

I had to rush that story in the most horrible way. I think I told you that *Cosmopolitan* wanted it for the April number, and I had about five days to deliver it and got it all wrong and had to write about 20,000 words before I got it set. And then when I reached Palm Beach, I found that the artist had illustrated a scene which was not in the final version, and I had to add a new one by telephone!

Much of the language in this initial story is taken directly from the earlier novel, but the character of S. F. Ukridge has changed significantly. One may say that he bears less resemblance to his earlier persona than even Bertie Wooster does to Reggie Pepper. For one thing, his wife, the pitiful Millie, is as if she never were. I think Wodehouse ditched her mostly because having such a sweet innocent forever tied to a man like Ukridge brings a note of pathos disturbing to the comic atmosphere. The famous yellow Mac, the pince-nez with ginger beer wire, his acquisitive habits, and exclamations of “Old horse,” “Laddie,” and “Upon my Sam” all make their appearance.

Wodehouse wrote the first eight stories in quick succession. He was very pleased with the series and he planned to marry Ukridge off in the last story of the series—oddly enough, to a girl named Millie—and that would be an end of him. But Wodehouse wanted him back and, once again, a Mrs. Ukridge would be an impediment, so, immediately after “Ukridge Rounds a Nasty Corner,” wherein she appears, Millie Secundo disappears as quietly as did Millie Prime. Corky did after all refer to Ukridge as “the sternest of bachelors.” In fact, the Ukridge saga is

unique in the canon of Wodehouse in that it practically never has a love interest.

These ten stories are published one a month in the *Strand* and *Cosmopolitan*. This, mind you, at the same time *Leave It to Psmith* is running in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The swaddling clothes are definitely gone; this is right at the beginning of his Middle—or Vintage—Period. And can you imagine what the fellah is raking in?

Wodehouse, that is, not Ukridge. Ukridge is still the hapless capitalist, jumping into a new, doomed hare-brained venture every month, but there is a subtle change in the nature of his business plans.

Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard, in their wonderful concordance *Wodehouse Among the Chickens*, are quite right in listing these plots not as plans or ventures, but as “schemes.” That is what they are at best. At worst, they are nothing but scams. The concordance lists the following:

- Running a chicken farm
- Running a duck farm

Well, we’ve already delved into the chicken farm and whilst Stanley does leave us contemplating the duck farm it is unlikely that it ever got off the ground. Ducks are far more expensive to keep and there is a much smaller market for their eggs. I think it is safe to say that we can retire the Ukridge of 1905 at this point and bid him farewell. The Ukridge we want to examine is the one from the short stories. His schemes are:

- Training dogs for the music-hall stage
- Taking out subscriptions for accident insurance in the name of a predestined victim
- Managing Battling Billson, the fighter (twice) [actually 3 or 4 times, depending how you look at it]
- Selling 700 tickets to his aunt’s Pen and Ink Club dinner
- Turning his aunt’s place into a hotel
- Turning it into a gambling den [technically, that was Oakshott, the butler, though Ukridge thought up the scheme]
- Holding a flag day in support of himself

And, three left out of the concordance: going into business with an established book-making firm, acting as front man for a fencing operation of stolen furniture, and selling a snake-oil medicinal called Peppo.

If we look at these schemes narrowly, only two even come close to being possible business ventures: managing Battling Billson and being a bookie. Now in any business start-up, it is necessary for the entrepreneur to provide value in the form of capital, expertise, or good will. In the case of Battling Billson, Ukridge adds none of these. In the case of the book-making enterprise, he presumably adds good will by providing a larger customer

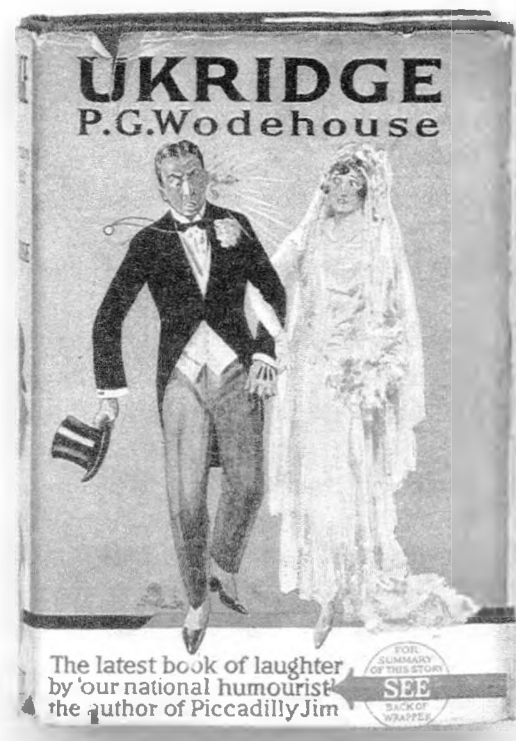
base and one could argue that it was not his fault that one of his friends bankrupts the business with a lucky bet.

BUT there you have it. The Ukridge of *Love Among the Chickens* is a naïve, foolish businessman, but the Ukridge of the short stories is nothing but a scam artist. Where in Ukridge do we find what Warren Buffett calls “hidden value”? In other words, where is a Ukridge we can know and love?

Well, “know,” of course—at least I would hope that everyone here has at least dipped into a Ukridge or two—but “love”? Is that possible? It is for Usborne: he says so on page 88 of his great opus, *Wodehouse at Work*. On the next page, however, he says, “Ukridge is a thief, a black-mailer, a liar and a sponge. He alternates self-glorification with self-pity....Ukridge is a total immoralist, and he dulls the moral sense in others. He is totally selfish.” Nowhere, however, does Usborne explain how one can love such a character. David Jasen claims that Ukridge was Wodehouse’s favorite character, but he does not say where he got this or why it should be so.

Other Wodehouse characters whom we cherish in a fictional context may not be ideal friends in the flesh—certainly one is better off without a Bingo Little in one’s life—but there is something charming or loveable about them. This is not so with Ukridge. Other than the fact that he is universally loved by all canines, he hasn’t one redeeming quality. If he existed in real life, is there any one of us who not run like a hare from such a man? So why does he endure?

Whilst in this talk I draw frequently on Usborne’s superb chapter on Ukridge, I cannot agree with the theory



he offers for Ukridge's appeal. Usborne says that all of Ukridge's friends are old school chums, and that makes him family and he must be rescued.

This gives the reader a rewarding sense of security. He feels able to laugh the louder when Ukridge falls, because he knows Ukridge must be put on his feet again and all will be well, not only with Ukridge but with his own old-school conscience.

I don't think this is valid. If so, one would feel the same about G. D'Arcy "Stilton" Cheesewright and Oofy Prosser, for example, which we do not. No, we laugh when Ukridge falls because he deserves it.

TO UNDERSTAND the endurance of Ukridge, we need to look past the main character, at the stories themselves. They fall into a genre that Frances Donaldson calls "the situation short story." The other types of story in this genre are the Mulliner stories, the Golf stories and the Drones Club stories. What these four sagas have in common is the use of a narrator who is only marginally part of the action, if he takes part at all. (At first blush it would seem that the Bertie Wooster stories should fall into this category, because he too is a first-person narrator, but they don't really because Bertie is always at the center of his own stories, even when he is not the love interest, which, after a few early romances, he will never again be. It is because Bertie and Jeeves are so central that they made the transition to novels while none of the other narrators did.)

The narrative voices of these sagas are very similar and are drawn primarily from W. W. Jacobs's night-watchman stories. The narrative voice and story structure closest to this earlier narrator is the golf stories' Oldest Member. Like the night-watchman, he is an older, wiser member of the society of individuals about whom he reports; he is rarely a participant in the story, except so far as providing the role of advisor or being placed where he can observe the action; and he is telling his story to someone who is only listening politely because, well, he really has nothing else to do. The Oldest Member, like all Wodehouse narrators, tells stories of loves lost and regained, but the context is always the golf course.

When some action or piece of news pops up in the bar or smoking-room of the Drones Club and various members discuss the situation, we know that one of them will soon have some relevant story to tell. The narrative voices of all those Eggs, Beans, and Crumpets are similar to the Oldest Member's, though there is a touch of a Wooster-like vernacular.

Mr Mulliner is, of course, the narrator of his stories but there is another dimension to Mulliner narration not found with the Oldest Member or the Drones Preamble, besides his having a name.

There is a free-association test that was once very popular amongst psychologists, where one says a word and the patient is supposed to say the first thing that comes into his mind. Try this sometime at a Wodehouse Society meeting and, upon saying the word "Mulliner" the most frequent response is likely to be something like "cousin" or "nephew" or "family." (Of course, it is always possible to get "Hot Scotch and Lemon" or "Postlethwaite," but you know what I mean.) What you will not get, but you should, would be the word "liar."

The first Mulliner story is called "The Truth About George" and the irony of the title is in Wodehouse's calling deliberate attention to the fact that there is not a word of truth in it. The pub is called the Anglers' Rest for a reason: this is a fish story; Mulliner is making the whole thing up. Even if you cannot get it from the several subtle clues dropped in the first couple of stories, we know it because Wodehouse tells us so in his introduction to *The World of Mr Mulliner*. He says he deliberately made Mr Mulliner a fisherman so that "[his] veracity would be automatically suspect."

But over time, as the saga develops and as various relations put in encore presentations, an aura of reality surrounds the Mulliner clan, and so we all begin to believe in these lies. Even Wodehouse later forgot his original intent on at least two occasions. I seem to recall an article in one of our many societies' learned journals that actually plotted the Mulliner family tree. The sad reality is, however, that, in Wodehouse's world, in the world of the Anglers' Rest, there is no George, no Adrian, no Sacheverell Mulliner; no Honeysuckle Cottage nor Bludleigh Court; no Buck-U-Uppo, no Noddors, and no Webster; for there are no other Mulliners, either in Hollywood or Tottenham Court Road. Mr Mulliner is alone in the world.

But I digress.

SO THE narrative voice and structure of the Drones, Mulliner, and Golf stories, while differing somewhat in tone or nuance, are essentially the same.

Now one concedes that Mr Mulliner has a terrific imagination and is a wonderful spinner of yarns; the Oldest Member, too, is an excellent raconteur; and the Drone who tells us about the antics of Freddie Widgeon, Barmy Phipps and the other idiots of the club has a nice way with a phrase and a good sense of timing; but, as stylists, none of them hold a candle to the chronicler of Ukridge's disreputable career.

Corky's stories differ from the other three narrators, not just in their lack of love interest, but most obviously, in their subject. The others, whilst they may have their favorites, nonetheless have a variety of different characters about whom they report. Corky has only Ukridge. So as

we delve into each new Ukridge story, we may not know the scam, we may not know the girl, we may not know whether it will end ill or well, but we know it will be about Ukridge.

The most significant difference, however, is in the nature of the narrative voice. The narrators of the other three sagas are individuals whom one happens to come upon, and they just begin talking. The context of the story is that the narrator is telling it, verbally, to some luckless individual passing by. The Ukridge stories are not presented as spoken, but rather (like Bertie Wooster's stories) as written, but, unlike Bertie, this narrator is a writer by profession. Corky isn't talking to someone—he is penning these stories, and not just for his own amusement; it's with an eye toward publication and, probably, much-needed money. In a way, he tells us so in the beginning of the very first story, "Ukridge's Dog College":

"Laddie," said Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge, that much-enduring man, helping himself to my tobacco and slipping the pouch absently into his pocket, "Listen to me, you son of Belial."

"What?" I said, retrieving the pouch.

"Do you want to make an enormous fortune?"

"I do."

"Then write my biography. Bung it down on paper, and we'll split the proceeds."

I think this is a fabulous introduction. Here is true value and economy of language. The initial descriptor, "that much-enduring man," will be filled out before long, but what a deftly elegant first brush-stroke to the portrait! (Later, more often, the brush is harder: "that man of wrath," or even "that chronically impecunious man of wrath" will be the opening appositive).

We are also, before the first sentence is over, introduced to Ukridge, the pincher of other people's things. We learn that the "I" of this story won't let him pinch his, if he can stop it. We see that Ukridge's idea for making lots of money involves someone else doing the work. We know the two men are good friends—one would not call an acquaintance "you son of Belial." We easily infer that both men are impecunious, even if we don't, at this point, know that one is more chronically so. And, as I said, we learn why these stories are being written. And all in 58 words. That Corky sure knows how to write! Well he should, of course; he is, as Usborne says, the young Wodehouse. In fact, in that same letter to Townend I quoted earlier, Wodehouse, discussing the action in one of the stories, actually refers to the narrator as "I" and "me," as if he, Wodehouse, were Corky.

Corky's narration consistently displays the extra value of a professional writer, but as Usborne points out, there is also the dividend that Corky, as a writer, can truly speak

for Wodehouse:

Keep half an eye on Corky. He is really a very interesting background character. He is modest and amusing about his go-anywhere-write-anything trade of Pleasing Editors, but perfectly sure that this is the work he wants to be in. He is fallible and flatterable....His description of the Pen and Ink dance in "Ukridge Sees Her Through" has, below its alert descriptions of sound, smells, gilt chairs, and potted palms, a cold anger. Here for the first time Wodehouse rolls his sleeves up against the Phonies of the Pen.

You remember the scene. Corky is covering the dance for a Society paper. Ukridge's formidable Aunt Julia is the President of the Club. This story takes place after she's had Corky coldly removed from her house for gaining admission under false pretenses.

The dance of the Pen and Ink Club was held, like so many functions of its kind, at the Lotus Rooms, Knightsbridge, that barrack-like building which seems to exist only for these sad affairs. The Pen and Ink evidently went in for quality in its membership rather than quantity; and the band, when I arrived, was giving out the peculiarly tinny sound which bands always produce in very large rooms that are only one-sixth part full. The air was chilly and desolate and a general melancholy seemed to prevail. The few couples dancing on the broad acres of floor appeared sombre and introspective, as if they were meditating on the body upstairs and realizing that all flesh is as grass. Around the room on those gilt chairs which are only seen in subscription-dance halls weird beings were talking in undertones, probably about the trend of Scandinavian literature. In fact, the only bright spot on the whole gloomy business was that it occurred before the era of tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles.

That curious grey hopelessness which always afflicts me when I am confronted with literary people in the bulk was not lightened by the reflection that at any moment I might encounter Miss Julia Ukridge.

Which, of course, he does, for, you see, Corky is more than a mere narrator. While Mr. Mulliner and the Drones Bean are merely the chorus, Corky is often a principal, dreadfully mixed up in Ukridge's little plots, not just tangentially, but right in the heart of them. He opens many of the stories on some adventure on his own, which is only interrupted by Ukridge. Most of "The Return of Battling Billson" is Corky's adventure—Ukridge only comes on the scene when almost half the story has taken place—and, in "First Aid for Dora," it is Corky's confrontation with Aunt Julia—sans Ukridge—that provides the denouement.

To be fair, much space in the Ukridge stories is taken up by Ukridge himself speaking. Whole swaths of writing

come between quotation marks where Ukridge is either filling Corky in on offstage action or commenting on the situation. But the humor in Ukridge's speech is derived from his predicament; Corky's narration is simply perfect prose.

We have already sampled two examples of his storytelling and descriptive talents. There are many more, just as fruity: Corky's commentary on the pusillanimity of Teddy Weeks, his blow-by-blow of the fight at the Universal Sporting Club, his nightmarish evening with the parrot Leonard, and his horrific afternoon with Flossie's mother and kid brother, the morbid Cecil, to name just a few. The following passage describing the political rally from "The Long Arm of Looney Coote" could almost be a rough draft for the introduction to what is arguably Wodehouse's most famous passage of all, the prize-giving scene from *Right Ho, Jeeves*:

The monster meeting in support of Boko Lawlor's candidature was held in that popular eyesore, the Associated Mechanics' Hall. As I sat among the elect on the platform, waiting for the proceedings to commence, there came up to me a mixed scent of dust, clothes, orange-peel, chalk, wood, plaster, pomade, and Associated Mechanics—the whole forming a mixture which, I began to see, was likely to prove too rich for me....

The principle on which chairmen at these meetings are selected is perhaps too familiar to require recording here at length but in case some of my readers are not acquainted with the workings of political machines, I may say that no one under the age of eighty-five is eligible and the preference is given to those with adenoids. For Boko Lawlor the authorities had extended themselves and picked a champion of his class. In addition to adenoids, the Right Hon. Marquess of Cricklewood had—or seemed to have—a potato of maximum size and hotness in his mouth, and he had learned his elocution in one of those correspondence schools which teach it by mail. I caught his first sentence—that he would only detain us for a moment—but for fifteen minutes after that he baffled me completely....

Besides Bertie Wooster's, there is little first person narration in the whole of the canon to rival Corky's.

But Corky is not our hero; Ukridge is. And when we look at Ukridge's balance sheet, we must say that the liabilities far outweigh the assets. Can we find any hidden value in the man? Osborne thinks we can. He says "It is a great tribute to Corky/Wodehouse that he can make such an anti-social menace as Ukridge appealing." But I think we can see that it is not Ukridge who is appealing, but the Ukridge stories.

WODEHOUSE published the first ten stories in 1924 in the volume *Ukridge*; the American edition published the following year was called, for some mysterious reason, *He Rather Enjoyed It*. Everything was properly copyrighted this time, including English serial rights and American serial rights and book rights, dramatic rights and movie rights, not to mention translation rights (including the Scandinavian). Wodehouse wrote several more stories over the next fifteen or so years but with ever-decreasing frequency. With "Success Story" in 1947, he clearly planned to end this saga. Ever kindly to his creations, Wodehouse means to leave Ukridge pretty well off, just as he later does Lord Emsworth (eating, you will remember, roly-poly pudding in the library wearing slippers and a shooting coat with holes in the elbows, Constance thousands of miles away); "Success Story" ends with Ukridge flush with cash: not, alas, from any successful business enterprise, but rather as the recipient of multitudinous bribes. Nonetheless, Wodehouse drags him out of retirement in 1955 and again in '67. But one is getting tired of Ukridge. It is no mistake, I think, that only one of the stories written after "Buttercup Day" in 1925 is narrated by Corky; the rest are all narrated by Ukridge himself. Corky has no larger part in Ukridge's life than that of a patient listener. Robert Dunhill, Victor Beamish, and Bertram Fox had abandoned him long ago. By the end, while George Tupper may be available for a quick fiver and Corky for a free lunch, they have effectively abandoned him as well. And who could blame them? It profiteth a man nothing to gain Ukridge as a friend if he thereby loseth his shoes, socks, shirts, and dress-clothes.

Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge will be forever frozen in the twenty stories that frame him, an asset, certainly, for his creator, providing, as he did, rough fodder for some of Wodehouse's most memorable short stories. But the real value of the Ukridge stories, I think we can see, is not in the protagonist, but, rather, is hidden in the sublime style and unique character of his Boswell, Mr. James Corcoran.



Elliott Milstein is a past President of TWS and leads the newly-formed Pickering Motor Company, the Detroit chapter of TWS. For more information on the exploits of the Pickering Motor Company, see page 15.

Mammoth, Marson, and Lord Tilbury

BY STU SHIFFMAN

The Mammoth Publishing Company, which controls several important newspapers, a few weekly journals, and a number of other things, does not disdain the pennies of the office boy and the junior clerk. One of its many profitable ventures is a series of paper-covered tales of crime and adventure. It was here that Ashe found his niche. Those *Adventures of Gridley Quayle, Investigator*, which are so popular with a certain section of the reading public, were his work....Until the advent of Ashe and Mr. Quayle, the British Pluck Library had been written by many hands and had included the adventures of many heroes; but in Gridley Quayle the proprietors held that the ideal had been reached, and Ashe received a commission to conduct the entire "British Pluck Library" (monthly) himself. On the meager salary paid him for these labors he had been supporting himself ever since.

— *Something Fresh*

"A profession whose business is to explain to others what it really does not understand" — Lord Northcliffe

LONG before the stunning ubiquity of Robert Maxwell and Rupert Murdoch in the realm of international mass-communications, there was P. G. Wodehouse's Lord Tilbury of the Mammoth Publishing Company.

American readers of Wodehouse may not realize that the character of Lord Tilbury was inspired by that "Napoleon of the Press," Alfred Charles William Harmsworth, Viscount Northcliffe (1865–1922). This great Press Lord was an inspired figure whose empire began with *Answers to Correspondents* (1888), a seemingly modest publication modeled on the successful formula used by George Newnes' *Tit-Bits*, and *Comic Cuts* (first issued in 1890). Their success eventually led to a publishing empire of magazines and newspapers grouped into the corporate entities of the Amalgamated Press and Associated Newspapers. This is the enterprise that Wodehouse calls "Mammoth Publishing" in *Something Fresh*. Alfred Harmsworth was a working journalist at the age of sixteen, a proprietor at twenty-two, a baronet at thirty-eight, a baron at forty, and a viscount at fifty. On the seventh day, we may presume, he rested.

Wodehouse's Lord Tilbury comes on stage as Sir George Pyke in *Bill the Conqueror*, and has assumed his title by the time of *Sam the Sudden*, strutting his full display of Bonapartesque power: "Lord Tilbury was a short, stout, commanding-looking man, and practically everything he did had in it something of the Napoleonic quality." In *Heavy Weather*, Tilbury takes the reins to dismiss even the least of his servants, Monty Bodkin of *Tiny Tots*. Wheels within wheels, of course. It is not an appropriate time for Lady Julia Fish to come in asking for a position for her son Ronnie, or for Lord Tilbury to find a letter briefly setting out the infuriating position of Galahad Threepwood:

Dear Sir:

Enclosed find cheque for the advance you paid me on those Reminiscences of mine. I have been thinking it over and have decided not to publish them after all.

Yours truly, G. Threepwood.

Tilbury's formidable real-life counterpart founded the *Daily Mail* and *Mirror* in the United Kingdom, pioneered the modern tabloid format, and took control of *The Times* in 1908. In his person, he affected much that Street & Smith did for mass entertainment as well as what Hearst and Pulitzer did in newspaper publishing in the United States. It wasn't delicate, but his was a more English type of muckraking and yellow journalism.

His perennial drum-beating on the menace from the German Empire was one of the factors behind the mass support for the British entry into the Great War. As early as 1897 he had sent the writer G. W. Stevens to Germany to produce a sixteen-part series entitled "Under the Iron Heel." The articles praised the German Army and warned that Britain was in danger of being defeated in a war with Germany. Three years later Northcliffe wrote an editorial in the *Daily Mail* predicting a war with Germany. In both his story weeklies for boys (like *Union Jack* and *Pluck*) and his newspapers, Northcliffe provided a home for Tory alarmists like William Le Queux ("The Battle of Dorking"), whose breathless bestseller *The Invasion of 1910* is perhaps the most famous of all the German invasion fictions. It was first serialized in the *Daily Mail* in 1906, and detailed a successful invasion of England by an Imperial German army of 40,000 men, leading to such clashes as "The Battle of Royston" and "The Bombardment of London." A newspaper proprietor like Lord Northcliffe found Le Queux's militant fantasies quite useful in building readership. He even redrew the route of this fictional German invasion so that it would pass through towns with

large potential *Daily Mail* readerships. Northcliffe could be a graceless wielder of his raw power, especially during the last years of his life after the war. This was the genre that Wodehouse lampooned so brilliantly in *The Swoop! or, How Clarence Saved England: A Tale of the Great Invasion* (1909).

“The power of the press is very great, but not so great as the power of suppress.” — Lord Northcliffe

After Northcliffe’s death in 1922, in shrouded circumstances and rumors of madness, his brother Harold, Lord Rothermere, assumed principal control of the enterprises. Rothermere was an even colder character than his brother, a business and political thug who felt that post-Great War Britain needed a Mussolini or Hitler, and thought that he had found him in the person of Sir Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists. Wodehouse’s splendid sendup of the fascist beast, Roderick Spode of the Saviours of Britain (the Black Shorts), is as much a lampoon of Rothermere as of Mosley.

Joan Valentine, as seen in *Something Fresh*, wrote her romantic Rosie M. Banks-like sludge for the Mammoth magazine *Home Gossip*. Northcliffe had pioneered magazines for the masses, and the first for women of the middle class and working class (the so-called “shopgirls”) in such publications as *Forget-Me-Nots*. Northcliffe was

quite proud that he had pioneered in this area, and even the *Daily Mirror* was originally conceived as a newspaper for, and produced by, women. However, since he was still shackled by Victorian ideas of the proper concerns of women and totally against the “types” called “The New Woman” and female suffragist (the neologism “suffragette” is condescending chauvinist drivel, yet is the term most widely known), the concept ran short on expertise and on sales. The *Mirror* soon abandoned that special orientation and its female staff. Northcliffe turned it into a picture paper for men (or at least the general reader), and it soon showed profitability.

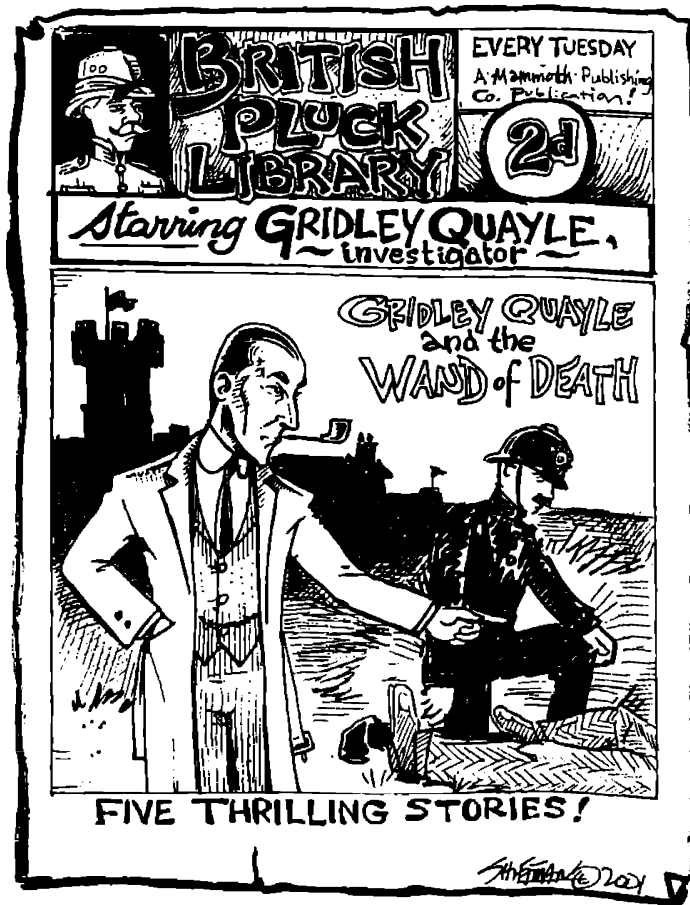
He had a little library made up of old numbers of *The Union Jack*, *Pluck*, and *The Halfpenny Marvel*.

— “An Encounter,” *The Dubliners*, James Joyce

Ashe Marson, we are told in *Something Fresh*, had become the sole chronicler of the *Adventures of Gridley Quayle* in the monthly pages of the British Pluck Library. Wodehouse took his inspiration from the adventurous mysteries of Sexton Blake, who has been called the “prince of the penny dreadfuls” and “the office boys’ Sherlock Holmes.” Blake made his first appearance in December 20, 1893 in “The Missing Millionaire” appearing in *Halfpenny Marvel*, during that period when Sherlock Holmes was still thought killed at Reichenbach Falls. Blake eventually acquired a residence in Baker Street, a landlady named Mrs. Bardell and an assistant named Tinker Bell! The first writer was Harry Blyth as “Hal Meredith,” who signed away all rights to the character and faded from the scene after some eight stories. Blake’s career passed through the hands of some 200 writers over the years, including Edwy Searles Brooks, who wrote 76 adventures. Even the now noted science-fantast Michael Moorcock (creator of Elric of Melnibone, etc.) contributed to the story cycle.

Blake soon outgrew his Sherlockian tropes and embraced the exciting life-style of an Edgar Wallace sort of detective, with plenty of hooded menaces, fast cars, and criminal lairs in ruined abbeys. Blake’s adversaries included such as the lovely Mademoiselle Yvonne (a character who, in the manner of Batman’s Catwoman, loves her adversary), gentleman desperado Waldo the wonderman, the mad Harley Street surgeon Dr. Huxton Rymer, and sinister Asiatic Prince, Wu Ling, of the Brotherhood of the Yellow Beetle.

The first so-called “penny dreadful” (called “dime novels” in the United States), Charles Stephens’ *Boys of England*, appeared in 1866. It was priced at one penny (1 d) and the fiction was of a simplistic nature, each paragraph consisting of no more than two sentences. Hundreds of writers were required at the turn of the century to keep all these papers going. Penny dreadfuls died out by the turn of



the century and were replaced by modern types of story papers, the first being the *Halfpenny Marvel*, published by Alfred Harmsworth, in 1893. *Union Jack* and *Pluck* first appeared in 1894. The Harmsworth Brothers' motto for their story paper *Pluck* was that "*Pluck is the Paper that Kills the 'Penny Dreadful.'*" They portrayed their story papers as being less sensational and so better for the youth of the Empire. This is the basis of Wodehouse's "British Pluck Library."

At Sexton Blake's height of fame in the 1920s and 1930s, he was appearing in publications that included the *Sexton Blake Weekly*, the *Union Jack*, and the *Detective Weekly* ("Starring Sexton Blake"), and was collected in the "Sexton Blake Library." This last, one of Amalgamated's many pocket library series, provided a second life for the stories from the story weeklies collected in pocket form. After the Second World War, however, all of the "Sexton Blake Library" volumes contained original material and

were published as late as 1970. Sexton Blake's only American equivalent for longevity and number of recorded adventures was Street & Smith's detective Nick Carter.

What is a "Wand of Death," anyway?

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The Night When the Good Songs Were Sung

BY AUNT DAHLIA

WHEN I heard recently that Hal Cazalet and Sylvia McNair were going to give a concert of songs from their CD, *The Land Where the Good Songs Go*, on February 28 in New York, my mind immediately went back to the night of December 1, 2001, at London's Wigmore Hall. As a new resident of London, it seemed fitting that one of my first nights out should involve a plethora of nifty Wodehouse songs performed by top-flight talent—chief among them Plum's great-grandson.

Oh, what a night! Hal and Sylvia were joined onstage by Janie Dee and Henry Goodman, two terrific singers with a fine comic touch; Steven Blier, the concert's arranger and director, accompanying on piano; and instrumentalist Gregory Utzig backing them all up on guitar, banjo, and mandolin. This sextet performed all the songs from the CD and several more besides, making for a ripping good entertainment. There was music, there was dancing, there was comedy—and most of all, there were Wodehouse's lyrics, set to the music of Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Ivor Novello, and George Gershwin.

Some of the highlights: Hal singing "My Castle in the Air" from *Miss Springtime*, a perfect showpiece for his tenor voice; Sylvia finding her men best if they are all "Rolled Into One" (*Oh, Boy!*); Janie and Henry agreeing that "You Can't Make Love By Wireless" (*The Beauty Prize*); Sylvia doing a beautiful rendition of one of my favorite Wodehouse songs, "Go Little Boat" (*Miss 1917*);

all four performing "Non-Stop Dancing" (*The Beauty Prize*) with non-stop energy; Hal and Sylvia conveying the bumpy rhythm of "The Enchanted Train" (*Sitting Pretty*); Henry wearing a paper hat and using a broom for a dancing partner in "Napoleon" (*Have a Heart*); Janie and Sylvia



taking turns as they tell Hal and Henry to “Wait Till Tomorrow” (*Leave It to Jane*); Janie spot-on in her amusing interpretation of “Cleopatterer” (*Leave It to Jane*); Hal at his best in “The Land Where the Good Songs Go” (*Miss 1917*); a tremendously vigorous “Anything Goes” as the finale; and more than I can possibly describe here, all of it Good Stuff.

There was only one moment when I felt let down, and it was really not the fault of the performer. Sylvia McNair did a fine job of singing “Bill,” performing it atop a piano à la *Show Boat* but using the original lyrics from *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* Still, I must confess that I missed the poignancy of a girl in love that the song deserved. Perhaps this is because I have heard Lara Cazalet give it what I think is the definitive reading. Indeed, Lara’s “Bill” is so good that in my mind (and that of many other Wodehouseans), no other singer does it with the same charming touch. (By the way, it’s Lara who sings “Bill” on the CD.)



Altogether this marvellous ensemble performed 23 of some of the best songs in the vast Wodehouse canon. Although I have the CD to comfort me, I yearn to be in New York on February 28. If it’s anything at all like what I heard last December—and why shouldn’t it be?—then it will be a perfect evening, filled to the brim with foot-tapping music and Plum’s splendid lyrics, shared with infectious joy and enthusiasm. Indeed, when Hal sang, “And I wish some day I could find my way / To the land where the good songs go,” every Wodehousean in the Wigmore Hall felt they had at least had a glimpse of it.

More CD News

ERIC MYERS gave the CD recording a glowing review in the December 2001 issue of *Opera News*. He calls these songs with lyrics by “one of the first great musical-comedy lyricists” “a perfect fit for McNair,” who is quoted as saying “I’m happiest straddling both sides of the fence” between operatic and musical-comedy singing styles. She “makes ‘Go, Little Boat’ a reverie of great beauty and tenderness, capping the song with a lovely pianissimo melisma.”

Myers praises Hal Cazalet’s “strong, charismatic sound reminiscent of the young Barry Bostwick...perfect for these witty yet old-fashioned numbers.” In “My Castle in the Air,” Cazalet “conjures up images that make one think of Maxfield Parrish illustrations for early-twentieth-century children’s books.” [Or the original sheet music illustration as shown on page 10.] For “If I Ever Lost You” (the self-parodying duet whose second chorus begins “Think how sad a carrot would be if no boiled beef was near”) “McNair and Cazalet’s Nelson Eddy–Jeanette MacDonald treatment is right on target.”

Accompanist/arranger Blier “has a real affinity for this kind of material and whips it all up into a pleasing froth.”

—GW

The CD recording *The Land Where the Good Songs Go* may be ordered directly by mail from Harbinger Records, 25 Charles Street #1C, New York NY 10014-2780. The catalog number is HCD 1901. The special price, for Wodehouse Society members only, is \$14.00 including postage, handling, and tax.



Steven Blier, Sylvia McNair, and Hal Cazalet

Listing to Paradise

BY GARY HALL & LINDA ADAM-HALL

IN THE BEGINNING, there is the book. Perhaps it's a gift from one's mother, uncle, gardener, guru. Or it's found on a table at a bargain basement sale. Or it simply sits on the bookshelf in the den for years until a precocious child pulls it down, and notices the picture of the charcoal pig on the cover.

As the worm attracts the unsuspecting fish, the preface dangles enticingly:

"The thoughtful reader...will, no doubt, be struck by the poignant depth of feeling which pervades the present volume like the scent of muddy shoes in a locker-room...."

Intriguing.

And the first page glows: "Another day had dawned all hot and fresh and, in pursuance of my unswerving policy at that time, I was singing "Sonny Boy" in my bath...."

The reader is titillated: Are there truly individuals for whom "Sonny Boy" is a policy?! Or,

"In these disturbed days in which we live, it has probably occurred to all thinking men that something drastic ought to be done about aunts."

Aunts?

To the connoisseur, the first paragraph is the first glimpse of sunlight on a carefree morn in Spring. To the eyes of the uninitiated, those first sentences wriggle through the pupil, caress the retina, glide up the optic nerve, and begin to make merry among the synapses, like a horde of tipsy fairies cavorting in the cattails.

It is the neophyte's first Wodehousian paragraph, gently leading him to a life of addiction with no hope, nor desire, of relief.

The new reader discovers a genial juxtaposition of diverse elements ("the caterpillar in the salad"), stumbles upon a first instance of radical verbalism (as a character "pronged a moody forkful" of "fragrant eggs and b."), or encounters "a Bean and Crumpet...in the smoking-room of the Drones Club having a quick one before lunch when an Egg...approached them." The reader smiles, or laughs, or merely blinks, pleased but still unsure where this is leading.

Can the writer maintain the effervescence of the opening lines? Or, like the immortal chimp, did he simply sit at his typewriter and peck one pleasant passage by chance?

The answer comes as one paragraph leads to another, a daisy chain of connected ideas, a remarkable economy of language, no wasted words. The new reader begins to sense something special, to feel the presence of a

master. The sentences and characters and situations are now Plumming the depths of his defenseless brain, evoking the perfect picture of a pastoral universe.

The reader nips all other plans in their respective buds and hunkers down in the bookish bunker.

Thus is born the amateur Wodehousian. The first book never finds its way back to its prior owner, as it becomes the *de facto* property of the new recruit.

Blandings, Bertie and Jeeves, Ukridge, the passion of golf: whichever spoonful is sampled creates longing for more. The quest has begun.

Having completed the first story or novel, the eager reader searches for another. It is then that the new fan begins to discover, and hoard, the prolific output from the pen of P. G. Wodehouse.

The rosy-cheeked devotee composes the first list to solicit birthday gifts from generous relatives, even aunts! For now, any title will do, as long as the byline starts with "P. G." Cheap paperback, threadbare hardbound; at this stage, quality is less important than quantity. The list is short, a one-dimensional inventory of those titles currently owned.

The list lengthens, and categorization begins. The various species within the *genus wodehouseus* are collected and noted.

Eventually, somehow, our hero has, of course, come upon a society of fellow happy sufferers. As Sue Brown discovered in *Heavy Weather* when uttering a sharp scream "she had unwittingly hit upon the correct procedure for girls marooned on roofs," the searcher has hit upon the network by which all Plum books become accessible. The consummation of the list seems now but a matter of cash and time. Pawning his mother's pearls is the work of an hour, and the aspirant procures the next volume, and the next.

But the fickle finger of fate is about to fan the fanatic's fancy again....

The reader chances upon the golf story "High Stakes" and reads how Bradbury Fisher's wife, "finding him crooning over the trousers in which Ouimet had won...the American Open...had asked him why he did not collect something worth while, like Old Masters or first editions."

It is as though a monk, for years certain that he's followed the proper path to enlightenment, gets a good whack on the head and realizes that there is a realm beyond that which he previously envisioned.

It is a paradoxical moment, combining great despair with huge optimism. Yes, the reader realizes that the early years have been squandered collecting lesser tomes; but there is still time to atone for that sin. "Grow old along with me," says our protagonist, more or less quoting the famous poet, "the best is yet to be, the last of

life, for which the First Editions were made!”

With renewed energy, the searcher plows onward. The seeds of the collector’s effort begin to yield new, better, plummier fruit. And yet, the list has now been revised to include the awful asterisk, marking as replaceable those inferior copies that earlier had been primary sustenance.

The quest gains momentum. Shards of the Grail are assembled. But soft, yet more light breaketh through the window.

As Dante’s blood pressure must have taken a bit of a boost at the Gates of Inferno, our poor collector’s heart beats faster upon the realization that there are British AND American versions of the SAME BOOK! And often, with different titles!!

The horror!

This apocalyptic discovery results in a complete reworking of the list. Like the one-celled organism who, tripping through the turgid swamp, imagines he’s the head of the herd, then suddenly finds himself split into two equal amoebæ, the list now becomes two.

With great trepidation, our Plum gatherer looks over the edge of the precipice and draws back. Must the list now split into four, and eight, and...? Emphatically, the decision is made: I will NOT collect the TRANSLATED First Editions!

It quickly becomes evident that condition, and dust jackets, matter greatly. And so the goal is not just to complete the collection of Firsts, but to perpetually improve the quality. The Grail might hold water, but if a hungry worm has eaten the “hoo-o-o-ey,” can the quest be complete?

Damaged Firsts become holiday gifts for relatives and friends, leaving room on the shelf for the collector to purchase better Firsts for the collection!

Unless, however, Warren Buffett is a dotting uncle, some books are forever out of reach. Gazing through the bullet-proof glass at *The Globe By The Way Book* or *The Swoop*, the eager hoarder wonders: Is there hope with an extra mortgage or two? Perhaps a week-end auction of my goods and brood?

The seeker decides against such drastic measures, and has now arrived at the Great Rationalization. The conclusion: Reprints of the true Unattainable Volumes will be allowed in the collection. As Lord Ickenham rationalizes to Connie that she is “very lucky to have the chance of marrying even into eel-jellying circles,” the collector settles for something less than the pinnacle.

Now, a reciprocal list forms of the few remaining volumes needed. With each passing month, the list shortens. In this final covetous stage, the reader doesn’t need the list, but carries it anyway, as a reminder to dash into any bookstore, whether in London or Higgleford-cum-

Wortlebury-beneath-the-hill, in the hope that such a nook may harbor the final jewels for the crown.

Fortunately, amidst the fever of collectivitis, the poor soul still finds time to read the words of the master. But through this comes another epiphany: The Firsts are too fragile, too valuable, to read!

The logical step, of course, is to create a list of Reading Copies, lower quality editions that can be bashed in the briefcase or dog-eared in the den.

With Scroocean regret, our hero tries to retrieve the literary largesse previously distributed. Without actually pilfering the prior presents, the collector drops little hints: “If that paperback copy of *Laughing Gas* is getting in your way...”

Our intrepid collector, now in the late autumn of life, encounters one last canyon. Magazines, playbills, musical scores...with a sigh and an affirmation of mortality, the seeker steers away from that slope, and basks in the glow of the crowded bookshelves.

The list is now obsolete. Now, the only necessary expenses are for a good lamp and a steady supply of bread and wine.

As the collector staggers toward the final peace, the last act of this passion play begins. The owner of so many well-worn volumes turns the other cheek, and begins to consider to whom the glorious collection will be bequeathed.

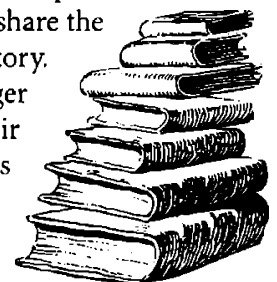
The University? Certainly not, where they would undoubtedly be buried forever in dusty dungeon stacks, to be found only by bugs, rodents, and lost philosophy majors.

The Public Library? No, perish the thought of the Firsts being handled by the riff-raff with catsup on their hands, or by the suburban socialites with latte on theirs!

The collector’s children? Whose interests lie in the realm of electronic information, and show no sign of awakening to Wodehouse? One thinks not.

Kindling for the cremation pyre? Or buried in the collector’s casket, and used to share a chortle with Charon or pass the time on the shore of Lethe?

No, best to distribute them into that network of fellow devotees. Perhaps one each to a hundred converts, perhaps several here, several there. Perhaps the appropriate book to those who best share the traits of the chief character in each story. The collection is spread to the younger disciples who are only beginning their quest, and still eagerly seek the riches along the Wodehousian trail to Plum Paradise. And the cycle begins anew...



The authors thank David Landman for inspiring this article.

Featherstonehaugh Revisited—and Then Some

BY ELIN WOODGER

THE OM's contention—as published in the Autumn 2001 issue of *Plum Lines*—that the preferred pronunciation of “Featherstonehaugh” is “featherston-haw” inspired this protest from Rob Kooy (aka Boko Fittleworth on PGWnet):

Having read OM's comments on the above subject in the newest *Plum Lines*, I'd like to sow some dissension again, and for good reasons. Firstly: PGW thought of Ukridge's middle name many, many decades before the boys at the BBC decided how it should be pronounced. I think I once read someplace that PGW himself has said (or was quoted as having said) that it is to be pronounced “Fan-Shaw.” Of course I cannot find the relevant source off-hand right now. Secondly: Tony Ring, perhaps the most knowledgeable of all authors on PGW writes in *Wodehouse Among the Chickens* (page 95): “His second name, of course, is pronounced ‘Fanshaw’...” Thirdly: Joseph Connolly, in his *P. G. Wodehouse, An Illustrated Biography* (1979), writes (page 30): “Featherstonehaugh is pronounced Fan-shaw...” So, whatever it may be, the Fanshaw-aficionados are in good company!

Now it's Auntie's turn. I decided to raise this point with The Man Who Knows All, Norman Murphy. He tells me that “Fanshaw” is certainly the pronunciation Wodehouse had in mind, because of the Latin tradition. Every Latinist, he says, will recognize the long-short-long-short-long-short pattern. Furthermore, he cites a British surnames dictionary which states bluntly that “Featherstonehaugh” is the only English surname with seven pronunciations! These are:

Feeson-haw
Feeson-huff
Feeson-hay
Feather-stone-huff
Feather-stone-hay
Feather-stone-haw
Fan-shaw

The dictionary adds (drum roll, please): “The last is the most commonly used.” Which just goes to prove that no source is necessarily *the* source on pronunciation queries.

PGWnet resident poet Ed Bronstein (Ranny Gazzoo) then punctuated the discussion with this:

The British name Featherstone-haugh
Obeys no phonetical law
Many ways are correct
But the best, I suspect
Is the simplest one, pronounced Faw.

But that's not all, folks! Auntie not being a Latinist, she had no idea what the good Colonel meant by “the long-short-long-short-long-short pattern,” so a query was put out to PGWnet, sparking this mind-boggling exchange between Neil Midkiff and James Robinson (Piccadilly Jim):

NEIL: I think Col. Murphy is talking about the “poetic meter” of the full name: STAN-ley FAN-shaw UKE-ridge (phonetic spelling) following the pattern of such names as GAI-us JU-lius CAE-sar. This is trochaic trimeter, if I remember the terms correctly.

JAMES: Ahem. That is: GAI-us Ju-LI-us CAE-sar. Dactyl, trochee, trochee. He stated pedantically. Also MAR-cus Ju-NI-us BRUT-us. On the other had, STAN-ley Feath-er-STON-haugh UKE-ridge, simply refuses to scan. Dactyl, orphan syllable, trochee, trochee. [To Neil's statement “This is trochaic trimeter, if I remember the terms correctly:” I believe you are correct. However, I believe it is a pretty rare classical meter (if it exists poetically, at all). But it does create a nice flow in a name.

NEIL: Ah, but you're talking about how we *now* think the ancient Romans would have pronounced it, based on the linguistic studies that (if I remember correctly) were done in the early-to-middle twentieth century. I expect that a schoolboy in Victorian England would have learned it in the Anglicized pronunciation that I showed. My father's college “First Year Latin” textbook (published in the USA in 1936) still teaches the older rules, including the “consonantal I”, spelled with a J in the modern alphabet, and pronounced as Y. It teaches the accent on the antepenult (third from last) syllable when the penult (second from last) is short. It shows the i in the middle of Iulius to be short; only the first u is long. The “Collins Gem” Latin-English dictionary (London & Glasgow, 1957/1982) marks the accent on the first syllable: Iū'l/ius. Based on this, YULE-yus may well be the best phonetic spelling for the older Anglicized pronunciation of Latin.

JAMES: [In response to Neil's statement about the ancient Romans:] I am afraid you are absolutely right. [In response to Neil's comments about the penults and syllables and so forth:] Yes, but unless it shows an elision (not sure that is

GAIUS IULIUS CAESAR

the correct term, diphthong?) between the i and the second u, Julius is still three syllables, not two. It becomes a natural dactyl if the i is short: JUL-i-us.

NEIL: I agree that technically Julius is three syllables, as I mentioned regarding antepenults. There is no diphthong here. But those who pronounce Featherstonehaugh as FAN-shaw, I submit, are likely to elide Iulius in speech to YULE-yus as well.

The above is submitted for your edification and entertainment.
—AD

Neil notes: In the introductory paragraphs of "Sir Agravaïne" the modern writer (in Plum's voice) describes finding the old black-letter MS at the castle of the Duke of Weatherstonhope (pronounced Wop). Surely this analogous example will dispel any suspicion that PGW might have intended Featherstonehaugh to be pronounced as spelled. Ranny Gazzoo's poem may be right after all.

The Pickering Motor Company Hits the Road

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

THE first meeting of The Pickering Motor Company (the Detroit Chapter of TWS) took place recently; all four members were quite enthusiastic about planning the 2003 convention. The first item of business was an attempt to attract more members. From the dining room of the Embers Grill in Novi, Michigan, the cry went out:

"HELLLLLLPPPP!!!!"

The second item of business was reviewing the various possible venues for said convention and the group sadly came the conclusion that Detroit was NOT the place to have a convention. No worry. The dauntless quartet felt that the whole thing could be organized in Detroit for a site somewhat removed. After much hemming and not a little hawing, the site chosen was Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Continuing to throw tradition and caution to the winds, we considered a change of season to be in order. Whilst holding the biennial pilgrimage on or near Plum's birthday is a pleasant idea, the middle of October does not always suit many of our members, especially those tied to school schedules for one reason or another. So the auto-

Farewell to 15 Berkeley Street

BY JOHN GRAHAM

IN THE Spring 1991 issue of *Plum Lines*, Norman Murphy reported the astonishing news that he had discovered the real-life location of Bertie's London flat, Berkeley Mansions, just off Berkeley Square. The address was 15 Berkeley Street, where Plum himself lived for a short time in the early 1920s. Since then, 15 Berkeley St. has been an important highlight of Norman's London walking tour.

I just returned from London, where Norman gave me his famous tour this past Wednesday morning. Unfortunately, we have sad news to report. Within the past two weeks, 15 Berkeley Street has been destroyed by the wrecking ball (along with its next-door neighbor) to make room for a new building. Bertie Wooster's and P. G. Wodehouse's 15 Berkeley Street is no more! Hope someone out there has a good picture of the old homestead. May it rest in peace.

motive engineers have chosen the weekend of August 8 - 10, 2003. Summer weather can only be an added inducement to the staunch members of the TWSCC.

Another advantage to this time is that accommodations and facilities can be secured for the convention on the campus of the University of Toronto, allowing those for whom triple-digit-per-night hotel rooms are out of the question to attend. Assuming no sudden collapse of US currency (or sudden appreciation of Canadian currency), lovely dorm rooms will be available for as little as \$20 - \$40 a night. At the same time, a block of rooms has been reserved at the nearby Sutton Place Hotel, for those who prefer more posh surroundings.

Since the cry for help was ignored by the Motor City, we now appeal to all Torontonians Plummies for any assistance they can bring. All interested parties should contact Elliott Milstein at 248/661-1944 or elliott@emilstein.com. Feel free to talk to Elyse, if she answers the phone. She's really the one in charge anyway.

Mark your calendars. Brush off your passports. Start learning to say "Eh." Toronto, here we come!

Golf and the Well-Thumbed Rule Book

BY TOM THOMAS

GOLF DIGEST introduced its “Rules of the Game” feature in its August 2001 issue by quoting Wodehouse: “Even in foursomes where 50 yards is reckoned to be a good shot, someone must be away.” Readers might recall that the “someone” to whom he referred was Joseph Poskitt, a.k.a. the First Grave Digger, one of the slow-playing and unyielding Wrecking Crew who, in “Chester Forgets Himself,” let loose with the brassie shot of a lifetime that struck Chester Meredith on the seat of his plus fours as he stroked a putt on the final green in an attempt to break the course record.

This same Poskitt on another occasion became entangled in rules at the hands of Wadsworth Hemmingway, “a subtle Machiavellian schemer,” who constantly consulted a well-thumbed rule book to hold him at bay in “The Letter of the Law.” Poskitt was playing far over his head but lost holes in their match by grounding his club in a hazard and directing an innocuous question about club selection to someone other than his caddie. Further, Hemmingway invoked the rule highlighted in *Golf Digest* by making Poskitt replay a splendid drive that had carried the lake because he had played out of turn. He then flubbed two drives into the water and conceded the hole. Later, with the match even on the short 18th hole and Poskitt fearful he would miss a command performance at his wife’s luncheon party, Hemmingway adopted the tactic of repeatedly whiffing his ball and waiting the full five minutes allowed by the rules before taking another stroke. The exasperated Poskitt was nearly ready to concede when a ball from the practice tee struck Hemmingway and caused him to drop his club in the bunker, giving Poskitt the hole, the match, and the only cup of his golfing career.

Wodehouse wove the barbs of fate the rules so often produce into some of his best golfing stories. The judges in a bizarre one-hole match were called upon to consider the propriety of Ralph Bingham chipping his ball into a boat that he propelled across a wide body of water before chipping it onto the other shore, and of Otis Jukes

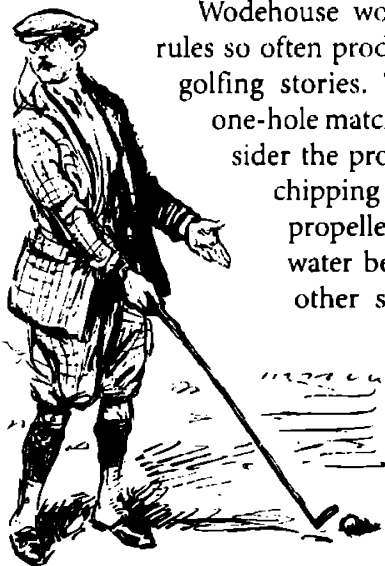
using a car to transport his ball over the final segment of the 16-mile hole leading from the first tee on their course to the front door of a downtown hotel. The

match ended in an impasse with Jukes unable to play a shot within the required five minutes because the car with his ball had departed the scene during the golfers’ mealtime break, and because Bingham playfully asked a passerby what club he would use for the short shot that should have ended the hole with a score of 1,101. [The golfers appear as Ralph Bingham and Arthur Jukes in *The Golf Omnibus* (1973) version of “The Long Hole.”]

One of the sterling attributes of golf is the expectation that golfers penalize themselves when they run afoul of the rules. Frederick Pilcher did just that in “Those in Peril on the Tee” when he removed a bit of mud from his ball before reaching the green. He and John Gooch were playing a match for the hand of Agnes Flack, a match neither wanted to win but she had ordained. Pilcher not only disqualified himself from the wedding party, quite a relief in itself, but also avoided an unpleasant interview with jealous Sidney McMurdo, that mass of rippling muscle and violent disposition who had proposed to Agnes no fewer than eleven times.

But our author also could poke fun at strict interpretation of the rules, as when Agnes Flack, a contestant this time rather than the trophy, lost the Women’s Singles match in “Feet of Clay” to Cora McGuffy Spottsworth when a small dog on the 18th green picked up her ball in its mouth and was carried by its owner into the clubhouse, or when Mortimer Sturgis’s errant shot in “A Mixed Threesome” came to rest inside the clubhouse piano. And he could be forgiving when circumstances called for compassion rather than censure. When a box of matches ignited in Wallace Chesney’s trouser pocket, his fellow competitor, Peter Willard, helpfully suggested jumping into a nearby lake, a move Chesney executed without delay. Wodehouse reminds us that he had accepted advice from someone other than his caddie but let them settle their match amicably in “The Magic Plus Fours,” perhaps because he hadn’t sought the advice.

Wodehouse was an ardent golfer, as Robert Sullivan’s “The Shakespeare of Golf” made clear in the Summer 2001 *Plum Lines*, even though his enthusiasm for the game exceeded his ability to maintain a handicap lower than 18. He and the *Golf Digest* editors surely would agree with Peter Willard and James Todd in “A Woman is Only a Woman” that it is sound practice before a match to agree upon obeying the rules, specifically not to ground clubs in bunkers, count whiffs as practice strokes, or remove bothersome vegetation from around a ball that finds its way into a difficult lie.



Indian Summer of an Uncle

BY JANE AUSTEN

The astounding byline above is susceptible of a ready explanation. David McDonough announced “The Great Plum Paragraph Contest” in *Plum Lines* last summer: contestants were to choose a paragraph or passage from Wodehouse and rewrite it in the style of their second-favorite author. From among the rich harvest of entries the judges announced the winners at our recent Philadelphia convention. The first place winner is (drum roll, please):

Dennis Chitty

who chose a section from “Indian Summer of an Uncle.” What follows is Dennis’s summary of the story thus far, followed by a section of the story as Wodehouse wrote it, then the same section as Jane Austen might have written it. Dennis supported his Jane Austen pastiche with no less than 41 citations from her writings—phrases, clauses, and sentences he used in their original form or modified only slightly to fit the new context.

—OM

Jeeves has persuaded Bertie to host a luncheon for his uncle George and the aunt of a waitress his uncle was proposing to marry. Aunt Agatha has ordered Bertie to prevent the marriage. Jeeves tells Bertie that once his uncle sees that the aunt will be coming to live with him (a woman of “sturdy lower middle class stock”) he will no longer wish to marry his waitress. Jeeves, however, was trifling with the truth; he now reveals his hidden motives.

Here’s Dennis Chitty’s version of the same section in the style of Jane Austen:

“If I might explain, sir. The young man Smethurst, who is greatly attached to the young person, is an intimate friend of mine. He applied to me some little while back in the hope that I might be able to do something to ensure that the young person followed the dictates of her heart and refrained from permitting herself to be lured by gold and the glamour of his lordship’s position. There will now be no obstacle to their union.”

“I see. ‘Little acts of unremembered kindness,’ what?”

“Precisely, sir.”

“And how about Uncle George? You’ve landed him pretty nicely in the cart.”

“No, sir, if I may take the liberty of opposing your view. I fancy that Mrs. Wilberforce should make an ideal mate for his lordship. If there was a defect in his lordship’s mode of life, it was that he was a little unduly attached to the pleasures of the table—”

“Ate like a pig, you mean?”

“I would not have ventured to put it in quite that way, sir, but the expression does meet the facts of the case. He was also inclined to drink rather more than his medical adviser would have approved of. . . . The future Lady Yaxley will check this. . . . I fancy, sir, that you will find the union will turn out an extremely satisfactory one.”

“By considering the offer of marriage from your uncle, Lord Yaxley, the waitress, Miss Rhoda Platt, was not disinclined to rise to a line of society above her; but with the entire extinction of this hope, she will now shew a considerably greater appearance of attachment to Mr. Smethurst, a person in her own class, who had solicited my help in preventing the marriage. A project for doing this was the consequence: that Lord Yaxley should be tempted to transfer his affections to Miss Platt’s aunt, a former barmaid, whom, in spite of her lower rank of life, he would have married but for the circumstance that, in return for money, she had agreed not to quit the sphere in which she had been brought up. Despite the ruins of the face which had once charmed him, Lord Yaxley, on meeting her at lunch, proposed to and has been accepted by Mrs. Wilberforce.”

“Upon my word, Jeeves,” cried Mr. Wooster, “with your velocity of thought you have produced a consequence for the young couple which may be considered the reverse of frightful. I dare say you have heard those charming lines of the poet—I forget the poem at this moment:

“His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love.”

“Thank you, sir; like Mr Wordsworth in his *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798.*”

“Thank you, Jeeves,” said Mr. Wooster, then (in a voice of very strong displeasure), “but did you not endeavour to comprehend the nature of the sad consequences for my uncle? In the November of his life he is to be married to a woman of inferior birth, entitled neither by birth nor situation to be the wife of a lord. I do think there is a disparity,

too great a disparity, in this connexion. Such an elevation on her side! Such a debasement on his! I foresee the smiles, the sneers, the merriment; the mortification and disdain of my Aunt Agatha. There will be an end to all pleasant intercourse between them. He will have thrown himself out of all good society, and she will be censured, slighted, and despised by everyone connected with him. Such a shock is not to be soon recovered from. It will take a long application of silence and reflection to recover myself.”

“You like it, sir, as little as I feared; this is one subject on which we do not think alike; but time, I feel sure, will make one or other of us think differently. I have no doubt of their being happy together. Their tempers are by no means unlike. They have so much concern for their health that they will take care of one another; so many shared memories that they will never lack for conversation; and so much money that they can afford to ignore the disdain of your Aunt Agatha. Moreover, Mrs Wilberforce has already observed the tendency of his lordship towards overindulgence in food.”

“You imply, Jeeves, that my uncle has an unpolished way of eating?”

“Those would not be the words of a man in my position, sir, but his lordship’s fondness for drink is another fault of which Mrs. Wilberforce is not insensible and will not be disinclined to correct. I am convinced of her being an artless, amiable woman, with very good notions. There have been successful marriages of greater disparity. Indeed, I have the highest idea of her merit; I believe them to be very mutually and very sincerely attached; and I am certain that theirs will be a union of the highest promise of felicity.”

Tasmanian Note

WE’RE world famous! John Parks, an Australian member of our society, received a newspaper clipping from a Tasmanian friend soon after our recent Philadelphia convention. The clipping, from the Launceston, Tasmania, *Examiner* of October 18, 2001, devoted nearly half a page to our convention and featured a full-color photograph of Hope Gaines, Alekh Bhurke, and Elise Fahey, arm-in-arm, wine glass in hand, and costumed to the teeth. The article noted that “for an escapist weekend, passionate readers became the scary aunts, flamboyant playboys, and fluffy women who inhabit P. G. Wodehouse’s lighthearted British novels.”

The article and photograph were probably picked up from the Associated Press wire by a Wodehouse fan on the staff of the *Examiner*. It’s good to see that we’re getting the worldwide attention we so richly deserve.

—OM

Wodehouse Collection for Sale

I WAS saddened recently to hear of the death of Fergus Horsburgh, a member of our society for many years. Len Lawson and I met him at a TWS convention in 1987, he visited me for several days the following year, and we corresponded occasionally after that. His widow, Mrs. Jane Horsburgh, wrote to me after his death about his extensive collection:

Fergus’s collection includes the complete Wodehouse opus—every book and every article he ever wrote. He had many rare copies and first editions of the books, and copies of every article in *Vanity Fair* and other magazines, also copies of songs. He also has some memorabilia such as a letter from Lady Wodehouse to Fergus. I would like to offer this collection (it comprises seven bankers’ boxes) to someone who would appreciate it. Do you know of anyone who might like to buy Fergus’s collection? If possible, I would prefer it to go to a Wodehouse fan rather than to a university collection.

Note: while this collection is no doubt very inclusive, collectors continue to find previously unknown items from time to time.

—OM



The revelers, as featured in the Antipodean press

How I Started The Wodehouse Society

BY FRANK AXE

A talk delivered (by proxy) at the Philadelphia convention of The Wodehouse Society, October 2001.

WHY anyone would want to listen to the maunderings of an old farce like me—and without even sitting on the terrace of the country club—is a mystery worthy of the fish-fed brain of Jeeves.

Unfortunately, I am strictly a meat man. However, last week at a restaurant, while I was having my delicious meat, someone near me was having fish; I know because I got a few whiffs—and in a flash it came to me, the reason I was asked to speak:

You see before you a living relic! A relic of the ancient and honorable history of The Wodehouse Society. For it was I who started The Wodehouse Society twenty years ago!

Well, all right, all right, it was really Bill Blood (Captain, U.S. Army, Retired). Yes, Virginia, there really was a real Captain Blood—and it is true that it was he who started The Wodehouse Society. But it is also true that he only did it because of me and my help. It happened like this.

WHILE MY WIFE was rooting through the books at the weekly auction she attended, looking for Wodehouse tomes, she noticed this handsome blighter with the military mustache also after Wodehouses. When she told him the books were for me, he asked her to bring me to the next week's auction so he could talk with me about Wodehouse.

She did; and we did. After we enthused and laughed ourselves silly for a goodish while about the Master, Bill popped the question: since this had been so much fun, what did I think of doing it once a month with some more Wodehouse lovers? I said I thought it was a great idea—so you can see the key part I played! You understand, of course, that I said this only after he said he would do all the work—I was always rather generous that way. But he was retired and I was just getting a grip on my new career as Professor of Business at Trenton State College (now College of New Jersey).

So okay—Bill did it all. It was his idea, he found another six fans, called the first meeting, did all the organizing, and actually did just about everything. But—well, I was there! And it really is the fact that Bill started The Wodehouse Society only after he met me and we had that happy and fateful talk comparing our enthusiasms for Wodehouse.

Then Bill launched into the real work. He was a walking, one-man publicity, public relations, and recruiting

department. He traveled around a bit—what else do retired men do, other than set up Wodehouse Societies, of course—taking motor trips and the like with Mary, and wherever he went, whether at the hotel, the bed-and-breakfast, the restaurant, the local library, or wherever, he would meet and talk to people. Talk, that is, about P. G. Wodehouse! And whenever he found a kindred soul who smiled at Plum's name, he would sign them up in TWS on the spot—we had no dues yet—and give them a membership card. Then, to keep in touch with those too far away to make our monthly meetings, he began sending out a regular newsletter, which over time morphed into the *Plum Lines* of today.

Bill Blood, in his quiet, soft-spoken way, was an inspiring, indefatigable worker, who knew how to get things done—you do them yourself. And so he did, all the way up until he couldn't do it all himself any more.

Of course, one could say it was easy when he had a collaborator like Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. But in a larger sense, Bill was just a lovely, plain guy who had a great idea, knew he had it, and acted on it. And all of us here and all of those far-flung others are proof how far his idea has come already—from eight members in the small nearby town of New Britain (appropriately enough for a Wodehouse group) in the state of Pennsylvania, to over seven hundred members in seventeen different countries, literally all over the world.

So what am I, the relic, doing up here? Well, it strikes me that I'm sort of a marker.

THE STORY OF the Wodehouse Society is like a two-part novel. I stand up here as a marker for the beginning, for one thing. We've come a long way since Bill spoke to me and started TWS, with some little help from me. No one knows where we're going from here. But before we can get to that part—Part 2, if you will—we have to end Part 1. That, I think, is the other thing I stand up here as a marker for.

So here I am, beginning and end of Part 1. Now it's on with the beginning of Part 2. To start that off, fellow Drones, let the bread-rolls fly (figuratively, of course) and the glasses be raised high:

**To the Wodehouse lover above all others:
Bill Blood!!**

Published in Philadelphia: PGW and the SEP

BY JOHN GRAHAM*

A talk delivered at the Philadelphia convention of The Wodehouse Society, October 2001.

EXACTLY 85 years ago this weekend, October 14, 1916, the nearly 10 million readers of the *Saturday Evening Post* were being treated to the fifth installment of P. G. Wodehouse's *Piccadilly Jim*. The magazine had a Norman Rockwell cover, and was published here in Philadelphia, from the southwest corner of Independence Hall Park. *Piccadilly Jim* was the third Wodehouse novel to be serialized in the *Post*—his first two, *Something New* and *Uneasy Money* had appeared the previous year. Over the next 50 years, Plum would go on to publish a total of 14 novels and 36 short stories in the *Post*—in all but one case they were first publications anywhere in the world.¹ To put that in perspective, it means that fully half of all Wodehouse novels from 1915 to 1945 were published *first* right here in Philadelphia—including, I am willing to bet, your own personal favorite.

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

An Illustrated Weekly
Founded by Benjamin Franklin

JUNE 26, 1915 5c THE COPY



Beginning

Something New—By Pelham Grenville Wodehouse

Looking back in June 1965, Wodehouse described those early years this way: “From 1909 onward, I had been living with a group of young writers at a Greenwich Village hotel, all of us just getting by with occasional sales to the pulps. We read the *Post* regularly and discussed its contents in awestruck voices, but the most optimistic of us never

dreamed of having anything in it....But by 1915 I had acquired a literary agent, and agents lack all sense of reverence. Mine had the nerve to submit a novel I'd written called *Something New* to the *Post*, and I was stunned to get a call from him one day saying that George Horace Lorimer, the editor, had actually accepted it. There were some good things in *Something New*—not many, perhaps—but I have always thought that what put it over was my changing my name. Until then, you see, I had been labeling my stories ‘by P. G. Wodehouse’ and this at a time when a writer for the American market who went about without three names was practically going around naked. *Something New* appeared as ‘by Pelham Grenville Wodehouse’ and no editor, even one with Harry Leon Wilson, David Graham Phillips, and Arthur Somers Roche on his list, was going to let a name like Pelham Grenville Wodehouse get away from him.”²

For Wodehouse, as for so many writers in the early part of the 20th century, the *Saturday Evening Post* represented the pinnacle of American publishing. The *Post* had been around since 1821, although like so much else in Philadelphia, it could trace a link even further back to Benjamin Franklin. By 1897, however, the magazine had fallen on hard times, when Cyrus H. Curtis, publisher of the *Ladies Home Journal*, purchased it for \$1,000. The following year, Curtis appointed George Horace Lorimer as its editor, a position he would hold until his retirement in 1936. Curtis may bring to mind Plum's Lord Tilbury, whose Mammoth Publishing Company gave us *Pyke's Weekly*, *Society Spice*, *Tiny Tots*, *The Sabbath Hour* and *Home Gossip*; but if so, I think the analogy ends there, for Lorimer was certainly no Percy Pilbeam. Although staunchly Republican and ultraconservative in his choice of nonfiction, Lorimer would more than fulfill a promise he made to *Post* readers in 1900 to “secure the greatest living writers” of fiction.³ He published Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* in 1903. Works by American writers Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, O. Henry, Sinclair Lewis, Edith Wharton, and William Faulkner would follow, as well as by British notables like Kipling, Conrad, and H. G. Wells. Lorimer—universally known as The Boss—constantly searched for and found fresh talent; the mere name of an established writer meant nothing to him; he read every submission as if it were the author's first, and is said to have turned down Kipling a dozen times. As Wodehouse remarked to his friend Bill Townend, “The Boss was an autocrat, but my God, what an

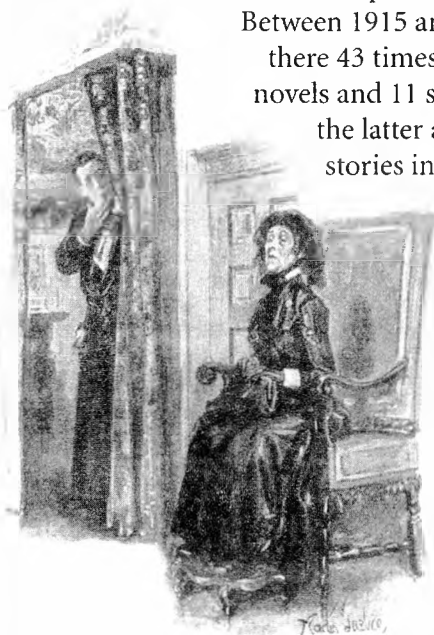
editor to work for. He made you give of your best, all right. I had twenty-one serials in the *Post*, but I never felt safe till I got the cable saying each had got over with Lorimer.”⁴ Plum may have gotten the number 21 wrong, but about Lorimer he was right on target.

It is clear from his many letters that the *Post* was important to Wodehouse. While he published more often in *Punch* and the *Strand* in England, and had nearly twice as many short stories in *Cosmopolitan*, nevertheless it was the *Post* he always bragged about. “I have a story coming out in the *S.E.P.*, week ending January 30th, which they think is the best I have ever done,” he tells Townend in 1936.⁵ “Did Mummie tell you I had sold the novel to the *Sat Eve Post* for \$20,000?” he asks Leonora in 1923.⁶ And then there is this strange entry from a letter to Townend dated July 20, 1928: “Just had a cable saying the *Post* have taken *Fish Preferred* and are paying me \$40,000, as they have been doing for the last two or three.”⁷ This is strange, because it was *Colliers*, not the *Post*, which won the rights to publish *Fish Preferred*; even in defeat, the *Post* gets the credit. Wodehouse’s letters hint at another attraction the *Post* held for him—it paid promptly and handsomely. He received \$3,500 for *Something New* in 1915, and with each novel his pay rose steadily: he got \$10,000 for *A Damsel in Distress*, \$20,000 for *Leave It to Psmith*, \$40,000 for *Heavy Weather* and \$50,000 for *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. As an economist, I can’t resist adding that these sums are all the more impressive when we convert them to current dollars. By my calculations, Wodehouse was receiving the equivalent of more than \$100,000 per novel by 1916, \$250,000 per book in the 1920s, and over \$500,000 for each novel in the 1930s. His later short stories were worth as much as \$50,000 apiece in present-day terms.

Although his publications spanned more than 50 years, Plum’s contributions to the *Post* can actually be divided into three or four short periods of intense activity.

Between 1915 and 1919, he appeared there 43 times, with four serialized novels and 11 short stories. Among the latter are seven early Jeeves stories including “Extricating Young Gussie,”

which contains our first glimpse of Bertie and Aunt Agatha courtesy of illustrator Martin Justice (at left), and “Leave it to Jeeves,” with artist Tony Sarg’s inaugural depiction of Jeeves (overleaf).



I call these years his “Pelham Grenville” period, since every story appears under this byline. It ends in July 1919 with “The Spring Suit,” his only *Post* fiction never to have been republished in book form. For the next four years, Wodehouse would publish nothing in the *Post*, placing 31 short stories instead in *Cosmopolitan*, under its new editor Ray Long, who had lured him and other *Post* writers away with the promise of fatter pay. By 1923, however, Plum was back at the *Post*, and from now on as P. G. Wodehouse, starting with *Leave it to Psmith*, as prominently announced at the bottom of the cover by Norman Rockwell. He would publish 36 times in the next three years—three novels and 14 short stories including the first Blandings Castle short story, “The Custody of the Pumpkin,” five vintage golf stories and the Mulliner classic, “Honeysuckle Cottage,” albeit without Mr. Mulliner’s lead-in. And then from 1926 to 1933, except for two short essays in 1929, Wodehouse would again abandon the *Post* in favor of greener pastures elsewhere—this time, *Cosmopolitan*, *Colliers*, and most notably, *Liberty*, whose editor offered him \$3,500 per story, against Lorimer’s \$2,500.⁸

Wodehouse returned to the *Post* in 1933 with two major contributions, *Heavy Weather* and *Right Ho, Jeeves*. From then until 1941, he published 64 times, including seven novels and 14 short stories. This period includes his one famous rejection—*The Luck of the Bodkins*—as it turns out, for reasons having to do not with literary merit, but taxes. Still, Wodehouse took it hard: “My first rejection in America in twenty-one years. It was a stunning blow. I had come to look on myself so much as the *Post*’s favorite son, to whom they could refuse nothing, that I felt like a child who has run to its mother for a slice of cake and been met with a solid kick in the pants.”⁹ Another novel worthy of our attention from this period is *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. At the editor’s request, Plum dropped two characters to make it easier to follow, which, given his intricate plot, meant rewriting practically the whole book. As Tony Ring has noted, *Uncle Fred* represents the most important magazine variant of any of his novels, as these changes were not retained when it was published in book form.¹⁰ Wodehouse’s last publication from this period—and his final novel to be published in the *Post*—was *Money in the Bank*, which appeared in November and December 1941, more than a year after his internment by the Germans. Its publication had been heralded in the *Post* the previous July with the mysterious announcement that “the manuscript is, at this writing, someplace between Berlin and Philadelphia.”¹¹

After the war, Wodehouse would publish relatively little in magazine form, in the *Post* or elsewhere. His fortunes had changed and the world of publishing was changing too, with competition coming from a new source—television. Although postwar circulation at the *Post*

remained strong, its ad revenue and profits began to slide. With both Curtis and Lorimer long gone, publishers and editors came and went quickly in the final years. The last weekly issue of the *Post* was printed on February 8, 1969. Four years before the end, Plum published one final short story there, 50 years to the month of his first publication. The story was called “The Battle of Squashy Hollow” (re-titled “Sleepy Time” when it appeared in *Plum Pie*) and contains, according to Richard Usborne, one of the best opening paragraphs in all of Wodehouse.¹² Let me end my talk with it: “In his office, on the premises of Popgood and Grooly, publishers of the Book Beautiful, Cyril Grooly, the firm’s junior partner, was practicing putts into a tooth glass and doing rather badly even for one with a twenty-four handicap, when Patricia Binstead, Mr. Popgood’s secretary, entered, and dropping his putter, he folded her in a close embrace. This was not because all publishers are warmhearted, impulsive men and she was a very attractive girl, but because they had recently become betrothed. On his return from his summer vacation at Paradise Valley due to begin this afternoon, they would step down to the Little Church Around the Corner and become man—if you can call someone with a twenty-four handicap a man—and wife.”¹³

* The author would like to thank Gus Caywood and Tony Ring for their assistance.

Notes

- ¹ “Anselm Gets His Chance” appeared the same month in the *Strand* (July 1937).
- ² P. G. Wodehouse, “Fifty Years is Practically Half a Century,” *Saturday Evening Post*, June 5, 1965.
- ³ Jan Cohn, *Creating America: George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989.
- ⁴ Wodehouse, *Author! Author!*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962, p. 158.
- ⁵ Wodehouse, *Performing Flea*, London: Jenkins, 1953, p. 93. The story is “All’s Well with Bingo.”
- ⁶ Wodehouse, *Yours, Plum*, London: Hutchinson, 1990, p.32.
- ⁷ Wodehouse, *Author! Author!*, p. 50.
- ⁸ John Tebbel, *George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post*, New York: Doubleday, 1948, p. 50.
- ⁹ Wodehouse, *Author! Author!*, p. 100.
- ¹⁰ Tony Ring, “Weekly Wodehouse,” *Book and Magazine Collector*, May 1998, pp. 4-18.
- ¹¹ *Saturday Evening Post*, July 19, 1941.
- ¹² Richard Usborne, *A Wodehouse Companion*, London: Elm Tree Books, 1981, p. 87.
- ¹³ Wodehouse, “The Battle of Squashy Hollow,” *Saturday Evening Post*, June 5, 1965, p. 50.



Jeeves, Bertie Wooster, Bruce “Corky” Corcoran, and Muriel Singer, as depicted by Tony Sarg in the Saturday Evening Post, February 5, 1916

Wodehouse Playhouse to be Released!

Len Brand sent the following to Aunt Dahlia, who shared the good news electronically with PGWnet and alt.fan.wodehouse:

It finally happened. I sent my annual letter in to Laura Palmer at BBC Worldwide to remind her again that we were eagerly awaiting the release of *Wodehouse Playhouse* on video. I have been doing this since 1998. This time she sent me a copy of the Acorn Media coming releases and there it was: *Wodehouse Playhouse*. I could hardly believe my eyes. Acorn Media is the outfit that recently released *No, Honestly*.

Unfortunately, when I called them, they said it probably would not be out until 2003. But it is definitely in the works. They indicated that they would be releasing all 20 episodes, although maybe not all at the same time. It is planned to be released on both VHS and DVD.

We need to spread this news far and wide. If everybody contacted them and told them we can't wait, maybe they would speed up their schedule. On the other hand, if they saw how anxious we are they might jack up the price. What a dilemma!

Here is the info:

Acorn Media	Acorn Media UK Limited
www.acornmedia.com	+44 20 8879 7000
(301) 608-2115	

Stuart Krasner reports receiving an email newsletter from Acorn announcing a USA release "in the third quarter of this year" — date to be announced later. TWS President Susan Cohen has been in contact with Acorn to express the Society's willingness to help publicize the release, and asking for Acorn's help in including information about TWS with the videotapes and discs.

Susan shares the following contact information for Acorn: (800) 474-2277 (main headquarters) and (888) 870-8047 (ordering and customer service). "To ask a question or comment on an Acorn-related issue, please send e-mail to: info@acornmedia.com with 'newsletter' as the subject. Acorn will respond to all submissions and may select one or more for inclusion in the newsletter. All submissions become the sole property of Acorn Media Publishing Inc., which reserves the right to edit them for content and length."

A Few Quick Ones

Susan Cohen found *The Most of P.G. Wodehouse* on a short list of favorite books in a September 2001 issue of *USA Today*.

Manetta J. Calkins writes: "Suggested reading for EVERY member is an article in the December 2001 issue of *The New Criterion* entitled 'Plum on Broadway' by Mark Steyn. It's an absolute must." [GW notes that everything Steyn writes is worth reading.]

Stephen Brown found this comment by film critic Roger Ebert about the current film "The Royal Tenenbaums": The film "is at heart profoundly silly, and loving. That's why it made me think of Wodehouse. It stands in amazement as the Tenenbaums and their extended family unveil one strategy after another to get attention, carve out space, and find love. It doesn't mock their efforts, dysfunctional as they are, because it understands them—and loves them."

Literary critic Katherine A. Powers, writing in *The Boston Sunday Globe* of December 30, 2001, suggests that the reason Conan Doyle killed Sherlock Holmes was that he realized "that even the greatest characters in fiction—just as in real life—begin to repeat themselves [and] can do nothing but play out the same old story again and again." "Clearly," notes David Landman, "she has not read Wodehouse." We remember with delight the preface in which Plum responded to a critic: "With my superior intelligence I have outgeneralled the man this time and used the same old characters with the same old names."

Elin and Norman's wedding is still getting some attention in the English press. An illustrated article appeared in the January 22 issue of *Woman's Weekly*. Purple prose, indeed—actually printed in purple ink. Elin comments: "I strongly suspect Rosie M. Banks of having had a hand in it. Norman and I categorically deny ever having said such things as 'I'm living my own happy ending,' and we are appalled if our friends could ever think us capable of uttering such slop."

Neil Midkiff joins the editorial board of *Plum Lines* with this issue, taking charge of layout and production. He has chosen "Glow Worm" as his editorial *nom de Plum*, after the school magazine jellygraphed by Charteris in *The Pothunters*.



The Oldest Member Society Spice Glow Worm

Toronto-Rah!

That cheer was this Gilbert-and-Sullivan fan's reaction to the news of the 2003 Convention plans. See page 15 for the details. —GW

Hope Gaines, David Mackenzie: Chief Perpetrators

Hope and David, more than anyone else, were responsible for organizing and presenting our recent Philadelphia convention, one of our best ever. Because of a layout error, their names were omitted from the list of convention workers in the last issue of *Plum Lines*. And lo, their names should have led all the rest. My apologies (and congratulations) to both. —OM

Captious critics

A misattributed photo on the www.wodehouse.org web site caused your editors to jump to a wrong conclusion in captioning page 7 of the Winter 2001 issue. The lower photo is neither Aileen Peavey nor Jill Singer, but Susan Garrett, if our sources can be trusted. Apologies to all affected by the error. —GW

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Locked for years in the BBC vaults, "Wodehouse Playhouse" is soon to be released on videotape and DVD. See page 23 for the exciting preliminary news. Thanks to George and Margaret Colbran for providing this BBC weekly issue from April 1975.

Volunteer Officers

Information and new-member inquiries:
Amy Plofker

<http://www.wodehouse.org/inquiry/>

Dues payments and changes in contact information:
Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall

<http://www.wodehouse.org/membership/>

Original contributions to Plum Lines:
David Landman, SS

Other contributions to Plum Lines:
Ed Ratcliffe, OM Neil Midkiff, GW

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

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