The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

Volume 37 Number 1 Spring 2016

Wodehouse in Wonderland

by Robert McCrum

Writer and noted Wodehouse biographer Robert McCrum spoke at the Pseattle convention about Wodehouse's ability to react with humor to any event, even the most extreme and painful, including his experiences during and after World War II. I personally was very moved when I considered Wodehouse's innermost feeling during those last decades of his life. Thanks to Robert for giving us permission to share this fascinating study with the entire society.

For more than twenty years I've been hearing about these Wodehouse conventions. Now, finally, I get it. This is probably the most fun you can have without being arrested, an offbeat symposium of sheer delight.

So first, my thanks to The Wodehouse Society for its kind invitation, with a special thank-you to Tom Smith. Since we first met in 2002, Tom has now become a doctor (of letters) as well as a major. Which just goes to show the therapeutic powers of the PGW regime.

It's been about ten years since I completed my study of Wodehouse [*Wodehouse: A Life*], an unforgettable experience with so many happy memories. But life since completing that work has been wonderful, too. It has given me time to step back from the biographer's canvas to look at the bigger picture, reflect on his genius, and think about the things I didn't say in my book.

Here at Psmith in Pseattle we celebrate Wodehouse's creations, especially the immortal Rupert Psmith. And we must not forget the centenaries of the "mentally negligible" Drone-in-chief, Bertie Wooster, and his omniscient manservant Jeeves.

Writer Robert McCrum

Nor should we overlook Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge, that shambolic sponger and con man, or Lord Emsworth and his peerless prize pig, Empress of Blandings. Or Mr. Mulliner. Or—well, we all have our favorites. This is about to be a golden season for Wodehouse anniversaries, and a jubilee for the world's Wodehouse societies.

From the appearance of Psmith, Lord Emsworth, and Jeeves, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Wodehouse was at the top of his game. Rarely, if ever, has an English writer sustained such a winning streak.

Then the war came.

When I was working on *Wodehouse: A Life*, people used to say: "But his life was so dull. What on earth are you going to write about?"

"What about Broadway and what about Hollywood?" I used to reply. "And what about the full story of Wodehouse's war?"

Wodehouse was 58 when the war knocked at his door in Le Touquet in May 1940. He was 65 in April 1947, when he sailed from newly liberated France back to postwar America, where he would live in retirement for the rest of his life, some 27 years, until his death on St. Valentine's Day, 1975. In my biography I devoted more than a hundred pages to establishing what is, I believe, the truth about his war. Today, I want to argue that those years, from 1940 to 1947, hold a key to understanding the man and the writer.

I hasten to say that Wodehouse himself would be horrified by this assertion. There never was a great artist less interested in exploring either the wellspring or the nuances of his literary imagination. He saw his job as pleasing himself, selling books and magazines, and entertaining his devoted readers. It was essential to his habitual detachment, and his instinctive good humor, that he should find the joke in any situation, however dire, and not examine its existential lineaments.

As a profoundly private man—some might say repressed—it was his credo never to explore the shadow side of the human condition, never to concede a weakness, and certainly never to investigate an intimate or troubling thought, except in code: the code of the Woosters. Typically, he preferred to make what he called, in a famous sentence, "a sort of musical comedy without music" rather than, as he put it, go "deep down into life and not care a damn."

No sex, no deaths, and no suffering—unless you count, for example, the pain inflicted on Alaric, duke of Dunstable, by the gardener's whistling on the grounds of Blandings Castle. In the Wodehousean paradise, the only references to violence are comic or biblical or both: "There's a boy," says Bertie of loathsome young Edwin, in *Joy in the Morning*, "who makes you feel that what this country wants is something like King Herod."

You could say that Wodehouse is the Mozart of light comedy, under whose influence humanity seems breezier, brighter, and better. Even in the case of Sir Roderick Spode, which is saying something. There were, however, areas of darkness that even Wodehouse could not dispel and could not ignore. I want to examine one moment when the mask slipped, the moment when we can glimpse the real Wodehouse. And when, perhaps Wodehouse himself caught sight of his inner self. This occurred when he was still living in Germany as the reluctant guest of the Nazis.

First, he did what he had rarely done before. He began to write about himself in the first person. At the end of World War II, with his disgrace still burning in his mind, Wodehouse began work on a memoir of his wartime experience.

But it was never published. Thelma Cazalet opposed it. His friends were queasy. Its fate remains a mystery. Bits of it were cannibalized and recycled, notably in *Performing Flea*. I believe that this lost memoir provides a vital clue to the tragedy of his wartime years, and also expresses his deep understanding of himself and his art—in code, of course.

To make this case, I want to begin by going back to Wodehouse himself, to explore the character of the artist as a man of letters. Unlike many great writers, he was not a truth-teller. It was always his first instinct to spread sweetness and light.

Consider, if you will, his autobiography, *Over Seventy*. It is—not to mince words—unreliable. I mean, let's look at the known facts of his early life.

Wodehouse was born near Guildford in 1881. As an infant, he was shipped out to Hong Kong to join his parents and brothers. Then, at the age of about three, he was steamered home to a country house near Bath, to be raised by nannies and aunts. Young Plum was sent away to his first boarding school when he was just six years of age. When he met his mother in England, for the first time, he'd had so little maternal attention that he didn't recognize her. In fact, according to his nephew, the late Patrick Wodehouse, Plum thought she was just another aunt.

As a teenager, he went to Dulwich, where he conceived an ambition to go to Oxford, in the footsteps of his elder brother Armine. A gifted scholar, there's no question he would have been accepted. But at the last minute he was told by his father that Oxford was out of the question (with the fall of the rupee, he couldn't afford it). Instead, young Wodehouse went to work at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.

But when he comes to address this in *Over Seventy*, what does he say about his early life and its disappointments? "The three essentials for an autobiography are that its author shall have had an eccentric father, a miserable misunderstood childhood, and a hell of a time at his public school. . . . I enjoyed none of these advantages."

He goes on: "My father was as normal as rice pudding. My childhood went like a breeze from start to finish. As for my school days at Dulwich, they were just six years of unbroken bliss."

Sometimes I think that Monty Python's "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" should be Wodehouse's theme song. His early life provides countless examples of his capacity to turn a blind eye to adversity, to think

alternative and distracting thoughts—and to place himself at the center of a pastoral fantasy.

Take, for instance, his response to the infamous trial of Oscar Wilde. This was sensationally heard at the Old Bailey in April and May 1895, when Wodehouse, now a Dulwich schoolboy, was a very impressionable thirteen years old. It is inconceivable that the boy did not read about it. The newspapers that splashed the trial were on sale at every railway station bookstall, and Wodehouse's boarding house was scarcely a quarter-mile from Dulwich station.

The case was reported in the most hysterical, lurid, and graphic terms, in the yellow press. Wilde's disgrace became a vicious public degradation: the utter annihilation of an artist of genius whose work Wodehouse must have known well.

I say that categorically because, just twenty years later, he quietly appropriated the dramatis personae from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and made them integral to his mature comic vision: Aunt Augusta (Lady Bracknell), her frivolous daughter (Gwendolyn), Wilde's silly young men (Jack and Algernon), their butler (Lane), and an absurd country parson (Canon Chasuble).

Borrowing from Wilde, Wodehouse proceeded to populate his stories with more innocent and less worldly versions of these magnificent comic archetypes. His aunts, in lineal descent from Lady Bracknell, became the epitome of ghastliness, like "mastodons bellowing across primeval swamps," according to Bertie. For him, Aunt Agatha becomes "the pest of Pont Street," with "an eye like a man-eating fish." Bertie says: "It is no use telling me that there are bad aunts and good aunts. At the core they are all alike. Sooner or later, out pops the cloven hoof."

Many of Wodehouse's girls were supreme examples of frivolity on the Wilde model. In *Galahad at Blandings*, Veronica is described as "just a sweet simple English girl, with about as much brain as would make a jay bird fly crooked." And then of course there's Madeline Bassett, who was definitely "the sort of girl who puts her hand over her husband's eyes, as he is crawling in to breakfast with a morning head, and says 'Guess who?'"

For Wodehouse's young men—as for Wilde's—love and its fateful corollary, marriage, are fearful prospects. "When it comes to love," says Sir Roderick Carmoyle, "there's a lot to be said for the 'à la carte' as opposed to the 'table d'hôte.'"

Wodehouse did not just borrow from Wilde, I believe he also learned from his example—indeed, from his dreadful fate. The lesson of Wilde's disgrace was clear: feelings could get you into trouble and intimacy was dangerous. It was safer to focus on romantic love for "the fair sex" in an abstract, almost medieval way. Thus, Wodehouse silently borrows Wilde's aunt, butlers, and Mayfair lounge lizards but pastoralizes them in his own lunatic Eden.

I think there's no doubt he had been shocked by the outcome of the Wilde case. *Fin de siècle* Victorian society's vengeance toward a homosexual Irish playwright was intentionally brutal. And Wodehouse never forgot it. Where he never failed to acknowledge his love of Gilbert & Sullivan, or make a funny story out of his awkward friendship with W. S. Gilbert, or report his admiration for Arthur Conan Doyle—you will search in vain for the faintest whisper of an allusion to Oscar Wilde or his work.

This, as Conan Doyle might have put it, is the dog that does not bark. Throughout his writing, Wodehouse will reference Shakespeare, Browning, Tennyson, Keats, and Shelley. He salutes "the inimitable" Dickens and the English classics. But Oscar Wilde's is the name he does not utter a single time.

The young man who attended the Savoy Operas open-mouthed with admiration, and who says he adored *Patience*, learned to police that sentiment. As a young literary lion, Wodehouse might occasionally have wondered about tripping down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in his medieval hand. But, after 1895, that avenue would be closed for ever. The Bunthorne Way was simply too dangerous.

Instead, he took up boxing.

As a mature writer, Wodehouse never risked any aesthetic diversions that did not involve work, work, and more work, subordinating any instincts for "greenery yallery" to the discipline of daily prose. He became, as he says in one of his letters, "a writing machine."

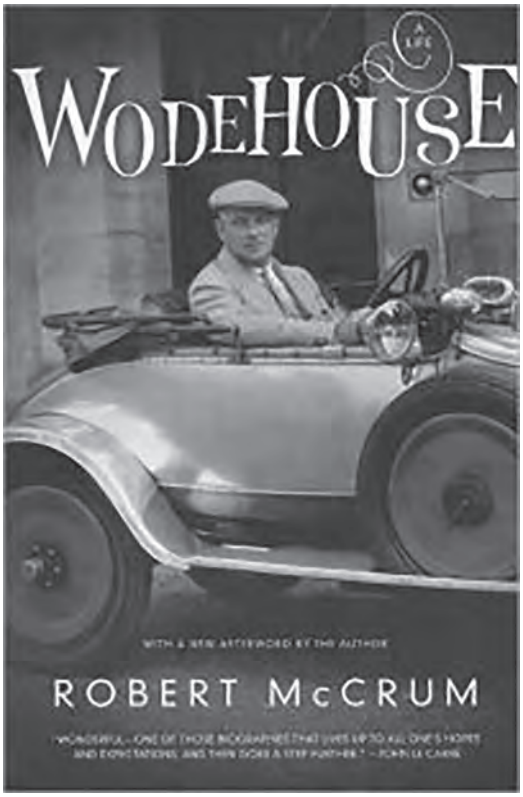
Wodehouse was, in fact, happiest in a kind of artistic solitary confinement. Solitude was safe; solitude could be secure. The worse the exterior world, the cozier was Wodehouse's inner life. That is why, I think, reflecting on his time in the internment camp at Tost, in Upper Silesia, he told a friend "Camp was really great fun." It's also why, in 1904, Wodehouse's show-stopping lyric for the West End musical *Sergeant Brue*, a highly Gilbertian number in which a stage villain celebrates the joys of the nick, was entitled "Put Me in My Little Cell."

It's in his songs, not his stories, that Wodehouse shows his feelings: his inner hurt, his sweet and sentimental melancholy. It's our good fortune, as his fans, that Wodehouse spent his adult life in the "little cell" of his imagination.

Later, in his sixties, writing about his life in wartime Berlin, he said: "It's extraordinarily hard to describe my

life there." He recognized the dark drama of his own story, but just could not relate to it. "I suppose," he goes on, "I was in the middle of all sorts of interesting things, but they didn't touch me. . . . I lived the life of a hermit, plugging away at my writing."

His wife, Ethel, whom he married at the outbreak of World War I, perfectly understood that he had to be left in a place more real to him than any fantasy, in which he could be happy and free.



Robert McCrum's Wodehouse: A Life*, still available at all the usual online outlets*

From 1914 to 1940, that's where he stayed, with hardly a break. The First World War, the stock-market crash, and the Great Depression followed in sequence. To the deepening darkness of these years, Wodehouse's response was *Right Ho, Jeeves*; *Money for Nothing*; *Summer Lightning*; *Heavy Weather*; *Hot Water*; *Laughing Gas*; *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*; and—the novel he wrote during the Phoney War of 1940—his masterpiece, *Joy in the Morning*. Every one of them, sweetness and light on a stick.

Until 1940, nurturing his inner self in this fantasy world, Wodehouse was artistically, personally, and psychologically semidetached. To his admirer, George Orwell, this was borderline irresponsible. But then the Second World War broke out.

In Britain, World War II is sometimes represented as an entertaining away match—a mixture of derring-do, boys' own adventure, and officer-class caper. Bestselling book titles tell that story: *Ill Met by Moonlight*, *Operation Mincemeat*, *The Dam Busters*, *The Wooden Horse*, *Appointment with Venus*, and *Agent Zig-Zag*. In fact, World War II was every bit as horrifying as the Great War. The Final Solution, Operation Barbarossa, the Fall of Singapore, Pearl Harbor, the War in the Pacific, the Blitz, the Katyn Massacre, the Battle of the Atlantic, and the D-Day landings match or exceed the atrocities from World War I.

Wodehouse had missed the Great War mainly because of his very poor eyesight and partly because he happened to be getting married in New York City, living a bagel's throw from Wooster Street, and writing the first Jeeves stories. No one, including Wodehouse himself, seemed to want him to come home and fight.

As he said later, "I never was interested in politics. I'm quite unable to work up any kind of belligerent feeling. Just as I'm about to feel belligerent about some country, I meet a decent sort of chap. We go out together, and I lose any fighting thoughts or feelings."

And yet, from 1940 onwards, Wodehouse encountered an awful lot of belligerency. To put that another way, he copped the Second World War with a vengeance. Few civilian Britons endured the trauma and horrors of the European conflict as he did.

In May 1940, as a bystander to the disaster of Dunkirk, he witnessed the fall of France from his villa in Le Touquet. Two months later, after a terrifying ordeal, he was interned in Poland, in a converted asylum some thirty miles from Auschwitz, which was under construction as a Nazi death camp. Released from internment in 1941, he went to live in Berlin, where he suffered Allied bombing and endured the "global howl" about those infamous broadcasts. To escape from the destruction of Berlin, he fled to Paris in 1943, where, among other torments, he was arrested, interrogated, and (again) imprisoned, this time in a maternity hospital.

In 1944, very hungry and now almost destitute, living on bread and jam, with occasional tots of gin, he witnessed the liberation of Paris and saw a woman killed in fierce street fighting. In September 1944, he was told, apparently without warning, that his beloved daughter, Leonora, had died in May during a routine operation in a London nursing home. (His response to this news, perhaps the most moving and brilliant sentence he ever uttered, was simply, "I thought she was immortal.") Soon after this—under threat of the death sentence as a possible traitor—he was interrogated by MI5. Finally, in 1947, he and Ethel packed up their possessions and sailed to the United States.

Among the unpublished typescripts in his cabin trunk were several stories, two novels (*Full Moon* and *Spring Fever*), plus the book of war memoirs I've already referred to. And now—this is the crucial bit—what does he call his memoir of these terrible years?

Wodehouse in Wonderland.

Here, I submit, is a man, a writer, and a great humorist, with a unique compulsion to pacify the pain of everyday life by living in the Elysium of his imagination. Confronted by the trials of wartime, he simply stayed in character, taking refuge in his own familiar world.

The great French writer Montaigne once said: "We laugh and cry for the same thing." Wodehouse went further than Montaigne. Defying gravity, and ignoring tears, he looked for laughter in everything, and usually found it.

In wartime Paris, suffering every kind of deprivation, he would joke that he had begun his war in a lunatic asylum and ended it in a maternity ward. That, he said, marked some kind of progress. It's also some kind of defense mechanism, which goes to the heart of who he really was.

Wodehouse in Wonderland was never published—and a good thing, too. When I was writing my life of Wodehouse, I unearthed in New York's Berg Collection an unpublished fragment from the book, entitled "Apologia." The tone is light, detached, and self-mocking, but its subject is deadly serious.

When the news came, in May 1940, of the imminent arrival of the Nazi *Wehrmacht*, Wodehouse tells us that he did not take up arms or try to organize a daring escape. No, he went shopping for vegetables in Le Touquet. Setting off for the farmers market in a van with his favorite Pekingese and the Wodehouse family parrot, he and Ethel ran straight into a German patrol.

It must have been a terrifying moment. The Germans were being threatened with air attack from the RAF. An Englishman, even an elderly Englishman with a parrot, could have been arrested or shot. In any event, almost the only violence came from the parrot, which gave the German officer who searched the Wodehouse van an angry nip.

Almost but not quite. The officer had yet to meet Wonder, the Pekingese. There was a sharp, indignant yap, then the cry of a strong man in agony, and the lieutenant staggered back, sucking his hand. "There, for a while, the matter rested," writes Wodehouse, as light and insouciant as ever.

"What would have been the upshot," he continues, "had the lieutenant been at liberty to go into the thing, one cannot say. He had the air of a man who was about to call for hollow squares and firing squads." Who else but Wodehouse could make light of summary execution? He goes on, "At this moment there came a droning overhead, and the company vanished into a thicket at the side of the road, like eels into mud. Some British aeroplanes were circling over us."

"Like eels into mud"—it's a brilliant image. How many of us, surrounded by the victorious German army, would have found such an inspired comic simile? "It was a tense situation," is all that Wodehouse will concede. "Presently," he went on, "the planes moved away, and the troops emerged, dusting their uniforms and trying to look as if they had gone into the thicket merely to see if they could find mushrooms."

And what of the dog? Wodehouse never forgets the dog. "Wonder," he writes, had "the light of battle in her eyes, and she was swearing softly to herself in Chinese." Such profound, vivid, and intense unreality is surely the very definition of Wonderland.

Wonderland, where Wodehouse knew he was safest, was his default position, the place where his art flourished. It had become part of his unconscious. If you read *Money in the Bank*, written in the internment camp at Tost, a book whose daily progress became an item of camp gossip, you will look in vain for the slightest allusion to his predicament. It is as though the war has simply passed him by. Even the England that it purports to describe is already extinct. The same farcical unreality afflicts *Full Moon*, the novel he wrote in Nazi Berlin, about Lord Emsworth and his wastrel son Freddie.

But Wonderland, which had sustained him for so long, could also let him down. Tragically, it was also the place in which he chose to set his response to his experience of Nazi Germany. Long before his Berlin broadcasts, he wrote a piece about his involuntary detention in Tost entitled "Whither Wodehouse?" (later published as "My War with Germany"). Here are his opening lines: "Since July 21, 1940, I have been the guest of the German Government at a series of their justly popular internment camps—remind me to tell you sometime of the week I spent in Loos prison—Oh, baby!" Then he describes life in occupied Poland with his now celebrated line, "If this is Upper Silesia, what must Lower Silesia be like?"

This was the Wonderland tone that Wodehouse adopted for his notorious broadcasts. For example, his account of the German invasion of France bore scant relation to the facts, but they completely expressed his reflexive attitude to a life-threatening situation:

"I was strolling on the lawn with my wife one morning," he writes, "when she lowered her voice and

said, 'Don't look now, but there comes the German army.' And there they were, a fine body of men, rather prettily dressed in green, carrying machine-guns."

As a private survival mechanism, Wonderland suited Wodehouse perfectly. As public relations, it was a disaster. And yet, deep down, it was also a surprisingly candid admission of weakness, a recognition that he was not as others are. I believe Wodehouse understood himself far better than perhaps we realize.

In his own limited way, he was being confessional. In the aftermath of the Wilde case, his strategy had been one of Bertie's favorite maneuvers—"stout denial." In 1945, after the "global howl," he had to recognize he was implicated. Typically, he referenced *Alice in Wonderland*, a childhood favorite, to normalize a highly disturbing experience.

I also think he chose to call his memoir *Wodehouse in Wonderland* to explain, and perhaps excuse, his detachment. What he never understood—how could he?—was that his audience no longer had the appetite for any kind of Wonderland. Mercifully, the memoir never came out.

I believe that he spent the rest of his life, 1947 to 1975, in a state of chronic regret, puzzling over his disgrace. And never once did he leave the Wonderland of his fiction. This is a vital part of the explanation for his late works.

From *Pigs Have Wings* (published in 1952) to *Service with a Smile* (1961) to *Do Butlers Burgle Banks*? (1968) to *Sunset at Blandings* (published posthumously), he never strayed far from the world he had created in his head. Every one of these, and many more, was written about, and located in, Wonderland.

Here, Bertie is always in his twenties; the Eggs, Beans, and Crumpets prop up the bar of the Drones Club; and Jeeves (inscrutable as ever) sorts out his young master's indiscretions like, says Wodehouse, "the High Priest of some refined and dignified religion." Wonderland was safe.

In the lives of most great writers, there usually are distinct phases of significant artistic development. Not with Wodehouse. After his Edwardian school stories, literary carbon-dating doesn't work with him. You can open a Jeeves story or a novel published in 1920 or 1930 or 1960. It will be virtually indistinguishable from its predecessors. Careful students of his work can detect small changes, but in most important respects, it is a work preserved in amber.

That, of course, is the secret of its longevity as a classic. Set in a timeless world—half fact, half fantasy—it is expressed in an airy, dateless prose that, as Evelyn Waugh so famously said, will "never stale." Part of Wodehouse's genius was to know his limits, and to work as a miniaturist—in his Wonderland—drawing on the antics of a near-contemporary world. So he placed his drones, dukes, and valets in a recently vanished society, whose reality was transformed by his remarkable powers of imagination into something timeless and enduring.

Another secret of that permanence lies in Wodehouse's surreptitious elegy for his country. Behind the clubland mayhem and the manor-house weekends is an addictive sweet nostalgia for an England of innocent laughter and song that had gone the way of Nineveh and Tyre.

To describe his appalling experiences in World War II as a trip to Wonderland was to invite his readers to suspend disbelief and step into that imaginative world, a place where time stood still. Wodehouse's tragedy was that, for once, the magic of Wonderland was no longer enchanting.

Today, however, more than seventy years after his disgrace, we love his characters not because we believe they are true to life, but because we know they are not. While still in Germany, Wodehouse wondered whether "the kind of people and the kind of England I write about will live after the war." They did not, of course, but that never stopped him writing about them. To sponsor joy and happiness through innocence and the English language at its sweetest is Wodehouse's unique triumph.

His comic genius remains almost impossible to define—lighter than air, more intoxicating than laughing gas. Appropriating Sean O'Casey's wartime gibe, he was content to identify himself as "English literature's performing flea."

Note that he could make a joke of being a flea, but he was deadly serious about the business of being funny. I think he worked harder at defying gravity than any writer. He always saw himself as first and foremost an artist. His so-called "nifties" were the niftiest. But they were the grace notes to the big score. It's always tempting to quote his quotable lines—thousands of us have, and will continue to do so.

But let's not lose sight of the bigger artistic arena he saw himself at work in. For him, the place called Wonderland is never a nonsense landscape. It's a place of greater safety: Wodehouse's Wonderland.

> "An absolute wash-out, that's what life is. However, it will soon be over. And then the silence and peace of the grave. That," said Frederick, "is the thought that sustains me."
>
> "Portrait of a Disciplinarian" (1927)

Treasurer's Report for 2015

BY KRIS FOWLER

Balance as of December 31, 2014	**$35,258.49**
Income:	
Membership dues[1]	$12,826.09
2015 Convention income[2]	$37,584.46
Drones Club ties	$336.00
Donations	$150.00
Interest	$4.50
Total Income	**$50,901.05**
Expenses:	
Plum Lines production and mailing	$13,258.73
2013 convention surplus to dues holiday	$3,000.00
2015 convention general expenses	$47,203.58
Correspondence, supplies, other	$39.50
Total Expenses	**$63,501.81**
Total Balance as of December 31, 2015:	**$22,657.73**
TWS Convention Reserve Fund[3]:	
Balance as of December 31, 2014	$20,790.62
2013 convention surplus to dues holiday	$3,000.00
2015 convention subsidy	$9,129.75
Balance as of December 31, 2015	***$8,660.87***

[1]*Including $3,000 from the Convention Reserve Fund for dues holiday for 2013 convention attendees.*
[2]*Registration, rummage, auction, etc.*
[3]*Included in the Total Balance.*

Some sort of female with plucked eyebrows and a painted face had just come in, and she might have been put there expressly for purposes of comparison. She made Pat seem so healthy, so wholesome, such a thing of the open air and the clean sunshine, so pre-eminently fit. She looked as if she had spent her time at Le Touquet playing thirty-six holes of golf a day.

Money for Nothing (1928)

Ohio Light Opera's *Have a Heart*

FROM HOLLY SCHWARTZ (aka Lady on the Train): For the third summer in a row, the Ohio Light Opera will offer a Wodehouse musical. This year's production will be the Bolton/Wodehouse/Kern show *Have a Heart* from 1917. Debuting on July 7, it will appear seven times through August 12, in repertoire with classic operettas—Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne* and Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado*—and a few musicals.

The Ohio Light Opera is located in Wooster, Ohio, at the College of Wooster. For more information, or to reserve tickets, email them at ohiolightopera@wooster.edu; call them at 330-263-2345 (Box Office) or 330-263-2329 (Group Sales); write to them at The Ohio Light Opera, 1189 Beall Ave, Wooster, OH 44691; or go to the website at http://ohiolightopera.org/.

We saw OLO's 2014 production of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* and their version of *Oh, Kay!* in 2015, and enjoyed both very much. We thought all members of TWS would like to know about this upcoming production, and we hope to see you in Wooster!

The P G Wodehouse Society (Pakistan)

A NEW ENCLAVE of Wodehouseans is always occasion for cheer, and we hereby announce a new and exciting Pakistani society.

Maheen Pracha is the contact for the new group—The P G Wodehouse Society (Pakistan). According to the society, the group owes its conception to "the grand Norman Murphy" who crossed paths with the founder twenty years ago at a U.K. society meeting at the Savage Club.

The new society operates out of a bookstore in Lahore, Pakistan. You may contact them by writing to The P G Wodehouse Society (Pakistan) c/o The Last Word, 37-A2 Mian Mehmood Kasuri Road Gulberg III, Lahore, Pakistan. Or you can email pgwodehousesoc@gmail.com. Their first gathering was to have been on January 23 at the Last Word Bookstore.

Sir Terry Wogan 1938–2016

Sir Terry and Helen Wogan

Veteran BBC broadcaster Sir Terry Wogan died on January 31 at the age of 77. Terry was the president of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK), having succeeded actor Richard Briers in that position.

Sir Terry had a fifty-year career on radio and television. He was the host of *Wake up to Wogan* on BBC Radio 2 and of the *Wogan* chat show on BBC1 television. He was the voice of Eurovision in the U.K. for many years and had been involved in the Children in Need appeal since it began in 1980. Sir Terry built up a large fanbase and dubbed his audience the TOGs, which stood for Terry's Old Geezers and Gals.

BBC director general Tony Hall said, "Terry truly was a national treasure. His warmth, wit, and geniality meant that for millions he was a part of the family." Sir Terry is survived by his wife, Helen, and their three children.

Prime Minister David Cameron wrote on Twitter: "Britain has lost a huge talent—someone millions came to feel was their own special friend." President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins said that Sir Terry was "always proud of his origins in Limerick, [and] he made many returns to his native country for television and radio projects."

Sir Terry and Helen converse with Prince Charles.

> She was standing in the road, her head still covered with that white, filmy something which had commended itself to Mr. Pickering's eyes. She was looking at him in a way that seemed somehow to strike a note of appeal. She conveyed an atmosphere of softness and repentance, a general suggestion of prodigal daughters revisiting old homesteads.
>
> *Uneasy Money* (1916)

Who Was that Mysterious Conventioneer?

In our four-page, full-color picture section in the convention issue (Winter 2015 *Plum Lines*), we were unable to identify Susan Bellamore's cheery companion in the photograph below. Susan identified the lady on the left as Peggy Thompson of Vancouver and Thetis Island.

Susan also pointed out that her own costume is actually a Pierrot, about which your humble editor had made an inaccurate "clowning around" comment in the original caption. For the edification of those who are unfamiliar, Susan reminded us that, in *Right Ho, Jeeves,* Jeeves has Gussie dress in a Mephistopheles costume. Bertie is horrified and remarks that the only suitable fancy dress costume for a well-bred Englishman is a Pierrot. When Gussie later comes to grief, having gone to his party without the invitation/address, his wallet, or his key, Bertie sternly remarks that a Pierrot has a pocket.

Susan made the costume herself—with pocket, of course—and wore it with her official Drones club bowtie. She also made the pompoms in the official Drones Club colors.

The only thing that remains is to congratulate Susan for her faithfulness to the canon in her costuming!

Peggy Thompson and Susan Bellamore at the Pseattle convention

George Ade, an Early Influence on P. G. Wodehouse

by Karen Shotting

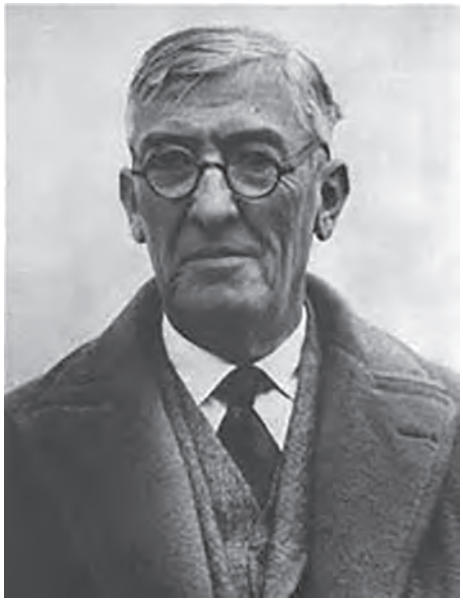
We've had bits about George Ade in these pages in the past, including Dan Cohen's "Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse" in Vol. 25, No. 3, and in William (Tom) Thomas's "Wodehouse Tips His Hat" in Vol. 33, No. 3. But Karen's research breaks new ground, and deserves your undivided attention!

One hundred years ago, P. G. Wodehouse observed, "George Ade is the greatest American humorist, I suppose."[1] That same year, no less a personage than Sir Walter Raleigh (Oxford professor of English Literature from 1904 to 1922, not the Elizabethan courtier/explorer) called Ade "the greatest living American writer."[2] Ade's admirers also included American humorists Jean Shepherd and S. J. Perelman, the latter of whom expressed the opinion that "Ade was undoubtedly one of the greatest humorists, if not the most outstanding humorist, America has yet come up with."[3] The now-almost-forgotten but oh-so-brilliant George Ade was one of the most successful authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In *Not George Washington* (1907), "the book that is so near autobiography that it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction,"[4] Cloyster (Wodehouse) states that he knows Ade's *Fables* "nearly by heart." If the above accolades are not sufficient, Cloyster's statement should lead Wodehouse fans to examine this author. A close reading of Ade is a lot of fun; a side benefit is that it reveals that Plum did, in fact, know Ade's fables pretty well. Wodehouse's stories are a treasure trove of literary quotes (direct, varied, and mangled) from a wide variety of authors, and identifying them is, for many of us, part of the fun of reading him. Below are just a few of the instances that I've identified where Wodehouse has mixed Ade's deft use of language with his own. (Note that the Capital Letters, a signature Ade device, are as in the original.)

Love Among the Chickens is a good starting point because Wodehouse mentions Ade in the novel itself. He also mentioned Ade in his notebooks, where, under the heading "Sunshine and Chickens," he jotted down, "Head Chapter One (?) with George Ade's sentence about the author sitting and trying to turn out any old thing."[5] The allusion is to "The Fable of the Author Who Was Sorry for What He Did to Willie"[6]:

> An Author was sitting at his Desk trying to pull himself together and grind out Any Old Thing that could be converted into Breakfast Food. It was his Off Day, however. His Brain felt as if someone had played a Mean Trick on him and substituted a Side-Order of Cauliflower.



George Ade

Wodehouse didn't use the "any old thing" sentence as a chapter header, but he does use quotes from this passage in various ways and in various versions of the story. Ade's influence can be seen in the first chapter of the first U.S. edition (1909): Wodehouse's author character, Jeremy Garnet, "was a conscientious young man, and he knew that he ought to sit down and do some work. On the other hand, his brain felt like a cauliflower, and he could not think what to write about." "Any old thing" does not make an appearance until chapter 12 of the original (1906) U.K. version of the story, when Garnet recounts the sequence of events that led up to his inclusion in Ukridge's chicken venture: ". . . like Mr. George Ade's fable of the author. An author—myself—was sitting at his desk trying to turn out any old thing that could be converted into breakfast-food . . ." (In the 1909 U.S. edition and the 1921 rewrite, Wodehouse changed "any old thing" to "something." The serialized version in *Circle* magazine in 1908–09 omitted the sentence altogether.) In chapter 16, Garnet again has trouble working on his novel. "It refused to materialize. I felt, like the man in the fable, as if someone had played a mean trick on me, and substituted for my brain a side order of cauliflower." (This is as it was in both the 1906 and 1909 versions; both the *Circle* serial and the 1921 revision omit the sentence.)

Wodehouse indirectly alludes to Ade one other time, in *Mike* (1909, later published in two parts as *Mike at Wrykyn* and *Mike and Psmith*). The source was, once again, the fable quoted above. Towards the end of *Mike*, when Mr. Downing is reeling from a series of abrupt turnings of events, he feels "that somebody, in the words of an American author, had played a mean trick on him, and substituted for his brain a side-order of cauliflower." (Thank you, Neil Midkiff, for identifying George Ade as the "American author" of this wonderfully crafted phrase and thus introducing me to Ade's fables.)

At that time, Ade was at the height of his fame and popularity. His fables had been published on both sides of the Atlantic and Plum was not alone in his enjoyment. "The Savage Club for a number of years followed a plan of having one of the actor members recite a Fable from memory when a visiting American was a guest of honor."[7]

Ade was an accomplished wordsmith whose language took the sort of unexpected turns that make Wodehouse's style so enjoyable. Both were adept users of vernacular, simile, metaphor, and syllepsis. This last is a rhetorical device "in which a word relates to two others but in a different sense to each." (Norman Murphy's definition cites Sam Marlowe in *The Girl on the Boat*—"full of optimism and cold beef"—and Lancelot Mulliner, who is "carried away by ginger-beer and original sin."[8]) Two adept uses of the device by George Ade occur in "The New Fable of the Search for Climate"[9] where a character is "Enlivened by Hope and a few Dry Martinis" and "would be craving only some cold Carbonic and a few Kind Words."

Ade's life and Wodehouse's had some parallels. Both worked as columnists for daily newspapers early in their careers, producing columns six days a week for over five years. Both were enormously successful writers, Broadway playwrights, and lyricists.[10] Both had short and unsatisfying associations with Hollywood. Both took up golf and wrote comic stories about the game. They both wrote for what Ade called the "family trade" and "used no word or phrase which might give offense to mother and the girls or a professor of English." Ade, by the way, also liked Wodehouse; in a letter to Damon Runyon, Ade listed P. G. Wodehouse as one of his preferred authors.[11]

Ade's biographers describe "the skill with which he made simple words turn up unexpectedly." Booth Tarkington, a friend and fellow Hoosier, said of him, "Natively he had the gift of the 'light touch' in writing; and more, he had his native kindliness."[12] "The charm of George Ade lies in his good-natured contemplation of our species, which he delineates, not with malice or with condescension, but with the gusty enjoyment of a spectator entertained by a continuous variety show."[13] Ade "made his readers wish they had made [his] remarks, and they often paid him the compliment of appropriating his statements."[14]

Wodehouse's Mulliner story "Portrait of a Disciplinarian"[15] contains a good example of his paying Ade such a compliment. In "The New Fable of the Father Who Jumped In,"[16] a young lady has made some discoveries about her chosen young man, including his way of imbibing the morning beverage:

> He made a funny noise with his Adam's Apple when drinking Hot Coffee. . . . [E]very time [he] lifted the Cup . . . she would grip the Table Cloth with both Hands, and whisper to herself, "Now we get the Funny Noise."

In Wodehouse's story, Jane Oliphant explains to Frederick Mulliner why her engagement to Dillingwater has been terminated:

> I found out that he had a trick of making a sort of funny noise when he drank coffee. I would sit on the other side of the breakfast table, looking at him and saying to myself, "Now comes the funny noise!"

Ade's fable focuses solely on Father's tactics in separating his daughter from "an insect too large to be treated with Powder." Wodehouse's short story is about bringing two sundered hearts back together, with the above vignette being a very small part of the story.

Another example of Ade's influence appeared in "The Fable of the Regular Customer and the Copper-Lined Entertainer"[17]:

> An inoffensive Person . . . had slipped in to get a Rhine Wine and Seltzer, and was pronging about Forty Cents' Worth of Lunch.

Miss Winch in *The Adventures of Sally*[18] uses the nearly the same expression:

> I'm sitting peacefully in my room at the hotel in Chicago, pronging a few cents' worth of scrambled eggs and reading the morning paper.

In "Jeeves and the Impending Doom,"[19] Bertie Wooster tells us that Jeeves "uncovered the fragrant eggs and b., and I pronged a moody forkful." Likewise, Sir Roderick Glossop, in "The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy,"[20]

after ingesting the "singularly toothsome" chicken, indicated his approbation by "pronging another half ounce." In "Jeeves and the Kid Clementina,"[21] Bertie sees nothing sinister in the simple pronging of a spot of dinner with Bobbie Wickham.

For me, reading George Ade is like finding an old friend. In "The New Fable of the Intermittent Fusser"[22] there's a gangly young man: "Every time he sauntered carelessly across the porch at a Summer Hotel, he gave a correct Imitation of a troop of Cavalry going over a Wooden Bridge at full Gallop." Does this remind anyone else of Wodehouse's memorable description of Honoria Glossop's laugh, which "sounded like a squadron of cavalry charging across a tin bridge"?[23]

The frisson of recognition happens often when reading Ade, and a favorite of mine occurred when I read "The Fable of the Man Who Didn't Care for Story-Books."[24] In this fable, Ade describes a Dyspeptic who disgustedly lists every type of book there is, including "the dull, gray Book . . . Nothing happens until Page 150. Then John decides to sell the Cow." Given the Wodehouse Touch, we have a superb summary of the writing style of the ever-so-modest Russian novelist, Vladimir Brusiloff. In "The Clicking of Cuthbert,"[25] we have PGW's masterful:

> Vladimir specialized in grey studies of hopeless misery, where nothing happened till page three hundred and eighty, when the moujik decided to commit suicide.

Reading Ade also cleared up a mystery for me. I have often wondered where PGW came up with the word "buzzer" to describe a young man who has a ready flow of talk and ease of manner with the opposite sex. Richard Usborne and David Jasen claim that Wodehouse coined the term for *Money in the Bank*.[26] Neil Midkiff, however, noted some years ago that PGW's first use of the term was in "Love Me, Love My Dog"[27] in 1910.[28] I believe we are, once again, seeing George Ade's influence here—he used it in one of his fables in 1902.

Ade first presented us with a buzzer in "The Fable of the Long-Range Lover, the Lollypaloozer and the Line of Talk."[29] The Long-Range Lover is a rising young lawyer who sees the Lollypaloozer from afar, but is tongue-tied in her presence. He then meets "Mr. Buzzer, the moving Graphophone and He-Vampire." The lawyer is appalled to find that the "unspeakable Buzzer" is familiar enough with the Lollypaloozer to give her the line of talk. This was Ade's first use of "buzzer," but he had already used "buzz" in a similar way in 1899 in "The Fable of the Two Mandolin Players and the Willing Performer."[30] Gus, the Willing Performer, saw Myrtle and felt that "she Suited him from the Ground up."

> As soon as he had been Presented, Gus showed her where to sit on the Sofa, then he placed himself about Six Inches away and began to Buzz, looking her straight in the Eye.

Gus gets the girl. They are married in the autumn, and the Father-in-Law takes Gus into the firm, saying that he has needed a good pusher for a long time.

This one is interesting because it resembles (in reverse) Jeff Miller's situation at the beginning of *Money in the Bank*.[31] Jeff has found himself unwittingly betrothed to Myrtle, the boss's daughter who does not suit him at all. He is in this position because he was a buzzer who "found himself backing the prettiest girl present into a corner and starting to buzz at her." Jeff wants out of both the firm and the engagement and manages it all in one fell blow, with what is probably one of the most singularly inept cross-examinations ever seen at the King's Bench.

Shockingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, generally an excellent source for determining the earliest use of a word,[32] has not seen fit to include an entry for "buzzer," at least not in the sense used by Wodehouse and Ade, both of whom are cited a fair number of times in this magnificent work. The closest it comes is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, IV.v.88, "Her brother . . . wants not Buzzers to infect his eare with pestilent speeches of his Father's death."

The *OED* does credit Ade as the originator of a couple of items that Wodehouse liked, including one which Ade used in the fable about the sorrowing author and Willie. In that fable the author's troubles begin when, in a fit of pique at the non-functioning cauliflower that has been substituted for his brain, he scribbles out an awful, syrupy poem about the fictitious and ultimately doomed Willie. ("He had to commit Infanticide to make it Weepy enough for the last Stanza.") He "wrote this Stuff merely to Get Back at himself and see how Sloppy he could be. So he tossed the Idle Product into the Waste Basket and wondered if he was beginning to lose his Mind. With that Poem in his Right Hand he could have walked into Bloomingdale and no Questions Asked."

PGW used "nut-factory" rather than the American insane asylum Bloomingdale in "Concealed Art"[33]:

> I could see that a man who would disgorge two thousand of the best o'goblins for Archie's Futurist masterpiece might very well step

> straight into the nut-factory, and no questions asked. ["*O'goblins" is Cockney rhyming slang for sovereigns—British pounds.*]

A variation on the quote appears in *The Adventures of Sally* when Miss Winch says to her fiancé, Sally's brother, "Fillmore, darling, . . . on present form you could just walk straight into Bloomingdale and they'd give you the royal suite."

The *OED* also credits Ade with the first use of "pie-eyed," one of Wodehouse's colorful "upper-class synonyms"[34] for drunkenness. It seems to have made its way across the Atlantic and up the social scale via George Ade. In "The Fable of What Horace Stood For in Order to Land the Queen"[35]:

> They put him down at a Table and sat around him and inhaled the Scotch until they were all Pie-Eyed.

Wodehouse is also credited for the use of the expression in 1924 and 1932 in *Ukridge* and *Hot Water*, but I think the People's Choice is probably from *Right Ho, Jeeves* (ch. 17):

> It just shows what any member of Parliament will tell you, that if you want real oratory, the preliminary noggin is essential. Unless pie-eyed, you cannot hope to grip.

I'll leave you with one final item, from Wodehouse's 1971 novel *Much Obliged, Jeeves/Jeeves and the Tie That Binds*, chapter 13. Ginger Winship, after realizing that his true love is Magnolia Glendennon rather than Florence Craye, tells Bertie Wooster, "Where one goes wrong when looking for the ideal girl is in making one's selection before walking the full length of the counter." Compare Ade's "The Fable of Eugene Who Walked the Length of the Counter Before Making His Selection."[36]

When Wodehouse was in his late eighties, Herbert Warren Wind interviewed him in his home in Remsenberg, and noted that PGW had the books of his favorite authors lining the walls adjacent to his own ninety-odd books. Among the favorites were nine books by George Ade.[37] I'm not at all surprised that he still kept Ade's books close at hand. I imagine he was still chuckling over them to the very end of his long life.

Endnotes

[1] *New York Times Magazine,* November 7, 1915, p. 13.
[2] *George Ade*, Lee Coyle, Twayne Publishers, Inc. (1964), p. 7.
[3] *The America of George Ade*, ed. Jean Shepherd, G. P. Putnam's Sons (1960), p. 7.
[4] *A Wodehouse Handbook: The World and Words of P. G. Wodehouse*, N. T. P. Murphy, Sybertooth (2014), vol. 1, p. 66.
[5] *Phrases and Notes: P. G. Wodehouse's Notebooks, 1902–1905*, transcribed and annotated by N. T. P. Murphy, Popgood and Groolley (2014), p. 97.
[6] *More Fables*, George Ade, Herbert S. Stone & Co. (1900), p. 205.
[7] *George Ade*, *Warmhearted Satirist*, Fred C. Kelly, The Bobbs-Merrill Company (1947), p. 197n.
[8] *Handbook*, volume 2, p. 410–11.
[9] *Ade's Fables*, George Ade, Doubleday, Page & Co. (1914), p. 71.
[10] In 2004, Dan Cohen wrote an article about George Ade in *Plum Lines*, volume 25, number 3. In his article you will find additional information about Ade, his background, his fables, and his Broadway career, noting in particular that it was Ade who wrote the play *The College Widow*, on which the Wodehouse–Bolton–Kern musical *Leave It to Jane* was based. This volume of *Plum Lines* is easily accessible at http://wodehouse.org/ by clicking on the "Plum Lines" tab and the link "Plum Lines Archive."
[11] *The Letters of George Ade*, ed. Terence Tobin, Purdue University Studies (1973), p. 15 (quoted phrases) and p. 180 (letter to Runyon).
[12] *The Permanent Ade: The Living Writings of George Ade*, ed. Fred C. Kelly, The Bobbs-Merrill Company (1947), Introduction.
[13] *Letters*, foreword by Paul Fatout, professor emeritus of English, Purdue University, p. x.
[14] *Letters*, introduction by Tobin, p. 2.
[15] *Liberty* magazine, September 24, 1927.
[16] *Ade's Fables*, pp. 94–95.
[17] *More Fables*, p. 163.
[18] *Collier's Weekly*, November 19, 1921.
[19] *Strand Magazine*, December 1926.
[20] *Saturday Evening Post*, September 27, 1924.
[21] *Strand Magazine*, January 1930.
[22] *Ade's Fables*, p. 45.
[23] "The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 27, 1924.
[24] *Fables in Slang*, George Ade, Herbert S. Stone & Co. (1899), p. 195.
[25] *The Strand Magazine*, October 1921.
[26] See Terry Mordue's annotation of *Money in the Bank* at the Madame Eulalie website (http://madameulalie.org/tmordue/pgwbooks/pgwmitb1.html).
[27] *Strand Magazine*, August 1910, and as "The Watch Dog" in *Hampton's*, July 1910.

[28] http://home.earthlink.net/~nmidkiff/pgw/story.html
[29] *The Girl Proposition*, George Ade, Harper & Brothers (1902), p. 9.
[30] *Fables in Slang*, p. 190. (The two players are named Fred and Eustace, precursors to Claude and Eustace?)
[31] *Money in the Bank* was written while Wodehouse was interned at Tost, where he did not have any of his usual reference works (other than the *Complete Works of Shakespeare*). Lacking those aids to composition, Wodehouse appears to have dredged up from his memory a theme from an Ade story, an early favorite that he likely knew by heart.
[32] See *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of The Oxford English Dictionary*, Simon Winchester, Harper Collins (1998).
[33] *Strand Magazine*, February 1915.
[34] *Handbook*, vol. 2, p. 139, 336.
[35] *Washington Post*, January 18, 1903, and *True Bills*, George Ade, Harper and Brothers (1904), p. 41.
[36] *The Girl Proposition*, p. 134.
[37] *The World of P. G. Wodehouse*, Herbert Warren Wind, Praeger Publishers (1972), p. 83.

Jeeves Intervenes in Asheville

by Ken Clevenger

The NCStage Company presented Margaret Raether's adaptation of some of P. G. Wodehouse's stories in Asheville in late January and most of February 2016. It was admirably done.

The adaptation is a superb crafting of a Wodehousian plot that plays on stage like a French farce and showcases many classic Wodehouse nifties. *Jeeves Intervenes* is one of several Wodehouse adaptations by Ms. Raether and seeing it makes one wish some enterprising theater would do the cycle. The play made for a charming evening of theater.

NCStage, a very intimate theater, set up a beautiful Mayfair flat that was perfect for the ensuing physical comedy and sparkling conversation. The costumes were apt and elegant with one odd note of the Drone character wearing white spats for a planned evening indoors. It conveyed Edwardian "dude" or clubman but he wasn't going out so it seemed a bit out of place.

The backstage wall had a highly functional set of three doors for the oh-so-timely exits and entrances needed to carry the fast-paced action of the farcical story line. A soup tureen added the final touch of farce and an extra soupçon of humor.

All the actors were quite convincing. Jeeves, played by Michael MacCauley, was quiet, dignified, and omniscient. He was simply masterful. Ms. Callan White was Aunt Agatha with a right-to-the-very-edge-but-not-over-the-top grand-dame manner; she played it with flair. Obviously she is the master of the old iron whatsit in the velvet thingamajig wheeze. Charlie Flynn-McIver as Eustace Bassington-Bassington was equally convincing as the tongue-tied Drone in love at first sight and as an Oxford alum who could be a Nietzsche-spouting swain feverishly intent on winning the target of his wooing.

I'll be a touch critical of one item. While the silly (albeit very English) pronunciation of proper names was a running gag, having different pronunciations for each "Bassington" was not very successful as humor.

The role of the girl, Gertrude, was executed delightfully by Lauren Fortuna as a classic Wodehouse Girton-girl determined to mold her man, be he Bertie or "Bassy." John Hall, the uncle, a knighted colonel and classic clay-footed Wodehousian heavy, was perfectly cast. I kept hoping that somehow the story would allow him to morph into Roderick Spode or Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, although Mr. Hall is more the build of a retired, once-fit colonel than a fat pig breeder.

Scott Treadway as Bertie was certainly the star. He had superb timing, physicality, and facial expressions, and he conveyed a general sense of kindly twitdom. Two very minor quibbles: Bertie wore glasses. Maybe Mr. Treadway needed to do so, but it jarred a bit. And in one scene, doubtless intended to ironically display Bertie's completely unconscious self-assurance, he trimmed a toenail in the drawing room. Even alone, that is just not what a gentleman like Bertram Wooster would do.

Quibbles aside, the cast was uniformly wonderful. Ms. Fortuna's walking pace changed when under Aunt Agatha's command, and this perfectly expressed the essence of both characters in one memorable scene. Mr. Treadway's physical humor was terrific, whether facing down Jeeves (briefly!), hiding behind the sofa, or dealing with the overbearing uncle and knuckling under to Aunt Agatha. He made the visual character of Bertie come alive in Ms. Raether's adaptation—almost as magically as in Plum's words.

TWS supplied its trifold brochures for the Asheville theater-going public to peruse. Clearly, the audience enjoyed the jokes and the Wodehouse-infused ambiance of the play.

Chapters Corner

What is your chapter up to these days? We welcome you to use this column to tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities. Chapter representatives, please send all info to the editor and O.M., Gary Hall (see back page). If you're not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member, please get in touch with the contact person listed.

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Anglers' Rest
(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott

Birmingham Banjolele Band
(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)
Contact: Caralyn McDaniel

Blandings Castle Chapter
(Greater San Francisco Bay area)
Contact: Neil Midkiff

The Broadway Special
(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker

Dear Broadway Special and assorted others who've expressed interest in our recent doings: I've been delaying sending out this update, hoping to have more definite info to give you on some points. However, I hear a muted but certain outcry from those who just want to know what plots are being schemed for the coming months. So here's what we know (and don't know) about our future schedule, in no particular order.

Definite: The annual songfest chez Luceil Carroll on Sunday, March 6 (12:30 pm). By *Plum Lines* publication time in March this will be history—very pleasant history, we're sure.

Completely Snookered: Forget *Oh, Boy!* on Saturday, April 2. Cross it out of your calendar. Call *Musicals Tonight!* and ask for a refund, if you're so inclined. They are no longer presenting *Oh, Boy!* this April but have substituted the completely non-Wodehouse musical *Do Re Mi* instead. An optimist would doubtless say "Maybe they'll do *Oh, Boy!* next year instead." Or, if you were buddies with Marcus Aurelius, he might say, "It is part of the destiny of the universe ordained for you from the beginning." To which you, like Bertie, might reply that M.A. is an ass.

Probable: To make up for our disappointment re: April 2, we hope to attend the musical *Sally* en masse on Saturday, May 7, as put on by Light Opera of New York (LOONY) at Theatre 80 in lower Manhattan. The run is only May 6–8 (Mother's Day weekend). We haven't attended LOONY events before, so we don't know how that will work out. If it's a go, M.E. will arrange a meal adjacent to the show. Tickets (times & prices unknown) should be available by the time you read this—see http://www.lightoperaofnewyork.org/

Prior to all these 2016 shenanigans, Miss Postlethwaite's chapter reports were at a low ebb. She was rather on her beam ends with carpal tunnel syndrome in all ten digits and a nerve so pinched that crustaceans could learn a thing or two in re: claw efficacy. She has returned wan but willing and herewith offers a belated report on the latter half of 2015.

In summer 2015, the Special's calendar was rendered moot when the chaps in charge at The Players declared that the club's infrastructure required more than a routine spit 'n' polish, and promptly shut up shop for both July and August. But we were resourceful! On the cusp of September we hied ourselves up to Central Park with a yo-ho-ho. Two gents in a rowboat rowed while four chorines languidly attemped Gershwin in the gondola. We ended as always with a stroll to the Conservatory Pond, humming "Go Little Boat" as a mini-regatta raced around invisible mini-markers.

As the season of mellow fruitfulness approached, one might have assumed that our members were busily preparing for the recent Bacchanale in PSeattle, limbering up the larynx by gargling with a tot of VSOP, buckling their knickerbockers below the knees, puttin' on their top hats, and urging the local silkworms to step up production of Crêpe de Chine. Alas, we were represented by just two merrymakers who headed westward to breathe the pure serene, to look at each other with a wild surmise as they plunged into the pacific and companionable pool of Wodehousians. However, we learned that in 2017 most Broadway Specialists

will be within Acela Express reach of the next society convention, which will be held in Washington D.C., and which will undoubtedly be filled with fantastic frivolity, fandangos, and, best of all, friends.

On December 4 we celebrated the solstice with a Plummy grab bag of treats and a double helping of Miss Postlethwaite's brownies. And that, as they say, is all the news that's fit to print.

Capital! Capital!
(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)
Contact: Scott Daniels

Chapter One
(Greater Philadelphia area)
Contact: Herb Moskovitz

The Chaps of Chapter One met on November 15 at Cavanaugh's Headhouse Tavern in Old City, Philadelphia. There was conversation about a recent post on PGWnet that a Wodehouse letter has been put up for auction. In the brief letter, Plum denied that any specific locations inspired his works, a claim that many of our members found dubious.

The conversation turned to how the PGWnet email forum functions as a bulletin board and discussion group, how those who post provide timely information and witty repartee, and how participants are polite and respectful and do not snipe at each other. (For information on subscribing to PGWnet, see page 19.)

The Chaps recounted unsuccessful attempts to see the BBC docudrama *Wodehouse in Exile*, which came out in 2013 and was re-released for limited free showings in the U.S. this August. The plan to see it as group at a local movie theater fell through, and Janet Nickerson said she wasn't able to see it at the Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C., because of a computer mishap. Bob Rains and Bob Nissenbaum both have the film on DVD, so we hope to arrange a showing at a meeting in the next year.

Bob Rains showed off his medallion as the new president of The Wodehouse Society. Bob, Jim Hawking, and Laura O'Neill attended the recent TWS convention, Psmith in Pseattle. They reported that the weather was "cooperative." In honor of Halloween, attendees received a booklet entitled *Mr. Punch's Spectral Analyses*, which consists of ghost stories written by Wodehouse in 1903–04, some with the premise that ghosts are afraid of people.

The conversation turned to introducing school children to Wodehouse using book donations to school libraries. It's a lofty aim.

The reading for this meeting was "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court." At the end of the meeting we watched the *Wodehouse Playhouse* dramatization of this story.

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The chaps of Chapter One gathered at Cavanaugh's Headhouse Tavern (formerly the Dark Horse, formerly the Dickens Inn) on January 30 to browse and sluice and be enlightened by Bob Nissenbaum, aka the Earl of Droitwich, on the labyrinthine rules and usages of the nobility of the Mother Country from days of yore through days of Wodehouse to the present time.

With quotes from the canon, Bob addressed timeless questions about the peerage. He provided an explanation of the order of precedence, their relationships to each other, and how Plum depicted various nobs. We confronted conundrums such as:

> If a duke takes precedence over an earl, why does Plum use so many earls as important characters, and only one duke? Why do almost none of the characters in the Jeeves stories have titles? Why does Plum have such animus toward baronets?

We also welcomed new members Barry Brinker and Deb Carroll. At the end of our jolly afternoon together, our heads were spinning. Was it the browsing and sluicing? Or was it a surfeit of information? Stay tuned for our next meeting on March 20, when we will, against all odds, discuss the BBC's *Wodehouse in Exile*.

Chicago Accident Syndicate
(Chicago and thereabouts)
Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner
(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)
Contact: Elaine Coppola

The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine
(Denver and vicinity)
Contact: Jennifer Petkus

The Drone Rangers
(Houston and vicinity)
Contact: Carey Tynan

The Flying Pigs
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)
Contact: Susan Brokaw

Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham
(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)
Contact: Laura Loehr

The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society
(Tennessee)
Contact: Ken Clevenger

We were sadly sparse at Pseattle but reported back that the Anglers' Rest chapter had done well. What a great convention!

On December 12, when we reported as noted above, eighteen Wodehousians arrived for lunch (don't tell *us* how to draw a crowd) and a reading of the very-slightly-Christmas not-so-short story "Jeeves and the Greasy Bird." It was a wonderful rendition by readers Harry Hall, Bill Watts, Fran and Bill Dotterweich, Joyce and Debbie Dalton, Audrey Duncan, and Alan Lee. It makes for a great dramatic reading. Being so relatively recent (1965), there are allusions to almost everything Wodehouse wrote before about Wooster and Jeeves in it. We even had a bar of patchouli-scented soap to suggest Trixie's presence.

Some of us, joined by our Broadway Special guest Amy Plofker, were headed to Asheville, North Carolina, and the performance of *Jeeves Intervenes*. [*See review on page 13.*]

Our next event in Knoxville, Tennessee, was to have been a reading of "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court" on March 5.

The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels
(San Antonio and South Texas)
Contact: Lynette Poss

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)
(Boston and New England)
Contact: John Fahey

The Northwodes
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Kristine Fowler

The Orange Plums
(Orange County, California)
Contact: Lia Hansen

This is the first time I've written for Chapters Corner since returning from the Psmith in Pseattle convention, and I'd like to extend my heartfelt, though belated, thanks to those folks from Anglers' Rest who made the event so wonderful. When I met with the Orange Plums upon my return to sunny southern California from the cold and damp Northwest, I tried to convey the experience of walking into the Garden Room at the Fairmont, a large-ish room full of people whose names I didn't know, and finding that those people were friends I hadn't met yet. There were warm and friendly smiles on all sides and animated conversations as friends became acquainted or reacquainted with each other. It was such a lovely start to a lively and entertaining weekend.

So here we are beginning a new year as Orange Plums. We have set ourselves the task of reading *The World of Mr. Mulliner*. We read three stories for each monthly meeting; at this rate, we should be finished by March 2017. My main concern is that we will begin referring to each other as Orange Soda, Decaf Coffee, Hot Tea, and Arnold Palmer. I'll be the G&T with Lime sitting at the bar asking, "What would Jeeves do?"

Barkeep, I'll have another!

The Pale Parabolites
(Toronto and vicinity)
Contact: George Vanderburgh

The PeliKans
(Kansas City and vicinity)
Contact: Bob Clark

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation
(Los Angeles and vicinity)
Contact: Karen Shotting

The Pickering Motor Company
(Detroit and vicinity)
Contact: Elliott Milstein

On December 27 the Pickering Motor Company met at Larry Nahigian's house for the traditional holiday gathering. Larry served shakshuka, which has become our traditional holiday fare. (Google the recipe, it's great stuff!) Everyone had read the assigned story, "Jeeves and the Yule-Tide Spirit." We had an interesting discussion of English country-house visits and the practice of playing practical jokes on the guests. (The upper classes live for pleasure alone.) We also discussed the recurrent theme of Bertie making sudden departures via two-seater or milk train and Jeeves's desire to visit Monte Carlo instead of the cold, dreary countryside. As usual, the hardest part of the meeting was selecting the date for the next one. We were to have met next at the Mahakians' on February 27. The reading assignment was "Jeeves and the Old School Chum." On March 19 we will have dinner at Polonia, a fine Polish restaurant in Hamtramck.

Seeking a change of pace, we had a meeting/event in November that did not have a Wodehouse theme. Instead, we spent an hour trapped in a room with a zombie! Wodehouse never wrote about zombies. One can only wonder at the omission. The possibilities are endless. The premise is that the group, a mad scientist, and a zombie are locked in a room. The group had sixty minutes to locate the key and escape before being killed by the zombie. Finding the key requires the group to find clues, decipher codes, and solve puzzles, all while avoiding the chained zombie. Every five minutes the zombie's chain is lengthened and if he touches you, you are dead. If you do not find the key and escape in sixty minutes you are all dead. We almost made it. We do expect to come back from the dead, though, in time for our next meeting.

The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)

The Plum Crazies
(Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and vicinity)
Contact: Betty Hooker

The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs)
(Portland, Oregon and vicinity)
Contact: Carol James

The Right Honourable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)
Contact: Jelle Otten

The winter meeting of the Honourable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney was on February 13, one day before Valentine's Day, the day P. G. Wodehouse passed away 41 years ago.

Jelle Otten and Vikas Sonak gave a report on the recent TWS convention in Pseattle, and they announced that the next convention will be in October 2017 in Washington, D.C.

We also can now happily announce that the Dutch Postal Services (Postnl) is issuing a new stamp with a portrait of P. G. Wodehouse on it. The stamp is being issued to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society. The stamp, of course, is only valid in the Netherlands.

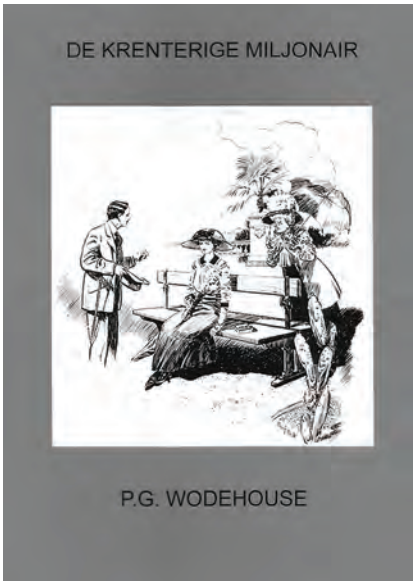
The new Postnl Wodehouse stamp

Peter Nieuwenhuizen told us that the Dutch society will organize an international Wodehouse dinner sometime in the near future, possibly in 2016.

Pjottr Hartzman reported that recently he was staying in a hotel in London and that the *Best Western Magazine* in his room included a pastiche about Bertie Wooster and Jeeves. The story was written by Mark Jones, who described a clash between Bertie and Jeeves about outrageous clothing that Bertie had recently worn. Of course Jeeves disapproved of the style of the clothes, whereupon Bertie argued that many of his friends had asked him for the name and address of his (Bertie's) tailor. Jeeves answered: "Certainly, Sir, they want to know in order to eliminate him!"

Vikas Sonak read his favorite excerpt from Wodehouse's works. Vikas had selected the start of the story "Fate" (from *Young Men in Spats*). It's the hilarious discussion between an Egg, a Bean, and a Crumpet about the reasons for Freddie Widgeon's return from New York to London.

Incidentally, the theme for this meeting was money. P. G. Wodehouse was fascinated by the stuff. Several Wodehouse books make that evident: *Uneasy Money*, *Money for Nothing*, *Money in the Bank*. And of course there's *Frozen Assets* and *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?* On the nonfiction side, when Sir Edward Cazalet permitted John Dawson and the Globe Reclamation Project team use of the young Wodehouse's cash journal, we learned much about "Money Received for Literary Work."



De Krenterige Miljonair

For this "moneyed" meeting, Marcel Gijpels and Herman van Riel translated the story "The Tuppenny Millionaire" (from the collection *The Man Upstairs*) into Dutch. The translation is now published in a little booklet with the Dutch title *De Krenterige Miljonair*. (The Dutch word "krenterige" means stingy.)

The traditional cock-and-bull-story contest was, of course, devoted to money. Hans Muller won the contest with a story which was not entirely dedicated to the theme but which was so uproarious that we thought we were listening to Mr. Mulliner tell it.

Hans Muller won the privilege to kiss the Cow Creamer by taking first place in the cock-and-bull story contest.

The meeting concluded with the Ffiendish Millionaire Quiz. For this quiz, the contestants had to recognize twenty coins from various countries. Rob Sander won with 51 points out of 66 so obviously he is a true money man.

Rob Sander won the Ffiendish Millionaire Quiz.

The next meetings of the Knights are scheduled for June 11 and October 15, both at 1 PM. The meeting place is still Mulliner's Wijnlokaal, Lijnbaansgracht 266-267 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

The Size 14 Hat Club
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)
Contact: Jill Robinson

The West Texas Wooster
(West Texas

Spotted on PGWnet

The PGWnet email forum covers any and many topics about P. G. Wodehouse: humorous, historical, academic, tangential.

- A reminder that February 18 was Wine Day, and a toast to Plum.
- A question about reading "The Kindness of the Celestial, and Other Stories" by Barry Pain, since it is said to have had a big influence on Wodehouse—and answers from 'netters that led to the identification of free online versions of many Barry Pain stories (Google Books). Two of those that were recommended by Wodehouse are "Una at Desford" and "Graeme and Cyril."
- A mention that there is a forthcoming comic book series based loosely on Sherlock Holmes and his Baker Street Irregulars.
- A query from a young student trying to find the script of *Miss 1917* for a research project—and a quick answer that directed the student to a script of *Oh, Boy!* since *Miss 1917* could not be found.
- A quote from PGW on the *Telegraph* website providing advice for happy marriages: "Chumps always make the best husbands. All the unhappy marriages come from the husbands having brains."

So you see that the forum always has worthy information and discussion! Feel free to join in; nom de Plum is welcomed but not required.

> Sue did not answer. When the solid world melts abruptly beneath the feet one feels disinclined for speech. Avoiding the monocle, she stood looking with wide blank eyes at a thrush which hopped fussily about the lawn. Behind her the sky gave a low chuckle, as if this was what it had been waiting for.
>
> *Fish Preferred* (1929)

Murphy's Wodehouse Walk—on DVD!

It has been more than two years since Norman Murphy last conducted a Wodehouse Walk for Society members. In 2009, in anticipation of having to give up doing the Walks, he put them in print in his book *Three Wodehouse Walks*. But in 2010, Andrew Chapman, then the Society's Treasurer, had another idea: to film a classic Wodehouse Walk and make it available to Wodehouseans. The filming duly took place but, due to some wheels within wheels, only recently has he been able to produce a very spiffing DVD.

A Wodehouse London Walk shows Norman leading a group of Wodehouseans through Wodehouse's Mayfair and on to Piccadilly, Pall Mall, and Trafalgar Square, before ending at the Sherlock Holmes pub. The DVD includes maps showing the route taken and many close-ups of the sites visited. Viewers can enjoy Norman's descriptions of the addresses Wodehouse knew and wrote about, as well as many additional stories from London's past, all told in his inimitable (some would say machine-gun) speaking style. This is as close as you can get to a Wodehouse Walk experience without actually being there.

The DVD (which includes walk-appropriate music) can be played on computers and on DVD players in Britain and the U.S. It is being produced by Andrew Chapman, while Norman and Elin Murphy are handling orders. See below for ordering information, and write to Elin at at the address given below if you have any questions.

Cost in U.S. dollars: $15 + $4.80 shipping. (This may change with the exchange rate.)

Stig Tossed Doodle-Gammon
by Karen Shotting

Norman Murphy was the first to read this article and he wrote, "Firstly, I have been wondering what on earth the phrase meant from the time I first read it and I reckon a lot of Wodehouseans will agree with me. Secondly, the first version, the writer's vituperative condemnation of his local team, will never fade from my memory. He was so annoyed that, when the English language was insufficient, he invented his own words. They don't write like that anymore! Thirdly, Wodehouse was fascinated by American terminology from his earliest days and adapted it for his purposes—and never better than in this case. Fourthly, Karen's impressive research brings to light the way newspapers of the time promptly adopted it and equally promptly misquoted it—a perfect example of how a language changes through misreading and misprinting. Philologists have earned their doctorates on findings less enjoyable than this. No wonder Wodehouse enjoyed picking up what he called 'Americanisms.' I am grateful to Karen for finding the origin of this most strikingly American Americanism."

I am happy to report to our faithful readers that I have tracked down the source of an item that I consider to be one of PGW's most opaque quotes, i.e., Jimmy Crocker's statement in chapter 5 of *Piccadilly Jim* that "You start the day with the fairest prospects, and before nightfall *everything is as rocky and ding-basted as stig tossed full of doodlegammon*." (Emphasis added.) I recently reread that story, and the thing hit me smack in the eye again. I was sure it wasn't Wodehouse (it just doesn't scan properly), and as I had previously consulted *A Wodehouse Handbook* regarding this item and knew that Norman Murphy was similarly perplexed, I determined that I was going to summon the resources of the worldwide web and figure out where the dashed-blank thing originated.

Before I get to the source quote, I'd like to point out that Wodehouse, with his unerring ability to find the mot juste in any given situation, chose this (mis)quote appropriately. *Piccadilly Jim* has a baseball subtext; both Jimmy Crocker and his father, Bingley Crocker, are avid baseball fans. It will not then surprise you to learn that Wodehouse chose a phrase right out of the sports pages for Jimmy to describe his enfeebled state after a night out on the tiles.

The source for this quote was a newspaper article about a baseball game between the Quincy Browns and the Omaha Omahogs that appeared in the *Quincy Daily Herald* on May 24, 1895. The Quincy team gave up fifteen runs to Omaha after eight errors by the Browns, including five errors by the shortstop, Hickey. The author of the piece was far from gruntled, to say the least, by the home team's abysmal performance and started off his piece with the words, "Donnerwetter and sapristi!" (German and French words, respectively, of extreme exasperation.) There follows a masterful rant, an edited excerpt of which is set forth below:

> Drat the measly, pestiferous luck anyhow! The glass-armed toy soldiers of Quincy were fed to the pigs yesterday by the cadaverous Indian grave-robbers from Omaha. . . . Hickey had more errors than Coin's Financial School [*a pamphlet about monetary policy*] and led the rheumatic procession to the morgue. The Quincys were full of straw and scrap iron. They couldn't hit a brick wagon with a pick-axe and they ran bases like pall-bearers at a funeral. . . . The geezers stood about and whistled for help and were so weak they couldn't lift a glass of beer if it had been all foam. . . . Everything was yellow, rocky and whang-basted like a stigtossel full of doodle-gammon. The game was whiskered and frostbitten. The Omahogs were bad enough but the Brown Sox had their fins sewed up until they couldn't hold a crazy quilt unless it was tied around their necks. . . . Here is the whole dad-binged business and how it was done . . . [*followed by the scorecard*].

The article has been quoted and misquoted ever since, generally under the heading of "how the American language has been taxed to describe the game of baseball." I found it quoted in *Life* magazine and the Davenport, Iowa, *Daily Republican*. The East Aurora *Citizen* pretty much plagiarized the *Herald*'s language to describe a game between East Aurora and Elma "Buffalo's bedroom" New York. (That one I found quoted in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of July 23, 1895.) Both *America for Americans* (1915) and *Little Masterpieces of American Wit and Humor*, Volume V (1903), cite it for its unique use of nomenclature for describing baseball, but both misquote it just slightly. "Everything was yellow, rocky and whangbasted, like a stigtossel full of dogglegammon." (The *America for Americans* version is almost the same, adding an "l" to whangbasted to give us whangblasted.) The *Citizen* gives us "whambasted," "stigtosel" (omitting an "s" from "stigtossel"), and "greasers" instead of "geezers";

various other sources prefer "doggie-gammon" or "dogglegammon."

The piece even crossed the Atlantic to England where *The British Printer* (with which is incorporated *The Bookbinder*, *The British Bookmaker*, and *The Printers' International Specimen Exchange*), in the July–August 1895 issue, had the following take on it (quoting and misquoting) in an article titled "Enviable Descriptive Powers!":

> The wealth of playful expression and delicate refinement sometimes displayed by "the great American language," completely puts in the background our methods of forcible description by means of "the Queen's English." Illustrating this, we note that *The Daily News* makes some selections from a report of a baseball match in *The Quincy Herald*, Illinois, which are interesting as betokening the flowers of speech indulged in by Quincy journalists: "Quincy was playing Omaha, a neighbouring city, and had the worst of it. Hence the wrath of the Quincy critic. 'The glass-armed toy soldiers of this town were fed to the pigs by the cadaverous grave-robbers from Omaha.' Quincy is 'the Gem City,' and her players 'had their shins toasted by the basilisk-eyed cattle-drivers from the West.' These 'grisly yaps ' (the Omaha men) 'ran the bases' victoriously. Hickley, the Quincy captain, 'led the rheumatic procession to the Morgue.' Quincy 'ran bases like pall bearers at a funeral.' They are styled 'geesers' and 'hoodos,' and are said to be 'whangbasted like a glass full of doodlegammon.' 'The game was whiskered and frostbitten; the Quincy Brown Sox had their fins sewed up.'
>
> "An American critic says the American language is, at present, 'unsettled.' It does seem to be a trifle whangbasted, as it were, a little frosty and whiskered; too rich in doodle gammon. The citizens of the Gem City should establish an Academy, on the French model, right now. It might not be safe for a cricket critic to call Mr. Mordaunt a 'geeser,' or to presume on his belief that Mr. Fry had 'his fins tied up.' It will be long before we 'get even' with such eloquence!"

Here we have "glass full" instead of "stigtossel full." (Note the assumption by the British writer that Hickley (sic) was the team captain because he "led the procession." C. B. Fry and G. J. Mordaunt were famous cricket players. Mordaunt, like Mike Jackson, came from a cricket-playing family: two brothers, two uncles, and his father, son, nephew, and grandson were all cricketers, according to cricketarchive.com.)

Like so many things in Wodehouse, the reference likely would have been recognizable at the time it was written. It is clearly just nonsense, and the garbled versions probably arose because it *was* nonsense. It was even more garbled by 1915 (*Piccadilly Jim* appeared in 1916), when the quote had a resurgence, under the heading of "here's how they wrote about baseball 20 years ago."

As far as I can tell, it was at that time that the made-up nonsense word "stigtossel" (which was meant to convey some sort of vessel) became "stig tossed"—the *Lincoln Daily News*, June 10, 1915, gives this variation on the theme: "Everything was yellow, rocky and whangbasted like stig tossed full of doodlegammon." The ever-so-important indefinite article "a" is lost here and the noun "stigtossel" changed to two words: an entirely different meaningless noun "stig" and the verb "tossed."

According to syndicated newspaper columnist Jay E. House ("On Second Thought," *Hutchinson News*, Hutchinson, Kansas, October 24, 1932), the word "stigtossel" was created by Eugene Brown of Quincy, Illinois (who may have been an editor of the *Herald*). House likened Brown's creation of the word "stigtossel" to Shakespeare's creation of the word "petard." (For more on Shakespeare's tendency to do this, please see, "All About Shakespeare," by P. Brooke-Haven—aka P. G. Wodehouse—in *Vanity Fair*, April 1916: "When he was pushed for time, William Shakespeare just shoved down anything and trusted to the charity of the audience to pull him through.")

I also found a reference to the phrase "stigtossel full of doodle-gammon" in *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poet's Life*, by Scott Donaldson (2007), p. 239. In a letter from his friend Ridgely Torrence (described as a man who "had a gift for pure, divine nonsense"), Torrence says, "I wish you and I were sitting around some heavenly board . . . with about a half stigtossel of doodlegammon . . . between us." No date is given for this letter, but it appears to have been written around 1903.

The article is still being (mis)quoted well into the 21st century. I found the *Little Masterpieces of American Wit and Humor* version quoted in sportswriter John Sterling's blog in a post dated 2009 (which is also where I found the link to the *British Printer* article.)

So, there you go, more than you ever wanted to know about stig tossing and doodle gammon.

P. G. Wodehouse and Hunstanton Hall

by Norman Murphy

Thanks to Norman for permission to reprint this article, which was first published in the Journal of the Alliance of Literary Societies *(U.K., Volume 9, 2015).*

P. G. Wodehouse died forty years ago but is still widely read across the world. His continued popularity is probably best explained by Evelyn Waugh's panegyric: "Mr Wodehouse's idyllic world can never stale. He can continue to release future generations from captivity that may be more irksome than our own. He has made a world for us to live in and delight in."

His stories of Blandings, the Drones Club, and the adventures and misadventures of Bertie Wooster and his omniscient manservant Jeeves are indeed a world to delight in and have led many enthusiasts to explore its origins. In a letter to a friend, Wodehouse wrote that he always liked using a real location whenever he could; it saved time and effort. It was that letter that set me off looking for the settings of Wodehouse's stories.

In London, it was straightforward. By reading his letters whenever they came up for auction, I discovered that just about every London address in his 98 books was based on houses where he had lived or the addresses of relatives or friends. Visiting places he knew outside London, Emsworth in Hampshire, and Upton-on-Severn in Worcestershire produced more obvious candidates, especially when I discovered his habit of retaining the initial letters of real names. Thus, Bingley-on-Sea and Bramley-on-Sea are his versions of Bexhill-on-Sea, to where his parents moved in 1922.

While Blandings Castle ("a mixture of places I remembered") is almost certainly based on Weston Park in Shropshire for the gardens and estate, and on Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire for the building itself, one of Wodehouse's country houses is unmistakable: Hunstanton Hall in Norfolk.

Because his father was a magistrate in Hong Kong, Wodehouse saw little of his parents during his childhood, and was looked after by uncles and aunts in Worcestershire and Wiltshire. He remembered accompanying them to tea in the local Big House, but it was not until he stayed at Hunstanton Hall that he came to know such an establishment well.

Hunstanton Hall, the home of the Le Strange family from the twelfth century until 1948, is a large rambling building. It has a gatehouse dating back to 1490, while the main hall itself was built in 1578. Though much of the main section was rebuilt after fires in the nineteenth century, it is still very impressive and is surrounded by a moat which has been enlarged on one side to form a picturesque lake. The house has been divided into separate dwellings now, but the family still owns the estate.

Peaceful Hunstanton Hall

Wodehouse and his wife, Ethel, first stayed here for Christmas 1924 and were invited back frequently over the next nine years. Their host, Charles le Strange, was clearly an hospitable man: the Hall Visitors' Book shows that Wodehouse stays were often a fortnight or longer, and their total time there came to about twelve months. In 1933, they rented the Hall, and the local newspaper noted that it was the first time the place had been let in 800 years.

Although Wodehouse had already written about country houses, his stays at Hunstanton gave him an invaluable insight into the life of a landowner. Before his first visit in 1924, he had written two Blandings novels: *Something Fresh* and *Leave It to Psmith*. Both are good, but we hear comparatively little of Lord Emsworth's role in the community or the way an estate is managed. Hunstanton enabled Wodehouse to see firsthand the responsibilities of a landowner and his role in local affairs. It also refreshed his boyhood memories of such events as village concerts (*The Mating Season*) and point-to-point meetings. (The local newspaper of the time reported on him attending a concert by the Hunstanton Boy Scout Troop.)

It was at Hunstanton that Wodehouse heard of timber that needs clearing ("The Crime Wave at Blandings"), and since Charles le Strange was a keen breeder of Jersey cows, I think we can attribute to him Lord Emsworth's anxiety over a Jersey cow in "Lord

Emsworth Acts for the Best," as well as the technical details about Alpha separators and Thomas tap-cinders in *Doctor Sally*.

Charles le Strange was a Justice of the Peace (JP) and, as patron, he nominated the vicars of three parishes. I suggest that Wodehouse used the JP factor when we read of Chuffy Chuffnell and Esmond Haddock and their relationship with the local bobby (*Thank You, Jeeves* and *The Mating Season*). Although Wodehouse had four clerical uncles, we do not read of patrons choosing a new vicar until he had learned what factors a patron like Charles le Strange took into account.

In a letter to a friend, Wodehouse described the Hall:

> It's one of those enormous houses, two-thirds of which are derelict . . . [I]t's happening all over the country now . . . thousands of acres, park, gardens, moat, etc., and precious heirlooms but not a penny of ready money.

I believe that the heirlooms gave Wodehouse the idea for *Money for Nothing* and *Company for Henry*, while "The Fiery Wooing of Mordred" and "Big Business" reflected the fires that occurred at Hunstanton, one of which coincided with a Wodehouse visit.

Money for Nothing (1928) is set in Hunstanton Hall and, because Wodehouse described the house and grounds so accurately, he spent the first page of the book moving "Rudge Hall" and estate over to Worcestershire on the other side of England. Having visited Hunstanton, I can see why. I recognized at once the small bridge where the lake flows into the small stream, the path through the grounds to the village, and the oaks in the parkland.

"Mr. Potter Takes a Rest Cure" is clearly set in Hunstanton, as is "Jeeves and the Impending Doom." In that story, Bertie and Jeeves row off to rescue the marooned Rt. Hon. A. B. Filmer from the Octagon, an unusual edifice built exactly as Wodehouse described, which stands on a small island upstream from the house. This was the center of attention when Wodehouseans from all over the world came here in 2012; half a dozen of them emulated Bertie Wooster's scramble up to the roof when he was pursued by an angry swan.

Perhaps the most important feature of Hunstanton for Wodehouseans is the now-disused pigsty at the entrance to the kitchen gardens. It was here that Wodehouse used to begin his regular afternoon walks, and it was here that, in 1928, a black pig was installed. Wodehouse had been trying for two years to work out a new Blandings Castle plot. Towards the end of his visit that summer, he wrote to a friend that he had the answer at last. The following year, *Summer Lightning* appeared, the first novel to feature Lord Emsworth's pride and joy, the immortal Black Berkshire pig Empress of Blandings.

In "Jeeves and the Old School Chum," Bingo Little, having inherited "a fine old place in the country about thirty miles from Norwich," leads the party to "Lakenham Races." Hunstanton is 33 miles from Norwich, and Fakenham Races, a feature of Norfolk social life, are held some fifteen miles from Hunstanton. I would bet money that Wodehouse attended them with a Hunstanton house party, since his accurate description of the point-to-point races and the Norfolk countryside in winter could only stem from personal experience.

While Blandings may be, for many, the epicenter of the happy Wodehouse world, its origins are still subject to heated argument. With Hunstanton, there is no such doubt. Wodehouse remembered it fondly all his life, referred to it often in letters, and was sad to hear that the family had been forced to give it up. It had become a haven for him: his own personal Blandings Castle.

Wodehouse the Bard

R. L. Stine, the author of the *Goosebumps* and *Fear Street* series, said that he avoids nonfiction, that he hates "anything real." In the August 23, 2015, *New York Times Book Review*, Stine was asked by the interviewer, "What books might we be surprised to find on your shelves?" Stine responded that he has "a complete collection of P. G. Wodehouse stories." Stine claimed that he's "read them all, sometimes more than once," and went on to say that "no one ever created such a funny and delightful world with such style. . . . [Wodehouse] is the Shakespeare of humor writers."

> "Could you teach me to play?"
>
> "In a few lessons. Unfortunately, I shall be leaving almost immediately for the Rocky Mountains, to shoot grizzly bears."
>
> "Oh, must you?"
>
> "Surely it is the usual procedure for a man in my position."
>
> There was a silence. Her foot made arabesques on the turf.
>
> "It seems rather tough on the grizzlies."
>
> "Into each life some rain must fall."
>
> "Up from the Depths" (1950)

Book It!

We don't normally print offers for book sales, but this one's a bit high on the scale, so here you go: **Nick Townend**, one of our English members, is selling over three hundred surplus items (including many pre-1920 items) from his Wodehouse collection. For a full listing, including first editions and reprints, with and without dust wrappers, U.K. and U.S. editions, periodicals, plays, anthologies, introductions/prefaces, music, and books and articles about Wodehouse, please contact Nick Prices start at £1, so there is something for everyone. Some of the early editions for sale are pictured below. Nick can only accept payment in sterling, but such payments can be made via PayPal.

> "One feels, as I feel so strongly with regard to poor old Stilton, that the kindly thing to do would be to seize the prospective bridegroom's trousers in one's teeth and draw him back from danger, as faithful dogs do to their masters on the edge of precipices on dark nights."
>
> *Joy in the Morning* (1946)

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