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P. G. Wodehouse, Feminist

by Elin Woodger

One of the most common misconceptions one hears about P. G. Wodehouse's books is that his humor appeals only to men. Some critics point to characters like Aunt Agatha, Madeline Bassett, and Honoria Glossop, and assume that women must feel offended by such representations of their sex.

Frances Donaldson bears part of the blame for this. In the introduction to her biography of Wodehouse, she writes that his is "a world of purely masculine fantasy" which "women as a whole do not care for." She also tells us that women have more imagination but a different sense of humor from men, and that they are "too subjective to be amused by the indiscriminate heartlessness of knockabout farce." She caps off her argument with this:

> Wodehouse puts all his literary grace, his talent for dialogue and his inspired humour entirely at the service of knockabout plots. This is his claim to be unique and it accounts for his appeal to a wide male readership as well as an intellectually distinguished one, but, with many exceptions to the rule, it puts him out of reach of the female sex.

Well, my response to this is: *Piffle!* And I suspect that every female member of The Wodehouse Society will agree with me.

Of course there are women who don't appreciate Wodehouse's humor, just as there are men who don't care for him either. But I doubt very much we would have such large numbers of women joining Wodehouse societies around the world, writing articles for their journals, attending conventions, and taking prominent roles in online discussion forums if there wasn't *something* they appreciated about Wodehouse's so-called masculine fantasy. (By the way, folks, there are more women registered for this convention than there are men. That fact alone puts Donaldson in her place.)

Elin Woodger takes a moment between her international duties editing Wooster Sauce *and proofing* Plum Lines.

In a recent discussion on the Fans of P. G. Wodehouse Facebook page, there was a general attitude of astonishment that there should be any separation of the sexes when it comes to appreciation of great writing. Indeed, for many enthusiasts, the writing is what it's all

about, just as much as the funny and intricate plots and the characters whom we come to regard as friends—characters that include women of all ages, backgrounds, and personalities.

In that same Facebook discussion, one woman commented that "there seems to be a misogynistic air about some of [Wodehouse's] works." It's easy to see where such an impression comes from if one looks solely at the loony females who inhabit the Jeeves and Wooster universe. Wonderful as they are, those stories are prime examples of literary farce, in which Wodehouse makes fun not only of women but of men as well. In the Jeeves and Wooster saga, the comedy often arises from personal traits that are exaggerated to the *n*th degree—Jeeves's omniscience, Bertie's softheaded softheartedness, Aunt Agatha's reputation for conducting human sacrifices, Madeline Bassett's drippiness, Florence Craye's bossiness, and so on. All these characters are drawn to make them outrageous and, thus, outrageously funny.

If you make the mistake of using the women in the Jeeves and Wooster stories as an indicator of how Wodehouse regarded the female population, then you'd be forgiven for thinking he was a bit of a misogynist. But let's discard that saga, and let's also ignore those other women in the canon, such as Lord Emsworth's dragon sisters, whose primary role is to bully or manipulate the men. Instead, let's look at the stories and characters created by Wodehouse the feminist—a man who understood women much better than we give him credit for, and who drew them in ways that justify his appeal to his legions of female fans.

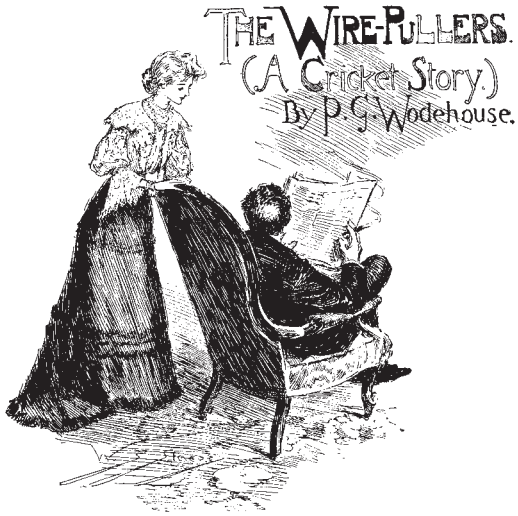
Now, Donaldson also says:

> In his novels Wodehouse usually manages what passes for love interest but it is not of the romantic sort, and his early attempts at romance were disastrous.

Of all the twaddle Frances Donaldson writes, this comes close to being the twaddliest. True, in his early years, Wodehouse was honing his craft, and not everything he wrote could be classified as masterly. He was living to write, but he was also writing to live, and his output reflected this. He wrote whatever the market demanded, and in the process he produced some uneven stuff. But he also produced some fascinating and delightful stories, including the five Joan Romney tales, which can be read on the excellent website Madame Eulalie's Rare Plums (http://tinyurl.com/pgwjoan).

The first of these, "The Wire-Pullers," published in July 1905, is notable not just because it was Wodehouse's first story published in *The Strand Magazine*. It also stands out because it is narrated by a seventeen-year-old girl, Joan Romney, who shows herself to be full of spirit and enterprise—in many respects a forerunner of Gally Threepwood and Uncle Fred as she schemes to solve other people's problems. In "The Wire-Pullers," however, it is herself she is looking out for. She dreams of going to London, but her father says she can only do so if he manages to make fifty runs in an upcoming cricket match—an unlikely possibility. Joan persuades Saunders, her maid and also the sweetheart of the opposition's strongest bowler, to use her influence to affect the outcome. With the promise of a new hat, Saunders agrees, upon which Joan tells us:

> Father came back in very good spirits from practising at the village nets next day.
>
> "I was almost in my old form, my dear," he said. "I was watching them all the way. Why, I am beginning to think I shall make that fifty after all."
>
> I said, "So am I, father, dear."



Most of the Joan Romney stories have cricket at their heart, which is not surprising given that Wodehouse's main output at the time was school stories in which sports featured heavily. But why did he choose to have a female protagonist? And what enabled him to convey her thoughts and feelings with such accuracy?

As Norman Murphy pointed out in his 2013 convention talk, Wodehouse had many female friends in his life, and in the early years of his career, he recorded conversations with them in his *Phrases and Notes* notebooks. These friends included the Bowes-Lyons sisters: Joan, Effie, and Teenie. When "The Wire-Pullers" was published in 1905, the eldest, Joan, was seventeen. Coincidence? I think not. When Joan

Romney boasts of being old enough now to put her hair up, and the satisfying difference it makes in her life, there can be little doubt that Wodehouse heard similar expressions of delight from Joan Bowes-Lyon.

As we all know, Wodehouse was brought up by a succession of aunts, some of them dragons, others good eggs. As a young man he was friendly not only with the Bowes-Lyons girls but also with his cousins Violet, Dorothy, and Marjory Deane; with his other cousins, the Thompson sisters; as well as with other young women. As the years passed he came into contact with women of all sorts—servants, chorus girls, actresses, secretaries, writers, and so on—even aristocrats. He drew upon these female acquaintances when creating the characters in his books; he even says so sometimes in *Phrases and Notes*. And, especially in his early years, his depiction of women was often sympathetic and sometimes quite touching.

This can be seen in two collections of his early short stories, *The Man Upstairs* and *The Man with Two Left Feet*. These stories are about as far removed from Wodehouse's later work as Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* is from *Bleak House*. Women are the central characters in many, with plots written from their point of view, and often they are struggling to survive in a man's world. In "The Man Upstairs," piano teacher and composer Annette Brougham strives to sell her songs to indifferent music publishers. Before finding happiness with George Vince, Ruth Warden, of "Ruth in Exile," works long hours as a secretary-clerk while also looking after her weak father. In "Three from Dunsterville," Mary Hill, fresh from the sticks in Canada, gets a job as a secretary in New York and learns important lessons about human nature. And it is chorus girl Peggy Norton who solves Rutherford Maxwell's problems in "In Alcala," letting him go despite loving him, because she knows it is the best thing for him.

The tired, jaded narrator of "At Geisenheimer's" works in a dance hall. In an O. Henry–style twist, she rigs a dance contest, saves a marriage, and then quits to return to the husband she had deserted. Wodehouse gets right inside the narrator's skin, conveying her point of view so well that one wonders if he had known someone like her during his years in New York.

In 1915, Wodehouse enjoyed major success when the *Saturday Evening Post* serialized *Something New*. This was also the year we first met Bertie and Jeeves in "Extricating Young Gussie," and Wodehouse was still in a happy glow from having met and married Ethel just eight months before. So perhaps it is appropriate that *Something New* would see the first strong, independent heroine in a full-length Wodehouse novel.

Up to then, Wodehouse's adult novels had little to commend them in the way of female characters. Millie Ukridge and Phyllis Derrick play marginal stand-by-your-man roles in *Love Among the Chickens*. *Not George Washington* is noteworthy in that the first three chapters are narrated by Margaret Goodwin, but after writing a play she allows her fiancé to take credit for, she disappears until the end. Skipping over *The Intrusion of Jimmy* and *The Prince and Betty*, we come to *The Little Nugget*, in which Wodehouse depicts Audrey Blake as a woman of principle deserving respect.

But it is with Joan Valentine that he really cracked it, coming up with a heroine who has intelligence, a good sense of humor, and great strength of character. Where the male lead, Ashe Marson, is driven by events, Joan does the driving. She inspires him to pursue the adventure that takes him to Blandings Castle, and becomes his competitor, then his ally, in the quest to retrieve Mr. Peters's scarab. It is the experienced Joan who knows the below-stairs etiquette that completely dismays Ashe:

> "Listen, Mr. Marson. I was thrown on my own resources about five years ago. Never mind how. Since then I have worked in a shop, done typewriting, been on the stage, had a position as governess, been a lady's maid—"
>
> "A what? A lady's maid?"
>
> "Why not? It was all experience, and I can assure you I would rather be a lady's maid than a governess."

Later, when Ashe tries to take on all the dirty work in recovering the scarab, Joan will have none of it:

> "I won't take favors just because I happen to be female. If we are going to form this partnership, I insist on doing my fair share of the work, and running my fair share of the risks—the 'practically non-existent' risks."
>
> "You're very—resolute."
>
> "Say pig-headed. I shan't mind. Certainly I am. A girl has got to be, even nowadays, if she wants to play fair."

To have written these words, Wodehouse must have known and respected women just like Joan Valentine.

A year later he gave us Elizabeth Boyd in *Uneasy Money*. Elizabeth keeps bees to earn a living, looks after her wastrel brother, Nutty, and sends Lord Dawlish—Bill—away because she fears he wants to marry her out of pity. At the end, having learned her late uncle's

Some Women's Occupations
Spotted in Wodehouse

Actress
Barmaid
Beekeeper
Chorus girl
Crook
Dance-hall girl
Detective
Doctor
Editor
Explorer
Literary agent
Newspaper reporter
Politician
Researcher
Secretary
Servant (especially cook)
Teacher
Veterinarian
Writer

fortune is coming to her, not Bill, she goes after him and threatens to stick him with a pin unless he stops being noble and marries her immediately.

Joan and Elizabeth are women of decision and action—interesting, sympathetic, quick-witted, and often funny. There are many interesting women in the canon, including Ann Chester, Ruth Bannister, Maud Marsh, Jill Mariner, Flick Sheridan, Pat Wyvern, Sally Smith, and Ann Bannister, to name just some from *Piccadilly Jim* in 1917 to *Laughing Gas* in 1936. And, as ever, Wodehouse was able to draw on the characteristics of the women he knew to create his heroines. In a 1924 letter to his daughter, Leonora, he wrote of *Bill the Conqueror*: "Flick, the heroine, is so like you that the cognoscenti cannot help but be charmed."

But my own favorite is the hardworking and goodhearted Sally Nicholas in *The Adventures of Sally*. As Joan Valentine does with Ashe Marson, Sally takes Ginger Kemp in hand, advising him so persuasively that he follows her to New York. Kind and generous, she gives away all her inheritance to her no-good brother, Fillmore, and to Ginger, hoping it will help them, though ending up broke herself. Her original fiancé marries another woman and she nearly enters into a disastrous marriage with Ginger's cousin before Fate finally allows her to find happiness with Ginger.

Wodehouse depicts Sally beautifully, showing both her strengths and her weaknesses, and expressing her thoughts and feelings with a sympathy and insight that few men possess when it comes to the female psyche. It is a sublime piece of work that proves Wodehouse had a very good perception of life from a woman's point of view.

Over time, much of Wodehouse's writing became formulaic, and there were fewer women as central to the plots as Joan Valentine and Sally Nicholas were. Instead, his books became ensemble pieces with lead characters and supporting players, many of them from the world of show business—viz., Billie Dore in *A Damsel in Distress* and the marvelous Lottie Blossom in *The Luck of the Bodkins*.

Wodehouse was especially fond of chorus girls or ex-chorus girls, and they show up often in his novels, but he also depicted a wide variety of working women—actresses, barmaids, beekeepers, writers, secretaries, servants, detectives, career criminals, and even a doctor and a veterinarian.

I have Arunabha Sengupta to thank for pointing out to me that Wodehouse's admiration for women sometimes went beyond their strength of character. He also seems to have admired women who were physically strong or athletic. *Not George Washington* provides an early—and quite goofy—example, as Margaret Goodwin tells how she rescued James Cloyster (whom Wodehouse had based loosely on himself):

> The dinghy was wobbling unsteadily. The dressing-gown was in the bows; and he, my sea-god, was in the water. Only for a second I saw him. Then he sank.
>
> How I blessed the muscular development of my arms.
>
> I reached him before he came to the surface.
>
> "That's twice," he remarked contemplatively, as I seized him by the shoulders.
>
> "Be brave," I said excitedly; "I can save you."
>
> "I should be most awfully obliged," he said.
>
> "Do exactly as I tell you."
>
> "I say," he remonstrated, "you're not going to drag me along by the roots of my hair, are you?"
>
> The natural timidity of man is, I find, attractive.

In *Doctor Sally*, the title character impresses us not only by being a woman in a profession dominated by men, but also because she is an ace golfer and proud of her physique. When Bill Bannister queries her vocation, she lectures him on why she is proud of her lifestyle, capping her argument:

"I wonder if you've the remotest idea how happy it can make a woman feel just to be a worker and alive—with good nerves, good circulation and good muscles. Feel my arm. Like iron."

"Wonderful!"

"And my legs. Hard as a rock. Prod 'em."

"No, really!"

Numerous other women are overwhelmingly physical—for example, Honoria Glossop; Monty Bodkin's fiancée, Gertrude Butterwick; Jane Hubbard in *The Girl on the Boat*; and Hilda Gudgeon in *The Mating Season*, not to mention Blandings Castle's Monica Simmons, who looms over her small and fragile lover, Wilfred Allsop. Athletic women flourish in the golf stories, and in *Full Moon*, Bill Lister's mother is revealed to be a strong woman who once entertained Gally Threepwood by lifting a 200-pound dumbbell. In *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, even gentle Emerald Stoker shows just how effective a motherly woman's wrists can be when she brings a basin down on Roderick Spode's skull to save Gussie Fink-Nottle.

And let's not forget Dolly Molloy, who appears in the canon five times from 1925 to 1972. An extremely resourceful woman, as well as an expert shoplifter, she is the brains of her partnership with Soapy. She hatches schemes, keeps her husband well under her thumb, and is happy to resort to violence when needs must—for instance, beaning Jeff Miller with a stone tobacco jar in *Money in the Bank*. Similarly, Gertie Carlisle is a woman of action who doesn't hesitate to knock out Cosmo Wisdom with a cosh in *Cocktail Time*.

Dolly and Gertie are two of what I call the "tough cookies" who abound in the canon. They include just about anybody whose name is preceded by "Aunt," almost all of Lord Emsworth's sisters, female crooks and imposters galore, and the nastiest character Wodehouse gave us, Princess Dwornitzchek in *Summer Moonshine*. Almost all of his one-off novels contain at least one tough cookie who will do whatever she can to interfere in or control the lives of others. Yet in spite of their domineering ways, they are drawn as strong and resourceful women to be respected as well as disliked.

Many of Wodehouse's most memorable women display strength of will. The key word here is "strength." That quality is especially evident in the middle-aged protagonists of his later novels. In *The Old Reliable*, the young Kay Shannon would have been the lead if Wodehouse had written the book thirty years before. But now, older and wiser, he has cast Kay's aunt, "Bill" Shannon, as the heroine, and Bill takes the plot and runs away with it. Breezy and full of energy, she outmaneuvers her tough-cookie sister—Adela Shannon Cork, the onetime Empress of Stormy Emotion—and achieves happy endings for Kay and her sweetheart, Joe, as well as for herself when she snags Smedley Cork, whom she loves even though she knows he's a bum.

Similarly, *Cocktail Time*'s Barbara Crowe knows perfectly well that Beefy Bastable has become a pompous old stuffed shirt, but she looks forward to unstuffing him. Other more mature women happily take on men not worthy of them: for Kelly Stickney in *The Purloined Paperweight* it's Henry Paradene, and for Barney Claybourne in *The Girl in Blue* it's Crispin Scrope. And though we don't know for sure, it seems highly likely that in *Sunset at Blandings*, Lord Emsworth's widowed sister, Lady Diana Phipps, is going to end up married to James Piper.

More often than not in literature, it's boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl—who loves him in spite of his failings. But Wodehouse had enough respect for women to ensure the reverse applied as well, so that, more often than one might think, girl meets boy, girl loses boy, and—if she is a determined woman, which so many in Wodehouse are—she will jolly well go and get him back again. And he will be a lucky man if she does.

Whether young or middle-aged, a Wodehouse heroine has presence of mind, handling whatever life tosses her way with good humor and equanimity. She is bright, hardworking, quick-witted, and self-assured, with a snappy comeback always at the ready. Wodehouse did not discriminate when he created his characters: whether they are male or female, he has given us a rich variety of types to enjoy and discuss. And from Joan Romney in 1905 to Diana Phipps seventy years later, he retained his admiration and respect for women until the end.

If that doesn't make him a feminist, I don't know what does.

Jill walked out into Forty-second Street, looking about her with the eye of a conqueror. Very little change had taken place in the aspect of New York since she had entered the Gotham Theatre, but it seemed a different city to her. An hour ago she had been a stranger, drifting aimlessly along its rapids. Now she belonged to New York and New York belonged to her. She had faced it squarely, and forced from it the means of living. She walked on with a new jauntiness in her stride.

The Little Warrior (1920)

More to Do in D.C.

by Scott Daniels

Members of TWS chapter Capital! Capital! (the "CapCappers!") are now hard at work in preparations for the 2017 convention, **Mr. Wodehouse Goes to Washington** (D.C., that is). It promises to be a jolly weekend of fun and friendship, just like Seattle in 2015 and every TWS convention before it! You will find a registration form enclosed with this issue of *Plum Lines*, and that form will provide significant clues to what is in store; many more useful details will follow in future issues.

Still, not all of our loved ones love Plum quite the way we do. It's hard to accept, but some of them will not want to attend the Riveting Talks or other convention treats. We simply cannot leave them in the hotel room, leafing through the latest issue of *Washingtonian*. So here are just two—flowers and plays—of the hundreds of attractions Washington offers to civilians.

Garden Tours

Dumbarton Oaks: Historic garden located in Georgetown; regular admission $10 (www.doaks.org)

United States Botanical Gardens: Conservatory just west of Capitol Hill at 245 First Street SW; admission free (www.usbg.gov)

Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens: 4155 Linnean Avenue NW; suggested donation of $18 (www.hillwoodmuseum.org)

Theatres

Kennedy Center: Ballet, opera, orchestra, and theater (www.kennedy-center.org)

Folger Theatre: Shakespeare on an intimate Elizabethan-style stage at 201 East Capitol Street SE (www.folger.edu)

Shakespeare Theatre: Shakespeare on a grand stage at 450 7th Street NW (www.shakespearetheatre.org)

Ford's Theatre: Plays and museum at 511 10th Street NW (www.fords.org)

National Theatre: Plays at 1321 Pennsylvania Avenue NW (thenationaldc.org)

Warner Theatre: Plays at 513 13th Street NW (www.warnertheatredc.com)

For immediate information on all convention events plus registration information, direct an email to Scott Daniels at sdaniels@whda.com.

Merrythought: An Inquiry into the Nature of P. G. Wodehouse

by David Landman

A merry mind looks forward,
scornes what's left behind.
Robert Herrick

I

It is a commonplace that we apprehend the material world and the creatures that inhabit it through a narrow loophole in the citadel of our mind and senses. We cannot truly experience what it must feel like to be a saint or a Norse berserker if by sorry chance we happen to be neither, and we can only base our "knowing" on variations and exaggerations of our own thoughts and feelings. A commonplace indeed, but our indifference to it has, in my opinion, created a situation in which those who venture to write about the inner being and thought process of an Olympian like Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, more often than not, unwittingly end up writing about themselves. (I do not think I do so now, for my assessment of Wodehouse's nature is of the highest order, but if I am thought guilty, I shall, blushing prettily, accept the charge.)

Wodehouse suffered more and greater blows than most of us have sustained. Though many have borne the slaughter of friends in war and the early death of a loved one as did Wodehouse, fewer have suffered the deprivations of Nazi internment. And it is hard to name anyone else who sustained the opprobrium of his or her nation for what was, after all, a harmless lapse of judgment.

Considering this last and probably severest blow, Robert McCrum in his talk at the Seattle convention surmised that Wodehouse spent "the rest of his life, 1947 to 1975, in a state of chronic regret, puzzling over his disgrace." I have canvassed a number of thoughtful NEWTS on the subject.

When asked upon what evidence this opinion is based, the answer is likely a resort to notions about the way a human being would naturally behave—a recourse that, traced to source, means how they and those they know would behave if they were in Wodehouse's shoes. This rationale returns us to the doctrinaire response based on nothing more than personal feelings.

However, I think that, rather than projecting one's own probable responses onto the man, we can get a truer reading of how Wodehouse bore his disgrace

simply by consulting the testimony of those who knew him best and by searching his works for outcroppings of suppressed distemper that might have broken through the surface.

To do so will not take long. The testimony of those who knew Wodehouse best and were most likely to be privy to any inner demons universally report a genial and contented man absorbed in his work.

As for his literary output during those 28 years, it is an unalloyed series of ariettas on the absurdities of life. There is, as many have noted, a reduced value for money that is attributable to aging, but there is no sign, at least to my mind, of stifled self-reproach.

"Then," say the amateur psychologists, "he must have retreated into Wonderland."

I will oppose in this paper the notions that Wodehouse was a stricken deer hiding the natural impulse of remorse by a prodigious act of stiff-upper-lippishness, and that he retreated from reality by an act of self-willed oblivion. I will argue that his sentience was different from that which his detractors recognize in themselves or have encountered in their experience. Wodehouse knew and said that he had made an ass of himself (see Chapter 4 of McCrum's biography); my argument is that the disgrace did not fester.

The pragmatist will argue that it doesn't matter. It is irrelevant whether the books were written by a man who, like the Spartan lad, concealed a fox gnawing at his entrails; or by a man who has retreated into Wonderland, pulling the turf over his head; or by a man who is constitutionally incapable of rankle. What matters is the consistent halcyon of the works themselves.

I disagree. Our answers to these questions matter a lot. They will lead us to what I believe is an accurate assessment of Wodehouse's nature and a perception of where he stands in the continuity of English literature.[1] Most importantly, they will lead to an appreciation of his significance in the psychic history of our time.

If Wodehouse is not a stricken deer licking his wounds in the privacy of his lair; if he is not a fantasist; and if he is not mad, puerile, or a humbug—then what sort of sentience do we encounter when we read him?

I answer this question by asking another: what if the often expressed response to Plum's work in which the reader feels shifted from his or her conventional thought into a slightly giddy way of being, a feeling that lingers for a bit after the book is shut, is not merely an idle respite from the stern shocks of a veritable and immutable reality, but a temporary displacement of our customary mind to an entirely different "take" on reality? In short, have we been in the contagious presence of a merrythought?

II

St. Ignatius Loyola was once asked what his feelings would be if the Pope were to suppress the Company of Jesus. "A quarter of an hour of prayer," he answered, "and I should think no more about it."

I derive my term for what I believe is Wodehouse's innate nature, "merrythought," from the name of a character in Beaumont and Fletcher's play, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (c. 1613). Upon Merrythought's head a series of disasters have fallen. He has been reduced to penury and cannot get credit, his eldest son has been reported dead, and his wife and younger son have deserted him. Contemplating these disasters he says:

> Not a Denier left, and my heart leaps; I do wonder yet, as old as I am, that any man will follow a Trade, or serve, that may sing and laugh, and walk the streets: my wife and both my sons are I know not where, I have nothing left, nor know how to come by means to supper, yet am I merry still.

Compare this to what Plum writes to his friend William Townend in September 1945, not long after his release from internment:

> I don't know why it is, but I am enjoying life amazingly these days. Thunderclouds fill the sky in every direction, including a demand for $120,000 from the U. S. Income Tax people. . . . but I continue to be happy.

In a previous letter (December 1936) he had expressed much the same thought:

> Isn't it amazing that . . . with Civilization shortly about to crash, [I] can worry about school football? It is really almost the only thing I do worry about.

In these remarks eight years apart Wodehouse seems surprised by his own imperturbability in the face of ill winds, something that, I suggest, demonstrates that his merrythought nature is innate and not a pose.

In the play, Merrythought's jolly temperament is consistent throughout, and he delivers the play's last word in a song whose final couplet is:

> Hey ho, 'tis nought but mirth,
> That keepes the body from the earth.

These words echo the first words spoken by Shakespeare's attempted portrait of a merrythought, Sir Toby Belch,[2] in *Twelfth Night*. As he frequently does, Shakespeare defines a character in his first speech: "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life." There is something startling about this utterance that generally goes unnoticed: the tragedy of a dead (probably young) nephew and a niece's vow of seven years' veiled mourning fails to subvert in the least Belch's merry habit of mind. Shakespeare, evidently, saw no need to define further or highlight this merrythought as he makes Belch merely one of the conspiracy to humiliate the puritanical Malvolio. About a dozen years later Beaumont and Fletcher apparently saw the need to make Merrythought a major figure.

For the reader, I should at this point define "merrythought," that mental characteristic that was the ideal of English behavior. It can best be done by quoting the first stanza of a profound 15th-century carol.

> The boar's head in hand bear I
> Bedeck'd with bays and rosemary.
> And I pray you, my masters, be merry
> *Quod estis in convivio.*
> [*Because you are at a banquet.*]

The first line speaks of the destruction of the boar of ignorance and improper behavior. The second speaks of honor and love, the virtues that have supplanted the boar. The stanza concludes by saying that because of this, one should live merrily in this world as at a feast. A merrythought, then, is someone who lives life as if at a banquet. There, one accepts with grace and goodwill whatever one is served. Apparently, Wodehouse had a place reserved for him at the table.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not add that a subsequent line in the carol says that "the boar's head is the rarest dish in all this land."

With the Puritan victory in the English Civil War the existence of merrythoughts might have become a thing of the past, but during the Restoration the great playwright George Etherege (himself probably a merrythought) brought upon the stage a play called *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub* (1664) which featured the rackety Sir Frederick Frollick. Twelve years later in the comedy *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), Etherege brought forward an even greater merrythought, Dorimant, said to be an accurate portrayal of Lord Rochester's wit, charm, intolerance of sham, and attraction for women. These men are wilder and more roguish merrythoughts than those previously portrayed because they are saddled with a serious program of breaking the Puritan's 18-year stranglehold upon attitudes to money and sex, the two mainstays of the social order. Etherege's success was short-lived, and when Mirabell, the putative rake in Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), prudently finds a husband for his cast-off mistress and keeps the fortune she has consigned to him in trust, we know the game is lost. The gentleman has superseded the merrythought as the national ideal.

Although literary figures cannot serve as proof that such beings existed in what is rashly called real life, I think it legitimate to ask what the playwrights were getting at by creating characters who treat life as a game. Why would they bring such characters on stage and portray them not as freaks but as all their other dramatis personae, as slight exaggerations of types that one could encounter outside the theater?

III

> *By a man without passions I mean one who does not permit good or evil to disturb his inward economy.*
>
> *Chuang Tsu*

But, if we are to make our point, we need to locate real merrythoughts. Consider the Tudor priest and poet John Skelton. The glimpse we have of Skelton marks him as a man of irrepressible mirth and very probably a merrythought. Noted for his wit and gleeful pranks, Skelton maintained his jocular view of life even when beset and threatened by the enmity of the all-powerful Cardinal Wolsey, whom he baited in his poetry. Skelton defied his superiors by flying his falcon inside the cathedral of which he was dean. Once, responding to the demand of his flock that he turn his mistress out of doors, he complied, but let her in again by an open window. The stories of his quick wit and merry antics were so numerous that a collection of his reputed sayings was one of Tudor England's most popular jestbooks. True it is that eventually he made his peace with Wolsey in a rather abject way, but his apparent merrythoughtness was not, as his subsequent poetry demonstrates, diminished in any way.

With Skelton's friend Thomas More we are on surer ground. His well-documented jesting with the headsman on the scaffold—laying his beard over the block because "it has not offended the king"—enters him in the roll of merrythoughts. More's anonymous biographer, Ro: Ba:, wrote, "for all his grieves and paines and hard vsages, he neuer shewed any token of sorrow or lamenting, but allwaies a sweet and quiet

minde fixedlie seated in the vprightnes of his cause, and keept his old merrie talke whensoeuer occasion served."

The literary figure that seems to me most like Wodehouse in his response to disastrous circumstances is the 18th-century poet and playwright John Gay. Gay's catastrophe came when the thousand pounds he earned on his collected poems and invested in South Sea stock, having inflated to a fortune of £20,000, was entirely lost when the bubble burst. It is said that the shock aggravated Gay's chronic stomach trouble, but dyspeptic or not, he soon righted the ship with the sensational success of *The Beggar's Opera*, an effervescent satire of a corrupt political system in which his merry and lyrical temper is present throughout.

An important litmus of mind is style, and both Gay and Wodehouse wrote in a lively, limpid, and unpretentious style. It is English such as, in my view, could only stem from an innately genial and untroubled mind. Both Gay and Wodehouse wrote silken lyrics to the music of the great composers of their time: Gay for Handel's music in *Acis and Galatea* and the Queen Esther oratorio, Wodehouse for Kern and Rudolf Friml.

Gay's biographer, William Henry Irving, sums him up in a paragraph that with a few adjustments could be applied to Wodehouse:

> The common life of men interested Gay. He was amused by its absurdities, and sometimes saddened by its revelations. He was never outraged by its perversities. He was willing to accept life as he found it, to call it jest or earnest as the mood was upon him. Never did he seek to explain the inexplicable, or, it appears, to bow before the mystery of things. A fly on the cathedral dome, he refused to speculate on the principles of architecture.

The distich Gay willed be put on his gravestone could serve equally for Wodehouse: "Life is a jest; and all things show it; I thought so once, and now I know it."

Slow-witted Oliver Goldsmith, often the butt of jibes by the rapier wits of Samuel Johnson's "club," eventually outdid them all by writing one great novel (*The Vicar of Wakefield*), one great poem ("The Deserted Village"), and one great play (*She Stoops to Conquer*). Forever in arrears because of his generosity to those in need and his own imprudence, he nevertheless maintained what his biographer (Kraus) calls the "wonderful buoyance of his temperament [that] were his for the most of his life. . . . The sordid shifts and expedients of poverty proved powerless to spoil the wholesome sweetness of his nature, and left his childlike purity of heart unsullied."

There are others, such as the aforementioned playwright George Etherege. I nominate him not only on the basis of his creation of Frollick and Dorimant (for it takes a merrythought to know and portray one), but also for the accounts of his amours that add spice to his dispatches from Germany as well the reports of skylarking his scandalized secretary secretly enclosed in the letter box. Hugh Chisholm wrote that "his temperament is known by the names his contemporaries gave him: 'gentle George' and 'easy Etherege.'"

In Wodehouse's own time, W. S. Gilbert of Savoyard fame may qualify. Of Gilbert, Andrew Crowther writes: "Whatever happened to him in his life, whatever triumphs and reverses he experienced, he himself seems somehow detached from it all, experiencing it almost at one remove." Could we not say the same for Wodehouse as he appears in his prison diary?

Placed in the community of both fictional and real merrythoughts, Wodehouse does not seem an odd duck after all. His serene, somewhat detached personality can be accepted as a plausible human type in no need of psychological interpretation. It is not defensive façade, moral insensitivity, immaturity, numbness, apathy, or pretense. He is not Alfred E. Neuman. What leads to the belief that Wodehouse spent the last 28 years of his life eating his heart out is nothing but imperfect knowledge of the full range of possible human sentience.

Merrythoughts may be scarcer today, but the appearance of P. G. Wodehouse in our time is an event of the utmost magnitude because it shows that the attitude is still possible. Even today many people know someone of merry and phlegmatic elegance who is content to live a humble private life. However, if you have not had the good fortune to know one, there is always a merrythought in easy reach on your nightstand.

Footnotes

[1] I hope allowances will be made for the cursory nature of what I say in this regard. Not to skim would require a long dissertation unsuitable for *Plum Lines*. If the reader has objections, corrections, or bazoos to shed on my unorthodox views, I'd be happy to engage in correspondence on these questions.

[2] Falstaff is not a merrythought. His first words in *King Henry the Fourth, Part 2*, are addressed to his page: "Sirrah, you giant, what says the doctor to my water?" [I.ii.1]. Falstaff is sick both physically and morally, and his humor has a touch of the despair and bitterness of such persons.

Borrowing from Brookfield

by Norman Murphy

It was a copy of *A Pink 'Un and a Pelican* (1898) by "Pitcher" Binstead and "Swears" Wells that I bought around 1970 that started my interest in where Wodehouse got his ideas from. Forty-six years later, another volume, very similar, has turned up.

Recently, while sorting some of Richard Usborne's notes, which he was kind enough to give me, I came across a 1977 letter to him from a Mr. A. J. Brooker, who said that some of Gally Threepwood's stories were to be found in the memoirs of Charles Brookfield. He mentioned specifically the man "who was given bed and breakfast and turned out to find dinner for himself." Mr. Brooker had written to Wodehouse, who had replied that he "had enjoyed Brookfield's memoirs for many years and had used them extensively." Luckily, the London Library has a copy, and I am able to confirm that Mr. Brooker was right.

Charles Brookfield (1857–1913) was the son of a clergyman whose parents were friends with Tennyson, Thackeray, Carlisle, and Dickens. After reading Law at Cambridge University, Brookfield shocked his family by announcing he wanted to go on the stage. He joined Squire Bancroft's company, then D'Oyly Carte, and in 1893 he became the first actor to portray Sherlock Holmes on stage in a parody that infuriated Arthur Conan Doyle. Brookfield went on to write plays, including *The Belle of Mayfair* (1906). He published his *Random Reminiscences* in 1902.

The first part of the book is dull—undergraduate days at Cambridge, shooting boar in Germany, and fishing in Norway—but his time as a young actor introduced him to a very different world. He met con men, card sharps, and other actors who, through drink or idleness, could never hold down a job but were expert in the art of extracting money from others with a good sob story.

In chapter 4, Brookfield recounts the sad story of Captain Charles Buller, whose girlfriend had insisted he bring her a basket of strawberries—in March. Buller borrowed enough money to procure the fruit at a sovereign per berry and took it in triumph to her house, but he was forced to wait as she dressed. Anxious to check their condition, he tried one and then another—and his hostess came into the room as he was throwing the last stalk out the window. See "The Knightly Quest of Mervyn" in *Mulliner Nights*.

In the next chapter, we read of Frank Marshall, a popular member of the Sheridan Club, who had lost a finger early in life and wore a finger stall to conceal the deficiency. He was renowned for his skill in mixing a salad, and one night at the club, his friends persuaded him to mix a salad for them all. The result was devoured eagerly and compliments were showered upon him, but "the face of the founder of the feast wore a troubled expression. 'What's the matter, Frank?' 'Oh, nothing,' replied Frank, peering round the polished bowl, 'only—only I seem to have lost my finger stall!'" See chapter 5 of *Pigs Have Wings*.

Further on, Brookfield tells us of a young fellow called Schroder living at Shepperton on the Thames. Educated and clever, he refused to work at anything, so his father made an arrangement with the landlord of the Anchor Hotel at Shepperton that he was to have bed and breakfast but nothing else: "If he wants dinner and supper, he must earn them." Schroder possessed a black spaniel called Rook and would sit on the lawn of the Chertsey Bridge Hotel where steam launches stopped for lunch. When a suitable party arrived, he would whisper to Rook, who would approach the newcomers and commence performing a series of tricks. Schroder would then call him back—to no avail—and then approach the party full of apologies. He would ensure the subsequent conversation about Rook and his tricks was prolonged until they went in to lunch, when, invited or not, he would accompany them, pick up the wine list, and advise them on what to order.

Brookfield also mentions the occasion Schroder spotted three friends outside the Anchor: "Come in, you fellows. There's a new barmaid and she doesn't yet know I'm not allowed credit!" See chapter 7 of *Summer Lightning*.

In a chapter on con men he had known, Brookfield reveals some secrets of the card sharp's trade, especially in the game of Blind Hooky. He writes: "The game played is Blind Hooky, but so much money has been lost at this particular game that the name often causes alarm. This danger is averted, however, by the simple subterfuge of calling it something else." The sharp explains how to play a new game called Persian Monarchs, and when the victim replies that it sounds just like Blind Hooky, the sharp gives the same answer as Lord Brangbolton did to Adrian Mulliner in "The Smile That Wins" (*Mulliner Nights*): "Very like Blind Hooky. In fact, if you can play Blind Hooky, you can play Persian Monarchs."

In another chapter, Brookfield recalls the time he was called for jury duty and the judge endeavored to find a marked passage in a ledger:

> "Who is this Mr. Jones?" asked his lordship.
> "I have nothing about him in my notes."

Charles Brookfield, one of Wodehouse's many sources for ideas

"Your lordship is looking at the wrong page. If your lordship would kindly look at the right-hand page instead of the left-hand page . . ."

"But why should I not look at the left-hand page?"

"Because, my lord, with great deference, there is nothing there concerning this particular case."

See chapter 2 of *The Girl in Blue*.

Toward the end of the book, Brookfield tells of a visit to Madeira, where an old family friend invited him to dinner and plied him with rare vintages of Madeira. He says he had been teetotal for a month and was very conscious of the effect of the alcohol. When, in the middle of the night, he felt his bedroom jerk from left to right and back again, and even the chairs and table seemed "to join in the strange supernatural fandango," he ascribed it to the rare Madeira he had imbibed and went back to sleep. In the morning, he was greeted with profound admiration by his fellow hotel guests who had spent the night outside because of the severe earthquake. See "The Story of William" (*Meet Mr. Mulliner*).

I have been unable to trace the Mr. Brooker who wrote to Richard Usborne back in 1977, but I am very grateful to him. There are only a million or so books in the London Library. Clearly the biographies are worth another look.

[*Note: Charles Brookfield's* Random Reminscences *can be read online at http://tinyurl.com/randrem*]

A Tree for Percy Jeeves

by Elin Woodger

The U.K. Wodehouseans plant a tree for Percy Jeeves.

Of all the wonderful characters that P. G. Wodehouse created, the omniscient valet Reginald Jeeves is probably his best known. More than 100 years after Jeeves made his first, rather undistinguished, appearance in print, his name has become ubiquitous—a synonym for unrivalled sagacity, efficiency, and resourcefulness.

We owe a lot to Wodehouse for creating Jeeves, but we owe even more to Percy Jeeves, a Yorkshire-born cricketer whom PGW saw playing on Cheltenham College cricket ground in August 1913. It had not been one of Percy's better days on the pitch, but all the same his bowling had made an impression on the young writer. "I remember admiring his action very much," Wodehouse later wrote of Jeeves, and when he needed a name for a valet in a new story he was working on, he remembered the cricketer he had seen—"It was just the name I wanted." The story, "Extricating Young Gussie," was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* of September 18, 1915. You know the rest.

Sadly, Percy Jeeves would never know that he had given his name to a literary icon. In October 1914, two months after the outbreak of war, he enlisted in the British Army. Two years later—on July 22, 1916—he was killed on the Somme, one of thousands whose body was never recovered from that terrible battle. His name is inscribed on the Thiepval Monument in France, this serving as his only memorial—until now.

Percy Jeeves had already been the subject of a book, *The Real Jeeves* by Brian Halford (2013), and earlier this year a plaque was put on the house where he had grown up in Goole, Yorkshire. With the 100th anniversary of his death on the horizon, the committee of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) decided a commemoration would be appropriate. And what better way to do

In memory of Percy Jeeves

this than to plant a tree in Percy's memory on the very ground where Wodehouse had seen him play in 1913? Plans began to take shape with the enthusiastic cooperation of the Gloucestershire County Cricket Club (GCCC: organizers of the Cheltenham Cricket Festival), and Cheltenham College itself, the festival's location. The tree was chosen—a poplar, to fill in a gap in a row of poplars bordering the cricket ground—and a date was set: July 14, 2016.

On the day, the sun shone bright and strong. In attendance were members of the UK society; Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire, Dame Janet Trotter; the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, the Rt. Hon. The Countess Bathurst; and representatives of Cheltenham College, the GCCC, Warwickshire County Cricket Club (Percy's club), and the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (the current name of his Warwickshire regiment). Also present were innumerable reporters and photographers; the story had certainly captured the attention of the press!

Most important, however, were the members of Jeeves's and Wodehouse's families who had the honor of "planting" the tree. These were Keith Mellard, Percy Jeeves's great-nephew; and Sir Edward Cazalet, Wodehouse's grandson. The ceremony began with a welcome and words from the society's chairman, Hilary Bruce, about Percy Jeeves and the reasons we were honoring him. She then introduced Mr. Mellard and Sir Edward, who each used a spade to dispense some earth onto the already-planted tree's base. When this was done, Hilary unveiled the plaque that will sit by the base of the tree in perpetuity (see photo above). Donated by the society, the top is rendered in the shape of a book's spine and says, simply, "Jeeves."

And with that the ceremonial part of the occasion was complete, though it should be noted that in addition to the tree and plaque, the society presented the Cheltenham College library with a set of Wodehouse books that have "Jeeves" in the title.

We then repaired to a tent where a lovely lunch was served and speeches were given by Hilary, Dame Janet Trotter, Keith Mellard, and Sir Edward. Space does not allow me to share all the wonderful things that were said about Percy Jeeves and Wodehouse, but it was tremendously touching—a beautiful ending to a beautiful day. And on top of everything else, we were able to watch some splendid cricket being played in glorious sunshine. To think we were walking the very grounds where Wodehouse had watched Percy Jeeves play 103 years ago!

I examined my imagination. It boggled.

New on Madame Eulalie

by Neil Midkiff

On PGWnet, "Chimp Twist" (Ananth Kaitharam) and I recently mentioned a few new items at Madame Eulalie's Rare Plums, for those who like to read *everything* PGW wrote. First is a short item titled "A Family Doctor Tells This Story," from the *Weekly Telegraph* of March 30, 1901. Wodehouse entered it on the March 1901 page of his account book as "Strange Questions Asked of Doctors," without giving the day—so, as far as we know, no current Wodehousean had discovered or seen this until now.

The second article is "The Amazing Ambassador" from the *Sunday Chronicle*, December 13, 1914. It describes the evasions and rationalizations of Germany's ambassador to the U.S. regarding wartime atrocities, and is a useful corrective to anyone who has the impression that Wodehouse was pro-German.

Another item is Wodehouse's first paid article for a general-circulation periodical: "Men Who Have Missed Their Own Weddings," from *Tit-Bits*, November 24, 1900, written when he was nineteen, shortly after he began working at the bank.

In his usual modest way, Chimp didn't mention that the only reason we have these rare items is that he spent several days in the British Library and the Bodleian recently, scanning and photographing original materials. In a manner reminiscent of his alter ego J. Sheringham Adair of the Tilbury Detective Agency, he tracked down the *Weekly Telegraph* item where all others had failed. Chimp had to examine all five issues from that month before finding it in the March 30 paper.

To keep up with additions to the website, visit http://madameulalie.org/Changes.html.

Your Board at Work

> *Judges, as a class, display, in the matter of arranging alimony, that reckless generosity which is found only in men giving away someone else's cash.*
>
> *Louder and Funnier* (1932)

This is to let the members know that your board has been hard at work giving away your hard-earned spondulicks. In response to an urgent plea from "The Gunroom"—the group that maintains the servers and software that run PGWnet and our own website (www.wodehouse.org)—we have donated $500 from the coffers to help defray the expense of an upgrade. We'd like to offer our special thanks to Susan Collicott for facilitating this relationship. Many members of PGWnet made their own contributions to the cause as well.

For those of you not already familiar with PGWnet, it is an invaluable resource for all things Wodehousean, and it is free. Instructions for joining the list can be found on our wodehouse.org website.

Archives, Anyone?

by Anita Avery and Ken Clevenger

Like the ninth Earl of Emsworth, you too might have a very nice collection, though yours probably includes good share of Wodehouse's works. As you sift through your collection, chuckling at a *bon mot* here or there, recalling the pleasure of delving into Plum's gift for an incomparable turn of phrase, or perusing rare collectibles, does it feel "like being in heaven without going to all the bother and expense of dying?" If so, you are not alone. But, unlike Lord Emsworth, you may not have a George, Lord Bosham, to whom all your worldly poss. will pass. So, what to do?

Of course, you may just stick your heirs with the stuff and let them sort it out. Or the local Friends of the Library doubtless would be glad to get the books: "Anybody know what these Woad-house books are worth?"

But you might have a couple of nice, even rare, near-mint, dust-jacketed first editions. And you may have devoted endless time and some not inconsiderable sum of money to all and sundry Wodehouse books and stuff. Gosh, wouldn't it be nice if your collection could be appreciated by any and all? Wouldn't it be nice to contribute to the glory of our Plum in the future?

Let it be so! There is an idea afoot to create a Wodehouse archive. The idea is that Wodehouse collectors, who may realize that their natural heirs are not particularly interested in taking over their collection, might want to leave a legacy to both Plum and future generations of Wodehouse fans and scholars.

This suggested archive would aim to be as complete as could be assembled over the vastness of time. It would accept gifts, inter vivos or testamentary, as the legal eagles say, of all Wodehouse books and other materials by or about the Master, down to TWS convention-type trinkets.

It will need an archivist and an institutional home. The hunt is on. Ideally, gifts would be shipped at the donor's/testatrix's/testator's expense and the donor would consider a cash gift to assist in keeping the archive going. Of course, no archive needs four copies of the A. & C. Black 1923 reissue of *The Gold Bat*, as an example, but while keeping the best, those extras could be sold to help support the archive.

Chances are that every collection has at least a few unique items or the best copy of some Wodehouse book. Mind you, even Plum's many paperback editions merit space in the archive, as do Wodehouse stamps, commemorative pint glasses and mugs, and pig-shaped cutting mats. OK, just one or two of those, perhaps. The excess would need to be recycled through some appropriate disposition process.

This initial notice is just the beginning. When Anita shared the vision at TWS's 2015 Psmith in Pseattle convention, the conversation and correspondence got started. It will continue. But we would like to hear from the Wodehouse collecting public. Are there similarly situated collectors who might favorably consider such a disposition of their collections in whole or part?

Are there other ideas we should contemplate as this develops? Is anyone interested in actively participating in the planning and creation process? We hope to hear from you! Write to Anita Avery

or to Ken Clevenger

> Lord Belpher, meanwhile, in the library, had begun . . . to feel a little better. There was something about the library with its somber half tones that soothed his bruised spirit. The room held something of the peace of a deserted city. The world, with its violent adventures and tall policemen, did not enter here. There was balm in those rows and rows of books which nobody ever read, those vast writing tables at which nobody ever wrote.
>
> *A Damsel in Distress* (1919)

Phil Ayers, 1939–2016

by Elin Woodger

Longtime members of TWS were sad to learn that past president Phil Ayers died on May 30 this year. Born Phillip Clarence Ayers in Indianapolis, Indiana, he grew up in Vancouver, Washington, and lived in that state for the rest of his life. He met his wife, Amy, at the University of Washington and married her in June 1967. Later in life, they lived on Whidbey Island, where he indulged his love for animals, especially his dogs.

A lifelong Wodehouse aficionado, Phil was one of 24 fans from the USA and the Netherlands who took part in an iconic occasion in the society's annals: the 1989 Wodehouse Pilgrimage to England, a tour led by Norman Murphy. This was the event that began the decades-long friendship and camaraderie among Wodehouseans worldwide that continues to this day—and Phil was at the forefront. The BBC, then preparing a documentary on Wodehouse, sent a film crew to follow the pilgrims to sites around England. At one point, while filming at Sudeley Castle, the director asked Dutch member Rob Kooy about the Berlin broadcasts. Following Rob's masterly response, Phil immediately stepped in and explained that it was due to American concern about where and how he was that Plum agreed to do the broadcasts. Phil also pointed out that Wodehouse had been persuaded to do the prerecorded talks by friends whom he had trusted, and concluded by pointing out what a shame it was that such a great writer, who gave such pleasure to millions, should continue to be condemned so unfairly years after his death.

Phil's magnificent defense of Wodehouse can be seen in the BBC documentary "Plum," which was broadcast in 1990 as part of their Bookmark series; it can be viewed on YouTube: http://tinyurl.com/pgwphil

A contributor of several articles to *Plum Lines*, Phil served as president of TWS from 1989 to 1991, and oversaw plans for the 1991 convention in New York City. That convention is often hailed as one of the most memorable in the society's history. He attended numerous biennial binges, though he was sorely missed at more recent gatherings, which he couldn't get to due to declining health. We shall miss his quiet charm, his passionate devotion to Wodehouse, and his wonderful sense of humor. The society's deepest condolences go to Amy and to all his family.

You, Too, Can Host a Convention!

As all TWS stalwarts know, our biennial conventions are organized and hosted by one of our many chapters, with every effort made to move the binge around the USA and Canada. Last year we enjoyed the beautiful city of Seattle with the Anglers' Rest; next year Capital! Capital! will be our guides to the delights of Washington, D.C.

But what of 2019? That year is particularly special as it will see the society's 20th international convention take place—oh gee, oh joy! The only question is: where will it be?

Perhaps your chapter would like to be the host for this landmark event? If so, we invite you to submit a bid detailing why your city would be the best place for our 20th binge. Guidelines for what must go into the bid are in the Convention Committee Charter, which can be found on the society's website (www.wodehouse.org; click on the Conventions tab, and the link to the Charter is at the bottom of the page).

Bids should be sent to the Convention Committee Chairman, Elliott Milstein
If you have any questions about how to prepare your bid, Elliott will be glad to help. Bids must be received by January 22, 2017. The winning chapter will be notified by April and the 2019 location announced at the Washington convention. Let's hear from you!

> Assuming that my visitor was Stilton, I was about to rise and rebuke him through the keyhole as before, when there penetrated from the outer spaces an ejaculation so fruity and full of vigor that it could have proceeded only from the lips of one who had learned her stuff among the hounds and foxes.
>
> "Aunt Dahlia?"
>
> "Open this door!"
>
> I did so, and she came charging in.
>
> *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1954)

Wodehouse in Wonderland: Some Thoughts

by Nick Townend

Robert McCrum's talk at the Pseattle convention ("Wodehouse in Wonderland," *Plum Lines*, Spring 2016, pp. 1–6) was an interesting attempt at "understanding the man and the writer," particularly by reference to the Oscar Wilde trial of 1895 and to Wodehouse's wartime and postwar experiences from 1940 to 1947.

While I hesitate to cross swords with the author of the definitive biography of Wodehouse, there were a few assertions in Robert's talk with which I found myself in some disagreement, concerning Wilde, *Money in the Bank*, and Wonderland.

Firstly, the influence of Oscar Wilde in general and *The Importance of Being Earnest* in particular. While I agree with Robert that "Wodehouse must have known [Wilde's work] well," his assertion that Wodehouse "quietly appropriated the dramatis personae from *The Importance of Being Earnest*" is more open to challenge. Two earlier plays arguably influenced Wilde; both were well known to Wodehouse, and are likely to have been to have been at least as much of an influence on him in any appropriation of dramatis personae.

The most important influence upon Wilde's play is generally accepted to be W. S. Gilbert's 1877 farce *Engaged*, with Wilde borrowing several incidents from it. Wodehouse's knowledge of, and admiration for, the works of Gilbert is well known. He was certainly familiar with *Engaged*, altering the line "the tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing" into "the tree on which the fruit of my/his/her life hung" and using it at least ten times in his works. (My thanks to Arthur Robinson for identifying this quotation.) It is also worth noting that one of the leading characters in *Engaged* is a certain Angus Macalister of Scotland, who was arguably the nominal inspiration for Angus McAllister, the head gardener at Blandings Castle. (I believe this is the first time this link has been identified.)

Another potential influence on both Wilde and Wodehouse was Brandon Thomas's *Charley's Aunt,* which opened in the West End on December 21, 1892, and ran for a record-breaking 1,466 performances, closing on December 19, 1896. (By contrast, the original production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* ran for only 86 performances from its opening on February 14, 1895.) Like *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the dramatis personae contain an aunt, frivolous young women—one the niece and the other the ward of the piece's villain (an arrangement reminiscent of Sir Watkyn Bassett, Madeline Bassett, and Stiffy Byng)—and silly young men. However, whereas one of the young men in *The Importance of Being Earnest* has a butler, in *Charley's Aunt* one of the young men has a valet. As all Wodehouseans know, the difference between a butler and a valet is significant. For those unfamiliar with it, the plot (handily summarized on Wikipedia), featuring impersonations and the importance of obtaining a letter of consent, and ending with four happy couples successfully paired off, bears marked resemblances to various episodes in the Blandings and Jeeves novels. That Wodehouse was familiar with Thomas's play is clear from the school short story "The Reformation of Study Sixteen" (*Royal Magazine*, November 1904), in which one of the characters states that he prefers *Charley's Aunt* to Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*.

Robert went on to speculate that "Wodehouse . . . also learned from . . . [Wilde's] dreadful fate. The lesson . . . 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." Surely the lesson for a man was limited to the fact that intimacy with one not of "the fair sex" was dangerous, which can hardly have come as a surprise given that it was illegal at the time. In any case, I do not understand why Robert thinks this "lesson" is relevant to Wodehouse. Romantic love for the fair sex in an almost medieval way was, in any case, a particularly late-Victorian approach (see Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, 1981), and lies behind Bertie's desire to be a *preux chevalier*.

Robert also claims that throughout Wodehouse's writing "you will search in vain for the faintest whisper of an allusion to Oscar Wilde or his work" and that this is because Wodehouse was remembering the "lesson" of the Wilde case. An alternative explanation could be that Wodehouse was simply reflecting the mores of his contemporaries in not mentioning Wilde, it being considered bad form to refer to the disgraced playwright.

In any case, there are at least two explicit references in Wodehouse's output to Wilde or his work. The first reference is to Wilde himself and occurs in *Piccadilly Jim* (Chapter 9, 1917), where we are told that "It was a fascinating feature of Mrs. Pett's at-homes that one never knew, when listening to a discussion on the sincerity of Oscar Wilde, whether it would not suddenly change in the middle of a sentence to an argument on the inner

meaning of the Russian ballet." The second reference is to *The Importance of Being Earnest* and occurs in *Pigs Have Wings* (1952). In Wodehouse's novel, Penny Donaldson wants to engineer a meeting with her beloved, Jerry Vail, so claims to be dining with an old female friend of her father, but admits to Gally that she doesn't really exist: "Did you ever see *The Importance of Being Earnest*? Do you remember Bunbury, the friend the hero invented? This is his mother, Mrs. Bunbury." And later in the novel Maudie Stubbs is introduced into Blandings Castle as an undercover detective under the pseudonym of Mrs. Bunbury.

Secondly, Robert stated that "if you read *Money in the Bank*, written in the internment camp at Tost, you will look in vain for the slightest allusion to his predicament." Richard Usborne detected some internment camp influences, if not direct allusions, in the novel: "Probably all-male camps account for the use of the words 'fanny,' 'bloody awful,' 'too bloody much,' and 'lavatory inspector.' The Cork Health-Farm, filled with clients longing for square meals, may have got an impetus from internment camps." (*A Wodehouse Companion*, 1981, p. 63)

Incidentally, there is also a potential wartime echo in the next novel, *Joy in the Morning* (1946). Here's Boko Fittleworth reconciling himself to appearing at the fancy dress ball in the wrong outfit, namely a "gent's footballing outfit . . . with 'Borstal Rovers' written across the jersey": "I would prefer, of course, not to have to flaunt myself before East Wibley as a member of the Borstal Rovers, but one realizes that this is not a time when one can pick and choose. Yes, I can take it." The "I can take it" can be interpreted simply as "I can use the outfit," but it could also be interpreted as "I can bear the punishment" in a deliberate echo of the phrase "London can take it" used in the Blitz (and also the title of a famous film by the GPO Film Unit for the Ministry of Information in October 1940). As an example of this usage, in a speech in the House of Commons on October 8, 1940, Winston Churchill said, "On every side, there is the cry 'We can take it.'"

Thirdly, in his discussion of the wartime memoir *Wodehouse in Wonderland*, Robert said, "This was the Wonderland tone that Wodehouse adopted for his notorious broadcasts. . . . As a private survival mechanism, Wonderland suited Wodehouse perfectly. As public relations, it was a disaster. . . . It was also . . . a recognition that he was not as others are. . . . [H]is audience no longer had the appetite for any kind of Wonderland . . . [For] the rest of his life . . . never once did he leave the Wonderland of his fiction. This is a vital part of the explanation for his later works. . . . Every one of these . . . was written about, and located in, Wonderland."

I have three points of disagreement with Robert here. Firstly, it was not "the Wonderland tone" that caused the public relations disaster, it was the act of broadcasting on German radio. Secondly, I dispute that Wodehouse "was not as others are." And thirdly, Wodehouse's postwar book sales demonstrate that his audience did still have the appetite for his Wonderland.

In connection with my first two points of disagreement, Robert says of *Wodehouse in Wonderland* that "[t]he tone is light, detached, and self-mocking, but its subject is deadly serious." This is in fact a standard response from those who, like Wodehouse, spent their formative years at a Victorian public school, with its emphasis on "good form," "playing the game," keeping "a stiff upper lip," and demonstrating "the public school spirit." As R. B. D. French noted, Wodehouse's "care to avoid the ostentatious or the unusual in everything must itself be rooted in the public school insistence upon good form which was in its finest flower in Wodehouse's youth." (*P. G. Wodehouse*, 1966, p. 111)

Various examples can be cited to demonstrate the ubiquity of the stiff-upper-lip/playing-the-game response among English gentlemen.

In World War I, "[w]hen Captain Francis Townend (1885–1915), the younger brother of Wodehouse's friend Bill Townend, had his legs blown off by a shell, he told the [doctors] that he thought he would give up Rugby football next year; he died shortly afterwards." (Jan Piggott, *Dulwich College: A History*, 2008, p. 237)

Captain W. P. Nevill, of the 8th East Surrey Regiment, started his company's advance on the first day of the battle of the Somme in 1916 by kicking two footballs towards the German lines, having offered a prize to the first platoon to dribble a ball as far as the German trenches. (Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos*, 1987, pp. 213–14)

This response persisted in World War II. On a bombing raid on a German ship, Wing Commander Bob Horsley held his Lancaster on course, even though his plane's canopy had been destroyed by anti-aircraft fire; in a post-war letter to one of the German sailors on the ship he merely recalled that "the cockpit was very drafty without its top, which you had blown off." (*Times*, March 19, 2016, p. 78) And another RAF pilot, Sir Ken Adam, recalled that "the British commanding officers had an incredible psychology of treating everything like a game of rugby, or possibly cricket—which was just as well because if you realized the horrors of what was going on you had a nervous breakdown." (*Times*, March 12, 2016, p. 76)

The notion that this response was what was expected was confirmed by Wodehouse himself, when he told Major Cussen in 1944 that "I thought that people hearing the talks would admire me for having kept cheerful under difficult conditions." (Iain Sproat, *Wodehouse at War*, 1981, p.162)

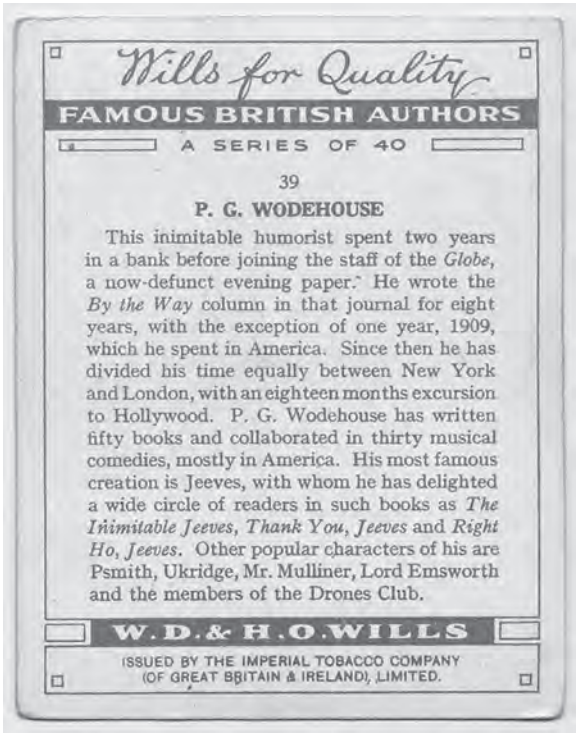
As mentioned earlier, it was not the "Wonderland tone" that led to the "global howl," as the tone was typical of an English gentleman; rather, it was the act of broadcasting on German radio at all, regardless of what was broadcast. To be fair to Robert, although he did not make this point in his talk, it is a point he has previously made clearly in his biography of Wodehouse: "To the British, he wanted to demonstrate what he believed to be a typically English patriotism, his refusal to be downhearted or dismayed by his internment, that is, to exhibit the stiff upper lip; as he put it, to show 'how a little group of British people were keeping up their spirits in difficult conditions.' What he never grasped, to the end of his life, because it was beyond his understanding, was . . . the offensiveness of using Nazi radio." (*Wodehouse: A Life*, 2004, p. 307) However, Robert's chapter title, "A loony thing to do," which is a quotation from a Wodehouse letter, indicates that Wodehouse did indeed grasp the point. As Wodehouse put it in his letter to Bill Townend, "Of course I ought to have had the sense to see that it was a loony thing to do to use the German radio for even the most harmless stuff, but I didn't. I suppose prison life saps the intellect." (*Performing Flea*, 1953, p. 115)

As for Robert's assertion that Wodehouse's "audience no longer had the appetite for any kind of Wonderland," this is flatly contradicted by the fact that his postwar books still sold well. As Frances Donaldson stated, in connection with his first four postwar novels, they "achieved sales which often exceeded those of his prewar books." (*P. G. Wodehouse: A Biography*, 1982, p. 295) And, as Robert acknowledges, "[e]very one of these . . . was written about, and located in, Wonderland." To quote Donaldson again, "One thing which helped Wodehouse's worldwide rehabilitation was that, strangely enough, whatever else had suffered from his imprisonment and the terrible troubles that followed it, his muse had remained in glorious form." (*P. G. Wodehouse: A Biography*, 1982, p. 294)

In summary, I hope I have shown that certain assertions in Robert's talk, persuasive though they may seem if taken at face value on first reading, are either open to challenge or are simply incorrect. Armed with the additional information which I have cited, the reader may now wish to revisit Robert's talk and reassess his conclusions.

Wills Cigarette Cards, Part 2

In the Summer 2016 issue of *Plum Lines*, we published a bit from Pete Georgiady about the antique Wills cigarette cards. One of the cards (#39) was P. G. Wodehouse. Lo and behold, **Ian Michaud** found jpg images of the entire set a few years back. Here for your viewing pleasure are the front and back of #39!



Chapters Corner

What is your chapter up to these days? Tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities! Chapter representatives, please send all info to the editor, Gary Hall (see back page).

Please note that our webmaster, Noel Merrill, tries to keep chapter activities posted on the society website. So it's a good idea to send information about upcoming events to Noel on a timely basis. His contact information is on the last page of this issue.

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

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

Chapter One
(Greater Philadelphia area)
Contact: Herb Moskovitz

The Chaps of Chapter One met at the usual sluicing spot in Philadelphia: Cavanaugh's in Head House Square. There were sixteen at table, including two guests of Mark Reber: Ben and Steve Weiland.

After a hearty welcome and luncheon, the Plummies got down to business. First, the momentous announcement of Washington, D.C., as the venue for the 2017 convention—huzzah!

The day's program could have been a Mulliner whodunit—"The Mystery of the Competing Titles and the Disappearance of Reggie Pepper."

The first part was presented by Larry Dugan (Alpine Joe), who explained why many Plum books have several titles. Some were due to different presentations—the American serial had one title, but the British publication another. Others were a change from a sophisticated title to a screwball one. A couple of changes were due to a similarity with another book, such as Betty Smith's *Joy in the Morning* of 1963, so Plum's classic was republished as *Jeeves in the Morning*. Some title changes seem not to make any sense at all.

The second part was presented by Mark Reber, who discussed how some of the early stories about Reggie Pepper were later rewritten as Jeeves and Wooster stories. A comparison of "Rallying Round Clarence" and "Jeeves Makes an Omelette" showed how Plum's reworking of the story had heightened the plot and improved the give-and-take between characters. [*Note: We hope to print a version of this talk in the December issue.*] This was probably due to Plum's having written several plays, so he had sharpened his dialogue skills. Bob Nissenbaum (Anthony, Lord Droitwich) and Herb Moskovitz (Vladimir Brusiloff) did the honors of reading the selections.

Janet Nickerson, (Zenobia "Nobby" Hopwood) had a book to give away: *A Brief Guide to Jeeves and Wooster* by Nigel Cawthorne. The Chaps decided that the person whose birthday was the closest to the day should be the winner. It was a close call, but Diane Hain won by a matter of hours, not days.

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On July 24, 2016, the chaps of Chapter One met at the usual sluicing place.

Was the air electric with talk about the approaching political convention? No! The discussion was all about the early Plum novella *The Swoop! or How Clarence Saved England*, or, as it was called in the U.S. version, *The Military Invasion of America—A Remarkable Tale of the German-Japanese Invasion of 1916*.

Bob Rains led the discussion, sharing copies of the original illustrations from the Overlook Press edition (which contained both versions).

The Swoop! is a transitional book, following the school stories. The hero, Clarence, is a fourteen-year-old Boy Scout who uses his training and cunning and that of his fellow Scouts to rout the enemy. Clarence is

quite different from the boys in later Plum works. He is dedicated, not delinquent.

The Swoop! pokes fun at such novels as *The Riddle of the Sands* and *Swoop of the Vulture*, and also at the sports-mad Brits, as the invasion news follows the sports results in the national press. The theater world is also parodied, as Downing Street diplomacy is replaced by the music-hall stage. The fighting is also theatrical, as there are no real body counts until the end of the invasion.

We discussed how prescient Plum was about events that were to follow thirty years later in his own life. The two Germans coming to the door of Clarence's house seem to foreshadow that later incident. Diane Hain found passages in the story that mirror today's politics.

Another discussion revolved around some of the racist language used in the novella and the original illustrations, some of which would be considered very offensive today. Some suggested that the book should be published with a preface explaining the times and sensibilities (or lack thereof) in which it was written.

Bob also discussed Plum's mention of *The Swoop!* in his pseudo-autobiography, *Over Seventy*. Plum claimed that he had written the novella in five days, and that although not too many people had read it, he had fun writing it.

Janet Nickerson told us that a number of Plum's works are now available online at http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/search?author=wodehouse

The next meeting was held on September 11, 2016, at Cavanaugh's.

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 Den(ver) of the Secret Nine indulged in a little *Summer Moonshine* at our July meeting, discussing Plum's delightful one-off and surprisingly long story. The eight of us professed to have enjoyed the story, marveling at the number of characters and especially admiring the well-rounded heroine. We indulged in our usual game of which actors we would cast in a movie adaptation of the novel. Ed, who had proposed the book, was a fount of knowledge and provided us with a link to a post about the story by John Robson, a filmmaker and columnist with the Canadian *National Post* (http://www.thejohnrobson.com/929/). Ed also entertained us with a demonstration of the near impossibility of impersonating a linnet.

At the meeting, we discussed the possibility of attending another cricket game at Cornerstone Park in Littleton. If/when we do, we'll report it apace!

We also discussed where to have our October tea, and I suggested hosting it at my home. (I'll have to buy some teacups.)

Our next book is *The Girl on the Boat*, and perhaps if we promote it enough, people wanting to discuss *The Girl on the Train* might accidentally attend. The book is available at Project Gutenberg and as an audio book at Librivox. It was also published as *Three Men and a Maid*.

Our next meeting was on September 11.

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

The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society gathered on July 30 at the Crown & Goose Pub in the Old City section of Knoxville. We were graced with a special guest: the immediate past president of TWS, Karen Shotting, on her emigration from California to North Carolina. We took a moment to honor her for her service to TWS and her significant contributions to the Globe Reclamation Project books. Then some quite decent browsing and sluicing ensued.

Eventually, we had to do a bit of business, distributing the scripts for our next meeting on Saturday, October 1, which will feature a reading of the Wodehouse murder mystery "Death at the Excelsior," for ten voices. I acknowledge a debt to Joan Roberts of the Capital! Capital! chapter for her adaptation, which suggested the idea.

If you are in the Knoxville area on October 1, please come and share the joy. After that, we will meet again on Saturday, December 10, for a now traditional pre-holiday BBQ lunch at the Clevengers' home in Alcoa, Tennessee. The program is TBD. Any Wodehousians in the area are most welcome.

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

When summer has a stranglehold on South Texas, we Oysters/Eels hunker down indoors with Wodehouse in one hand and a cold one in the other. Our little group read *A Damsel in Distress* in June and *Louder and Funnier* in August.

This correspondent went off to Mervo in July. At the July meeting, important topics came up: Craig Hardwick ended his one-month retirement. The Lilii entertained family and friends from near and far. Lynette Poss jetted to Belpher Castle to escape the heat and may also have attended a school reunion. Jan Ford and Cecilia Etheridge continued a 9-to-5 schedule. In August, when we got around to *Louder and Funnier*—Wodehouse's collection of early essays written for *Vanity Fair*—we found that it was our first reading of the book, and it was deemed enjoyable. The essays provided us with new subjects and quotes to look up on the internet, both before and during the meeting. *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* was moved to October.

At our September 1 meeting, we talked about the 2016 Bollinger-Everyman Wodehouse Prize winner. There was a tie this year: Hannah Rothschild's *The Improbability of Love* and Paul Murray's *The Mark and the Void*. Oysters and Eels, you may pick one to read and compare to Wodehouse's wit and wisdom.

We meet on the first Thursday of each month, around 7:30 pm at the La Cantera Barnes & Noble, second-floor history section. If you are a Wodehouse fan living in or near San Antonio, or just visiting, we'd love to see you. Food and drink never being far from our minds, we are usually at a nearby Emsworth Arms (aka the Cheesecake Factory) before the meeting.

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

Could it be that "How's that, umpire?" is the clarion cry of all NEWTS? You be the judge.

The NEWTS enjoyed a Nottle in Waltham, Massachusetts, on a pleasant July day, hosted by our inestimable Stefanie "Stef" Adams, an all-around good egg. Your intrepid reporter, arriving on the scene, was immediately accosted by John Kareores, looking like a hound dog that had just cornered its prey, only to discover no one was about to pat him on the head and say "Good boy." He dragged me into the kitchen and pointed to something on the counter. I saw something that could best be described as a science experiment. Stef, who was nearby cooking up another of her wonders à la Anatole, smiled and said, "Would you like a cocktail? That's homemade gin. I made it myself. I used vodka."

Not having a periodic table to consult, I was at a loss as to how to process this information. Kareores piped in: "I say, did you make it in your bathtub?"

This brought Stef up to greater than her full height, five-foot-eight I would estimate, and with umbrage she responded, "No, of course not. I mixed it in a large, clean plastic container." Instinctively my right eyebrow raised a bit at this info. Stef, her height reducing by a half-inch and with slightly less umbrage, said, "Well, what with a young boy on the loose I was concerned about accidental spillage, so I stored the container in the bathtub." Kareores thrust his glass forward. "Hoy! Make mine a double."

I wandered away and started perusing the expansive table laden with delectable food offerings, to discover too late I had walked right into a bevy of aunts. One aunt, holding glass in hand, was extolling her drink's virtues to the others. "It's the most remarkable iced tea, and Stef made it herself from scratch. You must try some." Off they headed to the kitchen.

After a leisurely browsing and sluicing stint it was time to rally the troops to gather round for our traditional reading. There was a slight delay corralling the aunts, who had wandered onto the lawn to pick dandelions. Into the room they marched, glasses in hands and dandelions stuck in their hair.

The chosen reading was a lesser-known corker titled "How's That, Umpire?" It was well-received. At the conclusion every face was beaming. And it was at this point I realized something was different. I was feeling completely at ease, without stress, feeling nothing but good thoughts toward my fellow man.

I must explain that, at past Nottles, one or more aunts find an opportunity to inject discord and disruption. But at this Nottle there was none of that. True, an aunt who volunteered to read the part of Clarissa started reading Lord Plumpton midway through. And another aunt who hadn't volunteered to read at all suddenly started reading the part of Alistair, who is from a different story. But even these auntisms just added to the jollity.

As the Nottle drew to a close, I marveled. Never have I seen a more contented group of NEWTS. I looked toward Stef and she gave me a knowing look, a look that said all. A look that said, "How's that, umpire?"

The Northwodes
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Mike Eckman

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in July, thirty-one Northwodes and friends attended a performance of Margaret Raether's *Jeeves Intervenes* at Theater in the Round in Minneapolis. Mary McDonald and Joan Barnes made arrangements with the theater for a block of seats and a special discount price. Maria Jette collected the oof and distributed the tickets. Maria also introduced The Wodehouse Society and Northwodes to the crowd before the show, and the announcements attracted a few inquiries.

Theater in the Round put on a very enjoyable performance. Jeeves was portrayed by an older, paternal actor who did a most credible job. In the end, Bertie sacrifices his red cummerbund to avoid marriage to Gertrude Winklesworth-Bode. Gertrude will instead mold Eustace Bassington-Bassington, who has wooed her with quotes from *Types of Ethical Theory*. At the end of the show and the end of a chaotic dinner scene, Bertie's Aunt Agatha and Eustace's Uncle Rupert are left in the locked dining room as Jeeves and Bertie leave for Cannes.

The show was well-received and enjoyed by all. A little more than half the Northwodes group retired to the Republic next door for browsing and sluicing al fresco in the late afternoon sun and cooling breezes.

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

The Orange Plums at a summer meeting also attended by a number of stuffed animal friends. Love among the chickens?

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: Doug Kendrick

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

The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)

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

The Plum Crazies met on August 21 for a riveting presentation by Bruce Montgomery about Wodehouse's early collaborations with Jerome Kern, Guy Bolton, and others. Specifically, he followed up on his presentation earlier this year when he discussed and played selections from several shows illustrating Wodehouse's gift for witty and humorous lyrics. Members convened at Character's Pub, Lancaster, at noon for brunch, followed by dessert at the home of Emily and Harry Booker, where the lecture was held.

On Sunday, November 6, the Plum Crazies will meet at the Dutch Apple Theatre for a matinee of *Anything Goes*. The $51/person charge includes a buffet lunch. The Plum Crazies have a block of tickets and invite TWS members in the area to contact Betty Hooker at bhooker@ptd.net if they wish to attend.

The Plum Street Plummies
(Olympia, Washington and vicinity)
Contact: Thomas L. R. Smith

On August 13, the Olympia chapter held its monthly meeting with the Plum Street Plummies' First Annual Gowf Tournament. Due to the weather and illness, the field was a tad smaller than we wished.

You must understand that in the Pacific Northwest, any time the temperature rises above 75, many of the locals feel it best to stay inside rather than go out and have to contend with that strange bright object in the sky. Nevertheless, three members braved the heat and sun and arrived at Marvin Road Minigolf at 10 am. Our own Plug Basham (Major Thomas L. R. Smith) and Archie and Lu Maugham (Owen and Susan Dorsey) constituted the field for the tournament. Plug won the day, going round in 63, with Archie scoring 73 and Lu reaching 75.

For the September meeting, the Plum Street Plummies returned to their regular meeting place and time at Casa Mia on Plum Street at 1 pm on Saturday, September 17. The book of the month for September was *The Gold Bat*.

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

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

On June 11, the Right Honourable Knights met and heard the good news that there will be another P. G. Wodehouse International Memorial Dinner, this time on Saturday, November 19, 2016. The event will be held at Paushuize in Utrecht, Netherlands. Paushuize, a Dutch name, means "papal palace." In the sixteenth century the Dutchman Adrianus VI was pope of the Roman Catholic Church. He was the last non-Italian pope until Poland's Pope John Paul II.

We also got the bad news that a P. G. Wodehouse–Sir Philip Sidney plaque, mounted on the powder tower in Zutphen, had been stolen, supposedly because it was brass. (The price of copper is very high at the moment!) We intend to mount a new plaque with the same text, but this time a synthetic one. The text will help keep alive the memory of the mortally wounded Sir Philip speaking the immortal words that Wodehouse riffed on so well: "Thy need is yet greater than mine!"

The theme of the meeting was "Crooks in Wodehouse." We invented a game called "Break Into the Safe" wherein you had to guess the name of the crook after hearing the Wodehouse description of the character. For example: "Who was in the service of Bertie Wooster before Jeeves and was dismissed for stealing his employer's silk socks?" You'd write the first letter of the crook's name. After eleven questions you'd have a combination of eleven letters. If you had answered all the questions correctly, you had the right letter combination in order to open the safe. It was Elsbeth Westeman who brought the safe that the contestants had to try to open. Rob Sander was the only person who managed to open the safe.

Later in June came the sad news that our lovely meeting spot at Mulliner's Wijnlokaal in Amsterdam would close permanently on September 1 of this year. This has been our society's watering hole since

1981, and not just for the members of the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society, but also for the members of TWS's Amsterdam chapter. The investment trust that bought the building has decided that a wine bar is not an appropriate business for their interests.

The lost Dutchmen and Dutchwomen

So the Dutch Wodehousians are homeless people. We'll certainly safeguard the various regalia that adorned Mulliner's, including the plaque that commemorates the founding of the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society, the Modern Dutch Cow Creamer, the letter from P. G. Wodehouse, and the letter from Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

All things must pass: Mulliner's will close to the Dutch Wodehouse Society this year.

Many Wodehouse fans from abroad have visited Mulliner's in the past. The last in the line of foreign visitors was none other than the vice president of TWS, Thomas Langston Reeves Smith, and his wife, Kathy. On July 8, they finished their cruise on the Rhine from Basel, Switzerland, to Amsterdam. On the afternoon of that day Vikas Sonak and Marjanne and Jelle Otten met the couple for a walking tour through the Amsterdam South area. If you ever get to visit Amsterdam, this is a worthy walk. This area was built in the first half of the twentieth century in the style of the Amsterdam School of architecture, part of the international Expressionist architecture. There are many apartments as well as the former Asschers Diamond Cutting factory, the Lekstraat Synagogue, and, at Merwedeplein, the Anne Frank statue. (The Frank family lived at Merwedeplein before they moved in 1942 into the safe house that became famous as the Anne Frank House.)

Breaking news: Elsbeth Westerman and Josepha Olsthoorn have discovered a replacement for Mulliner's Wijnlokaal! It is Café Schiller, which is designed in an Art Deco style that is very appropriate to Wodehouse. And so the next meeting of the Knights will be on October 15 at 1 PM in Café Schiller (Spreukenzaal), Rembrandtplein 24A in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

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

The West Texas Wooster
(West Texas)
Contact: Troy Gregory

A Few Quick Ones

In the September 26, 2015, *Spectator*, columnist Laura Freeman wrote of her feelings about autumn: "On a fine mists-and-mellow-fruitfulness morning, I am as high as Bertie Wooster waking up to 'one of those days you sometimes get latish in the autumn, when the sun beams, the birds toot, and there is a bracing tang in the air that sends the blood beetling briskly through the veins.'" We wish her many misty mellow mornings!

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The February 19 *Times Literary Supplement* included Michael Williams's review of the travel book *The Trains Now Departed*. Sixteen now-vanished steam-train excursions are documented, and reviewer Patrick West concluded by stating that some of the stations commemorated "evoke as much the lost, imaginary world of P. G. Wodehouse as they do the real-life one of John Betjeman."

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The *Times Literary Supplement* of February 12 published a review of Philipp Blom's *Fracture: Life and Culture in the West 1918–1938*. This between-the-wars study is not just a historical treatise but also a description of cultural change during those years. Reviewer Alex Danchez mentioned that Blom "makes good use of P. G. Wodehouse" to offset the grim bits.

Happy Birthday, Marilyn!

Marilyn MacGregor as Lord Emsworth's Girl Friend

Belated but heartfelt best wishes to Marilyn MacGregor on the occasion of her 90th birthday, which she celebrated on August 1. Long-time members were probably welcomed to TWS by Marilyn, who served as our membership secretary (with great distinction and bonhomie) for many years. Regular convention-goers will remember her as Lord Emsworth's Girl Friend, clasping her bouquet of flarze at Saturday banquets. She has been unable to attend recent conventions, alas, but is always with us in spirit and remains a cheerful presence in our hearts. Happy Birthday, Marilyn!

Oops!

In our Summer 2016 issue of *Plum Lines*, we misspelled Jen Scheppers' name as "Jenn" in the byline of the article about the modern Wodehouse reader. Apologies to Mrs. Plum!

Contents

Officers & Volunteers

We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, tales of My First Time, and other observations. Send them to Gary Hall via e-mail or snail mail at the addresses above. Deadlines are February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1. If you have something that might miss the deadline, let me know and we'll work something out.