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Plum Lines

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The Supercilious Sisters of Galahad Threepwood and a Long, Lingering Look at the Best of Them

by Elliott Milstein

At the 2017 TWS convention in D.C., we were treated to a talk by the always erudite and witty Elliott Milstein. Thanks to the Trustees of the P. G. Wodehouse Estate for kindly consenting to allow us to reproduce the extended quoted passage at the end of the article.

In planning this review of that gang of harridans, harpies, and shrews that comprises the Sisters of Galahad Threepwood, it was best, I thought, to begin with a definitive list. However, when collating said list I ran slap-bang into a serious canonical problem right at the outset and I thought it best to deal with it first. The question is: Do we or do we not include *Sunset at Blandings*? This is the book, you will remember, that Wodehouse was working on when he died and that was published several years later under this title (which even its brilliant editor, Richard Usborne, admitted Wodehouse never would have used).

For years, I did not, as a Wodehouse scholar, feel that its contents should be taken into account during any analysis of his work. It was, after all, unfinished, and as such deserved no more attribution or attention than any of his other leftover notes and ideas. True, it was much more fleshed-out and was nearly two-thirds completed, but it was still rather raw around the edges. Even Usborne conceded that Wodehouse left notes indicating that he planned some significant changes. Also, it contained so many departures from the other ten Blandings novels (and nine short stories) that much of it strikes a jarring note. So in approaching this book, or, to be more precise, this fraction of a book, I found myself in the same position as the early Christian exegetes trying to decide what to do with the Gospel according to Barnabas, and, like them, I consigned it to a lesser place.

But given the fact that virtually all of the other Wodehouse scholars of our day have accepted this novel as a work to be counted as an official part of the canon—the ultimate arbiter being the Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard *Millennium Wodehouse Concordance*—I decided that it was silly of me to continue holding out. So, after all these years of quibbling, I relent, and doing so radically influences my approach to the current topic, which is why I felt it necessary to deal with this issue before getting down to the *res*.

You see, when tackling this business of the Ladies Threepwood, *Sunset at Blandings* both complicates and simplifies matters at the same time. It complicates things by introducing, for no particular reason, two new sisters, one of them so wholly different from the rest that one wonders whether it was really Wodehouse who created her, and the second so similar to the others that one wonders why he bothered with her at all. We know from Usborne's "Work in Progress" addendum that, when Wodehouse was sketching the story out, he was planning on re-purposing Lady Dora Garland for the part, which makes perfect sense. But then why did he, somewhere between June 14 and August 3, 1974, suddenly and for no apparent reason, split her into two completely new sisters as if she were some kind of literary stem cell? It's all so complicated.

But the book also simplifies things in that, after playing fast and loose with his readers for nearly sixty years regarding the exact number of sisters, Wodehouse

himself settles the question once and for all by clearly stating at the beginning of Chapter Six that there are ten. Just to keep the record straight and so you all can follow along as I proceed, here's the list:

Lady Ann Warblington
Lady Constance Keeble (later Schoonmaker)
Lady Jane
Lady Georgiana Alcester
Lady Julia Fish
Lady Charlotte
Lady Hermione Wedge
Lady Dora Garland
Lady Florence Moresby
Lady Diana Phipps

Now one of the nice things about having a fixed list of ten is that it goes a long way to resolving the problem of Wilfred Allsop.

Now what, I hear you ask, is the problem of Wilfred Allsop? For those of you who haven't met Wilfred—or perhaps have forgotten him—the little chap appears as a newborn in *Galahad at Blandings*. I use the term "newborn" figuratively, Wilfred being quite grown up, but newly born as a character, having never been mentioned or seen before.

Wilfred is a problem because he is explicitly described as Lord Emsworth's nephew while none of the sisters is specified as being named Allsop. There are two sisters (Lady Jane and Lady Charlotte) who are not given surnames, so one of them could be his mother. Geoffrey Jaggard claims that it is indisputable that Lady Jane is his mother, but it is in fact possible that he is the son of Lady Charlotte or—and here's the crux—the son of some unnamed sister.

Tony Ring agrees with Jaggard, concluding that "it is a signal fact that Wilfred's mother does not try at any time to interfere in his life. One can justifiably theorize that the only reason a Threepwood sister would have for not interfering was because she was in no position to do so, and we can thus prefer the name of the late Lady Jane over that of Lady Charlotte, whose fate is unclear, but who might still have been alive."

Logical, perhaps, but not absolute or even substantive proof. It is, after all, a signal fact that if Lady Jane were Wilfred's mother, Angela in "Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey!" would have been his sister, which is most unlikely, as no mention of that is made either in that story or in *Galahad at Blandings*. But at least now, although we cannot know for certain if his mother is Charlotte or Jane, Wodehouse himself eliminates the possibility of another sister having brought Wilfred into the world. And so with that issue closed, we can continue with our review.

Having dispensed with Lady Jane and Lady Charlotte—two of the four "absent sisters," those referenced but neither seen nor heard—let's dispense with the other two and get on with the more interesting ones.

The third absent sister is Lady Dora Garland, whose daughter Prudence is the female protagonist in *Full Moon*. We know as little about Dora as we do the other two absent sisters, but there must be something special about her because Wodehouse mentions her a number of times throughout the later portion of the saga, such as here in *Pigs Have Wings*:

> [Gally] was one of that determined little band who, feeling that London would look better if painted red, had devoted themselves at an early age to the task of giving it that cheerful color. A pain in the neck to his sister Constance, his sister Julia, his sister Dora, and all his other sisters, he was universally esteemed in less austere quarters . . .

Or this exchange between Gally and Clarence in *Galahad at Blandings*:

> "I've always said it was a mistake to have sisters. We should have set our faces against it from the outset."
>
> "Constance . . . Dora . . . Julia . . . Hermione . . . How they oppressed me!"

And this musing of Lord Emsworth while contemplating his dinner in the very opening of *A Pelican at Blandings*:

> He gave it the vague stare which had so often incurred the censure—"Oh, for goodness' sake, Clarence, don't stand there looking like a goldfish"—of his sisters Constance, Dora, Charlotte, Julia, and Hermione.

The three main sisters plus Dora again, but also, strangely, after an absence of 35 years, Charlotte.

The final absent sister is Lady Diana Phipps, created but never used except as a plot device in *Sunset*. This is the one and only sister whom Gally considers a good egg, and everything else we hear about her seems to confirm it. Why suddenly a nice sister after all these years, we can never know. Perhaps he was trying to even the score a little after creating nine pests of the

first order. She is absent but clearly Wodehouse was planning to bring her onstage in the latter part of the book, had he had time to finish.

No one could say, however, that he didn't have plenty of time to bring back Lady Ann Warblington, but he never chose to do so. She appears, but just barely, in *Something Fresh*, the very first Blandings book (1915), and she never appears again nor is she mentioned again. She is described briefly and referred to a few times in the book, but she never really makes it on stage, except once to be present at tea. Oh, we also know she has a cat. That's about it. The fact is that Wodehouse really had no use for her in the plot, but clearly he felt a castle needed a chatelaine, so he created one. And there she remains, for all eternity, unfulfilled and unfulfilling, except as a quaint Wodehouse trivia question. We have to remember that *Something Fresh* was only Wodehouse's third novel for the adult market and he was still learning his craft.

Not so with his second Blandings novel. Written eight years, ten novels, and dozens of short stories later (not to mention the musicals), Wodehouse's craft here is fully honed: *Leave It to Psmith* is a masterpiece. The plot, the characters, the imagery, the writing are all top form. The characters he brings back from the first book return in a somewhat revised—and, in my opinion, vastly improved—form. Here, Wodehouse knew exactly what to do with his chatelaine, introducing us to the indomitable and abominable Lady Constance Keeble.

While Connie will go on attempting to ruin several other young people's romances, her machinations in *Leave It to Psmith* are the most repugnant. In future stories she will try to stop marriages but, one presumes, having failed, she gives up and moves on. Not here. The story opens with her husband Joseph Keeble trying to get permission to loan—not even give, mind you, but loan—his stepdaughter some of his money so she and her husband can purchase a farm in Lincolnshire. However, Constance, out of sheer pique (because Phyllis didn't marry the man Constance chose for her), firmly consigns her to a life of penury. No matter how you slice it, this is mean stuff. Connie will mellow somewhat later on—indeed, later we will see her flustered and frightened and even in love—but in her debut, she is powerful, strong-willed, and malevolent.

The description of Lady Constance as Wodehouse introduces her to us is telling. If you haven't read it in a while, you may have forgotten how contradictory her appearance is to her personality:

> But Lady Constance Keeble really took the eye. She was a strikingly handsome woman in the middle forties. She had a fair, broad brow, teeth of a perfect even whiteness, and the carriage of an empress. Her eyes were large and grey, and gentle—and incidentally misleading, for gentle was hardly the adjective which anybody who knew her would have applied to Lady Constance. Though genial enough when she got her way, on the rare occasions when people attempted to thwart her she was apt to comport herself in a manner reminiscent of Cleopatra on one of the latter's bad mornings.

Lady Constance is the sister of the saga. A main character in seven novels and four short stories, she dominates the distaff side of the family equation. Shortly after *Leave It to Psmith*, Lady Georgiana Alcester makes two appearances, once in the short story "Company for Gertrude" and then appearing briefly in a scene with Lady Constance in "The Go-Getter." Of course, we don't know for certain why Wodehouse felt the need to create a new sister with Constance so easy to hand, but it was most likely because he wanted the mother of the girl in love to be the stumbling block and Constance had no children. Lady Julia Fish is the only other sister to share the stage with Constance, and *Heavy Weather* is the only novel or story which has substantive interaction between two of the sisters.

Also, as Constance appears so frequently and consistently, she is the most three-dimensional sister. Her interest in the arts and the bohemian community, her snobbishness, her concern for appearances, her desire to remain on good terms with her neighbors, and so forth, are not only mentioned but expanded upon. Lady Constance is also the chief sparring partner with her brother Galahad as well as being the only sister to deal with his counterpart, Uncle Fred. Throughout several books we note that her relationship is so intense with her brother's secretary Rupert Baxter—including being distraught when he is forced to leave the castle—that it has led at least one Wodehouse scholar to speculate whether they could be lovers.

She goes through the greatest evolution as a character. In *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, we learn of her early romance with the Duke of Dunstable. We see her unbend enough to shoot Beach with an airgun in "The Crime Wave at Blandings." In *Service with a Smile*, we see her recoil in fear from a berserk Lord Emsworth of all people, and in that same book we see her in a romantic role. In the novel that follows, she is married to James Schoonmaker.

But Constance does share the limelight with her sister Hermione Wedge, as Hermione is the only other

sister to appear as a sole sister in novels (two, in fact). Lady Hermione is not quite as complex a character as Connie, but she does have some unique qualities. First, Wodehouse makes her physically different from all her sisters, and he specifically makes a point of that difference when initially describing her in *Full Moon*:

> Unlike the rest of the female members of her family, who were tall and stately, Lady Hermione Wedge was short and dumpy and looked like a cook—in her softer moods, a cook well satisfied with her latest soufflé; when stirred to anger, a cook about to give notice; but always a cook of strong character.

Of course, this cook-like appearance is essential for a specific plot point (where Bill Lister mistakes her for the cook and gives her a note to give to Prudence), but I also think that Wodehouse, in this sixth Blandings book, was trying to break the pattern he had set up of cold, beautiful, haughty women.

Hermione is also unique in her close, warm relations with her husband and in the fact that she has an unruffled relationship with her daughter, who does whatever her mother wants without any objection. This may be due to excellent parenting skills or possibly due to the fact that her daughter Veronica is the dumbest blonde in Shropshire and its adjoining counties. Nonetheless, it is quite distinct from the other sisters and, whatever else one may hold against Hermione, a credit to her.

While she is working assiduously at breaking up her niece Prudence's romance, she is promoting a romance for her own daughter that is set in a positive light (and which is ultimately consummated). This is quite unusual; in fact, the only other example of a Threepwood sister promoting a courtship of which we approve is Georgiana's change of heart regarding Beefy Bingham at the end of "Company for Gertrude." In all other cases, the sisters serve the plot as the impediment to romance or by pushing some undesirable Cosmo, Rollo, or Claude on the resistant niece or daughter.

Finally, Hermione, while still disapproving of Galahad, is the only sister to accept him as an ally: in *Full Moon* when he helps the Tipton-Veronica romance along and in *Galahad at Blandings* when he helps repair the broken engagement.

And that was that for nearly thirty years when, in the evening of his life, Wodehouse suddenly springs Lady Diana and Lady Florence on us, like a vaudeville conjuror pulling not only a rabbit from his top hat but a snake as well. We don't get to meet Lady Diana, but Lady Florence is an integral part of the book, although there is nothing particularly special about her. She is pretty much of the same mold as the others, but Wodehouse seems intent on trying to present her as particularly nasty, like the director of a superhero movie sequel, increasing the strength and evil of the villain in order to maintain the audience's interest.

The first mention of her is when Beach informs Gally that she is at the castle, a piece of news that affects Gally unusually strongly. Certainly he never quailed in response to similar news about Connie or Hermione. The first time we meet Lady Florence, Wodehouse provides no description, saving it for the scene where Jeff Bennison first encounters her. He is intrepid in his approach, despite Gally's description of her as a Gorgon, but this is what happens:

> Forbidding was the adjective a stylist like Gustave Flaubert would have applied to her aspect, putting it of course in French, as was his habit. She was an angular woman, and her bearing was so erect that one wondered why she did not fall over backwards. She had not actually swallowed some rigid object such as a poker, but she gave the impression of having done so. . . . Some women who at first sight intimidate the beholder set him at his ease with charm of manner. Florence was not one of these. Her "How do you do," delivered from between clenched teeth, was in keeping with her appearance, and Jeff's morale, already in the low brackets, slipped still lower. . . . A worm confronted by a Plymouth Rock would have been more nonchalant.

And this is before she knows that Jeff is the unwanted suitor of her stepdaughter. There again, we have that extra bit of nastiness—it is not a niece or daughter whose hopes for a joyful marriage she is destroying, but a stepdaughter, putting her in that infamous and iconic role of the evil stepmother.

So we have reviewed all the sisters and looked in depth at the two principal ones. But I want to return now to a sister whom I skipped over lightly and give you that long, lingering look I promised in the title of my talk, because she is not just my favorite sister, but one of my very favorite characters in all of Wodehouse, appearing in one of my very favorite novels.

While as scholars we can dissect works of fiction to show that there are objective criteria to separate great works from less worthy fare, we must admit that much of this is subjective. So, while I could easily spend the

next twenty minutes giving you example after example of why *Heavy Weather* should be counted as one of the greats, I know that much of my affection comes from the fact that it was the second Wodehouse I ever read and it holds a special place in my heart. That being said, I still maintain that it is possible to demonstrate objectively that Lady Julia Fish is unique in the Wodehouse canon and that she, more than anything else, makes this novel so brilliant. I will now attempt to do so.

From the moment we meet Lady Julia we know we are in for something special. She practically opens the book and dominates it from beginning to end, completely overshadowing Constance in the process. Wodehouse's description of her is, at first blush, pretty standard, but with close attention you will see a subtle difference from the other sisters:

> Lady Julia Fish was a handsome, middle-aged woman of the large blonde type, of a personality both breezy and commanding. She came into the room . . . like a galleon under sail, her resolute chin and her china-blue eyes proclaiming a supreme confidence in her ability to get anything she wanted out of anyone.

Breezy while commanding and confident is unique among the sisters and the keynote to her personality. Later, Wodehouse will describe her responding to someone in "her usual good-humored disdain." In fact, nearly all descriptions of her are oxymoronic; her complexity as a character is to combine seemingly incongruous attributes.

In the opening chapter, she has come to Tilbury House to secure a job for her son, Ronnie Fish. Where the other sisters tend to hold their relations in high esteem, at least publicly, Lady Julia is openly sarcastic and damning about even her own child. "I want a job for Ronnie. . . . My son. Didn't you meet him in Biarritz? He was there. Small and pink." In putting forth his qualities, she says—and remember, she is trying to get him a job—"Ronnie won't take up much room. And I shouldn't think he could do any actual harm to a solidly established concern like this." In explaining why she wants him to have a job, she replies, "Well, primarily to distract his mind . . . well, yes, in a loose way, you could call it a mind." Even Hermione would never say such a thing about her daughter, and Veronica has an IQ not much higher than that of a slightly retarded billiard ball.

Julia is also more devious than her sisters. Where Constance, Hermione, and Georgiana come right at the unwanted suitor with daggers drawn, Julia wraps Sue Brown in a cloak of warm civility when they meet on the train to Blandings. Sue walks into the compartment and Monty Bodkin puts her wise to his companion by mentioning Lady Julia's name several times. Sue takes the hint and goes for it:

> "I beg your pardon," she said breathlessly. "Are you Lady Julia Fish?"
>
> "I am."
>
> "My name's Sue Brown."
>
> …
>
> "Well, well, well," said Lady Julia. "Fancy that. Quite a coincidence, Mr. Bodkin."
>
> "Oh, quite. Most."
>
> "We were just talking about you, Miss Brown. . . . I am losing a son and gaining a daughter, and you're the daughter, eh? . . . Yes," said Lady Julia, "I recognize you. Ronnie sent me a photograph of you, you know. I thought it charming. Well, you must come over here and tell me all about yourself."

No intimation here that Lady Julia will be doing her damnedest to destroy this girl's life. Connie could never have pulled that off. In fact, later on, Julia berates her sister for losing Percy Pilbeam's good will due to her inability to dissemble.

Another unusual attribute for a Threepwood sister is her repeated sarcasm. When Monty Bodkin explains his dismissal from Tilbury House to her as there being "wheels within wheels," she replies "How cozy!" During the silent, frosty dinner where everyone is wondering where the inebriated and now unconscious Pilbeam has hidden Gally's Reminiscences, she breaks the silence with the toast "To the body upstairs."

But it is one scene in particular that really brings out the complexity and brilliance of this character and it is this episode with which I would like to close out my argument. The scene is where Galahad finally confronts Julia and tells her to stop trying to break up Ronnie and Sue's engagement. You will remember that Gally has secured Connie's agreement by promising not to publish his Reminiscences. However, Julia has not been a party to the agreement, so Gally comes to finally convince her to accept the situation. He takes his leave of Ronnie and Sue promising to "spoil [her] tea and shrimps."

The scene, being almost wholly dialogue, reads more like a play than a chapter in a novel and its brilliance comes from the rapier-like back-and-forth conversation that reveals rather than explains the nature of the characters—not just Julia, but Gally as well—in many complex and subtle ways. It also contains a

surprising, realistic, and racy reference to non-conjugal sex, unique in all the canon, which gives an extra edge to Julia's special character.

Now I could dissect this scene to show Wodehouse's genius in character exposition through dialogue. Although I am sure that would be incredibly edifying, it would be quite tedious, and the last thing one wants to be when discussing Wodehouse is tedious. Besides, I have tried many times to show people the genius of Wodehouse and in the end I have found that the best way is simply to let Wodehouse do it. So I will conclude my talk by doing just that and simply read it to you:

> [Lady Julia] was seated in an arm-chair, smoking a cigarette and reading an illustrated weekly paper. The tea which [Galahad] had hoped to spoil was in the process of being cleared away by Beach and a footman.
>
> She looked contented, and she was feeling contented. Ronnie's growing gloom during the past two days had not escaped her. In a mood to be genial to everybody, even to one on whom she had always looked on as the Family Blot, she welcomed the Hon. Galahad with a pleasant nod.
>
> "You're late, if you've come for tea," she said.
>
> "Tea!" snorted the Hon. Galahad.
>
> He stood fuming until the door closed.
>
> "Now, then, Julia," he said, "I want a word with you."
>
> Lady Julia raised her shapely eyebrows.
>
> "My dear Galahad! This is very menacing and ominous. Is something the matter?"
>
> "You know what's the matter. Where's Connie?"
>
> "Gone to answer the telephone, I believe."
>
> "Well, you'll do to start with."
>
> "Galahad, really!"
>
> "Put down that paper."
>
> "Oh, very well."
>
> The Hon. Galahad strode to the hearthrug and stood with his back to the empty fire-place. Racial instinct made him feel more authoritative in that position. He frowned forbiddingly.
>
> "Julia, you make me sick."
>
> "Indeed? Why is that?"
>
> "What the devil do you mean by trying to poison young Ronnie's mind against Sue Brown?"
>
> "Really, Galahad!"
>
> "Do you deny that that is what you have been doing ever since you got here?"
>
> "I may have pointed out to him once or twice the inadvisability of marrying a girl who appears to be in love with another man. If this be treason, make the most of it. Surely it's a tenable theory?"
>
> "You think she's in love with young Bodkin?"
>
> "Apparently."
>
> "If you will step down to the billiard-room," said the Hon. Galahad, "I think you may possibly alter your opinion."
>
> Something of Lady Julia's self-confidence left her.
>
> "What do you mean?"
>
> "Touching," said the Hon. Galahad unctuously. "That's what it was. Touching. It nearly made me cry. I never saw a more united couple. All their doubts and misunderstandings cleared away . . ."
>
> "What!"
>
> "Locked in each other's arms, weeping on each other's chests . . . you ought to go down and have a look, Julia. You'll be in plenty of time. It's evidently going to be one of those non-stop performances. Well, anyway, that's the first thing I came up here to tell you. You have been taking a lot of trouble to ruin this girl's happiness these last few days, and now you are getting official intimation that you haven't succeeded. They are all right, those two. Sweethearts still is the term."
>
> The Hon. Galahad spread his coat-tails to the invisible blaze and resumed.
>
> "The other thing I came to say is that there must be no more of this nonsense. If you have objections to young Ronnie marrying Sue, don't mention them to him. It worries him and makes him moody, and that worries Sue and makes her unhappy, and that worries me and spoils my day. You understand?"
>
> Lady Julia was shaken, but she had not lost her spirit.
>
> "I'm afraid you must make up your mind to having your days spoiled, Galahad."
>
> "You don't mean that even after this you intend to keep making a pest of yourself?"
>
> "You put these things so badly. What you are trying to say, I imagine, is do I still intend to give my child a mother's advice? Certainly I do. A boy's best friend is his mother, don't you sometimes think? Ronnie, handicapped by being virtually half-witted, may not have seen

fit to take my advice as yet; but if in the old days you ever had a moment to spare from your life-work of being thrown out of shady night-clubs and were able to look in at the Adelphi Theatre, you may remember the expression 'A time will come!'"

The Hon. Galahad stared at this indomitable woman with something that was almost admiration.

"Well, I'm dashed!"

"Are you?"

"You always were a tough nut, Julia."

"Thank you."

"Always. Even as a child. It used to interest me in those days to watch you gradually dawning on the latest governess. I could have read her thoughts in her face, poor devil. First, she would meet Connie and you could almost hear her saying to herself 'Hullo! A vicious specimen this one.' And then you would come along, all wide, innocent blue eyes and flaxen curls, and she would feel a great wave of relief and fling her arms around you; thinking, 'Well, here's one that's all right, thank God!' Little knowing that she had just come up against the stoniest-hearted, beastliest-natured, and generally most poisonous young human rattlesnake in all Shropshire."

Lady Julia seemed genuinely pleased at this tribute. She laughed musically.

"You are silly, Galahad."

The Hon. Galahad adjusted his monocle.

"So your hat is still in the ring, eh?"

"Still there, my dear."

"But what have you got against young Sue?"

"I don't like chorus-girls as daughters-in-law."

"But, great heavens above, Julia, surely you can see that Sue isn't that sort of girl you mean when you say 'chorus-girls' in that beastly sniffy way."

"You can't expect me to classify and tabulate chorus-girls. I haven't your experience. They're all chorus-girls to me."

"There are moments, Julia," said the Hon. Galahad meditatively, "when I should like to drown you in a bucket."

"A butt of malmsey would have been more in your line, I should have thought."

"Your attitude about young Sue infuriates me. Can't you see the girl's a nice girl . . . a sweet girl . . . and a lady, if it comes to that."

"Tell me, Gally," said Lady Julia, "just as a matter of interest, *is* she your daughter?"

The Hon. Galahad bristled.

"She is not. Her father was a man in the Irish Guards, named Cotterleigh. He and Dolly were married when I was in South Africa."

He stood for a moment, his mind in the past.

"Fellow told me about it quite casually one day when I was having a drink in a Johannesburg bar," he said with a far-off look in his eyes. 'I see that girl Dolly Henderson who used to be at the Tivoli has got married,' he said. Out of a blue sky . . ."

Lady Julia took up her paper.

"Well, if you have no further observations of interest to make . . ."

The Hon. Galahad came back to the present.

"Oh, I have."

"Please hurry, then."

"I have something to say which I fancy will interest you very much."

"That will make a nice change."

The Hon. Galahad paused a moment. His sister took advantage of the fact to interject a question.

"It isn't by any chance that, if this marriage of Ronnie's is stopped, you will publish those Reminiscences of yours, is it?"

"It is."

Lady Julia gave another of her jolly laughs.

"My dear man, I had all that days ago from Constance. And my flesh didn't even creep a bit. It seems to agitate Connie tremendously but speaking for myself I haven't the slightest

objection to you publishing a dozen books of Reminiscences. It will be nice to think of you making some money at last, and as for the writhings of the nobility and gentry . . ."

"Julia," said the Hon. Galahad, "One moment."

He eyed her intently. She returned his gaze with an air of faintly bored inquiry.

"Well?"

"You are a relict of the late Major-General Sir Miles Fish, C.B.E., late of the Brigade of Guards."

"I have never denied it."

"Let us speak for a while," said the Hon. Galahad gently, "of the late Major-General Sir Miles Fish."

Slowly a look for horror crept into Lady Julia's blue eyes. Slowly she rose from the chair in which she had been reclining. A hideous suspicion had come into her mind.

"When Miles Fish married you," said the Hon. Galahad, "he was a respectable—even stodgily respectable—Colonel. I remember your saying the first time you met him that you thought him slow. Believe me, Julia, when I knew dear old Fishy Fish as a young subaltern, while you were still poisoning governesses' lives at Blandings Castle, he was quite the reverse of slow. His jolly rapidity was the talk of London."

She stared at him, aghast. Her whole outlook on life, as one might say, had been revolutionized. Hitherto, her attitude towards the famous Reminiscences had been, as it were, airy . . . detached . . . academic is perhaps the word one wants. The thought of the consternation which they would spread among her friends had amused her. But then she naturally supposed that this man would have exercised a decent reticence about the pasts of his own flesh and blood.

"Galahad, you haven't!"

The historian was pointing a finger at her, like some finger of doom.

"Who rode a bicycle down Piccadilly in sky-blue underclothing in the late summer of '97?"

"Galahad!"

"Who, returning to his rooms in the early morning of New Year's Day, 1902, mistook the coal-scuttle for a mad dog and tried to shoot it with the fire-tongs?"

"Galahad!"

"Who . . ."

He broke off. Lady Constance had come into the room.

"Ah, Connie," he said genially. "I've just been having a chat with Julia. Get her to tell you all about it. I must be going down and seeing how the young folks are getting on."

He paused at the door.

"Supplemental material," he said, focusing his monocle on Lady Julia, "will be found in Chapters Three, Eleven, Sixteen, Seventeen, and Twenty-one, especially Chapter Twenty-one."

Q.—if I may be so bold—E. D. Thank you.

Comments

Occasionally we receive letters wherein readers debate or compliment certain published articles. Rarely do we have a comment at the same time as publication. But we have that here, since ***Tony Ring*** *had the opportunity to preview this article. Deep thoughts, even as the ink dries on Elliott's article.*

Tony writes: One continuing mystery which Elliott overlooked in his researches into Lord Emsworth's sisters was the question of which aunt of Ronnie Fish (the son of Lady Julia) was "[found] sitting on the roof of the stables playing the ukulele in a blue dressing-gown. She said she was Boadicea. And she wasn't." (*Money for Nothing*)

The book was published in July 1928 after earlier serialization, by which time there had been just two Blandings novels and three short stories. The first references to Ronnie Fish and his mother at Blandings appeared in *Summer Lightning* the following year, so there are not many clues to go on! Was this aunt perhaps an eleventh sister, who had been disowned by the family and her existence expunged from the family archives?

Well, goodness, we have a response from Elliott already! We may as well continue the discussion now.

Elliott responds: Tony Ring, in his usual meticulous manner, has found an early and obscure reference to an aunt of Ronnie Fish's and uses it as a pretext to reopening the debate on how many Threepwood sisters there are, suggesting that there might be an eleventh. Clever, yes, as always, but, in the end, I think, unjustified.

First, as I stated in my talk, Wodehouse himself clearly limits the number in Chapter 6 of *Sunset at Blandings*: "After all, Gally felt, he himself had ten sisters, four of them just as bad as Brenda, but you never heard unmanly complaints from him."

Tony's comment that the eleventh sister is left off the list because she was disowned by the family might hold up if this recollection was being made by Constance, Georgiana, or even Lord Emsworth himself, but it is Galahad who is reflecting on the size of the distaff pool of Threepwoods. He would be more tolerant. In fact, he would most likely prefer such a sister to Hermione, Julia, or Florence.

Besides, there is no reason to create a new sister when we have Lady Jane and Lady Charlotte at hand who are mentioned but mysteriously absent from the saga and could easily have been carted off by the authorities after an impromptu musical engagement on the stable roof. And then there is always Lady Ann Warblington, who was such a recluse in *Something Fresh* and never seen or mentioned again. Perhaps some time before Psmith arrives it was she who did her Boadicea ukulele act.

But I actually prefer another theory. I think it was his father's sister Ronnie was referring to. After all, isn't it more likely that such a woman would be the blood relative of a man who rode a bicycle down Piccadilly in sky-blue underclothing or who mistook the coal scuttle for a mad dog and tried to shoot it with the fire-tongs? I mean, these things run in families, what?

Frankly, I think it was this very anecdote that Gally was alluding to darkly when he warned Julia that she would be especially shocked at Chapter 21. A great story like that had to be saved for the final chapter of the Reminiscences.

A New Chapter in North Carolina

We've been informed of a new Wodehouse chapter in the mountains of North Carolina. They hail from Waynesville/Sylva, and their small, jolly group meets once a month for cocktails, a Wodehouse trivia quiz, and Plum book discussions. They might tally up their collection of policemen's helmets while perhaps tossing a few bread rolls. Their chapter name is A Little More Bertie than Jeeves.

The Wodehouse Society Goes to Cincinnati

The Flying Pigs chapter of The Wodehouse Society happily invites you to the upcoming TWS convention, which will be held in Cincinnati from October 17 to 20, 2019. The convention will be held at the fabulous Netherland Hilton Hotel (https://tinyurl.com/7l6ylty). You'll find the registration form in this issue of *Plum Lines* and online at www.wodehouse.org. Send it in now to avoid the rush!

For those who know Cincinnati, you know it to be a city that celebrates the arts, sports, fine dining, and much more. The rest of you are in for a treat. We will have the convention website up and running soon, so be sure to check it out regularly. Meanwhile, here is the link to the preview video we presented in Washington, D.C.: https://youtu.be/0tbxhf_9gsg.

We're looking forward to seeing everyone in the Queen City in 2019!

The Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza Hotel looks fit for our festivities in October 2019.

Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: James Thurber

by Bob Rains

James Grover Thurber was born on December 8, 1894, in Columbus, Ohio, a city he would put on the literary map. One day in in the summer of 1901, while playing a game of William Tell with a homemade bow and blunt arrows, Thurber's older brother accidentally shot him directly in the left eye, destroying it. For reasons that remain unclear, Thurber's parents failed to get him prompt medical attention, and the damaged eye was not removed and replaced with a glass eye until several weeks later. The injury would have lifelong repercussions.

Starting in 1913, Thurber attended Ohio State University on and off, where he was a reporter and editor for both the school newspaper and the humor magazine. In May 1918, at the age of 23, with the Great War still raging, Thurber, still far short of graduating, decided to leave OSU. He obtained a cryptography job at the U.S. Department of State (alongside, among others, Stephen Vincent Benét). In October 1918 Thurber sailed for Paris with his fellow code clerks, conveniently arriving two days after the Armistice was declared. With little real cryptographic work to do, he sailed home fourteen months later and became a reporter for the *Columbus Dispatch*.

In 1922 Thurber married Althea Adams. Thurber and Althea had a daughter, Rosemary. Ultimately the marriage was not a happy one, and it ended in a rather lurid divorce in 1935. Both Thurber and his ex were married to other spouses within a very short period of time. Thurber's second wife, Helen, survived him.

By 1924 Thurber had left the *Columbus Dispatch* to become a freelance writer. The following year he returned to Paris, where he worked for the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. While in France he tried his hand at writing a novel. "It didn't work out because I got tired of the characters at the end of 5,000 words, and bade them and novel-writing farewell forever." There would be no Blandings Castle or Jeeves and Bertie sagas in his future. During his stay in Paris, Thurber heard of a fledgling magazine which had recently appeared, edited by a brilliant and quirky man named Harold Ross with high literary aspirations. Ross called his publication the *New Yorker*.

In 1926 Thurber relocated to New York and became a reporter for the *New York Evening Post*. He started submitting pieces to the *New Yorker* which "came back so fast I began to believe the *New Yorker* had a rejection machine." Finally, his wife suggested that he was worrying too much over each piece and he should stop reworking them to death. Thurber—in his retelling, at least—set an alarm clock for 45 minutes, and gave himself that much time for his next piece. The *New Yorker* accepted it, and Ross loved it so much that he eventually sent for Thurber. So, one fateful day in February 1927, Thurber presented himself at the *New Yorker*'s office and met, in short order, E. B. White and Harold Ross. Oddly, Ross hired Thurber as a managing editor, a position for which he was totally unsuited. Soon, though, Thurber was "demoted" to being a staff writer, and the rest, as they say, is literary history. He remained on the *New Yorker* staff until 1935, when he left to become a freelancer, and continued submitting pieces to it for decades, with the last one being published in 1961, the year of his death from a stroke.

Bob Rains not only documents peers and rivals of Wodehouse, but he takes the time to research his subjects. Here he is at the Thurber House in Columbus, Ohio, with a bronze modeled after the creature in Thurber's story "The Unicorn in the Garden."

Thurber produced many types of writing for the *New Yorker*, and some of his most famous works first appeared there. In March 1939 the *New Yorker* published "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," which was made into a 1947 movie starring Danny Kaye—Thurber apologized for it before it was released—and remade with Ben Stiller in 2013. A "Walter Mitty" is defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary as "a commonplace unadventurous person who seeks escape from reality through daydreaming." "Walter Mitty" was honored as Merriam-Webster's Word of the

Day on April 15, 2014, an accolade never accorded to "Jeeves," defined in the same source as "a valet or butler of model behavior." (On the other hand, unlike Walter Mitty, Jeeves has appeared as both a float and a balloon in Macy's Thanksgiving Day parades.)

Thurber never claimed to be an artist. "I'm a painstaking writer who doodles for relaxation." But, with the possible exception of Pablo Picasso, he may be the most famous doodler of all time. According to Thurber, his *New Yorker* office mate E. B. White picked up off the floor a Thurber doodle of a seal with Arctic explorers in the distance, inked it in, and tried to peddle it to Ross as an illustration for the magazine. Ross and the art staff rejected it, but White kept sending it back until Ross gave in and published it. That was just the beginning. The *New Yorker* ultimately published over 300 captioned Thurber drawings.

It is virtually impossible to describe Thurber's non-art. In her introduction to *The Seal in the Bedroom*, Dorothy Parker asserts that Thurber's drawings of people "have the outer semblance of unbaked cookies." When White and Thurber presented a sheaf of Thurber's drawings to Harper and Brothers with their manuscript of *Is Sex Necessary?*, one of the publishers assumed that they were rough ideas meant for a professional artist to execute. He was forcefully disabused of that notion, and fortunately Thurber's original drawings grace the book. One day, a real artist at the *New Yorker* asked Ross in frustration, "Why do you reject drawings of mine, and print stuff by that fifth-rate artist Thurber?" Ross sprang to Thurber's defense. "Third-rate," he replied. In 1934, Thurber's "third-rate" drawings were featured in a one-man art show in New York, the first of nine such shows during his lifetime.

James Thurber

Unfortunately, Thurber's childhood eye injury finally ended his career as a non-artist artist. As the vision in his remaining eye deteriorated through a process known as "sympathetic ophthalmia," Thurber underwent five painful and ultimately unsuccessful operations during 1940–41 to try to save it. After the operations, he was essentially blind, but with some very vestigial vision. Additionally, and understandably given his situation, Thurber often struggled with alcohol, depression, and mental breakdown. At times he fought with many old friends, even E. B. White; and his relationship with the *New Yorker* was often fraught.

Thurber was a portraitist, if not a biographer. His controversial *The Years with Ross*, while probably containing many inaccuracies, brings a brilliant genius to life. As an autobiographer in such books as *My Life and Hard Times*, Thurber is even less reliable than Wodehouse in his autobiographies.

Like Wodehouse, Thurber was a successful playwright. With his college friend Elliott Nugent, he wrote *The Male Animal*, first performed in 1940, then adapted as a 1942 movie starring Henry Fonda, Olivia de Havilland, and Joan Leslie. Thurber's revue, *A Thurber Carnival*, had a respectable Broadway run in 1960 and later was staged in London. *A Thurber Carnival* (not to be confused with the more comprehensive book *The Thurber Carnival*) includes the retelling of such Thurber classics as "The Night the Bed Fell," "The Macbeth Murder Mystery," and "If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox." *A Thurber Carnival* continues to be performed, with productions as recently as March 2018 by the Gates Mills Players in Cleveland.

Incredibly, despite his blindness, Thurber was an occasional actor, appearing on Broadway in 88 performances of *A Thurber Carnival*.

Thurber was a fabulist; some of his most memorable writing is in fable format. "The Unicorn in the Garden" relates the tale of a classic "Thurber husband" who manages to turn the tables on his wife.

While not a poet per se, Thurber was lauded in the December 1943 issue of *Poetry* magazine as "the comic Prufrock." *Poetry*'s editor, Peter De Vries, opined that Thurber had more in common with modern poets than with modern humorists.

Thurber's writing is often as inventive and vivid as anything penned by Wodehouse. In "The Car We Had to Push," he describes the demise of that vehicle when it was parked too close to the streetcar line and the streetcar couldn't get by:

> It picked up the tired old automobile as a terrier might seize a rabbit and drubbed it

> unmercifully, losing its hold now and then but catching a new grip a second later. Tires booped and whooshed, the fenders queeled and graked, the steering-wheel rose up like a specter and disappeared in the direction of Franklin Avenue with a melancholy whistling sound, bolts and gadgets flew like sparks from a Catherine wheel.

Wodehouse and Thurber both enjoyed playing with pronunciations. Ukridge's middle name Featherstonehaugh is, of course, pronounced Fanshaw. In "The Story of Sailing," Thurber relates how various sails (real and imaginary) are pronounced. Hence, the "fore-top-mast staysail halliards" are called "fazzles." (Thurber also explains that because Norsemen only had a simple square sail on their boats, they were unable to turn around, thus had to keep going straight and thereby discovered America.)

Wodehouse and Thurber shared another commonality. As the latter reported in "The Secret Life of James Thurber":

> The adults around me when I was in short pants were neither so glamorous nor so attentive. They consisted mainly of eleven maternal great-aunts, all Methodists, who were staunch believers in physic, mustard plasters, and Scripture, and it was part of their dogma that artistic tendencies should be treated in the same way as hiccups or hysterics.

Both Thurber and Wodehouse lived to write. In a 1958 interview, Thurber said, "I write basically because it's so much fun—even though I can't see. When I'm not writing, as my wife knows, I'm miserable." Wodehouse would often slip away from Ethel's parties to go off and write. Thurber went one step further and composed in his head during his wife's parties: "Helen will come up and say, 'Thurber, stop writing. That girl has been talking to you for ten minutes and you never even realized she was there.' And I have to admit I was preoccupied because I had just realized how to get out of a certain paragraph."

The two men had markedly different philosophies of writing humor. Wodehouse famously described his method of writing novels as "making a sort of musical comedy without music, and ignoring real life altogether." Thurber, on the other hand, claimed that his writing was based on truth distorted for emphasis and amusement—but truth. "It is reality twisted to the right into humor rather than to the left into tragedy." Furthermore, Thurber's writing was often political,

Bob sports a Thurber cartoon T-shirt as he poses in front of the Thurber House (now a literary center) at 77 Jefferson Avenue in Columbus.

overtly or covertly. He was very critical of McCarthyism and the Red Scare. His play *The Male Animal* involves a college professor who kindles a free speech debate by planning to read Bartolomeo Vanzetti's sentencing statement. In 1950, Thurber rejected an honorary degree from Ohio State University in protest against a gag rule it had imposed on outside speakers. Irrational fear of propaganda is, of course, the theme of his fable "The Very Proper Gander."

Especially toward the end of his long writing career, Wodehouse understandably had trouble creating new plots. Thus, on July 5, 1956, he wrote to Guy Bolton that he was "still trying without success to think of a plot for a novel." Thurber claimed to have no such problem. In a 1958 interview, he said, "I don't have that fear that suddenly it all will stop. I have enough outlined to last me as long as I live."

There appears to have been no personal relationship between Thurber and Wodehouse. Both published collections of letters; none of the collections contain correspondence with the other. In *Conversations with James Thurber*, a series of edited interviews, Thurber references many authors he has read and admired, but he doesn't mention Wodehouse. Nevertheless, Thurber was among the notable writers who cosigned the "Happy Birthday, Mr. Wodehouse" message published in the *New York Times* in October 1960 that lauded Wodehouse as "an inimitable international institution and master humorist." Wodehouse included Thurber stories in three humor collections which he edited or coedited. In *The Best of Modern Humor* (1952), coedited with Scott Meredith, the editors introduce Thurber's story "The Private Life of Mr. Bidwell" with the comment that "Thurber is easily one of America's

best and most popular writers, and no humor or short story anthology would be complete without him."

One of Thurber's more unusual stories—collected in *My World and Welcome to It*—is "You Could Look It Up," first published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1941. The story tells the tale of Pearl du Monville, a 35-inch-tall midget hired by baseball team manager Squawks Magrew, with the intention that he (Pearl) would always draw a walk, as no pitcher would be able to find his strike zone. Ten years after its first publication, Bill Veeck, flamboyant owner of the St. Louis Browns, famously played Eddie Gaedel, 3 feet 7 inches tall, in a game against the Tigers, with the same purpose in mind. Gaedel did indeed draw a walk in his one and only major league appearance, thus earning an enviable 1.000 on-base percentage. Veeck never credited Thurber as his inspiration, but you can draw your own conclusion. Veeck's stunt has never been repeated, and it is unlikely that any baseball commissioner would approve hiring a similar "athlete" for the majors. Query: Did any of Wodehouse's writing ever change the course of a professional sporting event?

Upon Thurber's death in November 1961, the *New Yorker* published a remembrance acknowledging its indebtedness and gratitude: "His work was largely unclassifiable (it was simply Thurber), and by the end it gave him a place in history as one of the great comic artists and one of the great American humorists." Although Thurber often denied in interviews that his humor was gentle, much of it has that same gentle, unreal quality that we so love in Wodehouse. Surely, *The Thurber Carnival* (which includes the complete *My Life and Hard Times*) contains many stellar, laugh-out-loud writings that should bring cheer to even the least gruntled among us.

Happily, some good people bought and renovated the Columbus, Ohio, house in which Thurber lived during his college days and opened its doors to the public in 1984. The Thurber House (www.thurberhouse.org) has become a destination for writers and aspiring writers, as well as for Thurber enthusiasts in general. It offers residencies for writers of adult and children's literature and sponsors the Thurber Prize for American Humor.

To mark the 125th anniversary of Thurber's birth, Thurber House has designated 2019 "The Year of Thurber." Several new collections of his works will be published, and the Columbus Museum of Art will feature an exhibition of his original drawings. Attendees of the upcoming TWS Cincinnati convention might consider stopping off in Columbus to visit the exhibition and the Thurber House.

Starrett on Wodehouse

According to Wikipedia, TWS's own Pale Parabolite G**eorge Vanderburgh** is publishing a complete edition of Vincent Starrett's works. There are already 22 volumes in print, and George tells us that there may be as many as 28. In the process of collecting all of Starrett's writings, George discovered some comments about Plum. Here's a nugget from Starrett's column ("Books Alive") in the *Chicago Tribune*:

> Villains, according to P. G. Wodehouse, may be divided into three classes—all silly. To wit: sinister natives who are on the trail of a jewel stolen from the eye of an idol; men with a grudge that has lasted as fresh as ever for thirty years; and "master criminals." P. G. must have been thinking of his youth when he wrote that; it has been long years since those stereotypes were popular. Today's villains are more formidable characters, realistic enough to scare the pants off cozily slippered readers of an older generation, like Wodehouse and your reporter.

And from "M. P. Shiel: An Undisciplined Genius":

> For myself, I confess, a sense of madness accompanies a reading of Shiel; I turn with relief to that other wild master, the eminent Wodehouse, and laugh maniacally at his equally preposterous creations. Sometimes I think I would like Shiel better if he displayed less genius and more talent. But if you have a strong grip on sanity, you may be able to read this undisciplined "Lord of our Language"—as he has been called—with somewhat of the rapture he inspires in the members of the Shiel cult, now broadening down the years.

The school which I propose to found . . . will have as its object the education of moving-picture villains in the difficult art of killing moving-picture heroines. The scheme deserves, and will doubtless command, public sympathy and support, for we all want moving-picture heroines killed. Is there one amongst us who would not have screamed with joy if Pauline had perished in the second reel or the Clutching Hand had massacred that princess of bores, Elaine? But these pests carried on a charmed life simply because the villain, with the best intentions, did not know the proper way to go about the job.

Vanity Fair (October 1915)

Wodehouse's Early Years, 1881–1902: Part Two

by John Dawson

In the Autumn 2018 issue of Plum Lines*, we printed the introduction and first chapter ("Sion Hill") of John's very detailed work about the early years of P. G. Wodehouse's life. We'll print more in this and subsequent issues, to give you a good sense of what the book includes, and hope that a good number of you will be interested in procuring the entire volume when it becomes available.*

2. Hong Kong

In the years following the establishment of the Crown Colony in 1842, Hong Kong grew from a remote fishing village in the South China Sea into the fourth-largest shipping port in the world. Thousands of British traders, merchant bankers, engineers, and their families migrated to the 29-square-mile island to carve out a civilization. Under rule of the governor, colonial administrators and civil servants established the rule of law. In the 1860s, China eased immigration restrictions, resulting in a large influx of natives to the island. In later years, more than 100,000 war refugees arrived from the mainland. Among the challenges immigration brought to the fore was a persistent problem with the language barrier. Jails were overcrowded with petty criminals, and, due to a lack of bilingual courts there was an immense backlog of unresolved legal and administrative matters.

The Civil Service Cadet Program was instituted in 1862 to address the problem. The plan was to import groups of young men of ages 20–23 to learn Chinese and serve in the colonial government. Successful candidates had to demonstrate proficiency in mathematics, Latin, history, geography, natural science, and constitutional and international law. Walter Deane and two fellow Cambridge graduates were the first selected for the program. They received £100 for passage and £200 per annum for two years with quarters, teachers, and books provided.

Walter and his fellow cadets arrived in Hong Kong on September 3, 1862. Five years after his arrival, he was appointed Captain Superintendent of Police, a position he was to hold for 25 years. (Ernest Wodehouse described the force as "a dissipated bunch of 20 to 30 Europeans from India. They were generally dismissed for drunkenness.") Although historical accounts credit Walter with eliminating corruption and bringing the Hong Kong police into the modern age, his life was not all work. He was secretary of the Hong Kong Cricket Club and an internationally recognized whist expert.

Walter Meredith Deane

He married Marian Susan Taverner of Deal, Kent, in 1870. They had two daughters: Christobel, born in 1880, and Beryl, born in 1882. A lanky, fit, mustachioed man, he retired to England in 1892 after being shot during a police raid. He died in Bath on August 2, 1906.

The Governor of the Crown Colony, Sir Hercules Robinson, was delighted with the first group of student interpreters and directed that additional cadets be recruited. In 1867 the third and final phase of the program produced the last cadet accepted into the program, 22-year-old Henry Ernest Wodehouse, thereafter known officially as H. E. Wodehouse. Ernest was from the settlement of Wribbenhall, Bewdley, on the east side of the Severn River. He was one of eight children of Colonel Philip Wodehouse (1788–1846) and his wife, Lydia née Lea. Philip died at the family home at Severn Hall when Ernest, the couple's fifth son, was not yet eighteen months old. Lydia sent her boys to Repton, a venerable boarding school in Derbyshire. Ernest's brothers Philip John and Frederick Armine chose the clergy for their livelihoods; three others were military men—Philip George (Royal Navy), Charles (Indian Army), and Albert Philip (Inniskilling Fusiliers). Ernest had a 31-year judicial career ahead of him in Hong Kong, but I expect he would have wanted his biography to note that he played for Repton's Sixth Form cricket team in 1864. Ernest's younger sister

Lucy was to become one of Plum's formidable aunts, and the youngest Wodehouse sister, Harriet, married a clergyman, moved to New Zealand, and does not enter into Plum's story.

Ernest's appointment to the student interpreter program was announced on January 22, 1867, and he arrived at Hong Kong on April 11. His training was specified in a curriculum designed by a board of Chinese and English educators. In his first year, he was required to translate and recite chapters 1–7 of the Gospel of St. John, Aesop's Fables, and the Sacred Edicts of the Emperor K'ang Hsi, written in classical Chinese. He and his fellow cadets spent one day each week at the Law Courts and other colonial offices to observe procedures and protocol.

With graduation in early 1869 came a salary increase to £400. Over the next two years, Ernest filled a series of appointments to various administrative offices and courts. In January 1872 he was named Assistant Superintendent of Police, second in command to Walter Deane. In June the following year, he was appointed to the new position of Sheriff of Hong Kong, entailing supervision of the Chinese police. In December 1873 he acted as interpreter for Princes Philip and Augustus of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha on their state visit to the island. Ernest had demonstrated his fluency in the language in 1872 when *China Review* published his 20,000-word retelling of the ancient myth "The Legend of the Monkey" ("Tsai Tin Tai Shing, the Great Spirit equal with Heaven"). From his introduction: "This legend is not a translation. The Chinese book in which it is contained extends over twenty volumes, and is so diffuse and prolix that I have thought it better to extract the main particulars and clothe them in my own words."

Ernest made his home in a wooden chalet-style structure called The Homestead, situated on Victoria Peak, the 1,811-foot mountain on the western half of the island. The Peak attracted colonists because of its panoramic view and more temperate climate, as opposed to the subtropical atmosphere below. Residents reached their bungalows by sedan chairs carried up and down the steep slopes by Chinese servants. After five years, he took his first home leave, sailing to Southampton on the P&O steamer *Geelong* on April 24, 1873. He returned to work his way through a series of administrative appointments, including Chief Clerk in the Colonial Secretary's Office. In Wodehousean fashion, in 1876 alone he and Walter played together in at least thirteen matches pitting the Hong Kong Cricket Club against such teams as Army & Civil Service, Non-Commissioned Officers of the Garrison, H.M. 80th & 28th Regiment, and Army and Navy.

Victoria Peak in Hong Kong

3. Ernest and Eleanor (Part One)

Where and when Wodehouse's parents met is not known. Biographer David Jasen did not ask Plum the question, but for his book he wrote: "There was certainly no shortage of eligible young ladies [in England] from among whom the empire builders [in India and elsewhere] could choose. Many an astute beauty had come to the conclusion that there was little point in dropping a handkerchief or having difficulty with a parasol on some dewy green English lawn when the cream of the young gallants was far removed from the scene. Consequently, handkerchiefs and parasols were hastily packed and shipped off with their owners in the wake of the young men. Perhaps it was thus that Eleanor came to be in Hong Kong."

Jasen's oblique reference is to a forgotten phenomenon known as the fishing fleet. Succeeding biographers assumed that the fanciful account was factual, however, and turned his "Perhaps it was thus" into an actual event. Benny Green suggested that the Deanes had prodded Eleanor to find a husband: "Ernest had married a member of the Fishing Fleet, that group of acceptable young English lady anglers whose parents, having perceived that so many of the big matrimonial fish seemed to go East, sent their daughters after them in the hope of landing one."

Barry Phelps, unlike Jasen, knew that Ernest Wodehouse and Walter Deane served together in Hong Kong and had to account for the fact: "Eleanor went out to Hong Kong 'to visit her brother' on one of those husband-hunting trips so common for young ladies of the period who had failed to find a suitable husband at home. She succeeded in Hong Kong."

Robert McCrum rewrote: "Eleanor exploited family connections to visit her brother Walter in Hong Kong with the so-called 'fishing fleet' in search of a husband, promptly snagged Ernest, and married him in 1877."

Ernest Wodehouse

These attempts to explain why Eleanor first came to Hong Kong conflate two mutually exclusive scenarios. She either intended to visit Ernest and/or Walter and his family, or she was a lovesick maiden in search of an "empire builder." It is one or the other, but can hardly be both. Women of the fishing fleet did not step off a boat 6,000 miles from home expecting to meet and marry men who had been known to their families for at least ten years.

The practice had its origin in the late seventeenth century when the East India Company advertised for unattached British women to sail to India to become brides for its officers. The voyages became known as fishing fleets because the aim was for the women to "hook" a husband. Paying up to £200 for the privilege, the ladies sailed in the autumn and spent the cooler months in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, attending social events arranged for them to meet men.

In her 2012 book *The Fishing Fleet: Husband Hunting in the Raj*, Anne de Courcy writes: "There were four unmarried men to every English girl. A young woman might look forward to house parties, hunting parties, dances, dinner parties, polo matches, card parties, amateur theatrics, costume parties, tennis, golf and swimming parties. And throughout this giddy season, she would have the opportunity to talk to, dance with, and flirt with a lot of different men."

"Fishing fleet" was a term associated solely with India. In over 200 years of available recorded history, including the British and Hong Kong library newspaper collections, neither Hong Kong nor any other non-Indian port is referenced as a destination. Hong Kong is nearly 2,700 miles from Bombay (Mumbai).

More importantly, biographic theory assumes that Eleanor was searching for a husband, which is far from known. She had four sisters who married and four who did not and presumably would not have faced strong family pressure to marry. The inference that her parents shipped her off to Hong Kong to land a husband is speculative. Like a typical young woman of any era, Eleanor may have wanted to get married, but taking a ship to Hong Kong to visit a brother and his family is not the same as paying a fee in order to find a husband.

Eleanor Wodehouse in 1882 with the infant PGW

There is persuasive evidence that the two families were acquainted well before Ernest and Eleanor married. In April 1874, the *Bath Chronicle* reported on the annual Easter Ball: "Among the guests were Mrs. Bathurst Deane, Mrs. H. Deane, Captain Deane, Miss C. Deane, Miss Eleanor Deane, Miss Jane Deane, Capt. Wodehouse, and Pelham von Donop." This article places at the same event Plum's future grandmother, mother, aunts, godfather of her third son, and an unidentified member of the Wodehouse family, possibly one of Ernest's two military brothers.

The 1876 marriage of Ernest's brother Rev. Philip John Wodehouse implies a prior Wodehouse/Deane connection. Constance Browne (1846–1877) was the

daughter of Wade Browne, Esq., who had died in 1851, leaving his widow Selina with five young children, Constance being the oldest. In 1858 Selina married the vicar of Corsham, Rev. Joseph Abbott, who adopted the children. An estate matter refers to them as "infants in care of Joseph Abbott, Bath, Somerset, clerk in Holy Orders." Philip and Constance's marriage in January 1876 was held at St. Swithin's in Walcot, the longtime parish home of the Deanes, a full year before Eleanor and Ernest were married. It is nearly inconceivable that Rev. Abbott and Rev. Bathurst Deane would not have met, or that the family of Philip's new father-in-law was unknown to the Deanes.

Christobel Deane Berkeley provided the only known documented account of Eleanor in Hong Kong prior to her marriage: "My father, the late Walter Meredith Deane, CMG, was for many years in Hong Kong, where I and my sister were born. My Aunt Eleanor, now Mrs. H. E. Wodehouse, was my godmother, and lived with my parents in Hong Kong. She was married out there from my parents' house." (*Bath Chronicle*, September 24, 1938)

The *Straits Times* of November 5, 1874, reported the arrival in Singapore of an unnamed ship originating from Marseilles, en route to Hong Kong. "Mrs. and Miss Deane" were among the passengers. Marseilles was one of the three European points of departure to Hong Kong, and Walter was the only known Deane on the island. If these passengers were Eleanor and her mother (or sister-in-law Juliette), it would place her in Hong Kong about two years before the marriage and conform to Christobel's account that she lived with her brother's family as opposed to just visiting them. Moving to Hong Kong and being accompanied by one's mother in order to live with family would be a different proposition than arriving on a "fishing fleet" expedition.

Finally, Ernest's first home leave brought him back to England in August 1873 for about fifteen months. He certainly could have gone to Bath to visit the Deanes; such a courtesy call would have been expected of Walter's deputy and cricket pal in Hong Kong. Perhaps he had heard about the houseful of Deane daughters and wanted to have a look as well. Four years before the marriage, Eleanor would have been about 21 and Ernest 28.

The "Ernest and Eleanor" chapter will be continued in a subsequent issue. For information about the entire volume, you may contact John Dawson at the email in your membership roster. Obviously, John has done a tremendous amount of research and compiled a very thorough description of Plum's early time on this planet.

Wodehouse Archive Exhibit

An exciting new exhibition has just opened at British Library in London. It is divided into four sections and features materials from the Wodehouse Archive loaned to the British Library by Sir Edward Cazalet. In case you happen to be in London in the next months, here's the relevant information:

Dates: November 29, 2018–February 24, 2019
Title of exhibition: P. G. Wodehouse: The Man and His Work
Place: British Library, London
Cost: Entry is free
Additional information: Please visit https://www.bl.uk/events/p-g-wodehouse-the-man-and-his-work

A Few Quick Ones

Thanks to all TWS members for the little nuggets you send along. We do read and appreciate every one of them!

Barbara Hoffman (*New York Post*, January 14, 2018) compiled a list of deceased authors whose characters have been revived by mimicking authors, like Sebastian Faulks's 2013 *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells*. While Barbara considered the Faulks work a flop, she feels that some writers have succeeded when creating new works for famous authors: Marc Cameron's with Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan, Ace Atkins emulating Robert B. Parker's detective Spenser, and many writers who have added to the James Bond saga.

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In addition to several reviews of his *Stories by Heart*, John Lithgow wrote his own article—"Barnstorming My Way to Broadway"—in the January 14, 2018, *New York Times*. He offered many anecdotes and said he keeps this show rolling to help people "discover or rediscover the dazzling work of Lardner or Wodehouse."

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Michael Dirda, Pulitzer-winning columnist for the *Washington Post* and great advocate for Wodehouse, compiled a list of some of the best "fan publications" sponsored by various literary groups. (Michael's columns are always worthy; check him out!) *Weird Fiction Review*; *Wormwood*; and *Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural, and Fantastic Literature* all sound a bit enticing. Michael even gave a kind nod to TWS when he said that "while academic journals tend to be unreadable, this isn't the case for, say, the Wodehouseans' lively *Plum Lines* . . ."

Chapters Corner

What is your chapter up to these days? 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.

In this issue, with great excitement, we get to announce our newest chapter, with top billing, in **bold,** from North Carolina! (See page 9 for complete details.)

A Little More Bertie than Jeeves
(Waynesville/Sylva, North Carolina)
Contact: Erin Watras

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: Bill Franklin

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

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

A Junior Bloodstain will be held on Saturday, January 12, 2019, during the Baker Street Irregulars weekend in New York City. The exact time, location, and program are still to be announced. You may contact Elaine Coppola at the email address above if you have questions or if you are interested in attending.

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

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

The Flying Pigs
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)
Contact: Susan Pace or Bill Scrivener

The Flying Pigs chapter is deep in the joyful throes of planning for the 2019 TWS convention in Cincinnati. We hope our fellow Plummies have been enjoying the enticing photos on our webpage—if you haven't, look for Pigs Have Wings on Facebook. We are planning a festive tea and planning session for December 9 and hope all interested parties within hailing distance will be there. Send Susan an email if you need directions. We're looking forward to many such evenings and encourage

all prospective Pigs lurking in the underbrush to come forward and join us.

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

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)
(Boston and New England)
Contact: Lynn Vesley-Gross

The NEWTS enjoyed a bucolic summer gathering in July at the home of Indu and "Ravi" Ravi and admired the pleasaunce they have created.

Varieties of hosts are described in *Uncle Dynamite*: "Hosts . . . are divided into two classes: those who, when helpless guests are in their power, show them the stables, and those who show them the model dairy." But there is also a subdivision that shows them the begonias, and the Ravis are closest to the begonia type. At the meeting, we held a rousing short-story reading and napped in the hammocks.

When autumn arrived, with its mists and mellow fruitfulness, we moved indoors for a September meeting *chez* Max Pokrivchak and Cindy McKeown. Refreshments were toothsome, and the champagne flowed like, well, champagne.

We shared fond memories of the late Anne Cotton. [*See the Autumn 2018* Plum Lines *for our tribute to Anne.*] She was a past president of the NEWTS chapter and will be much missed.

There is a new NEWTS skit already in rehearsal for presentation at the 2019 convention. Rumors are that farm animals will be involved—if not as cast members, then as stagehands. Further details will be leaked in the coming months.

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

The Northwodes celebrated Derby Day on May 5 while braving the competing and equally raucous Cinco de Mayo crowds. Mary McDonald organized the drinking, eating, and talking, all done very stylishly, and we had a dozen attendees. Slips of paper with the names of the starting horses were bought from a hat for a dollar that was added to the pot. Minutes before the race, the ritual singing of "My Old Kentucky Home" filled the pub. Fred Muschenheim was the lucky one who collected the massive winnings. The outstanding fancy hat was Maria Jette's solar-powered Queen Elizabeth on a hill with Corgis, gnomes, and hedgehog, highlighted with pheasant plumes.

The Northwodes watch with excitement as the Derby wagers grow. Meanwhile, Maria's hat amazes.

On June 9, Prof. Constance Walker spoke to the Northwodes about teaching Wodehouse to the hipsters (Carleton College students). Most of the presentation was that given to the 2017 TWS convention. [*See the Summer 2018 issue of* Plum Lines *for Dr. Walker's published talk.*] In particular, she mentioned "Neo Yokio," an animated series on Netflix. The series features a Bertie-like Kaz Kaan and his faithful mecha-butler. Kaz pursues love and fashion in Neo Yokio's high society. Of course, there are also sinister forces to fight.

Sunday, July 22, found many of the Northwodes at the Theater in the Round in Minneapolis for a production of *Jeeves in Bloom*, by Margaret Raether. There was much laughter at the show and the attendees were impressed by both the actors and the play. There was browsing and sluicing afterwards at the Republic

Gastropub, where the discussion ranged far beyond Wodehouse, as the Northwodes is an interesting group.

Mike Engstrom arranged for a September 9 book salon. The meeting was held at a comfortable old haunt at the Liffey Pub in St. Paul, which was a calm, peaceful, thoughtful (code for under-populated, but nice) sort of affair. We discussed *Bring On the Girls,* a memoir by P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton.

Eight of the Northwodes met at Crooners Nightclub on October 13 to celebrate Plum's birthday. Favorite quotes from the canon were shared, toasts were drunk, and "Happy Birthday" was sung.

The Orange Plums
(Orange County, California)

The Orange Plums in the midst of a lively discussion of The Crime Wave at Blandings

Stand back: new shooter at the table! Yours truly, Admiral George J. "Fruity" Biffen (aka **Jeff Porteous**), will be making good use of his recent retirement by henceforth splitting chapter reportage duties with the Orange Plums' masterful and beloved Miss Postlethwaite, everyone's favorite barkeep.

So, we SoCal Plummies have been busy plucking the gowans fine. I'll drop anchor here with a few words on our two most recent meetings.

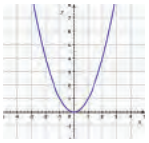
Back in August, our silver cow creamer mascot, The Duchess, showed up masquerading as the natty new feminine Dr. Who to welcome aboard out-of-state visiting TWS members Todd and Debbie Parkhurst. Hailing from St. Louis, these two, sadly, do not enjoy the luxury of a local chapter in their neck of the woods, so were quite happy they were present for our soirée. To truly ratchet up the welcome, we greeted their entrance with a cascade of wadded-up paper napkins—a real downpour!—in lieu of the more traditional bread-roll salute, such doughy products not being on the menu at this particular establishment and tossed foodstuffs being generally frowned upon in any case. Both Todd and Debbie are accomplished chefs, bakers, and overall foodies, however, so making the foodstuffs airborne would have been such a waste.

We all enjoyed a discussion of *The Crime Wave at Blandings* and then celebrated with a few rousing rounds of our chapter's trademark Boat Race Night Wodehouse trivia board game. Though the competition was loud and keen—as always—I can't remember who won. But nobody cares: it's all about the laughs. At the end of it all, we bid Todd and Deb a sorrowful farewell, much wishing they could join in our Orange Plumminess on a regular basis. (Note that it was Todd who first introduced me to the literary delights of Wodehouse way way back in our mutual Michigan State days, bless him.)

Margot Churchill studies Dynamite *as Rosie inspires.*

Our September meeting included a discussion of *Uncle Dynamite*. To honor Labor Day, our beloved Duchess sported a tribute to that icon of trenchant toiling, Rosie the Riveter.

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)
Contact: Allison Thompson

Top-hatted and spatted to the brim, members of the Pittsburgh Millionaires Club foregathered on October 14 to read aloud "Farewell to All Cats"—you know, the one where Freddie Widgeon travels to Matcham Scratchings in pursuit of yet another girl. ("Why does he even bother?" wonders a Crumpet. "They all turn him down in the end.") The regular crew of Millionaires was joined by a visiting Plummie and his host. We enjoyed a lively discussion of some of our favorite Wodehousean works.

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

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

The Right Honorable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)
Contact: Peter Nieuwenhuizen

The Knights visited the U.K. society's dinner and posed with Elin Woodger (third from right) in their midst.

On October 11, the Right Honorable Knights visited their English friends across the Channel for the biennial formal dinner at Gray's Inn in London. The Knights had an exquisite dinner with 140 Wodehousean friends and Wodehouse's step-grandson, Sir Edward Cazalet. Hal and Lara Cazalet sang many tunes from the Wodehouse collection, including "Our Little Nest," "We're Crooks," and the evergreen "Bill." There were readings by the Duke of Kent and actor Robert Daws, famous for his role as Tuppy Glossop in the *Jeeves & Wooster* (Fry & Laurie) series. TV presenter Alexander Armstrong, president of the U.K. Wodehouse society, sang the hilarious "Tulip Time in Sing-Sing."

Hal and Lara Cazalet in prime form

Two days later the Knights returned to sunny Amsterdam for the regular chapter meeting on October 13. The theme: A good cigar is a smoke. Members had to dive into their Wodehouse masterpieces to find text

referring to smoking in the Wodehouse canon. Many quotes were discovered and presented. The members read their fragment in Dutch and English, and the audience had to guess the original novel or story. Some were easy to identify—"The Man Who Gave Up Smoking," for example. Others were a little more difficult, like "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court."

For the first time, the Amsterdam Chapter also organized a book exchange: every member had to bring three Wodehouse novels for free exchange with others. It was a wonderful opportunity to freshen up your Wodehouse book collection and that of others.

Unfortunately, the Knights had to bid farewell to their longtime correspondent and cornerstone, Jelle Otten, who can no longer attend meetings due to his illness. For many years he has reported our illustrious adventures and has attended many Wodehousean conventions and tours, where he always brought warmth and good humor.

The next regular meeting of the Knights will be at 1 PM on February 9, 2019, in Restaurant Szmulewicz, Bakkerstraat 12 (off Rembrandtplein) in Amsterdam.

Rugby In All Its Niceties
(Rugby, Tennessee Region)
Contact: Donna Heffner

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

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

A Wodehouse Memorial in Westminster Abbey

FROM ENGLAND comes the wonderful news that P. G. Wodehouse will receive the supreme literary accolade with a memorial stone in Westminster Abbey. After a campaign by The P G Wodehouse Society (UK), the Very Rev. Dr. John Hall, Dean of Westminster, granted permission for the memorial to be placed. Dr. Hall is known to be a Wodehouse fan and certainly will be thought of fondly hereafter by Wodehouseans everywhere.

Journalist Patrick Kidd, a patron of the UK society, was the first to break the news of the memorial in the October 13, 2018, edition of The Times (London). His report was soon followed by many others applauding this well-deserved honor for Wodehouse. Mr. Kidd considered this memorial to be a tremendously significant achievement that may "finally complete the rehabilitation of Wodehouse's reputation almost 80 years after he was criticized for innocently assisting the Nazi war effort with a series of jaunty broadcasts on German radio." He also quoted broadcaster and Wodehouse fan Gyles Brandreth who, said that Wodehouse was "undoubtedly one of our greatest comic writers and the abbey is a place for forgiveness." (See also Letter from England, next page.)

Without a doubt, Westminster Abbey, already popular with literary tourists, will become an essential stop for all Wodehouseans when visiting London!

A memorial stone for P. G. Wodehouse will be placed in Westminster Abbey along with other literary greats.

She uttered a cry which might have been the howl of the banshee to which she had alluded, and gave me the sort of look which in the old tally-ho days she would have given a mentally deficient hound which she had observed suspending its professional activities in order to chase a rabbit.

Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit (1955)

"And I hope," said Packy, a little priggishly, perhaps, but the subject was one on which he felt deeply, "that this will be a lesson to you not to go to fancy-dress balls as a lizard. If fewer people went about the place pretending to be lizards," said Packy, "this would be a better and a sweeter world."

Hot Water (1932)

Letter from England

by Elin Woodger

My letters are few and far between these days, but that's not to say it has been all that quiet over here. Last year the U.K. Wodehouse society found a new venue for its thrice-yearly meetings, and it is a corker: the Savile Club, situated in an eighteenth-century building in Mayfair. Jeeves would undoubtedly approve of this elegant location; certainly the society's members do, as attendance at meetings has risen significantly. In July we had a near-record turnout for the annual quiz, a real mind-binder set by Paul Kent. Team names can be just as much fun as the quiz itself: This year we had, among others, the Stand-Up Comics (a group lacking chairs to sit on); Eggs, Beans, and Clueless; We Used to Know That; and the winners, the Wise Guys.

As enjoyable as our meetings are, they pale in comparison to the society's biennial formal dinners at Gray's Inn in London. This year's dinner, held on October 11, was nothing short of amazing, first of all because it had the highest attendance of any dinner since the society's founding: 148 in total, with several left lingering on the waiting list. A large number of those present came from overseas: at least ten from the USA, four from the Netherlands, one from Germany, one from Australia, and goodness knows how many from other countries. The dinners have certainly become as international as TWS conventions.

It was a splendid evening, made more so by the participation of the society's new president, Alexander Armstrong. Non-British members will probably not know who this excellent fellow is: television and radio presenter, half of the comedy-sketch duo Armstrong and Miller, actor, and singer. He is also one of the nicest chaps it has ever been my pleasure to meet. His toast to Wodehouse and the society was a masterpiece of humor and charm, and at the climax of the evening's entertainment, he wowed the crowd by singing the original version of "Tulip Time in Sing-Sing." The cabaret, once again written by Tony Ring, centered on Wodehouse's crooks. Among other songs, Hal and Lara Cazalet sang (big surprise) "We're Crooks," while commentary was supplied by Robert Daws, Neil Pearson, and Katy Reece. It was a top-notch entertainment, and it was followed by an exciting announcement, more on which in a minute.

Needless to say, with so many overseas Wodehouseans in London for the dinner, I had the pleasure of enjoying several other social occasions. One of these was an outing to Blenheim Palace on October 13 with Americans Ken and Joan Clevenger and Brit Christine Hewitt. After a pleasant day spent exploring the house and grounds, we met up with Australian Noel Bushnell, plus Hal and Edward Cazalet and Tony and Elaine Ring, to attend a very special one-man show entitled "Wodehouse in Wonderland," performed by actor Robert Daws (who played Tuppy Glossop in the *Jeeves & Wooster* TV series). In this work-in-progress, written by William Humble, Mr. Daws portrays Wodehouse in the late 1950s, reminiscing on the author's life and career up to that point in time. The show included several songs which Mr. Daws sang with considerable brio, but it also touched on the pathos of Plum's life, particularly his and Ethel's loss of Leonora, coming as it did on top of the controversy surrounding the Berlin broadcasts. It will be interesting to see how this excellent show is developed and where it will be performed in the future.

The Wodehouse Society was well represented at The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)'s biennial dinner on October 11, 2018. Among those Americans present were our current president and five past presidents. From left to right are Thomas L. R. Smith, Bob Rains, Karen Shotting, Ken Clevenger, Elin Woodger, and Elliott Milstein. Photo by Katy Photography

I now return to the dinner and the most exciting news of all—although not a surprise here if you've read the preceding article. For some time, the U.K. society has been working quietly to secure P. G. Wodehouse a memorial stone in Westminster Abbey—and by golly, they have succeeded! As announced by chairman Hilary Bruce at the dinner's conclusion, Plum will be memorialized in the Abbey, in recognition of his well-deserved place among Britain's literary lions. As *The Times* put it in an editorial on October 13, "Wodehouse is a great figure of English letters and eminently deserves his place near Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Shelley. Rehab was never sweeter."

Riveting Talks Need Riveting Speakers!

Bill Scrivener, co-coordinator of the 2019 TWS convention, has reminded us that a highlight of every TWS convention is the time set aside for the Riveting Talks. While there are a few speakers in place, more are needed. This could be your chance to hold forth (for 20–25 minutes) on some aspect of Wodehousiana that has always fascinated you. If you are interested, please write to
com. Just let him know what your proposed topic is and he'll take it from there.

Jeeves and Wooster Live On: The New "Wodehouse" Novel

If you participate in the PGWnet email forum, you're already familiar with the comments about, and the early reviews of, the new Jeeves and Wooster book, penned by Ben Schott. With the approval of the Wodehouse estate, Mr. Schott has published *Jeeves and the King of Clubs*. We expect to have a full review in the Spring 2019 issue of *Plum Lines*.

If you don't yet participate in PGWnet and would like to do so, visit http://wodehouse.org and click on the PGWnet tab for more details and instructions on subscribing.

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Quick Ones (unless otherwise credited) courtesy of John Baesch and Evelyn Herzog.

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.