



Plum Lines

VOL. 13 No 4

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY WINTER 1992

Put me among the Earls

by P. G.
Wodehouse

This chatty little talk about our elders and betters appeared in *Punch* in 1954 and comes to us by way of Len Lawson.

A critic, with whose name I will not sully my typewriter, was giving me the sleeve across the windpipe the other day for including so many members of the Peerage in the casts of characters in my books. Specifically, he accused me of an undue fondness for Earls.

Well, of course, now that I come to tot up the score, I realise that in the course of my literary career I have featured quite a number of these fauna, but as I often say . . . well, perhaps once a fortnight . . . Why not? I see no objection to Earls. A most respectable class of men they seem to me. And one admires their spirit. I mean, while some, of course, have come up the easy way, many have had the dickens of a struggle, starting at the bottom as mere Hons, having to go in to dinner after the Vice-Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and all that sort of thing.

Show me the Hon who by pluck and determination has raised himself from the

depths, step by step, till he becomes entitled to keep a coronet on the hat peg in the downstairs cupboard, and I will show you a man of whom any author might be proud to write.

Earls on the whole have made a very good showing in fiction. With Baronets setting them a bad example by being almost uniformly steeped in crime, they have preserved a gratifyingly high standard of behaviour. There is seldom anything wrong with the Earl in fiction, if you don't mind a touch of haughtiness and a tendency to have heavy eyebrows and draw them together in a formidable frown, like the one in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. And in real life I can think of almost no Earls whose hearts were not as pure and fair as those of dwellers in the lowlier air of Seven Dials.

Oh yes. Earl Carroll. He caused a lot of talk in New York some years ago by giving a party at which a girl took a bath in champagne with, if I have the story rightly, not so much as a Bikini bathing-suit on. But he was not a member of the Peerage, he was a theatrical producer. (That is a thing you have

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to be careful of in America. Earl is a Christian name.)

Our literature, lacking Earls, would have been a great deal poorer. Shakespeare would have been lost without them. Everyone who has written for the theatre knows how difficult it is to get people off the stage unless you can think of a good exit speech. That is why, as you pass through Bloomsbury and other literary quarters, you see haggard men wandering about and sticking straws in their hair as they mutter:

"Life, dear lady . . ."

"Life, dear lady, is like . . ."

"Dear lady, I have but two objections to life. One is that it . . ."

Than which nothing is sadder.

Shakespeare had no such problem. With more Earls than he knew what to do with, he was on velvet. One need only quote those well-known lines from his *Henry the Seventh, Part One*:

My lord of Sydenham, bear our royal word

To Brixton's Earl, the Earl of Wormwood

Scrubs

Our faithful liege, the Earl of Dulwich (East),

And those of Beckenham, Penge and Peckham

Rye,

Together with the Earl of Hampton Wick:

Bid them to haste like cats when struck with

brick,

For they are needed in our battle line,

And stitch in time doth ever save full nine.

[*Exeunt Omnes. Trumpets and hautboys.*]

"Pie!" Shakespeare used to say to Burbage as he slapped the stuff down, and Burbage would agree that Shakespeare earned his money easily.

A thing about Earls I have never understood, and never liked to ask for fear of betraying my ignorance, is why one Earl is the Earl of Whoosis and another Earl just plain Earl Smith. I always think Earl Smith sounds a bit abrupt, almost like a nickname. I have an idea—I may be wrong—that the "of" boys have a slight social edge on the others, like the aristocrats in Germany who are able to call themselves "Von". One can picture the Earl of Brighton at a cocktail party. The host says, "Oh, Percy, I want you to meet Earl Hove," and hurries away to attend to his other guests. There is a brief interval during which the two agree that this is the rottenest party they were ever at and possibly exchange a remark or two about the weather,

then the Earl of Brighton speaks:

"I didn't quite get the name. Earl of Hove, did he say?"

"No, just Earl Hove."

My lord of Brighton blinks as if he had been struck between the eyes with a wet fish. A coldness creeps into his manner.

"You mean *plain* Earl Hove?"

"That's right."

"No 'of'?"

"Good God!"

There is a tense silence. You can see the Earl of Brighton's lip curling.

"Ah, well," he says at length, "it takes all sorts to make a world, does it not?" and Earl Hove slinks off with his ears pinned back and drinks far too many sherries in the hope of restoring his self-respect. Practically all the Earls who are thrown sobbing out of cocktail parties are non-ofs. They can't take it, poor devils.

I don't think I have much more to say on this subject, though I know you would gladly have me ramble on forever. I will merely add that in certain parts of America—notably Brooklyn—if the resident wishes to attract the attention of a visiting Earl he shouts "Hey, Oil!"

Information and new memberships
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues payments and address changes
Tom Wainwright

Contributions to *Plum Lines*
Ed Ratcliffe, OM

Dues are \$15 per year.

All quotations from P. G. Wodehouse are reprinted by permission of the Trustees of the Wodehouse estate.

A few quick ones

Bill Norman reports that the following seven PGW quotations were chosen by Evan Esar for his *The Dictionary of Humorous Quotations* (New York: Dorset Press, about 1949):

The butler entered the room, a solemn procession of one.

The girl had as many curves as a scenic railway.

I could see that, if not actually disgruntled, he was far from being grunted.

It was one of those parties where you cough twice before you speak and then decide not to say it after all.

It looked as if she had been poured into her clothes and had forgotten to say "When."

She turned him down like a bedspread

Why don't you get a haircut; you look like a chrysanthemum.

Only seven. Any Wodehouse fan could have supplied dozens—and not one of our lists would have coincided with another.

Norman Murphy sends a list (from the Wodehouse estate, I believe) of known Wodehouse translations of the last ten years: 177 items in 13 countries, including 31 items not listed in the McIlvaine bibliography. Plum's enormous output, and the popularity of that output, almost guarantee that no bibliography of his can ever be complete.

William Hardwick sends an obituary notice of Dennis Price, the talented English actor who played Jeeves in the television series "The World of Wooster." Price was, according to the notice, "P. G. Wodehouse's favourite actor as Bertie Wooster's omniscient, shimmering valet." Price will be included in the next edition of the *English Dictionary of National Biography*.

Phil Ayers writes, in considerable anguish of soul, as follows: "On page 69 of my edition of *Heavy Weather* Monty Bodkin is finishing a lunch and calls for the bill. He says, "Waiter, laddishiong." What is that last word and where did it come from? Is it made up? A corruption? A misprint? Does anyone know its source?"

continued at bottom of next column

What ho in Washington!

by Jon Lellenberg

The founding meeting of a Washington, DC chapter of the Wodehouse Society took place November 10, 1992, in the art deco surroundings of the Kennedy-Warren Apts.' Uptown Café on Connecticut Avenue. Eight members were present for several hours of browsing, sluicing, and hilarity. No name has been chosen yet for the chapter; candidates mentioned in the course of the evening were The Precise Pips (based on a comment about Washington in Chapter 7 of *Indiscretions of Archie*); The Imprecise Pips, what with the Government here and all; something alluding to Roderick Spode's campaign for Parliament, to be researched; and a suitably Wodehousian expression, Capital! Capital! Further consideration will take place over high tea on Sunday, December 6th, at some local equivalent of Barribault's, and, if necessary, at a dinner at one of Washington's clubs in January.

Dominique Wainwright, a Frenchwoman with a delightful Gallic accent I hope she never loses, assures me that "laddishiong" is merely the French "l'addition"—the restaurant check or bill—with a Wodehousian garble on it.

This issue is about six weeks late. I was terribly busy with family matters in those weeks and even this important journal had to wait its turn. Back on schedule now.

The Oldest Member

Soapy, Dolly, and the Connaught

A friend has been good enough, if that is the word we want, to send us October's *Nothing Serious*, with its diatribe about our Autumn *Plum Lines* discussion of the true identity of Barribault's Hotel. Have we touched a nerve? Our critic fails to mention our arguments for the Connaught over Claridge's, let alone weigh the evidence. Instead, he resorts to strong language ("fie!"—even "fie upon you!"), he appeals to High Authority (whose views we discussed in *Plum Lines*), and he hurls insult at us (evidently we did not eat fish at the Connaught, therefore our views need not be considered).

What are our views on this vital subject? We hope readers of *Nothing Serious* will consult *Plum Lines* for themselves. Let us mention here just one compelling point in the Connaught's favor: to identify Barribault's with confidence, one must make sure of the browsing and sluicing arrangements, for it is to dine at Barribault's that Wodehouse's characters go there, in ecstatic anticipation, again and again. And in this area of civilization, the Connaught is universally acknowledged as by far superior to Claridge's. Its kitchen is acclaimed as one of the city's best, its dining room as paradise on earth as a place to dine. And it possesses something else which Claridge's lacks, a grillroom as well as a dining room—and a separate grillroom is required of any candidate to be Barribault's.

In favor of Claridge's, *Nothing Serious* argues that Brook Street is given in *Full Moon* as Barribault's address. But this is undermined by mentions elsewhere in the canon of a Clarges Street address. What's more, our critic overlooks *Full Moon's* rummy attitude. Its narrator seems hostile toward Barribault's, portraying it as not only snooty but cruel—saying, e.g., that "its staff are selected primarily for their ability to curl the upper lip and raise the eyebrows just that extra quarter of an inch which makes all the difference." *Full Moon's* Barribault's is not the usual pleasant place. Perhaps its narrator had had an unhappy experience at

Claridge's, and took the opportunity to get his licks in. Wishing to avoid legal rannygazoo, he needed to pin a different name onto it. But to make sure that his readers would know which hotel this *Faux-Barribault's* really was, for once and one time only, Claridge's address was deployed.

— Soapy and Dolly Malloy

Do I hear a rebuttal to this—or, for that matter, a buttal?

Convention '93

Charles Bishop, commander-in-chief of our convention campaign, asks you to drop him a line soon if you interested in coming to the convention. This is not a commitment; it's only an expression of serious interest so that we can plan for the maximum number of people likely to attend.

Charles would also like to know whether any other Wodehouse chapter would like to participate as a group—with a skit, for example. We will welcome you with incoherent cries of joy. Speakers, as distinct from skitters, are solicited with the following shout from the Speakers Committee::

Hoy!

New members

Melrose Granger

a newly discovered PGW pen name

by Tony Ring

Most of us know that Wodehouse wrote for the old (American) *Vanity Fair* in the teens, sometimes under his own name, but also under a number of pseudonyms to avoid the appearance of doing what in fact he was doing—often writing most of the magazine. Now Tony has discovered another of Plum's pen names.

Wodehousians are familiar with many of the pen-names used in *Vanity Fair*, but in the August 1915 issue, there was a golf story entitled "The Eighteenth Hole" by MELROSE GRANGER, which is definitely a new pen-name. The story is a virtual reproduction—down to the surname (Derrick) of one of the two characters, the plot, and most of the actual text—of a scene towards the end of *Love Among the Chickens*, where it can be found starting on page 290 of the US first. I have not had time to go through the other *Vanity Fairs* to see if our Melrose Granger appears again, but will do so in due course.

The golf story to which Tony refers is in Chapter XX of the "Popular Edition" of the rewritten *Love Among the Chickens* of 1921, the only edition I possess (I am covered with shame).

Pigs is pigs, not pumpkins

by Marilyn
MacGregor

Because of an error of mine, this article was published in a considerably altered form in the Summer 1992 issue. Here is Marilyn's own version, at last. —OM

Once the brain gets working, there is no knowing where it will stop, and you know how it is when you get an idea. For a while it sort of simmers inside you, and then suddenly it sizzles up like a rocket, and there you are, right up against it.

That's how it was with me, when after several of meals of fish juxtaposed, if juxtaposed is the word I want, with a re-reading of "The Custody of the Pumpkin," I began to wonder how Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, had begun to shift his focus from pumpkins to pigs. The splendid family record already included first prizes for roses, tulips, and for spring onions, granted, but Clarence was the first of his line to strive for and win a first prize for pumpkins. And then he went on to pigs. Fat pigs. One might almost say pumpkin-shaped pigs.

It is necessary here to bung in a bit of background information. One does not wish to fail to grip, but it is essential for the reader to understand the full posish, if you understand what I mean. We shall, therefore, temporarily leave the Earl of Emsworth suspended between pumpkins and pigs.

On my first visit to England, Jim and Margaret Earl showed me around Shropshire, including the Blandings Castle grounds (now apparently known as Weston Park) and told me some of the history of the countryside. Romans had been there, I heard, and as I learned later, Celts and the Druid statesmen-priests who controlled the tribes.

We know that Blandings Castle was one of the oldest inhabited castle in England and the Threewoods were an ancient and sturdy stock. The eighth earl was killed in a hung accident at 77, another relative broke his neck trying to jump a five-bared gate at nearly 84, yet another lived to nearly 90. Women in the family ate broken bottles. Ancestors of Clarence and Galahad went off to fight the Paynim—and returned to tell their tales. They had the rights of the high, the middle and the low justice and could divide a head-gardener into four with a battle-axe and no questions

asked.

There must have been generations of these hardy, long-lived, prominent Threewoods settled in and around Shropshire even before the first earl's creation. It is my contention that the family goes back in Britain at least to the time of the Druids; and it is my belief that a love of pigs was in the Threewood blood.

I recently discovered the book *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince, The Story of Lindow Man, and Archeological Sensation*. It contains an examination of Celtic and Druid society during the years of Roman contact, an well-documented period of British antiquity. The authors base their scholarly conclusion (that a Druid prince was a willing ritual sacrifice) on the results of a number of test and techniques, from radiocarbon dating to botanical and pollen analyses, omitting no detail, however slight.

I now approach the nib, or nubbin if you prefer, of my argument. It was on page 153 that I came upon a particular sentence and I tell you when I read it I was astonished. Amazed. In fact, dumbfounded about sums it up. Here it is: "Pork seems to have been the meat most commonly eaten, and the Celtic aristocracy is known to have had a passion for pork."

I don't pretend to be a Sherlock Holmes or anything of that order, but suddenly a ripe and fruity idea struck me. I saw that all through the Threewood generation the pork gene had lain dormant. What's bred in the bone will come out in the wash, and all that kind of thin, you know, and it took pumpkins to start the master of Blandings off in the right direction. Once started, it was a short step from large pumpkins to fat pigs.

It had been well said of Clarence that he had an I.Q. some thirty points lower that of a not too agile-minded jelly-fish. Yet he stared reverently at his prize pumpkin's golden roundness as it lay on the strawy bottom of one of the largest packing-cases ever seen in Shrewsbury town, and something stirred in his mind. He began dimly to grasp the concept, to make the grand transition from packing-case to sty, from pumpkin to pig. So you see: the obsession with pigs came to him naturally through genetic heritage, and winning those silver medals ensured that the ninth earl was, as we all know, a worthy descendant of his ancient line of noble ancestors.

Wooster & Wodehouse

Barry Phelps, not content with publishing a new Wodehouse biography, has almost simultaneously issued another Wodehouse tome, described in the following announcement from its publisher, Irene Editions.

To commemorate the 78th birthday of the celebrated diarist and author Mr Bertram Wooster, on 15 September 1992 we offer lovers of literary treasures Mr Barry Phelps' *Wooster of Yaxley & Wodehouse of Kimberley*. This treatise investigates the remarkable parallels between the two noble houses of Wooster of Yaxley in the County of Suffolk and Wodehouse of Kimberley in the County of Norfolk since the times of His Majesty King William, commonly called the Conqueror, to the present day. Particular attention is paid to the contemporary writers, Mr Wooster and Sir Pelham Wodehouse, scions of these ancient families. Mr Phelps is widely recognized as an authority on the life and writing of Mr Wooster. This book contains much new and implausible data, yet all these are justified from unimpeachable sources and, unexpectedly, the treatise abides by the most rigorous academic concepts.

Charles E. Gould Jr, the Wodehouse authority and author of *What's in Wodehouse?* and other scholarly works, who was asked to vet the text for gibberish and errors of spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation, replied *inter alia* "It's an absolute gem. I read it straight through with unwavering pleasure and admiration."

Wooster & Wodehouse is privately published by Mr Thomas J Wise. Text printed in Swiss 721 Roman 11 pt on pale-blue 110 gsm wove cartridge; 20cm by 24cm, 32 foliated leaves, gold marker-ribbon, mid-blue eps, bound in navy-blue buckram covered boards lettered in gilt on the spine and front cover, with lettered DW of Transmarque 130 gsm blue-marbled, semi-opaque paper, illustrated. The single edition is limited to 99 numbered copies worldwide, each signed by the author: £50 UK or US \$99, post free surface mail; air-mail plus \$10 per book. Not subject to the N. B. A. There will be no

second edition before the start of the next millennium.

Author's inscription to named recipient gratis upon request.

Cheque with order. On approval to cheap, humourless bibliophiles. Sterling cheques should be made payable to Barry Phelps. US dollar cheques should be made payable to The Bank of New York.

The book may be ordered from:

Irene Editions
Suite 49, 67 Hatton Garden
London EC1N 8JY
England
Tel: 071-831
Fax: 071-831 5530

Relighting the candle

Jim Earl has forwarded a brochure announcing a revival of Wodehouse's 1929 play *Candle-Light*. The revival was presented in the autumn of 1990 by the Palace Theatre repertory company of Watford at several provincial towns and the not-so-provincial Cambridge. Plum adapted the play from an earlier version. The 1990 brochure sketches the plot thus: "... the butler puts off his livery and dons his master's clothes in order to seduce the 'Lady' who has bewitched him." I'm willing to bet Plum purified that seduction scene of any taint of dross.

The original production, according to Jasen's biography, starred the great Gertrude Lawrence and was called "the most adroit and suave comedy this town has had the chance of laughing at for months." It ran for 128 performances, stopped only by the Depression.

My life and delight with Wodehouse

by
Vivianne
Halse

Picture, if you will, four junior high school girls, Kathleen, Lillian, Virginia, and Vivianne. The year is 1924, *Bill the Conqueror* is being serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*, and these girls are swollen with pride. They have DISCOVERED WODEHOUSE.

Naturally, we pronounced it to rhyme with Spode. Who knew from Wodehouse at John Muir Junior High School in Los Angeles in 1924? Times then were lean to the point of emaciation but one or the other of the four of us could usually lay hands on a nickel at the end of the week so that at least one issue of the *Post* was available to our hungry eyes.

The first book I ever bought (don't forget this was the mid-20's in economically depressed southern California) was a copy of *Leave It to Psmith*, read and re-read and once read aloud in its entirety to my mother when she was ill.

The scene shifts to 1930 and Los Angeles City College, and we are now what might be termed the "Band of Three," Virginia having gone astray. Still swollen with conceit, still applying the Wodehouse litmus test to anyone foolhardy enough to question our intellectual superiority, we'd made a few enemies, chief among whom was Ebria. Tall, intellectual, and "steeped to the gills in serious purpose," Ebria was reporter on the college newspaper and a lifelong foe of frivolity. No doubt she felt that disapproval from a trio of lightweights like us could be nothing but tribute of a high order. At any rate, she lost no time informing us one day she'd been assigned a PGW interview. I don't suppose we had the vaguest idea what he was doing in Hollywood, nor that he had done Broadway shows and lyrics. So you can imagine the breathless excitement with which we accosted her the following day, absolutely panting with curiosity. "How was it? Where does he live? What's he doing in Hollywood? What does he look like? What did he say?"

At this remove I can sympathize with the poor beleaguered girl, hemmed in by Furies. There was a glacial pause, she stared us down, and then pronounced: "He wasn't funny."

Well, silly, of course he wasn't funny. Can you imagine having to BE funny as well as WRITE funny?

Now the years have passed and it is 1986. Two wars have come and gone, Kathleen has long been resident in Surrey, I'm home at last from wanderings and settled in San Francisco, wondering and wondering what can have happened to Lillian, whose last address was somewhere in Los Angeles, some time in the late 30's. By a coup of brilliant detection, I managed to trace her through two new names and onto a hillside in Topanga Canyon [near Los Angeles]. We scheduled a reunion in San Francisco.

Her reunion gift to me might have been predicted: *P. G. Wodehouse*, by Frances Donaldson. I leave you to imagine the tears and laughter and reminiscence, PGW very much the invisible guest at our party.

I was, of course, carrying the book around with me for a week or so after our time together, and had it on the table in a coffee shop one day when it was noticed by a gentleman whose eyes widened and who—probably without even trying—gave the password: "You read Wodehouse?" We told each other our stories of this delightful lifelong addiction (he'd got acquainted with Wooster and Co. as a small boy in London) and no doubt he was surprised to know that our idol had been venerated in darkest Los Angeles in the 1920's.

"I suppose," he continued, "you've seen the Jeeves?"

I guess I just stared, or thought I'd heard wrong. "Seen the Jeeves? What Jeeves?"

"At the Marines' Memorial. A one-man show."

Well no, I hadn't, nor had I even known it was there, being a non-reader of the daily press and for the most part not addicted to the modern theater.

The rest, as they say, is crazy. At this point I've seen *Jeeves Takes Charge* in San Francisco, in Westwood (with Lillian and husband), in Washington D.C., in Toronto, and at the beautiful Wyndham's in London with Kathleen and her husband, who pronounced it backstage to Edward Duke as "the funniest

show I've seen in my life." And where, incidentally, on another evening I met the youngest Cazalet, handsome and personable college-age David.

So you think that the Wodehouse chapter of my life is over? Some little time ago a friend gave me her first edition of *Bring On the Girls*, which not only mentions the casting in *Sally* of my dear friend Mary Hay, but shows a picture of her in the "Little Church Around the Corner" wedding scene as well. I cannot to this this day understand why the subject of Wodehouse never came up in my hundreds of conversations with Mary in the long-ago days before she died. *Sally* had been her favorite stage experience, and we'd talked about books and actors and shows and especially all the funny sides of life. She was a very funny woman herself, had written comedy and had some of it staged. But somehow we never discovered a mutual love of the Great Sage of Dulwich.

So as I trace and retrace these golden threads in the tapestry of my life, I think of some of the world's Funny Men—Rosten and Marquis, Perelman and Durrell, the Marxes and Wodehouse, and wonder how drab and somber it could have been without them.

PG's pranks

Alex Hemming sent me the following Letter to the Editor, which appeared, with the above headline, in the English *Sunday Times* of October 4, 1992.

I hope Barry Phelps, the new biographer of P. G. Wodehouse mentioned by Godfrey Smith (News Review, last week), brings out the little realised fact that PGW was not a boring recluse but often as much fun in his private life as in his books. When living at Le Touquet, he conceived a brilliant scheme to save one of his Pekinese from the six months in quarantine applicable to all dogs entering Britain. He intended to smuggle her through Customs disguised in a cat-skin. The imagination boggles at the scene that would have ensued in the customs hall had not Ethel talked her husband out of such a Jeevesian idea.

James Dufficy, London SW5

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

by Jon Lellenberg

Susan Jewell Martin, Marilyn MacGregor, and Jon Lellenberg announce the formation of *The Clients of Adrian Mulliner*, an ambidextrous chapter of the Wodehouse Society for Sherlockians, and scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars for Wodehousians. Its first gathering is planned for sometime during the Society's convention in San Francisco next July 30-August 1, over cocktails at the S. Holmes Esq. atop the Union Square Holiday Inn around the corner from the convention hotel.

Members outside the US may perhaps be excused from sending a stamp; Jon couldn't use it. A twenty-pound turkey or a purse of gold—the kind medieval kings seemed to keep in the recesses of their costume to toss at deserving mendicants—would be an acceptable substitute.



Imagine how some unfortunate Master Criminal would feel, on coming down to do a murder at the Old Grange, if he found that not only was Sherlock Holmes putting in the week-end there, but Hercule Poirot as well.

The Code of the Woosters, 1938

Want ads and a bulletin board

We're going to try a couple of new features in *Plum Lines*, beginning in the next issue.

Want ads

These should make it easier for members to buy, sell, and trade books and other items related to P. G. Wodehouse. When an author has written nearly 100 books, it can be difficult and expensive to collect a large part of his output. Want ads in a specialist publication like this should make collecting easier and possibly less expensive.

Contents

Each ad should specify:

- (1) Name of the item, e.g., the book title.
- (2) Description of the item as necessary, e.g., first edition, reading copy, condition if you wish (good, fair, etc.), publication date, brief description of contents if the item is not well known, and so on.
- (3) If a seller, the price asked; if a buyer, the price you are willing to pay; if a trader, the item(s) you are looking for. Price is optional; you may wish to negotiate.
- (4) Your name and address (and phone number if you wish).

Examples

Want ads will be printed in two groups, headed *Wanted* and *Offered*. If you want a first edition of a certain early novel, your ad will appear in the *Wanted* section and might look something like this:

Love Among the Chickens, first edition, English edition preferred, \$1200 max. Tutu Twinkletoes, 123 Sunshine Ave, Beatific PA 16720

An ad to offer a number of duplicate copies will appear in the *Offered* section and might look this way:

Hardbound reading copies of 18 novels and collections, for sale or trade for first edition of *Summer Lightning*. Write Eunice Shuddering, 34

Miasma Lane, Appalling Sight, Salop SY2 5DR, England for details.

Your name and address may, and in rare instances *will*, differ from the example just given.

To sell a first (i.e., expensive) edition, you may wish to include considerable detail, as in the following example:

The Clicking of Cuthbert. London: Jenkins, 1922. First edition. Green pictorial cloth with green lettering. 8 titles, ending *Girl on the Boat*. Very close to very good (fading moisture spot lower rear panel, top edges darkened, front edges lightly foxed, corners wearing, text quite clean). \$175.00. Walter Gruesome, 67 Dreadful St, Stealthy Footsteps OH 42043

I copied the above listing (except name and address) from the current *Limestone Hills Book Shop* catalog, as an example of how a hard-core, spit-out-of-the-side-of-your-mouth bookseller describes a book. (See the "Something new" column in this issue for the *Limestone Hills* address.)

Book descriptions

Please be aware that certain terms have rather specific meanings in the bookselling world, as shown in a recent *Used Book Price Guide*:

- Mint—as new, same as when published.
Dust jacket without tears and in new condition.
Fine—no defects but yet not quite as new.
Very good—no defects but does show some wear. No tears.
Good—average used book. No pages missing.
Fair—well worn but complete text. May lack end papers. Jacket and binding may be badly worn.
Poor—badly worn but complete text legible.

To avoid misleading other members, it would be wise to bear these meanings in mind when using the terms.

Rules of the game

Want ads may be placed by TWS members only, and are limited to items by or about P. G. Wodehouse and his stories: books, magazines, audio and video tapes, and similar material. (Note that you may violate copyright if you sell a program taped off the air.)

No commercial booksellers or publishers, please. Doug Stow will give them full coverage in the "Something new" column. (Booksellers are free, of course, to respond to ads.)

Please keep your ads brief. Avoid verbal flatulence. For the present, let's try a limit of about 20 lines (150 words or so) per member per issue, and see how that works out.

I won't, just now, set a limit on the number of times an ad may be repeated in successive issues, but I'd like to avoid repeating a large number of ads, issue after issue, that readers will train themselves to skip, like liniment ads in a newspaper. *Plum Lines* is for fun. But issues are infrequent and I realize that some repetition may be necessary in order to find a respondent.

If a large number of ads is submitted for a single issue I may publish them in a supplement, separate from *Plum Lines*, that can be discarded when the reader is no longer interested.

An ad must be resubmitted for each issue in which it is to appear.

Advertisers and their respondents must deal directly with each other, not through *Plum Lines*. The Oldest Member is too decrepit to act as middleman or agent.

For the present, want ads are free.

Bulletin board

Most of us have literary interests in addition to P. G. Wodehouse. We can use the bulletin board to inform each other of those interests: such things as the existence of other literary societies, major new editions, and major exhibitions. If, like me, you have a great big mad passion for Jane Austen, you can notify other members of the existence of a Jane Austen society, so that anyone with a similar interest can join:

The Jane Austen Society. Membership secretary, Mrs George Knightley, Donwell Abbey, Highbury, Surrey TW10 6AR, England.

The bulletin board is not intended to inform us about, say, all the multitudinous activities of Sherlock Holmes fans. The proper source of that information is the Holmes societies themselves. The purpose of the bulletin board is to inform us of the existence of such societies, of institutions such as study centers, and of literary events we might otherwise overlook. I enjoy Trollope, and if a big Trollope exhibit is coming to San Francisco, I hope some Trollope fan will inform me of it through the bulletin board.

We can also use the bulletin board to ask such questions as whether a certain literary society exists. Who knows—it might develop into another Notes and Queries.

Please try to keep your announcements brief—something lean and mean, like the above example. You may wish to include your name, address, and phone number, so that interested readers can get in touch with you directly.

An announcement of a continuing activity, such as a society, will be printed no more than once a year.

An announcement must be resubmitted for each issue in which it is to appear.

For the present, announcements are free.

Deadlines

Want ads and announcements received by Feb 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1 will appear in the newsletter about a month later. Because of the lateness of this issue, I'll set a deadline of Feb 15 for the next issue.

'I didn't know poets broke people's necks.'

'Ricky does. He once took on three simultaneous costermongers in Covent Garden and cleaned them up in five minutes. He had gone there to get inspiration for a pastoral, and they started chi-iking him, and he sailed in and knocked them base over apex into a pile of Brussels sprouts.'

'How different from the home life of the late Lord Tennyson.'

Uncle Fred in the Springtime, 1939

Something new

by Doug
Stow

William Hardwick sends word of four items:

(1) A new (to me) Wodehouse book, *The Clergy Omnibus*, has been issued at £10.99 by Hutchinson (see address below);

(2) Frances Donaldson's authorized biography, *P. G. Wodehouse*, has been reissued by Allison & Busby for £11.99;

(3) *The Chatto Book of Office Life, or Love Among the Filing Cabinets* (Chatto, £14.99), compiled by Jeremy Lewis, contains, among others, selections from J. B. Priestly, Dickens, George Orwell, and "Wodehouse on banking when you've dronish tendencies;" and

(4) Spoken Word Cassettes (a British firm whose address I do not have) includes in its Spring 1992 catalog C. Northcote Parkinson's *Jeeves - A Gentleman's Personal Gentleman*, read by Gerald Harper and others, on two cassettes. This catalog, I might add (in fact, I do add), contains many juicy items and I would buy them all if I were rich.

Wodehouse is the Best Medicine, edited by D. R. Bensen, is available from Barnes and Noble for \$14.95 (see address below). It includes the novel *Dr. Sally*.

Len Lawson has discovered another source for Wodehouse audio tapes: Blackstone Audio Books, P. O. Box 969, Ashland OR 97520, phone (800) 729 2665. They offer, he says, "unabridged readings of five or six PGW books ranging from \$25 to \$35 each."

Jon Lellenberg sends a review, from the *English Sunday Times, of London, a Literary Companion*, by Peter Vansittart, published by John Murray. "No city in Europe is so vividly defined by its myth and in particular its literary myth. Dickens, Conan Doyle, P. G. Wodehouse and Virginia Woolf for starters."

Jan Kaufman informs us that the Mind's Eye offers video tapes of the Laurie/Fry television series "Jeeves and Wooster," as well as several audio tapes of PGW material. Their address is Box 1060, Petaluma CA 94953.

Charles Bishop recommends *The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Humorous Quotations*, edited by Fred Metcalf. It includes 80 quotes

from PGW, organized by subject.

Catalogs received (addresses below):
Charles E. Gould, Jr.
Limestone Hills Book Shop
Frederick Menschaar
Nigel Williams

The want ads announced elsewhere in this issue will be limited to private parties. In order to keep members informed about other sources of Wodehouse material, this column will list, from time to time, the following information:

1) Names and addresses of known Wodehouse publishers, with an indication of their book lists. Detailed information can be obtained directly from the publisher or, in most cases, a source such as *Books in Print*.

2) Names and addresses of Wodehouse booksellers and sources of audio and video recordings. Most issue catalogs.

Wodehouse publishers

Century Hutchinson Ltd, Brookmount House, 62-65 Chandos Place, London WC2N 4NW, England

I have no current information on their Wodehouse titles. They have published a number of titles in the past.

John Fletcher, Porpoise Books, 68 Altwood Road, Maidenhead SL6 4PZ, England

A Man of Means, P. G. Wodehouse
James H. Heineman, 475 Park Avenue, New York NY 10022

Nineteen unusual monographs and books on and by PGW, including "the Great Sermon Handicap" in 39 languages, a selection of Plum's letters, and *Lord Emsworth's Annotated Whiffle*.

Wodehouse specialist booksellers

These dealers generally carry a full range of material from reading copies to rare first editions.

Bertie Books, P. O. Box 8874, Lowell MA 01853

Charles Gould, Kent School, Kent CT 06757
Frederik Menschaar, 140 Cabrini Blvd, Apt 132, New York NY 10033

Nigel Williams, 196 Court Lane, Dulwich, London SE21 7ED, England

Modern 1st editions, including PGW

These dealers generally carry a wide

selection of authors, but usually in rare or first editions only.

Hawthorne Books, 7 College Park Drive,
Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol BS10 7AN,
England

Limestone Hills Book Shop, Box 1125, Glen
Rose TX 76043

The following two men also deal in modern first editions. Neither issues catalogs, but they welcome want lists.

Wilfrid de Freitas, Box 883, Stock Exchange
Tower, Montreal, Canada H4Z1K2

Address for US correspondents:
Box 819 Champlain NY 129191

Thomas Taylor, Box 85386, Westland MI
48185

New paperbacks

A Common Reader, 141 Tompkins Ave,
Pleasantville NY 10570, phone (800) 832
7323.

Penguin Books, Harmondsworth,
Middlesex, England and 40 West 23rd
Street, New York NY 10010

Many of the more popular Wodehouse
titles.

Remainders

These companies also carry many new books, usually at discounts.

Barnes and Noble, 126 Fifth Ave, New York
NY 10011

Daedalus Books, Box 9132, Hyattsville MD
20781

Edward R. Hamilton, Falls Village CT 06031

Audio and video recordings

The Century Sales Department, 20 Vauxhall
Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA,
England. Audio tapes:

Uncle Fred in the Springtime

Lord Emsworth and Others

Leave It to Psmith

Blackstone Audio Books

P. O. Box 969

Ashland OR 97520

Phone (800) 729 2665

Spoken Word Cassettes (A British source.)

This may be the name of the product
line or the name of the publisher. Ad-
dress unknown to me.)

Barnes and Noble (see above) sometimes
offers PGW audio tapes.

Jeeves Takes Charge

by Steven Winn

A revival of Edward Duke's popular one-man play, *Jeeves Takes Charge*, came to San Francisco in June and I neglected to print a notice about it in the Autumn *Plum Lines*. Herewith I, packed to the gills with contrition, print excerpts from a review in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I have no information as to whether the show is on tour.

The gentleman's gentleman Jeeves may have the imperious baritone voice of reason in *Jeeves takes Charge*, the delicious one-man P. G. Wodehouse comedy that returned to the Marines Memorial Theater Wednesday seven years after its initial run here. But it's Bertie Wooster, Jeeves' flappingly inept employer, who has our heart by the end of Edward Duke's two-hour tour through the burnished Wodehouse world of upper-class English caricature.

Idle bachelor Bertie's ageless charm, his honking laugh and a look of pure, daft pleasure that causes his tongue to loll like an innocent puppy's comprise a perfect martini of complementary ingredients. There's a subtle comic art at work here under the laughs Duke wins so easily with Wodehouse's shimmering, effortless wit.

If you witnessed nothing more than Bertie's horrified recreation of his encounter with a "sea" of monstrous aunts, you'd come away from the Marines with more comic nourishment than most shows offer in sum.

Edward Duke visited with our local TWS group for 20 minutes after a performance and told us, among other things, that next year he plans to present a portrayal of Noel Coward.

An Ascot gavotte for our Bertie

By Jim Earl

Great news! Bertie Wooster, our odds-on favorite horse, has won a race, and Jim Earl, our racing correspondent, tells us about it with a quiet note of pride in his voice. He begins with an excerpt from an *English Times* racing column about Ascot, dated Friday, July 24, 1992:

Richard Holder, discharged from Frenchay Hospital in Bristol at lunchtime following a minor operation, arrived home just in time to watch his veteran Bertie Wooster win the Palan Handicap.

Bertie Wooster, who landed this same sprint four years ago, showed there is still fire in the belly when producing a great final furlong surge under Frankie Dettori to cut down Running Glimpse in the last 100 yards and win by a length and a half.

Pat Murphy, Holder's son-in-law and assistant trainer, said: "The gov'nor told me that he feels like a new man, and he'll be thrilled by this success."

"We took Bertie to Bath on Tuesday to work with a few two-year-olds, and he proved much too fast for all of them."

Though Goodwood [a future race] never seems to bring out the best in the evergreen nine-year-old, Tuesday's big sprint remains very much a possibility for Bertie Wooster.

Jim was able to have a little heart-to-heart with Bertie just after the Ascot race:

I was fortunate to be granted an interview in the Winner's enclosure. I approached the smiling Bertie, who was tossing his head triumphantly as the saddle was removed.

"Well," I said. "Sixth time lucky, and about time if I may say so."

"Losing punters always talk like that," said Bertie. "Money isn't everything."

I conceded the truism, but pointed out that it's handy.

"I've upset a few knowalls by winning today," said Bertie complacently. "All that nonsense about the old boy being past it at nine years old! In fact I was just waiting for a suitable race—hope you had a bit on at the right price."

"That I did," I said. "I'm up to the tune of 25 o'goblins—and very grateful to you for

such a sterling performance."

"Well, you deserve it, Jim, for having faith in me."

Emboldened by this use of my Christian name—he had never used it before—I ventured to inquire whether he intended to win the next time out. "Bertie," I said, "I hear that you are entered for the William Hill Stewards' Cup Handicap, worth 51,662 simoleons, at Goodwood on Tuesday next. Tell me, as one pal to another, do you intend to extend yourself?"

All I received in reply was a roguish wink, more a roll of the eye, as he was led away. "Quen sabe?" he murmured, or maybe it was "Che sera, sera." "Wait and see."

Then came the Goodwood race and reality set in with unusual severity. Jim concludes his report:

Dateline: Goodwood, Tuesday, July 28, 1992.

Bertie, drawn 30th of 30 runners, ran well for 5 furlongs and finished several lengths behind the winner. Perhaps next time?

Did Wodehouse pun?

John Hanna, who asked a couple of issues ago whether Wodehouse coined words, now asks whether he used puns. I haven't examined the evidence, but my impression is that he used a pun rarely and then only as a minor element of a funny line, seldom or never as the joke itself. The great exception, of course, is the running Biggar joke in *Ring for Jeeves*. I've checked the indexes of three PGW biographies and two books about his writing and don't find the word "pun"—whatever that means.

But this is mere vapping. Has anyone looked into this question? Have you scholarshiped it? Let's hear from you!

More cricketer updates

by Frits Menschaar

The "A few quick ones" column in a recent *Plum Lines* mentions the updating of the cricketer Knox to the cricketer Trueman in *Mike at Wrykin*. There are several more of these:

- Tyldesly (page 15)
becomes Compton (page 21/22)
- Trumper (page 71)
becomes Hutton (page 84/89)
- Rhodes (page 151)
becomes Laker (page 171/212)
- Rhodes (page 157)
becomes Tattersall (page 178/221)

Page numbers of the first column refer to every edition of *Mike* (from 1909 through 1936). Page numbers of the second column refer to the English and American editions of *Mike at Wrykin* respectively.

Compton was the highest scoring batsman in England of his day, like Tyldesly 40 years earlier. Hutton was famous for his impeccable batting style, as Trumper had been before him. (The latter was called a pretty bat by the contemporary cricket authority, Prince Otto of Saxe-Coburg. See *The Swoop*, Part One, Chapter 7.) An important requisite of good batting style is keeping the bat vertical while executing the stroke, because it provides maximum blocking of the wicket. This is called "to play with a straight bat," a phrase also used, for instance, by Captain Biggar in *Ring for Jeeves*, to describe correct behavior in general.

Trueman and Knox, already mentioned in *Plum Lines*, were both fast bowlers (in cricket a bowler is roughly equivalent to a pitcher in baseball). Rhodes, Laker, and Tattersall were spin bowlers. The latter do not throw fast; instead they put spin, a rotating motion, on the ball to give it vim after it hits the ground in front of the batsman. Spin makes the ball change direction and, if topspin, makes it come through faster. If I remember correctly, Bertie Wooster somewhere remarks of a Tennyson line read to him by a one-time fiancée: "He put a lot of topspin into that one."

William Hardwick, responding to the earlier article about cricketer updates, wonders why P. G. Wodehouse put Knox (out of all the English cricketers) in his book in the first place?

"Neville Alexander Knox (1884-1935) only played for England twice," says William. "There must have been players better known to the general public at the time. The reason, I think, is that Knox played for Dulwich College." Could there be a better reason?
—OM

Movies, anyone?

Thomas Gifford asks if anyone knows a source for the 1936 movie *Thank You, Jeeves*, in which Arthur Treacher played the title role. "Why," he asks with understandable pique, "have I seen neither hide nor hair of it since I was a boy in the Forties? Why do I never see it on television?"

"Why," he continues, thundering now, "have I never heard of it on videotape? Where is the blasted thing?"

His pardonable warmth is shared by a number of us. Other members have asked the same questions in this august journal and our inquiries have led nowhere. If anybody has any information on the subject, please pass it along to us.

Incidentally, Len Lawson reports that he saw *Thank You, Jeeves* on television recently (this sounds like a bird watcher's report, doesn't it?) and, except for the names of the principal characters, the movie bore little relation to the book.

'When a studio executive charges you, look to the left but leap to the right. This baffles the simple creature.'

Barmy in Wonderland, 1952

Something New: another Wodehouse first?

by Tony Ring

Wodehousians will probably never agree on the definition of a 'first' edition, or even an 'American first,' but the Beagle Books paperback edition of *Something New* in May 1972 must have a very good claim.

The American history of the book is worthy of review, and with the aid of McIlvaine's bibliography can be traced in some detail. It was first published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, from 26 June to 14 August, 1915, and then released in book form on 3 September, 1915, by Appleton. There were two more Appleton editions, a Dodd Mead in 1930, and an A L Burt in 1931. The Burt edition is stated to be reissued from the plates of the third Appleton edition. Beagle Books and Ballantine Books are both shown producing new paperback editions in 1972, my Beagle copy being May, and the Ballantine copy being reported as May.

So what, you might ask. The answer is, remarkably, that Beagle uses a different text to the original Appleton. It uses the English, rather than the American text, and although for most books this would not matter, in the case of *Something New* it is critical.

Both the *Saturday Evening Post* and Appleton versions included about twenty pages stolen straight from the school story, *Mike and Psmith*, the second part of *Mike*. *Mike and Psmith* had been serialised as "Lost Lambs" in the *Captain* in the UK in 1908, and *Mike* was published in book form by Methuen in 1909. It had included an extended, consistently funny, scene in which Psmith thwarted a master, Mr Downing, when the latter was detecting a crime and wanted to locate a paint-covered shoe belonging to Mike Jackson, and which he suspected was in Psmith's possession.

Mike had been issued in the US in 1910, when Macmillan made a small edition available from imported sheets, but Wodehouse was clearly confident that the US reading public would not all have read a school story about cricket by an unknown British author. He therefore considered it safe to include the painted shoe scene in *Something New*, the crime changing from a painted dog to a stolen scarab, the role of

Psmith changing to that of Ashe Marson, and the shoe to the more romantic possession of Joan Valentine. But to protect his growing reputation in the UK, when the novel was published as *Something Fresh* by Methuen in England on 16 September, 1915, Lord Emsworth is still in the library, painting the walls, but the paint pot remains upright and no mysterious splashes of paint spoil the shine on Joan Valentine's shoes.

It seems certain that all the Appleton editions and the Burt edition were printed from essentially the same plates, and thus included the painted shoe scene. It is absolutely certain that the Beagle edition used the original US text of *Something New*. So, unless the painted shoe scene was omitted from the 1930 Dodd Mead edition (which preceded Burt), the Beagle will be the first US publication of the UK text.

One must say that it is a pity that Beagle removed the painted shoe scene from: the text. The scene is undoubtedly the funniest in the school stories, and is one of the funniest of comparable length in the whole oeuvre.

Now, fellow members, can you let me know whether

- a) the Dodd Mead edition includes the paint scene in Chapter 8
- b) the Ballantine paperback was published before or after the Beagle, and whether it includes the paint scene, and
- c) the difference in text is so substantial as to warrant 'First US' attribution to the Beagle text.

On your replies depends an important point relating to the first Blandings story!

In this Victorian novel, Percy has a flowing beard which he appears to have acquired—honestly, one hopes—at the early age of twenty four.

Spring Fever, 1948

These pigs have wings

by Colin Wright

Helen and Norman Murphy, daughter and father, sent this remarkable news item about the racing pigs of Bellingham. It appeared in the *English Daily Telegraph* of August 19, 1992, and leaves me, as surely it must all lovers of proper, or fat, pigs, speechless.

They are lean and competitive. Over 50 yards, Linford Christie would be hard pressed to outpace them. They get on their marks to the theme tune from *Bonanza* and perform for a mere bucket of swill. They are the racing pigs of Northumberland.

With 12 days to go to what is being heralded as the North's first Porcine Grand National, excitement is mounting in the village of Bellingham and bets are being placed on the outcome.

Nine contenders, handpicked for their physical attributes—long legs are essential—are under intensive training at the stables of a former farmer, Mr. Michael Bell.

He is convinced that their performance, to mark the 150th anniversary of the local agricultural show [For shame!—OM], will be so spectacular that it will stimulate wide regional interest and result in racing pig studs and regular race meets.

"You would not believe just how fast these pigs can go. It is very exciting and I am sure it will catch on," he said yesterday.

Bought from market at nine weeks old, they have learnt to react to the Western theme music by lining themselves up in greyhound traps. A school bell is rung and they are off. The distances have been steadily increased in the five weeks of practice over log hurdles, behind the last of which a bucket of swill is placed as an incentive.

"We are getting towards the 100 metres they will race over at the show and things are looking good," he said.

On the day of the big race each pig will wear silks in the colours of its owner. It is planned for the victor to be pitted against a Porsche car in a 30-yard sprint. "It will be nip and tuck whether the pig or the car will win," claimed Mr. Bell.

Helen Murphy suggests a little scene:

The Duke of Dunstable and Lord Emsworth are regarding the Empress, one with disgust, the other with his never failing wondering admiration. When the Duke suggests that the Empress should slim and take more exercise, the ninth Earl's response is immediate:

"Are you under the impression," said Lord Emsworth (for when deeply moved he could be terribly sarcastic), "that I want to enter my pig for the Derby?"

Helen asks us to remember all the trouble that ensued in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* when slimming was recommended, and take heed before it is too late. But I'm afraid the current wave of health-consciousness will sweep us all out to sea on a raft of broccoli and tofu—and the pigs with us. I have seen the future and it is skinny.

Stories wanted

Tony Ring sends a plea for help. "I am trying to obtain copies of the stories listed below for a research project."

Between the Innings

Novel Magazine, July 1905

Pages 438-442

The Deserter

Royal Magazine (vol 14), August 1905

Pages 299-303

The Idle King

Sunday magazine (vol 32), May 1903

Pages 455-457

Mike's Little Brother

Pall Mall (vol 52), October 1923

Pages 451-456

The Ordeal of Bingo Little

Blue Book (vol 99), May 1954

Pages 6-12

The Strange Disappearance of Mr Buxton-Smythe

Public School Mag. (vol 8), Dec 1901

Pages 504-506

Can anyone help Tony in his quest? His address:

How complex was the comic genius?

by Philip Bassett

Several members sent newspaper reviews of the new Barry Phelps biography. Alex Hemming sent this one, with the above title, from the *English Times* of October 16, 1992.

P. G. Wodehouse, man and myth, by Barry Phelps (Constable, £16.95)

Wodehouse sets his biographers a difficult task. Across most of his 98 books, he is a brilliantly funny writer—perhaps the most consistently funny the English language has yet produced. Not for nothing did his peers call him the Master. By all accounts he was a pleasant, affable man, though apt to duck out of any development which looked likely to be awkward for him. What he liked most to do was work. Which couldn't be finer for his devotees, but is tricky for those who write about his life.

Wodehouse's wartime broadcasts on German radio have been examined in the most minute detail: Ian's Sproat's excellent *Wodehouse at War* laid to rest for all but the most ignorant of his readers the idea that he was some kind of collaborator. Inevitably, Barry Phelps dives deep into this by now pretty clear pool once again. Indeed, once Phelps's version of the war incident is over, the last 30 years of Wodehouse's life are quickly dismissed.

Phelps knows his Wodehouse: he used to be the principal British dealer in Wodehousiana 20 years ago: his catalogues from those days were so good that they themselves now fetch high prices from American dealers. He is rightly dissatisfied with the standard version of Wodehouse's life, Frances Donaldson's 1981 book *P. G. Wodehouse: The Authorised Biography* (which has just been reissued in paperback). But instead of accepting that, once he was established, Wodehouse's life was dull from the biographer's point of view, Phelps treats what we know of Wodehouse as a "myth" to be exploded.

The "myth" is this. Pre-war Wodehouse was a "complex" man: sociable, calculating (especially over money—a study of Wodehouse's battles with the American Inland Revenue is now being prepared), thrusting and

ambitious. But the affair of the war broadcasts was so devastating, according to Phelps, that afterwards Wodehouse created an image of himself as an "amiable and unworldly recluse, the simple man with a lucky ability to write sparkling humour who claimed he was about as pronounced an oaf as ever went around with his lower jaw drooping and a glassy look in his eyes."

Quite apart from failing to say why being "complex" is somehow *better* than being simple—useful to the biographer though this may be—Phelps never adequately demonstrates the complexity. Take one of the classic stories: a county lady, hearing of the young Wodehouse's social graces, invited his mother to bring her son to tea, only to be appalled when the socially graceless Pelham Grenville Wodehouse turned up, rather than his mellifluent elder brother Armine. Phelps asserts that in the Edwardian era, such a mistake by a hostess is simply "not credible." Then he goes on to use this assertion to cast doubt on Wodehouse's own telling of the story, and so to show his "complexity."

This theory blights the book, which is a shame, since otherwise *P. G. Wodehouse: Man and Myth* is a great deal better than previous attempts at his life. In particular, it is better researched, helped partly by the availability of Lady Donaldson's selection from Wodehouse's letters (though Phelps admirably marshalls the unpublished sources, including new letters).

Perhaps the best clues to this annoyingly flawed biography lie in the strange title of Phelps's introductory chapter, "Wodehouse and Me," and the even more bizarre cartoon on the book's dustjacket, depicting Wodehouse playing Jeeves to Phelps's Wooster. If that is how this biographer sees his relationship with his subject, it is surprising that the loopiness of Phelps's attempted demythologising of Wodehouse has not further damaged his otherwise impressive work.