

Remsenburg Historical Marker Ceremony

BY JOHN GRAHAM

PHOTOS BY BARBARA COMBS

THERE IS A blue plaque on the house in Guildford, England, where P. G. Wodehouse was born in 1881; there is a commemorative plaque at the Little Church Around the Corner in New York City where Plum and Ethel were married in 1914; and now, at long last, there is a historical marker at the churchyard in Long Island where the Master was laid to eternal rest in 1975. Thanks to the efforts of TWS, and with many of its members in attendance, the PGW historical marker was officially dedicated on Sunday, April 22, 2012, in front of the chapel of the Presbyterian Community Church in Remsenburg, at the corner of Main Street (also called South Country Road) and Basket Neck Lane.

The day of the dedication proved to be of typically English weather: it rained. Despite the damp chill and drizzle, an enthusiastic crowd of more than eighty people was in attendance for the hour-long dedication and unveiling. Most of the visitors came from Manhattan by motor coach, complete with onboard entertainment organized by Tony Ring, including poetry, songs, and a contest to win the hand of Bertie Wooster (which was won by Mrs. Hudson of 221B Baker Street). They were joined at the chapel by other TWS members who had arrived by car or by the Long Island Rail Road. There were members in attendance from all across the U.S., as well as England, Canada, Holland, Switzerland, and Japan.

Also in attendance were more than twenty local residents, including many with personal memories of Plum and Ethel in Remsenburg. There was caterer Bob Nidzyn, who escorted many TWS members on a quick tour of the grounds of the Wodehouse home, and who shared his



*Prime movers of the project, Andrea Jacobsen and Bob Rains, pose with the plaque.
(Please see the close-up and wording on page 24.)*



Likely the first-ever performance of "Bill" in the tiny Remsenburg chapel

boyhood memories of Plum's daily dog walks about town. Also present were Lynne Kiegel, Ann Smith, and Margaret Zbrozak, all of whom had helped to care for Ethel after Plum died. Margaret wore some of Ethel's costume jewelry.

Because of the rain, the majority of the ceremony took place inside the chapel. Andrea Jacobsen (aka Sweetie Carlisle) welcomed the assembled, and her partner, Bob Rains (Oily), gave a history of the marker project, which grew out of their visit to southeast Long Island in 2010 (see their full story in the Spring 2011 *Plum Lines*). Bob recently found out (thanks to Karen Shotting, who has either eagle's eyes or an elephant's memory) that TWS founder Bill Blood had first proposed that TWS help erect a commemorative marker in Remsenburg way back in the March 1984 *Plum Lines*. It may have taken 28 years, but Bill Blood's vision was finally realized, spearheaded by the hard work, leadership, and enthusiasm of Bob and Andrea.

Tony and Elaine Ring brought words of greeting from across the pond. Elaine read from prepared remarks by Hilary Bruce, Chairman of the U.K. Society, offering their enthusiastic support and thanks. Tony read excerpts from a long letter by Sir Edward Cazalet on behalf of the entire Wodehouse family. (*Plum Lines* hopes to publish the full letter in an upcoming issue.) Sir Edward recounted scenes of work and leisure from Plum's daily routine during the last twenty years of his life.

At this point, the audience was treated to a musical interlude, led from the piano by Virginia Mesiano, accompanying her daughter Caitlin and Christopher Duffy in six songs with Wodehouse lyrics, including "The Land Where the Good Songs Go," "You're the Top," and the title song from *Sitting Pretty*. For their



A large part of the group gathered at the Wodehouses' former home on Basket Neck Lane.

last number, Caitlin and Christopher encouraged the audience to sing along to "Bill," which they did with enthusiasm.

TWS President Ken Clevenger offered his thanks to all whose monetary contributions and hard work made the realization of the plaque possible. Highest praise went to Bob and Andrea, of course. Ken then delivered the Deed of Gift of the plaque to the Remsenburg Community Church, along with a donation of \$500 from TWS. These were gratefully accepted on behalf of the church by Kevin Crean, head of the church's choir. As Kevin went outside to prepare for the unveiling, glasses of champagne were passed around, and a heartfelt toast to the memory of Plum was proposed and seconded.

With champagne glasses and umbrellas in hand, the group reassembled on the chapel lawn to watch Kevin Crean unveil the plaque. After many photos were snapped, most visitors returned to the warmth of the chapel for coffee, cake, and good cheer. The intrepid bunch then ventured back into the rain to pay a final silent tribute at Plum's gravestone.

Call for Papers! Chicago Convention 2013

IT'S NOT TOO SOON! The Chicago Accident Syndicate is looking for witty and enlightening presentations for the 2013 convention. Presentations should be approximately twenty minutes in length—to allow for Q & A and a highly flattering introduction of the speaker within a thirty-minute period. If you have an idea for a presentation or you would simply like to receive the speaker guidelines and more details, please contact Susan Diamond. Please note that TWS policy is that speakers are "comped" into the Saturday talks portion of the program but are responsible for all other costs associated with the convention, including other portions of the program, travel, meals, and accommodations.

And a Dearborn Footnote

INTERESTING NEWS item for those who were at the Dearborn convention and went on the Detroit tour: News of the exceptional quality of this tour reached well beyond our Society, and tour coordinator and author Michael Smith was asked to join a group of Detroit boosting bloggers. You can find his first effort at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/6mna9np>.

Wodehouse in a Changing World

BY CURTIS ARMSTRONG

P. G. WODEHOUSE has been called many things, but mysterious isn't one of them. He was a simple man, in the very best meaning of the phrase, whose life centered around his work, who savored cricket and soap operas and enjoyed a couple of quick ones in the gloaming. One real mystery, at least according to some, is how Wodehouse managed to live and write through two world wars, the Great Depression, an internment by the Nazis, the death of his daughter, the Cold War, the Atomic Age, and the turmoil of the 1960s and early '70s, and yet consistently could create characters who remain untouched and apparently ignorant of what is happening in the world.

But the truth is, Wodehouse's characters did not pass through these tempests completely unscathed. People assume that the only disruption in the serene flow of Bertie's life is when he's forbidden access to Anatole's dinners, or when he's engaged to be married to Madeline Bassett again. Well, as far as Bertie is concerned, that's true, but there is a more serious offstage thunder rumbling on the very first page of *The Inimitable Jeeves*.

"How is the weather, Jeeves?"

"Exceptionally clement, sir."

"Anything in the papers?"

"Some slight friction threatening in the Balkans, sir. Otherwise, nothing."

It's true that Bertie doesn't express much in the way of concern about friction in the Balkans—in fact, he responds to this news with a question about putting his shirt on Privateer at the two o'clock. After all, Bertie and Jeeves lived in a world without a 24-hour news cycle. There is no television over the bar at the Drones Club, and if there were, it would more likely be tuned to test matches than CNN. But this doesn't mean the stories are void of political event. Political meetings could descend into vulgar brawling, but so too could prize-giving ceremonies and the occasional clean, bright entertainment. In general, though, politics tend to be avoided except in the noble aid of a joke, which is not a bad idea when you think about the state of



*Curtis Armstrong presented this paper at the Dearborn convention.
(photo by Elin Woodger)*

politics these days. If conservative politicians tend to predominate in the stories, it's just because they seem funnier when, for example, they are trapped on the roofs of summerhouses after being chivvied about by mad swans. It just seems people like that have more to lose. A. B. Filmer, the conservative cabinet minister from "Jeeves and the Impending Doom," is a great example, as is Sir Raymond Bastable from *Cocktail Time*. The examples are legion.

As a rule, class-bound people in Wodehouse who don't drink, don't smoke, don't gamble, have a lot of money and power, and have no sense of humor are just asking for it. They are always the ones

putting up barricades in the path of true love. They insist on standing for the Conservative seat at Bottleton East, or somewhere, but at the same time, they're the ones who have to worry about their youthful indiscretions coming to light in some old reprobate's memoirs. Men who resemble a cartoon of capital from a communist newspaper exist not to make political points but to deny their nephews enough money to open onion soup bars in Piccadilly Circus or marry an impecunious chorus girl. The Marx Brothers understood the value of knocking the self-important off their pedestal and then destroying the pedestal while they're at it. And so, on occasion, did P. G. Wodehouse.

Jeeves's awareness of friction threatening in the Balkans is just one example of the real world imposing upon the land of eternal summer that is Wodehouse's fictional world. But politicians, like headmasters, aunts, and bishops, are basically stock characters in the Wodehouse canon and can be pretty much taken as read. So for our purposes I will focus on the social or political movements that actually intruded on the lives of Wodehouse's characters: socialism and fascism. And how even these disruptions, like a summer shower at Blandings, pass quickly, leaving not a wrack behind.

We'll begin with fascism because, of the two movements, it seems to be of the least immediate concern to Wodehouse's characters. In their changing

world, the human (or nearly human) face of British fascism was, of course, Roderick Spode, later Lord Sidcup. The introduction of Spode shows Wodehouse's treatment of comic right-wing extremism differs from his depiction of left-wing extremism. Spode is the only memorable character in the stories to represent fascism. While we hear of the Black Shorts, we never see them, and by the time Spode is knighted, he has disbanded his followers. The socialists, however, have no such single manifestation of the movement. There are certainly memorable characters but no national figurehead like Spode. The other difference is that Spode fills his role as the evil nemesis without ever talking about the glories of his political beliefs, while the socialists, whether en masse or in a cozy tête-à-tête around the tea table, seem to do little else.

Spode bestrides Wooster's world like a Colossus, but his reputation as a charismatic fascist chieftain seems, on the surface, unwarranted. Spode is a thug. You can dress him up but you can't take him anywhere. It is easier to imagine him kicking out shop windows or laying into striking picketers with a wooden club than as the leader and mastermind of a political movement. And it is Bertie Wooster, of all people, who sees Spode clearly and sees him whole. "Stirring" is not a word that normally comes to mind when we think of Bertie Wooster, but stirring is what his memorable condemnation of Spode and his politics comes closest to being:

"It is about time," I proceeded, "that some public-spirited person came along and told you where you got off. The trouble with you, Spode, is that just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of half-wits to disfigure the London scene by going about in black shorts, you think you're someone. You hear them shouting 'Heil, Spode!' and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer. What the Voice of the People is saying is, "Look at that frightful ass Spode swanking about in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?"

Add a Max Steiner score in the background and it could almost be Victor Laszlo in *Casablanca*.

There is no better example than Spode of the old adage about living by the sword. His fear of being exposed as a closeted designer of ladies' undergarments is only one of his problems. In addition to being hit in the eye with a potato at a political rally, which sort of goes with the territory, this amateur dictator has been

knocked unconscious once by Bertie's Aunt Dahlia, once by a cook, and once by a curate. In *The Code of the Woosters*, Gussie Fink-Nottle wallops him over the head with an oil painting, after which Bertie wraps him in a sheet, breaks a china vase over his head, and puts out a cigarette on his hand. By themselves, any one of these unfortunate occurrences could be overlooked but put them together and they spell a public relations disaster. When word gets out to the other fascists that you can't get the upper hand of a newt-collecting freak like Gussie Fink-Nottle, you can start considering your days as a Man of Destiny officially numbered.

Despite these setbacks, Spode is such an overwhelming personality that it's easy to forget that fascism is addressed elsewhere in Wodehouse's writings. One example occurs in the Mr. Mulliner story "Buried Treasure":

The situation in Germany had come up for discussion in the bar parlour of the Angler's Rest, and it was generally agreed that Hitler was standing at the crossroads and would soon be compelled to do something definite. His present policy, said a Whisky and Splash, was mere shilly-shallying.

"He'll have to let it grow or shave it off," said the Whisky and Splash. "He can't go on sitting on the fence like this. Either a man has a moustache or he has not. There can be no middle course."

Two paragraphs which manage to satirize Hitler and, at the same time, the genial toppers of the Anglers' Rest, whose awareness of the Nazi menace apparently begins and ends with a discussion of the Führer's moustache.

As we move from fascism to socialism, we find Wodehouse working with a wider, richer palette. Appropriately for a movement that appealed to the masses, he no longer restricts himself to a single character, but to small groups or even mobs. He would appear to have as little sympathy for the socialists as he does their counterparts on the right, though it must be said that the attributes he assigns to the various socialists in the stories range from dullness to monomania to drunkenness to teetotalling (just as bad) to sociopathy and, finally, to murderousness. Worse still, one of them has no roof to his mouth, always a red flag in Wodehouse's world.

In "Archibald and the Masses," the subject of socialism is raised by a Pint of Bitter and a Light Lager at that hotbed of political disputation, the Anglers' Rest:

“This here Socialism,” said a Pint of Bitter thoughtfully. “You see a lot of that about nowadays. Seems to be all the go.”

...

“Spreading all the time, Socialism is [said a Light Lager]. May be something in it, too. What I mean, it doesn’t hardly seem right somehow that you and I should be living off the fat of the land, as the saying is, while there’s others, in humbler circumstances, who don’t know where to turn for their next half-pint.”

Archibald Mulliner in pursuit of love, as usual, hears the siren call of socialism. He has a valet, Meadows, who is a member of the League for the Dawn of Freedom, whose object is, he informs his employer, to hasten the coming revolution. Archibald takes a hard line with his man. “Now, listen, Meadows,” said Archibald firmly. “Fun’s fun, but no rot about stabbing me with a dripping knife. I won’t have it, do you understand?”

Archibald’s attempts to cluster round the masses are predictably catastrophic, but don’t really have anything to do with socialism, per se—more a series of simple misunderstandings which Archibald could look back on and laugh about, once he was released. No, to really see the effects of socialism on Wodehouse’s world, we must go to the Wooster and Psmith chronicles.

Bertie’s first recorded brushes with the socialist revolution occur through the good offices of his friend Bingo Little. In *The Inimitable Jeeves*, Bingo, falling in and out of love not wisely but often, plays Virgil to Bertie’s Dante, guiding him through numerous circles of romantic hell, starting in a blighted tea and bun shop near Piccadilly and ending with marriage to the prominent romance novelist Rosie M. Banks.

In the middle of this snipe-like search for love, Bertie is introduced to the most recent love of Bingo’s life, Charlotte Corday Rowbotham, along with her father, Comrade Rowbotham, and the rival for Charlotte’s affections, Comrade Butt. It is probably not a coincidence that Wodehouse invents surnames for his socialists in this story that both manage to suggest the human posterior. The three are members in good standing of the Heralds of the Red Dawn, which Bingo has joined in order to pursue his wooing. Old Rowbotham is described by Bingo as “A delightful chap. Wants to massacre the bourgeoisie, sack Park Lane and disembowel the hereditary aristocracy. Well, nothing could be fairer than that, what?” This tale of love and socialism features two scenes in which the Red Dawn’s most stirring orators—Comrade Butt and Bingo in a fake beaver—work up an appreciative crowd, but the

only physical violence occurs when Comrade Butt exposes Bingo by debearding him and Bingo grabs Butt by the neck and tries to twist his head off.

Say what you will about Spode, he never actually tried to kill Bertie with a knife and then burn his house down. Brinkley, Jeeves’s temporary replacement in *Thank You, Jeeves*, does both. Another firm subscriber to the rivers-of-aristocratic-blood theory of solving the workers’ problems, Brinkley returns to Bertie’s cottage after a night on the tiles and decides to say it with carving knives. Bertie recalled him as being “quite thin when I knew him, and very gloomy, you might say sinister. Always seemed to be brooding on the coming revolution when he would be at liberty to chase me down Park Lane with a dripping knife.” Brinkley is an unusual case, though. When we next encounter him in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, he has changed his name, his waistline, and his politics. Having come into a sizable fortune, Bingley, as he is now known, reappears as a kind of conservative captive balloon, and as obnoxious as ever. Jeeves is uncharacteristically blunt when he says, “I disapprove of Bingley. He is dishonest. Not a man to be trusted.”

Wodehouse’s most famous socialist is, of course, Rupert Psmith, though his orthodoxy is questionable. “I’ve just become a Socialist,” Psmith tells Mike Jackson moments into their friendship. “It’s a great scheme. You ought to be one. You work for the equal distribution of property, and start by collaring all you can and sitting on it.”

But apart from using it as an excuse for bagging Spiller’s sitting room, socialism doesn’t seem to figure largely in Psmith’s life, save as an amusing fashion accessory, sort of like the way I cheerfully affected a walking stick during my college years. “Others are content to talk about redistribution of wealth,” he says, sounding a little like Ukridge. “I go out and do it.”

Socialism gets its grandest treatment in *Psmith in the City*. In this slender novel, Wodehouse devotes nothing fewer than three full chapters to Mike and Psmith’s adventures in socialism. Psmith is delighted to discover his and Mike’s supervisor, Waller, is a staunch socialist, coincidentally making him one of the few characters in the Psmith saga who actually deserves the appellation “Comrade.” By mid-story, they are invited to come to hear Waller speak on Sunday at Clapham Common, with supper at Waller’s home afterwards.

Guided to the speaker’s platform by Waller, the two are just in time to hear two of Waller’s associates, Comrades Wotherspoon and Prebble, addressing the masses. Here we can do no better than let the author describe the scene:

Comrade Wotherspoon was a tall, thin man with side-whiskers and a high voice. He scattered his aitches as a fountain its sprays in a strong wind. He was very earnest. Comrade Prebble was earnest, too. Perhaps even more so than Comrade Wotherspoon. He was handicapped to some extent, however, by not having a palate. This gave to his profoundest thoughts a certain weirdness, as if they had been uttered in an unknown tongue. The crowd was thickest around his platform. The grown-up section plainly regarded him as a comedian, pure and simple, and roared with happy laughter when he urged them to march upon Park Lane and loot the same without mercy or scruple. The children were more doubtful. Several had broken down, and been led away in tears.

It may have been a different time, or it could just be the difference between Hyde Park and Clapham Common, but once Waller goes from the usual red-meat subject of socialism to his other pet passion, temperance, the response of the crowd couldn't be more different than that which Bertie experienced in *The Inimitable Jeeves*. The crowd turns into an ugly mob, and our heroes barely escape in one piece.

Dinner at the Waller residence following this debacle is even worse, if only because Mike and Psmith cannot, out of common courtesy, fight their way out of it. An awkward, dismal affair deteriorates into a lover's quarrel between Waller's daughter and her fiancé over the subject of women's suffrage. "That fatal topic," murmurs Psmith, who was probably also aware of friction threatening in the Balkans.

Change in the world of Wodehouse, though, doesn't necessarily have to be of the epoch-defining variety, and some stories, while sticking to the traditional forms and characters, bear every hallmark of having been written in a changed world. "Bingo Bans the Bomb" is a story which could only have been written during the nuclear disarmament protests of the '60s, and if you don't believe me, get a load of the Pan paperback edition of *Plum Pie*, featuring the Hon. Mabel Murgatroyd in a cleavage-revealing miniskirt. In *Cocktail Time*, Wodehouse's foray into long-form satire, Sir Raymond Bastable becomes so outraged when his hat is knocked off with a Brazil nut fired from the smoking room of the Drones Club that he writes a scathing novel on the subject of the current Lost Generation. The book becomes a cause célèbre, turning the pseudonymous author into a kind of cross between Henry Miller and Kingsley Amis. Sex, Wodehouse tells us, had crept into the narrative in

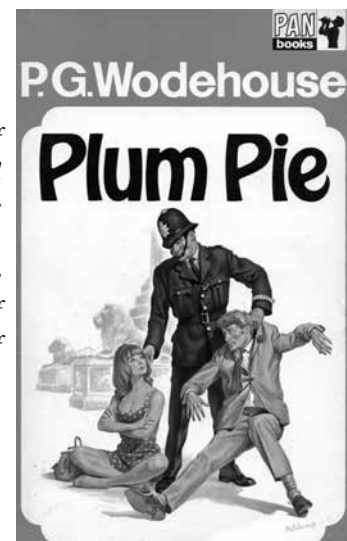
rather large quantities. While Wodehouse spares us the details, the book was daring enough to be railed against from pulpits and condemned in editorials across the country. Even the cover illustration pulled no punches, depicting, as Wodehouse puts it, "a young man with a monocle in his right eye doing the rock'n'roll with a young woman in her step-ins."

It's remarkable to realize that Wodehouse's work appeared regularly throughout every upheaval, war, and social or political change in the first three-quarters of the 20th century. Perhaps even more remarkable is that, throughout that time and ever since, he has continued, through the timeless richness of his humor, to bring a moment of escape to people the world over, people who face a changing world as terrifying as any in Wodehouse's lifetime. Certainly, social change and political upheaval were not unknown to Wodehouse's fictional world. They were just seen through the same genially warped looking glass as anything else there.

When the Nazis swept into Wodehouse's idyllic garden at Le Touquet, it was a "real world" incursion of the most unforgiving kind. Wodehouse was told that he had ten minutes to pack before being sent off to an internment camp. It is telling that the only book he took with him was the complete works of Shakespeare. Not Agatha Christie or Erle Stanley Gardner. Shakespeare. I suspect he knew he was facing a frightening future and reached for a book that would sustain him, cheer him: a book by a writer who could take him out of the nightmare reality in which he found himself, who could bring light to the darkness that surrounded him.

I am, of course, not comparing Wodehouse to Shakespeare, which would be unfair to Shakespeare. But in a world in which it sometimes seems the Spodes are always winning, I recommend a similar palliative. Turn often to the works of P. G. Wodehouse.

This depiction of Mabel Murgatroyd reflects the changing times. (cover image courtesy of Neil Midkiff)



The Courting of the Muse

BY TONY RING

Tony's talk at last year's TWS convention in Dearborn was enlivened by the theatrical presence of Bob Rains, dressed in a legal gown, who played the role of the judge in many of the quoted selections that follow. Bob and Tony thoroughly entertained the audience, and Tony's presentation is equally enjoyable in print.

A YOUNG ENGLISH journalist had heard surprising stories about the American justice system, and wanted to find out more details. So he obtained a passport and a visa, went to New York, and on his first full day there found himself in a courtroom just as the judge walked in.

The judge's opening words impressed him greatly.

"Before we start today's civil action of *Hamburger vs. McDonald*, I have to report to the court a disturbing occurrence. In chambers yesterday, I received a letter from the plaintiff's attorney enclosing a check made payable to me personally for \$25,000. This morning, while I was still deciding what action I should take, I received a letter from the defendant's attorney enclosing a cheque for \$40,000. I am pleased to be able to tell the court that I have returned \$15,000 to the defendant's attorney, so I can now proceed to hear the case with no possible complaint of bias."

I have often wondered how Wodehouse would have twisted and adapted the above anecdote if he had tried to incorporate it into one of his novels, and have always regretted that he never did, although there are hints that he might have thought about something along those lines. For, as we know, he lost no opportunity to tease the authoritarian individual or institution. Rarely did a judge, magistrate, or justice of the peace who made an appearance in Wodehouse's pages emerge entirely unscathed, with his dignity intact.

I can first illustrate the point about dignity with this extract from the later novel *The Girl in Blue*:

[The case was] one of those dull disputes between business firms where counsel keep handing books to the Judge and asking His Lordship with the greatest respect to cast an eye on the passage marked in pencil on the right-hand page, upon which he immediately looks at the left-hand page.

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

"Your lordship is looking at the wrong page.

Elaine and Tony Ring looking rather cheery at the Dearborn convention (photo by Barbara Combs)



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

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

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

And even where the judge is really the innocent party, Wodehouse's way of telling the tale still seems to leave him at least equally to blame for the problem which has arisen.

Recall the instance in *Money in the Bank* when the barrister Jeff Miller, briefed by Mr. Shoesmith ("of Shoesmith, Shoesmith, Shoesmith, and so on"), father of Jeff's fiancée Myrtle, wanted to discredit the evidence of a witness named Lionel Green, with whom Jeff had been to school. Mr. Pennefather, a taxi driver intent on suing an interior decorator for hitting him in the stomach, was Jeff Miller's client. It was his first case. But he was a buzzer, and perhaps did not show quite the gravitas expected of an up-and-coming young barrister, as was made clear in this quick-fire exchange:

Counsel: Is it not a fact, Green—

Judge: Mr. Green, if you please, Mr. Miller.

Counsel: Oh, sorry.

Judge: Not at all, Mr. Miller. Pray continue.

Counsel: Right ho. Thanks. Is it not a fact, Mr. Green—Look at me, and not at the jury.

Judge: Witness is looking at you, Mr Miller.

Counsel: Oh, is he? Right ho. Is it not a fact, Mr. Green, that at school you were known as Stinker, and that we were given a half-holiday the day the news came out that you had had a bath?

Witness: Your worship!

Judge: It is more customary to address me as “My Lord,” Mr. Green, or, alternatively, as “Me lud.” However, I find your emotion intelligible. Have these references to witness’s apparently misspent youth any bearing on the case now before us, Mr. Miller?

Counsel: I’m shaking him, me lud—showing what a louse he is.

Judge: Do not use the word “louse,” Mr. Miller.

Counsel: As your ludship pleases. Well, anyway, Stinker, putting aside for the moment the question of your niffiness, wasn’t it notorious that you couldn’t tell the truth without straining a ligament? What I’m driving at is that this story of yours about the blow or buffet being really a prod or tap is a tissue of lies from soup to nuts. Come on now, come clean, you unspeakable wart.

Judge: The expression “wart,” Mr. Miller—

Let me now draw you back to the title of this talk, “The Courting of the Muse,” which was actually the title of an article by Wodehouse in *Playboy* in January 1962. It had nothing to do with the law courts, but it made me muse on the question of what literary genre Wodehouse really belongs to. So I ask the question—should he be regarded as much as a crime novelist as a humorist?

The number of stories which he wrote which can be considered as traditional crime stories are, of course, few and far between. There are only one or two, such as “Adrian Mulliner, Detective,” and the various formats of “Death at the Excelsior,” both of which have been included in anthologies of short crime stories, and are widely recognized as such.

But if you take a Wodehouse book at random, and read through it carefully, you will often find enough crime going on of different types to occupy a moderate-sized police force in a country town almost full time. There are no murders, which proves that Wodehouse was not writing about the Midsomer area in England—a group of TV villages which enjoyed around 250 suspicious deaths in about fifteen years. But in almost every book there is theft, conspiracy, assault, blackmail, drunk and disorderly conduct, obstructing the police, and who knows what else—and that is only the criminal side of the law. It even ignores the crimes committed by those yet to reach the age of criminal responsibility. Add to that the libel, slander, trespass, and other actions which could give rise to civil cases, and you start to think of Wodehouse as the friend of the lawyer.

Furthermore, we have to bear in mind that this list only refers to actions which were crimes or causes for civil litigation when the books were written. Nobody in Wodehouse’s books would have thought twice about referring to Bobbie Wickham as a red-haired Jezebel, but today there would be a risk of both Bobbie and Jezebel taking legal action. Many of Wodehouse’s characters might today spend half their time in the courts, taking or defending civil cases through the medium of opportunistic firms of lawyers.

So, why is Wodehouse not regarded as a crime writer?

I think the answer is in the four types of crime which we read about in the oeuvre.

First, there are offences committed—usually from the best motives—by the hero or heroine, or their friends or supporters. This class includes the story fixers such as Gally Threepwood, Uncle Fred, Jeeves, and similar characters. Wodehouse ensures that the reader sympathizes with the perpetrator and will not regard these as real crimes. Ukridge fans will include in this category anything done by their hero!

Second, a variation of this concept, is the crime plotted or committed by the comic criminals—Soapy and Dolly Molloy, Oily and Sweetie Carlisle, Chimp Twist, Soapy Sid, and so on. The experienced reader knows that the criminals will not get away with the swag, and, again, is willing to accept the situation as merely comic, even where physical violence occurs. The one occasion on which Wodehouse proposed to allow the comic criminals to keep their ill-gotten gains was in the original serialisation of *Leave It to Psmith*, but the pressure of the complaining letters to the *Saturday Evening Post* made him change the ending for the book to the version with which we are more familiar.

Third, where the crime is committed by one of the villains (which term includes for this purpose anyone in a position of authority), the hero, heroine, and friends invariably neutralise the crime by taking matters into their own hands. Allowing justice to take its course is not a procedure which enhances good humorous writing, and Wodehouse eschewed its use.

Which just leaves us with the type of crime which has to be brought to the notice of the reader in order to progress the plot, or to establish a background aspect of someone’s character.

Let us look at a few examples, starting with the report of Bertie Wooster’s first encounter with Sir Watkyn Bassett at the start of *The Code of the Woosters*:

A few months before, while celebrating Boat Race night, I had fallen into the clutches

of the Law for trying to separate a policeman from his helmet, and after sleeping fitfully on a plank bed had been hauled up at Boshier Street next morning and fined five of the best. The magistrate who had inflicted this monstrous sentence was none other than old Pop Bassett, father of Gussie Fink-Nottle's bride-to-be.

As it turned out, I was one of his last customers, for a couple of weeks later he inherited a pot of money from a distant relative and retired to the country. That, at least, was the story that had been put about. My own view was that he had got the stuff by sticking like glue to the fines. Five quid here, five quid there—you can see how it would mount up



Bob Rains, in full judicial gear, aids and abets Tony Ring's presentation. (photo by Gary Hall)

Not only did these two paragraphs establish in the reader's mind how we were to regard Pop Bassett throughout this and the later novels in which he would appear, but it may be possible to discern just a hint of my opening story about bribery and corruption.

How about the court scene involving the barrister hero Johnny Halliday, who selflessly subjected his new fiancée Linda Gilpin to rigorous cross-examination on behalf of his client, G. G. Clutterbuck? One of the important plot elements of *A Pelican at Blandings* was for Gally Threepwood to reconcile this pair of lovebirds. Johnny explained to Gally how his dilemma had arisen:

“It was my duty to examine her and make it plain to the jury that she was cockeyed and her

testimony as full of holes as a Swiss cheese. . . . You can imagine my feelings. The court reeled about me. I thought for a moment I wouldn't be able to carry on.”

The drama was not lost on Gally. His eyeglass flew from its base.

“But you did carry on?”

“I did, and in about a minute and a half I had her tied in knots. She didn't have a leg to stand on.”

“You led her on to damaging admissions?”

“Yes.”

. . .

“. . . You gave her the works?”

“Yes.”

“And she resented it?”

“Yes.”

“Did you win your case?”

“Yes.”

“That must have pleased Clutterbuck.”

“Yes.”

“Did you see her afterwards?”

“No. She wrote me a note saying the engagement was off.”

In one of the earliest uses of a court appearance (in *A Damsel in Distress*, from 1919), the plot development actually occurred before the court appearance, which was almost incidental. But it did serve to confirm Wodehouse's skill in writing prose which rhymes:

Outside the Carlton, 'tis averred, these stirring happenings occurred. The hour, 'tis said (and no one doubts) was half past two, or thereabouts. The day was fair, the sky was blue, and everything was peaceful too, when suddenly a well-dressed gent engaged in heated argument and roundly to abuse began another well-dressed gentleman. His suede-gloved fist he raised on high to dot the other in the eye. Who knows what horrors might have been, had there not come upon the scene old London city's favourite son, Policeman C.231. “What means this conduct? Prithee, stop!” exclaimed that admirable cop. With which he placed a warning hand upon the brawler's collarband. We simply hate to tell the rest. No subject here for flippant jest. The mere remembrance of the tale has made our ink turn deadly pale. Let us be brief. Some demon sent stark madness on the well-dressed gent. He gave the constable a punch just where the latter kept his lunch. The

constable said “Well! Well! Well!” and marched him to a dungeon cell. At Vine Street Station out it came—Lord Belper was the culprit’s name. But British justice is severe alike on pauper and on peer; with even hand she holds the scale; a thumping fine in lieu of gaol, induced Lord B. to feel remorse and learn he mustn’t punch the Force.

In other cases, the court appearance arises because of Bertie’s preux chevalier conduct. You will probably recall Bertie’s second appearance at Boshers Street, in “Without the Option,” from *Carry On, Jeeves*:

The evidence was all in. The machinery of the law had worked without a hitch. And the beak, having adjusted a pair of pince-nez which looked as though they were going to do a nose dive any moment, coughed like a pained sheep and slipped us the bad news.

“The prisoner, Wooster,” he said—and who can paint the shame and agony of Bertram at hearing himself so described?—“will pay a fine of five pounds.”

“Oh, rather!” I said. “Absolutely! Like a shot!” I was dashed glad to get the thing settled at such a reasonable figure.

...

The beak gave a coldish nod in my direction, as much as to say they might now strike the fetters from my wrists; and having hitched up the pince-nez once more, proceeded to hand poor old Sippy one of the nastiest looks ever seen in Boshers Street Police Court.

“The case of the prisoner Leon Trotzky—which . . . I am strongly inclined to think an assumed and fictitious name—is more serious. He has been convicted of a wanton and violent assault upon the police. . . . I am aware that on the night following the annual aquatic contest between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge a certain licence is traditionally granted by the authorities, but aggravated acts of ruffianly hooliganism like that of the prisoner Trotzky cannot be overlooked or palliated. He will serve a sentence of thirty days in the Second Division without the option of a fine.”

In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, after Bertie had accompanied Florence Craye to a night club to enable her to research the soft underbelly of London’s nightlife, a police raid took place.

He told her how to react:

“All this is old stuff to me. Here in a nutshell is the procedure. They round us up, and we push off in an orderly manner to the police station in plain vans. There we assemble in the waiting-room and give our names and addresses, exercising a certain latitude as regards the details. I, for example, generally call myself Ephraim Gadsby of the Nasturtiums, Jubilee Road, Streatham Common. I don’t know why. Just a whim. You, if you will be guided by me, will be Matilda Bott, of 365 Churchill Avenue, East Dulwich. These formalities completed, we shall be free to depart, leaving the proprietor to face the awful majesty of Justice.”

Florence declined to act so sensibly, of course, so when she tried to escape from the premises, Bertie (like Monty Bodkin in *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin*) had to interfere, tripping the pursuing constable and suffered the indignity of being taken into custody.

I spent the night in what is called durance vile, and bright and early next day was haled before the beak at Vinton Street Police Court, charged with assaulting an officer of the Law and impeding him in the execution of his duties. . . .

It was the first time I had met the Vinton Street chap, always hitherto having patronized his trade rival at Boshers Street. . . . I didn’t like the look of the old blister at all. His manner was austere, and as the tale proceeded his face . . . grew hard and dark with menace. He kept shooting quick glances at me through his pince-nez, and the dullest eye could see that the constable was getting all the sympathy of the audience and that the citizen cast for the role of Heavy in this treatment was the prisoner Gadsby. More and more the feeling stole over me that the prisoner Gadsby was about to get it in the gizzard and would be lucky if he didn’t fetch up on Devil’s Island.

Ronnie Fish probably felt the same way when—this time at Boshers Street—he had to face the consequences of the previous nights’ excesses at Mario’s, following his mistaken assumption that it was necessary to defend Sue Brown’s virtue from the pill Pilbeam.

The Law of Great Britain is a remorseless machine, which, once set in motion, ignores

first causes and takes into account only results. It will not accept shattered dreams as an excuse for shattering glassware: nor will you get far by pleading a broken heart in extenuation of your behaviour in breaking waiters. Haled on the morrow before the awful majesty of Justice at Boshier Street Police Court and charged with disorderly conduct in a public place—to wit, Mario's Restaurant, and resisting an officer—to wit, P. C. Murgatroyd, in the execution of his duties, Ronald Fish made no impassioned speeches. He did not raise clenched fists aloft and call upon heaven to witness that he was a good man wronged. Experience, dearly bought in the days of his residence at the University, had taught him that when the Law gripped you with its talons the only thing to do was to give a false name, say nothing and hope for the best.

Shortly before noon, accordingly, on the day following the painful scene just described, Edwin Jones, of 7 Nasturtium Villas, Cricklewood, poorer by the sum of five pounds, was being conveyed in a swift taxi-cab to his friend Hugo Carmody's hotel, there to piece together his broken life and try to make a new start.

Perhaps you would care to think back to the story I told at the start of this perambulation. I would like to remind you of three more incidents in the books which perhaps have recognisable similarities to the principles on which it was based.

In the first Jeeves and Wooster novel, *Thank You, Jeeves*, Constable Dobson arrested Sir Roderick Glossop, whose face was covered in boot polish, in the grounds of Chuffnell Hall. He incarcerated him for the night in a potting shed, and the following morning notified Sergeant Voules, who then interviewed Lord Chuffnell, a Justice of the Peace, with power to commit the prisoner to a more recognized prison, awaiting trial on a charge of burglary.

Mr. Stoker, an American visitor and father of the girl Chuffnell loved, had been expecting Sir Roderick to give evidence to an American court, which had to decide whether the deceased testator of a will with \$5 million at stake had been sane at the time the will was made. Having heard the details of Sir Roderick's arrest, he realized at once that it would be no use having him give evidence.

"A lot of use any testimony in a lunacy case is going to be from a fellow who gets himself

pinched while wandering around the country in a black face. Why, there isn't a judge in America who wouldn't rule out anything he said on the ground that he was crazy himself."

Jeeves proposed removing Sir Roderick from the potting shed and substituting a similarly blacked-up Bertie. After considerable objections, Bertie acquiesced and then discussed his experience with Jeeves:

"I'm bound to confess that it was an unpleasant experience coming up before Chuffy. I was nervous and embarrassed. A good deal of the awful majesty of the Law about old Chuffy. I didn't know he wore horn-rimmed spectacles."

"When acting as Justice of the Peace, invariably, I understand, sir. I gather that his lordship finds that they lend him confidence in his magisterial duties."

"Well, I think someone ought to have warned me. I got a nasty shock. They change his whole expression. Make him look just like my Aunt Agatha. It was only by reminding myself that he and I once stood in the same dock together at Bow Street, charged with raising Cain on Boat Race night, that I was enabled to retain my *sang-froid*. However, the unpleasantness was short-lived. I must admit he rushed things through nice and quickly. He soon settled Dobson's hash, what?"

"Yes, sir."

"A rather severe reprimand, I thought?"

"Well phrased, sir."

"And Bertram dismissed without a stain on his character."

"Yes, sir."

In a later novel in the same series, *The Mating Season*, Constable Ernest Dobbs came in to see Esmond Haddock at Deverill Hall, yet another "in-house" justice of the peace, at a time when Bertie was impersonating Gussie and vice-versa.

"I've come on an unpleasant errand, sir," he said, and the chill in the Wooster feet became accentuated. . . .

"I'm looking for Mr. Wooster, sir."

"Wooster, eh? You wish to see him officially?"

"Yes, sir."

"What has he been doing?"

"Effecting burglarious entries, sir. . . . This evening, sir, a burglarious entry was effected by the accused into my police station and certain property of the Crown abstracted—to wit, one dog, what was in custody for having effected two bites. I copped him in the very act, sir."

It was evident that [Esmond Haddock] took a serious view of the matter. And when Justices of the Peace take serious views of matters, you want to get out from under.

"You actually found him abstracting this to wit one dog?" he said keenly, looking like Judge Jeffreys about to do his stuff.

"Yes, sir. I come into my police station and he was in the act of unloosing it and encouraging it to buzz off."

"And what makes you think it was Wooster?"

"He was wearing a green beard, sir, and a check suit. This rendered him conspicuous."

...

"Might I make a remark, sir," asked Jeeves.

"Carry on, Jeeves."

"Thank you, sir. I merely wished to say that the officer is mistaken in supposing that the miscreant responsible for the outrage was Mr. Wooster. I was continuously in Mr. Wooster's society from the time he left the concert hall. I accompanied him to his room, and we remained together until he took his departure for London. I was assisting him to remove his beard, sir."

"Ho!" said Dobbs. "Then if it wasn't the accused Wooster, it must have been the other chap. The fellow Meadows, who was doing Mike. He was wearing a green beard, too."

[Meadowes, whose real name was Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright, and in real life the brother of Cora, the girl with whom Esmond Haddock J.P. was infatuated, was summoned.]

"Meadowes?"

"Yes, sir. You wished to speak to me?"

"I not only wished to speak to you, I wished to give you thirty days without the option."

I heard Constable Dobbs snort briefly, and recognized the snort as a snort of ecstasy. [But then Gertrude Winkworth flung herself into Catsmeat's arms and revealed he was not a real valet but Cora's brother.]

"Now I've got it. How are you, Catsmeat?"

"I'm fine."

"That's good. That's splendid. Are you and Gertrude going to get married?"

"Yes," they said.

"Hoy," said Constable Dobbs.

Esmond proved fully equal to the situation.

"I see what you're driving at, Dobbs. You very naturally wish to make a pinch. But consider, Dobbs, how slender is the evidence which you can bring forward to support your charge. You say you chased a man in a green beard and a check suit up a tree. But the visibility was very poor, and you admit yourself that you were being struck by thunderbolts all the time, which must have distracted your attention, so it is more than probable that you were mistaken. I put it to you, Dobbs, that when you thought you saw a man in a green beard and a check suit, it may quite easily have been a clean-shaven man in something quiet and blue."

The thing that poisons life for a country policeman . . . is the ever-present fear that one of these days he may talk out of turn and get in wrong with a Justice of the Peace. He knows what happens if you get in wrong with a Justice of the Peace. . . . Sooner or later they catch you bending, and the next thing you know you've drawn a strong rebuke from the Bench.

The case reported in *Pigs Have Wings*, involving the dealings of Justice of the Peace Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe with Justice of the Peace Lord Emsworth, had even more obvious overtones:

Sir Gregory Parsloe was seated in a chair, looking fixedly at a photograph and as Gally and Lord Emsworth entered, he transferred an unpleasant gaze.

"Ha!" he said nastily. "The Master of the Vultures! I had an idea you would be coming along. If you're looking for that bloodstained butler of yours, you're too late."

Lord Emsworth replaced his pince-nez, which, pursuing their invariable policy at moments when their proprietor was surprised and startled, had leaped from his nose like live creatures of the wild.

"Who invited you to stroll in and make yourself at home?" asked Gally. . . . "I shall advise young Vail that an action may lie."

"Who's Vail?"

"The lessee of this house."

"Oh, that chap? Action did you say? He won't be bringing any actions. He'll be in prison, like Beach. . . . Constable Evans is probably

locking him in his cell at this very moment. He was in my house when Wellbeloved came with his news. . . . He said that he had been in this house, talking to this fellow Vail, and while they were talking, he suddenly heard the Queen of Matchingham grunt. . . . It had come from the kitchen. . . . There was plainly a pig there. . . . I don't know who this Vail is”

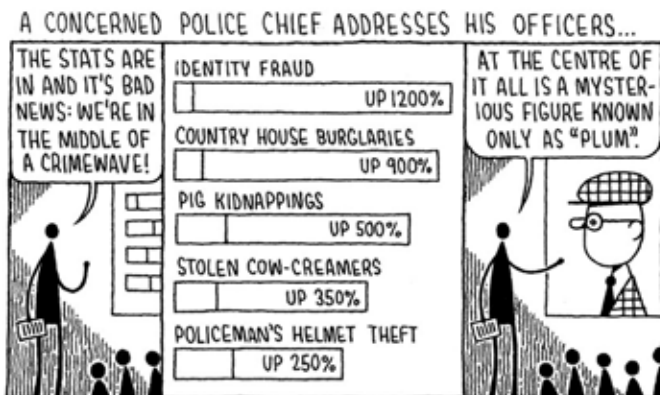
“He's my secretary,” said Lord Emsworth.

“In your pay, is he? I thought so.”

“No, he isn't, now I come to think of it,” said Lord Emsworth. “Connie sacked him.”

“The thing that matters is that he's a minion whom you have bought with your gold. . . . To go on with what I was saying, this bally Vail told Wellbeloved this bally story, and Wellbeloved shrewdly pretended to swallow it and then came and reported to me. I drove here immediately with the constable, heard my pig in the kitchen, found Beach on guard, and directed the officer to take him into custody and haul him off to a prison cell. At the next session of the bench of magistrates I shall sentence him to whatever the term of imprisonment is that a bounder gets for stealing pigs. . . . I shall be much surprised if it isn't six months or a year or something like that. Nor is that all. You, Emsworth, and you, Threepwood, will be up to your necks in the soup as accessories before the fact. With the evidence at my disposal, I shall be able to net the whole gang.”

I do not pretend to have presented the entire case—as time would not permit—but I can confidently leave it with you, as jury, to decide whether a campaign to promote Wodehouse as a leading crime writer would succeed.



Thanks to Jim Gray (www.threethirtypm.com) for permission to reprint Tom Gauld's cartoon (originally published in *The Guardian*), which seems very appropriate for Tony's talk!

The 2015 Convention!

YES, THE 2015 CONVENTION can be yours! The details about how the host chapter is chosen are available in TWS's Convention Steering Committee (CSC) Charter. If, for some reason, you are unable to get it from TWS's website (<http://www.wodehouse.org/twsCSCcharter.html>), please write to Elin Woodger for a copy (see below).

All bids for the 2015 convention must be submitted to Elin Woodger by January 18, 2013.

The host chapter selection will be made well in advance of the 2013 Chicago convention. The CSC Charter mandates: (1) Any chapter wishing to host a convention must submit their bid to the Committee by nine months before the next convention (in this case, by January 18, 2013). (2) The Committee will notify bidding chapters whether their bids have been successful at least six months before the next convention. Thus, chapters wanting to host the 2015 convention will be notified by April 18, 2013, whether their bid has been successful or not. (3) If the Committee receives no bids by the nine-month deadline, they will use those nine months to make their own convention plans—which may mean selecting a likely chapter and inviting them to play Persian Monarchs, with the honor of hosting the 2015 convention as the stakes.

For full host chapter selection criteria, you may download the CSC Charter from our website, or you may request a copy from Elin at the e-mail address or street address listed above.

Wodehouse Books for Sale

NICK TOWNEND, one of our English members, is selling about 200 duplicate items (books and magazines) from his Wodehouse collection. Please contact Nick for a full list, covering first editions and reprints, with and without dustwrappers, in U.K. and U.S. editions. Nick can only accept payment in sterling, but such payments can be made via PayPal.

“[S]he responded that I was barmy, because burglars don't burgle in the middle of the afternoon, and I said, 'Oh, don't they, that's where you make your ruddy error, because that's just when they do burgle, knowing that that's just when everybody's outside playing tennis and what not.'”

The Girl in Blue (1970)

Chapters Corner

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

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott
Phone:
E-mail:



Birmingham Banjolele Band

(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)
Contact: Caralyn Campbell
Phone:
E-mail:



IN MARCH, members and friends gathered for an afternoon musicale celebrating the collaboration of PGW and Jerome Kern. Hosts Joyce and Harry Hall not only provided a venue, they contributed the professional touch, with Harry as musical director and Joyce ably tickling the ivories. President and raconteur Ken Clevenger offered program notes on the musical comedies that were the framework for the ditties.

Harry Hall and Linda Walsh performed duets of "You Said Something" and "A Peach of a Life." Harry soloed on "Peaches," "Be a Little Sunbeam," and "Ain't It a Grand and Glorious Feeling." Linda performed "An Old-Fashioned Wife." Jeanne Davis sang "Poor Prune," with a musical interjection or two by Harry. Lucy Merrill sang "Rolled Into One." Noel Merrill gave the group "We're Crooks" and the only non-Kern piece on the program, "West Point Song," a Wodehouse-Sigmund Romberg number, with banjolele accompaniment.

The audience—fortified with punch, sherry, and hors d'oeuvres—took it well. Nary a fruit or vegetable was thrown, as the program was several notches above the typical Wodehouse village concert or East End church hall entertainment. More such musical lashing out is contemplated for future gatherings.

Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)

Contact:
Phone:
E-mail:



The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker
Phone:
E-mail:



And, though the streets be deep in snow,
Though slippery pavements make him stumble,
Though rain descends, though blizzards blow,
It matters not: he scorns to grumble.
What if it lightens, thunders, hails,
And common men grow daily glummer,
In him contentment never fails;
To such a man it's always summer.

"The Cricketer in Winter," P. G. Wodehouse

WHEN THE Broadway Special meets in the very depths of the Winter Term, we, too, scorn to grumble! For we congregate with hearts full of joy and gladness, as we "quaff mayhap the warming beaker." No, hold on, scratch that mayhap, it's misleading. Insert "full many a warming beaker." Might as well be candid because when we're in the sunny Plummy world, we'll quaff the cooling beverage just as contentedly.

When the Special celebrated our annual songfest on January 14 at Luceil Carroll's glorious Fifth Avenue residence, we quaffed and nibbled and warbled with abandon, courtesy of Luceil's liberally dispensed lashings of liquors, Luca's lucullan cuisine, and, of course, Lenny Metcalf's lively accompaniment at the grand piano. Special choristers sang lyrics both Wodehousian and vaudevillian, show tunes and Gay Nineties ditties, and were even able to include an early Burns Night tribute with "Auld Lang Syne" to close the revelry.

A scant six weeks later, on February 24, we returned to The Players to find another sing-along in progress, and were secretly chuffed to discover that the Special's vocalizing was of rather a higher caliber than the efforts offered on that mild February evening. We headed up the grand staircase to settle in with *Sam the Sudden*, a wildly popular choice, as it turned out. Co-chair Philip Shreffler praised the "sweetness and light" that surrounded even the not-so-antagonistic antagonists Chimp Twist and the Molloys. No real harm was ever

intended, though there was some boorish behavior by ancillary nobs. Sherlockians were pleased to note plot similarities to some SH adventures (“Red-Headed League,” “Three Garridebs,” “Stockbroker’s Clerk,” et al.), and several of the gentlemen present stoutly defended the somewhat farfetched, photo-induced passion of Our Hero for Our Heroine, citing similar reactions to poster-sized images of Ursula Andress, Raquel Welch, and Farrah Fawcett . . . Point taken!

There were quite a few new and newish attendees at this particular Broadway Special, possibly drawn by the thought of quaffing happily at the Grill Bar, or possibly just misdirected. One fellow in dapper suit and distinguished spectacles wandered in—Manhattan in hand—and was made welcome. Co-chair Amy Plofker advised that young Matthew intended to create a Brooklyn Wodehouse chapter over that very weekend; M. E. Rich urged everyone to plan for an August boating adventure on the lake in Central Park; suggestions were bandied for further reading with a particular request for the School stories, full of enthusiastic lads and happy adventures. This prompted Luceil to reminisce that she had attended a parallel institution for young ladies—Ladycliff College—which was deemed “socially convenient to West Point.” Another point taken!

We did our usual introductions ’round the table and on reaching the dapper chappie, we were delighted when he confessed that he was, in fact, at the wrong meeting. This made no difference to us, of course, and we urged him to stay, but he was having none of it, his appointment was down the hall for a Mensa confab, and he ambled away, purportedly a wiser, but undoubtedly a sadder, man. We’re pleased to advise that our other new attendees remained ensconced, voluble, and basking in the glow of that Broadway Special contentment that never fails.

Springtime brings dinner and a theatrical visit to the Musicals Tonight! production of *Sitting Pretty* (see related article on page 19), the Long Island Excursion, and a Midsummer Eve’s Eve discussion of *Jeeves in the Offing* at the behest of David Jasen, set for The Players on June 22. So, if you’re planning a trip to the Great White Way, we’d welcome you with open arms at the Player’s Grill and stand you to a Manhattan or the quaffable beaker of your choice.

Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Jeff Peterson

Phone:

E-mail:



ON MARCH 11, Capital! Capital! members and guests, some forty strong, gathered at the Embassy Suites Hotel in downtown Washington, D.C., for a buffet dinner, good fellowship, and a presentation by member John Baesch on the theme of “P. G. Wodehouse and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.” He is a member of both The Wodehouse Society (TWS) and the London-based Sherlock Holmes Society. John noted that PGW and Conan Doyle were friends, fellow cricket enthusiasts, and even teammates. Wodehouse, some 22 years younger, always considered himself a student of Conan Doyle and was one of his greatest professional admirers. Both men were, as we know, masters of the English language and world-class storytellers. John touched our heartstrings when he discussed whether Holmes/Watson and Wooster/Jeeves were real and eternal. He quoted from Vincent Starret’s poem “221B” that Holmes/Watson (and by extension Wooster/Jeeves) were “two men of note who never lived and so can never die.” And as to reality, well, “only the things the heart believes are true.”

For the Q&A and discussion portion of the presentation, John was joined on the dais by Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Dirda. Michael is also a card-carrying member of both societies and is the author of the 2011 book *On Conan Doyle: or, The Whole Art of Storytelling*. The book, which contains many Wodehouse references, was one of five short-listed for an Edgar Award in the critical/biographical category. (The Edgar Award is, of course, the annual award of the Mystery Writers of America, named after Edgar Allen Poe.) John and Michael commented and expatiated on questions brought up during the lively after-coffee discussions. The evening was also a book-signing opportunity for all.

Because of the theme for the evening, CapCap’ers were once again joined by thirteen members of the local chapter of the English Speaking Union (ESU), including chapter head author Mark Olshaker (see www.esu.org and www.esuwdc.org). Also in attendance was Peter Blau, aka Black Peter, chapter head of the “Red Circle,” the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Sherlock Holmes Society (see www.redcircledc.org).

Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Herb Moskowitz

Phone:

E-mail:



THE CHAPS OF Chapter One met at the Dark Horse Inn in Old City, Philadelphia, on March 23 with a

full house, as we welcomed several new and returning members. After introductions all 'round, we learned that one of the new members is writing a scholarly work on Plum and his oeuvre, another is preparing a science-fiction adaptation of "Jeeves and the Hard-Boiled Egg," and the third is and another is a collector of Plum's first editions who found TWS and Chapter One online. We discussed whether having a nom was absolutely necessary and how to avoid duplications. One of the newbies was thinking of taking Aunt Agatha as a nom (brave soul!).

Acting President Herb Moskovitz (Vladimir Brusiloff) passed the hat for Gussie, the Mandarin newt we support through the Philadelphia Zoo's adopt-an-animal program. We are happy to report that Gussie will be kept in the style to which he is accustomed for another year.

Bob Rains and Andrea Jacobsen (Oily and Sweetie Carlisle) gave us the latest information on the Remsenberg Marker Project.

After a fine repast, the Chaps got down to our assigned selection, "Extricating Young Gussie," which introduced Jeeves to the world. Several chaps also brought up other noted literary debuts, such as fellow Dulwich alum Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe; Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin (with the splendid line "There was no reason why I shouldn't go out for the beer"); Jeeves's forerunner Sam Weller of *The Pickwick Papers*; and, of course, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

After a splendid dramatic rendition of the story by several of the Chaps, we decided that Bertie Wooster's mother's family must have been named Mannering-Phipps and selected May 20 as the next meeting date.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

Phone:

E-mail:



THE CHICAGO ACCIDENT SYNDICATE (TCAS) met on February 4 to formalize their planning for hosting the next Wodehouse convention in Chicago. The convention, to be held in October 2013 at Chicago's beautiful Union League Club, was already the talk of the town, crowding out the G12 summit and the state of Illinois's ongoing budget disaster as the major topic of discussion among the Windy City's glitterati. Our kind and generous host, Tina Woelke, kept the news media out of the planning meeting with an attack cat stationed near the gated front entrance.

TCAS is pleased to announce that they are accepting proposals for presentations at the 2013 convention. They are also pleased to announce a new 2013 Wodehouse convention email address where those proposals (and questions about the convention) will be accepted. The new email address will be released once local TCAS members get a fair headstart on writing and polishing their own convention proposals. Seriously, the 2013 convention email address will be released, we were told, "when we're good and ready and not before."

Tina Garrison, TWS, a long-time TCAS member and all-around good egg, has been selected as the 2013 convention chairman—or should that be chairwoman? It seems impossible to keep up with these shifting standards. A scrum ensued among the remaining TCAS members as they tried to secure the most plum remaining subcommittee assignments. At least I think that was the scrum I remember. Your correspondent's notes became somewhat garbled after the third glass of wine, and there had been an earlier fracas over the Italian bread at the hearty potluck lunch that was served. At any rate, the "Loot" subcommittee was much fought over, and the "Dance" committee oversubscribed. Volunteers are still being sought for "Cleanup" and "Other."

It was suggested that the group should rename itself "Chicago Accident: The Syndicate" in order to provide this local Wodehouse chapter with a snappier acronym before the convention, but the motion was tabled as not immediately germane.

Chapter President Katherine Lewis led this latest TCAS meeting with her usual aplomb and provided the members with the opportunity to watch "Wogan on Wodehouse," a wonderful and tear-inducing BBC documentary on The Master. Every Wodehouse Society member can recount the joy they have in reading his works. But seeing Wodehouse writing, and hearing him speak—both new experiences for this author—were delicious and unexpected treats from this program. One only sighs to realize that the man was alive in one's lifetime, and with some pluck and foresight, might have been met in person. Ah, but we read his books and remember.

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact:

Phone:



The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Carey Tynan

Phone:
E-mail:



The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)

Contact: Susan Brokaw

Phone:

E-mail:



Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham

(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)

Contact: Laura Loehr

Phone:

E-mail:



The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: Lynette Poss

Phone:

E-mail:



The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and New England)

Contact: David Landman

Phone:

E-mail:



ON A CHILLY spring day, drenched in soup and nostalgia, the NEWTS celebrated their 20th anniversary as a force for good in the world. Old photographs were unearthed and fondly remembered totally accurate stories were told regarding NEWTS who had moved away or been accepted into the Drones Club in the sky, where every tossed playing card inevitably passes through the target halo and every bit of wafted manna gently hits its target. Current NEWTS president David Landman presided and was decked out in full regalia (including the rarely seen scaly tail). The secret NEWTS handshake was revealed to new members Janet Levy and Joan Driscoll. All pledged to make the next twenty years even better, if such a thing is possible.

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler

Phone:

E-mail:



The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)

Contact: Karen Shotting

Phone:

E-mail:



WE HAD OUR usual lively discussions with our March and April readings, *Psmith in the City* and *Tales of St. Austin's*, both early works of the Master. We were particularly impressed with PGW's portrayal of life in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank—oops, I mean the New Asiatic Bank—and the less-than-idyllic world that Mike faced in his early days in London. Psmith himself obtained some new admirers, not only for his facility of speech, but for his loyal friendship with school chum, Mike.

Our upcoming readings are as follows:

May: *Cocktail Time* (an Uncle Fred novel)

June: *Money for Nothing*

July: *Bill the Conqueror* (look for some Wodehouse autobiographical bits)

We are looking forward to welcoming our illustrious President, Ken Clevenger, in October. Ken will discuss Wodehouse the gastronome and will make the pious pilgrimage to the Huntington Library, Art Galleries, and Botanical Gardens to see the 18th-century Schuppe cow creamer and other Huntington delights.

We generally meet the second Sunday of each month at 12:30 P.M. You will find us at Book Alley, 1252 East Colorado Blvd, Pasadena, California (<http://www.bookalley.com/shop/bookalley/index.html>). Please contact Karen Shotting or join our Yahoo! group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PZMPCo> for more information and occasional changes of schedule and venue.

The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein

Phone:

E-mail:



THE PICKERINGS gathered at Larry Nahigian's house on January 22. Larry and Anne were wonderful hosts and a good time was had by all.

The book of the month was *Right Ho, Jeeves*. Most members had read it. Some had read it years ago but remembered it as though they read it yesterday. They were interrogated about the plot and passed with flying colors. The book was discussed in detail, addressing such important questions as the relationship between Tuppy Glossop and Sir Roderick Glossop.

David Warren read the passage that made him laugh out loud, when Gussie presents the prizes. The

consensus was that this is the funniest part of the book, although your humble reporter likes the exchange of telegrams between Bertie and Aunt Dahlia at the beginning of the book.

Our next meeting was on March 11. The book was *Summer Lightning*. Sue and Dicron Mahakian were the hosts. There was much intellectual discussion. One interesting topic that came up was the appearance of Jews in Wodehouse. We came up with several examples off the top of our heads and discussed their roles and possibilities. This topic could turn into a paper for the next convention.

Another obscure topic was Lancelot Threepwood, brother of Clarence and Galahad. He is mentioned a few times in the Blandings books, but he never actually appears. There was much speculation about what he was like and why he was not given a role in the Blandings Saga. There was also some speculation about the scandalous details of the story of the prawns, which was such an important part of Galahad's memoirs. There was an explanation of the difference between a prawn and a shrimp.

We then veered onto the topic of what scene in Wodehouse is the funniest. The two finalists, in our opinion, were Gussie Presents The Prizes and the flower pot scene in *Leave It to Psmith*. Both scenes have their partisans.

The next meeting is June 3, 2012. The book is *Heavy Weather*.

The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs)

(Portland, Oregon and vicinity)

Contact: Carol James

Phone:

E-mail:



The Right Honorable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney

(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Contact: Jelle Otten

Phone:

E-mail:

THE HONORABLE KNIGHTS met on Saturday, February 18, in Mulliner's Wijnlokaal in downtown Amsterdam. The most important event during the gathering was the presentation of *Avonturen van Ukridge* ("The adventures of Ukridge"). Mr Willem Desmense, publisher of Uitgeverij IJzer (in English, the publishing company "Iron"), presented the first commercial publication of a Wodehouse book in Dutch translation since 1986. The book is a collection of

Ukridge stories which had not been translated in Dutch before. The subtitle of the book is *Financiëel Genie met Tegenslag* ("A financial genius with bad luck"). Leonard Beuger translated the Ukridge stories, which have previously been featured in *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets*; *Lord Emsworth and Others*; and *Nothing Serious*. Several Dutch newspapers and broadcasting stations gave media coverage to the publication of *Avonturen van Ukridge*. Many copies of the new translation were purchased that night by enthusiastic Honorable Knights and members of the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society. By the way, the ISBN number is 978-90-8684-0786, and the online price of the book is currently at €17.50, which is about 23 American bucks.



The newly published Dutch edition of
The Adventures of Ukridge

After this major event, we could engage ourselves with the Dazzling Wodehouse Cover Quiz. Somebody had made a collection of book jackets of Wodehouse books from different countries. The twelve book titles ranged from *Neitonen Ahdingossa* to *Giovanotti con le Ghetto*. The challenge was to guess the right title in English and in Dutch. (In English, the above-mentioned titles are *A Damsel in Distress* and *Young Men in Spats*).

As is tradition, the February event concluded with the cock-and-bull contest. The winning story was delivered by Peter Nieuwenhuizen. He told the true story of the participation of a certain P. G. Wodehouse in the Elfstedentocht in 1942. The Elfstedentocht is the annual 120-mile skating marathon in Friesland, one of the Dutch provinces. (For more details, visit <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elfstedentocht>). Unfortunately, this particular Wodehouse had a poorer sense of direction than our Wodehouse had of literary style, and the former took the wrong route and did not win the skating marathon.

The next meeting of the Hon. Knights was to occur on Saturday, June 9, at 1 P.M. in Mulliner's Wijnlokaal, Lijnbaansgracht 266-267, Amsterdam. Stay tuned for the notes from that meeting in the autumn *Plum Lines*. For those who like to plan ahead, our autumn meeting will be on Saturday, October 20, at 1 P.M.

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



Why We're Sitting Pretty

BY M. E. RICH

THE BROADWAY SPECIAL has long been enamored of the Wodehousian productions offered by the redoubtable Mel Miller of Musicals Tonight!, who has been delighting us since first we coalesced as the New York chapter of TWS. When the season includes a Plum, we pounce like a “leopard moving toward the side-table,” and indeed, early pouncers come away with coveted reservations in their paws while lollygaggers must depend on our co-chair Amy Plofker's ticket-finessing skills. (Why hasn't this woman become the Rupert Steggles of our age, one asks?)

Thus it was that our little band was enhanced by visitors in town for the Long Island Pilgrimage, and we were thrilled to welcome them to dinner at the West Bank Café, a gen-yoo-wine theatrical haunt, before scurrying across 42nd Street for the concert-reading performance of *Sitting Pretty* on April 21. The last collaboration of “the trio of musical fame” (Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern), its music and lyrics are as fresh as fresh paint; the story is an improbable confection of daft romance, crafty conniving, and, of course, a nifty finale. As always, Musicals Tonight's production values are economically dictated, with simple suggestions of furnishings, décor, and wardrobe. Thus, the focus is on the company of energetic performers and especially on clever songs. Which brings me to an important point: Why aren't these clever songs to be found in the canon of the American Songbook? Therein lies a tale, or more accurately a story of incredible serendipity.

Jerome Kern was, in his own words, “a son of a bitch” with an obdurate aversion to the popular culture of the day—the reinterpretation or even bowdlerization of melodies by jazz bands and singers as heard on the

wireless, on recordings, or in speakeasies and clubs. He refused to allow *Sitting Pretty* to be published in sheet music form, insisting that he wrote specifically “to both the situations and the lyrics in *plays*” (emphasis mine). Without robust Tin Pan Alley support for the score, the show's tunes were heard only by a New York-area audience for its brief Broadway run of 95 performances and by those who saw it on its successful year-long road tour. Kern's original orchestrations with Wodehouse's lyrics were then delivered, as was the custom, to the music house which held the initial rights to the show. And that was pretty much the end of *Sitting Pretty*.

Now, remember that the show ran from spring 1924 in various productions until early 1926; the Roaring Twenties were about to roar for real, as the beginning of the “talkie” era was barely a year away. Silent films were soon passé, and Warner Brothers executives were quick to recognize that there was a significant opportunity in future musical earnings. Thus it was that they subsumed several publishing houses holding a substantial trove of stockpiled works of Kern—and Gershwin, Porter, Rodgers, and even Sigmund Romberg and Victor Herbert. All of the material was stored away and then transferred from archives to warehouses over the years. At some point Warners purchased a site in Secaucus, New Jersey, directly across the Hudson River from 42nd Street, transferring its hodge-podge musical collection, and many, many other ephemeral relics of its past, into what became a forgotten and forlorn outpost of Broadway's glory days.

But in 1982, an orchestrator named Donald Rose, who specialized in George Gershwin's oeuvre, learned about the Secaucus warehouse almost by chance and enlisted the help of Warner Music executives and theater historian Robert Kimball. “At that time, employees came across extensive files of old music,” Robert Kimball said. “They assembled them into eighty cartons and stored them in a remote part of the warehouse. It was believed that this material consisted of little more than piano-vocal scores prepared for publication by in-house arrangers.” Instead, the astonished team made history, finding an almost overwhelming abundance of historic compositions, and, specifically for Wodehousians, the complete scores to some of Kern's seminal works for his Princess Theater favorites, including *Very Good Eddie* (1915), *Leave It to Jane* (1917), and *Sitting Pretty*.

The Princess Theater treasures were of particular interest to a young musicologist, John McGlinn, who was trying his best to restore *Show Boat* to its original 1927 form for the Houston Opera. He described his joy at delving into the archives in Secaucus as akin to Howard Carter's dramatic discovery of King Tut's tomb.

John was often to be seen at The Players on Gramercy Park, the headquarters of our TWS New York Chapter. He was a force for good, an irrepressible advocate for composers and lyricists, with the smile of a cherub and the zeal of an archangel. His access to Kern's orchestrations resulted in a 1989 concert production he directed and conducted of *Sitting Pretty*, a CD of which can easily be found on Amazon.com. With an exuberant passion for all early 20th-century American musical theater, John worked tirelessly to bring original orchestrations and pristine productions of both beloved shows and lost gems to new audiences. There are many wonderful CDs of his work available, some featuring his own handpicked New Princess Theater Orchestra, and some star-studded concert performances.

Wodehousians owe a deep debt of gratitude to this wonderful and sadly missed kindred spirit who died at the impossibly young age of 55 in 2009. John McGlenn found an El Dorado and shared the wealth with all of us.

Potential Oldest Member of TWS?

WE DON'T KNOW who is the oldest current member of The Wodehouse Society. However, we have a good guess. During our recent membership renewal cycle, we were notified that member Edwin R. Adam of Spring Branch, Texas, celebrated his 98th birthday in April 2012. Any members of TWS out there who can top that to become our Honorary Current Chronologically Oldest Member?



Multiyear Memberships

FOR THOSE MEMBERS of The Wodehouse Society who have the desire and means to pay more than one year of membership, note that the limit for which you may pay ahead is four years. There are two ways to do this. You may send a check to Treasurer Kris Fowler (see her address information to the right) for the number of years of membership (up to four) that you'd like to pay ahead. Or you may take advantage of our new multiyear option on PayPal, if that's your preferred method of forking over your rubles. Since we think that our little society is immortal, feel free to avail yourself of the option if you are so moved.

The Anglo-American Angle

BY ELIN WOODGER

This is Part 1; Part 2 will be printed in September. Elin wishes to thank Tim Andrew, Curtis Armstrong, Hilary Bruce, and Jean Tillson for their superb assistance in presenting this paper at the Dearborn convention.

P. G. WODEHOUSE is most often described as an English humorist, but in fact he was an Anglo-American writer whose books captured the habits and language of both England and America. Now, this is hardly a revolutionary idea. We think of him as an English writer because his most famous characters are English to the core. Yet his stories contain many equally enjoyable American characters and settings, and his cultural observations as well as his mastery of both British and American idioms are essential elements of his popularity in both countries.

Wodehouse set 11 novels and quite a few short stories, in whole or in part, in America. Of the 86 books he wrote after 1909, only 17 do not have one or more American characters in them. Sometimes only our old friends Soapy and Dolly Molloy, Chimp Twist, or Oily and Gertie Carlisle are brought in to provide comic relief, but more often the story will include an American hero, heroine, or supporting character. In fact, English and American characters mix with such frequency that it's sometimes difficult to tell who is which nationality.

Many of Wodehouse's ocean-hopping protagonists can be divided into two general categories: American heroes or heroines who fall in love with English members of the opposite sex, and those from England who do likewise with Americans. Although there are variations on this theme, for the most part Wodehouse uses the cross-cultural divide as background for his romantic couples. Thus, we have Freddie Threepwood and Aggie Donaldson, Lady Constance and Jimmy Schoonmaker, Sally Nicholas and Ginger Kemp, and other Anglo-American unions. Norman and I are clearly in good company!

This propensity for transatlantic love stories is hardly surprising given that Wodehouse met and married his own (British) wife in the States. Altogether he made 22 trips to America, and such Homeric traveling is bound to affect a writer. It helped to fine-tune his already acute ear for language and gave him material for incisive observations of both Americans and Brits. He was a canny writer, attuned to, first, what editors wanted and, later, what his readers wanted. As Robert McCrum once wrote, Wodehouse kept "a sharp eye on his American audience." And well he should,

because after his first visit to the States in 1904, his career improved dramatically, as he tells us in *America, I Like You*:

Back in London, I found that I had done wisely in going to New York even for so brief a visit. The manner of editors changed toward me. Where before it had been "Throw this man out," they now said, "Come in, my dear fellow, come in and tell us about America."

In 1910 Wodehouse published *A Gentleman of Leisure*, the first novel in which he put Americans into an English setting. Barry Phelps describes this as "a Blandings novel in all but name" and says that with its publication, Wodehouse's "Anglo-American credentials were confirmed." And we can already see in it some of the themes he would explore in depth later.

Wodehouse gave us many types of Americans, but the ones we meet most often are people in show business, criminals, and con men or women—and it is perhaps worth noting that the majority of criminals in Wodehouse are American—and retired business executives who are often married to ambitious, social-climbing women. The executives are typically forced to live in some place they don't want to be—usually England. This results in homesickness that for some centers on baseball. Poor Bingley Crocker in *Piccadilly Jim*, marooned in London, feels this keenly. Doing what he can to adapt, Mr. Crocker takes instruction in cricket from his butler, Bayliss, who describes a match at Lord's as "a very exciting game." This confuses Mr. Crocker:

"Exciting? How do you make that out? I sat in the bleachers all afternoon, waiting for something to break loose. Doesn't anything ever happen at cricket?"

The butler winced a little, but managed to smile a tolerant smile. This man, he reflected, was but an American and as such more to be pitied than censured. He endeavoured to explain.

"It was a sticky wicket yesterday, sir, owing to the rain."

"Eh?"

"The wicket was sticky, sir."

"Come again."

"I mean that the reason why the game yesterday struck you as slow was that the wicket—I should say the turf—was sticky—that is to say, wet. Sticky is the technical term, sir. When the wicket is sticky the batsmen are

obliged to exercise a great deal of caution, as the stickiness of the wicket enables the bowlers to make the ball turn more sharply in either direction as it strikes the turf than when the wicket is not sticky."

"That's it, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks for telling me."

"Not at all, sir."

After being baffled by Bayliss's cricket terminology, Mr. Crocker fights back with a description of baseball.

"Quite an interesting game," said Bayliss. "But I find, now that you have explained it, sir, that it is familiar to me, though I have always known it under another name. It is played a great deal in this country."

Mr. Crocker started to his feet.

"It is? And I've been five years here without finding it out! When's the next game scheduled?"

"It is known in England as rounders, sir. Children play it with a soft ball and a racket, and derive considerable enjoyment from it. I have never heard of it before as a pastime for adults."

Two shocked eyes stared into the butler's face.

"Children?" The word came in a whisper. "A racket?"

"Yes, sir."

"You—you didn't say a soft ball?"

"Yes, sir."

A sort of spasm seemed to convulse Mr. Crocker. He had lived five years in England, but not till this moment had he realized to the full how utterly alone he was in an alien land. Fate had placed him, bound and helpless, in this country where they called baseball rounders and played it with a soft ball.

Bingley Crocker yearns to return to New York. The heart of J. Wellington Gedge, in *Hot Water*, lies in California, as does that of Howard Steptoe in *Quick Service*, while *The Small Bachelor's* Sigsbee Waddington wants to live in "the great, glorious West." These poor henpecked American husbands are almost always where they'd rather not be.

Younger, single American men fare better, as they inevitably end up falling in love and marrying a nice English heroine. A similar happy fate awaits young Englishmen who come to the United States.

As in so many of Wodehouse's books, impostures and misunderstandings often lead to complications, which in turn allow Wodehouse to sneak in some amusing cultural observations. In *The Girl on the Boat*, Englishman Sam Marlowe is talking to his aunt, Mrs. Hignett:

"How do you like America?" said Sam.

"I dislike it exceedingly."

"Yes? Well, of course, some people do. Prohibition and all that. Personally, it doesn't affect me. I can take it or leave it alone. I like America myself," said Sam. "I've had a wonderful time. Everybody's treated me like a rich uncle. I've been in Detroit, you know, and they practically gave me the city and asked me if I'd like another to take home in my pocket. Never saw anything like it. I might have been the missing heir! I think America's the greatest invention on record."

Later, back in England, Sam encounters the American Billie Bennett, with whom he has fallen out:

"And how do you like England, Miss Bennett?"

Billie's eye had lost its cheerful friendliness. A somewhat feline expression had taken its place.

"Pretty well," she replied.

"You don't like it?"

"Well, the way I look at it is this. It's no use grumbling. One has got to realise that in England one is in a savage country, and one should simply be thankful one isn't eaten by the natives."

"What makes you call England a savage country?" demanded Sam, a staunch patriot, deeply stung.

"What would you call a country where you can't get ice, central heating, corn-on-the-cob, or bathrooms? My father and Mr. Mortimer have just taken a house down on the coast and there's just one niggly little bathroom in the place."

"Is that your only reason for condemning England?"

"Oh, no, it has other drawbacks."

"Such as?"

"Well, Englishmen, for instance. Young Englishmen in particular. English young men are awful! Idle, rude, conceited, and ridiculous."

Marlowe refused hock with a bitter

intensity which nearly startled the old retainer, who had just offered it to him, into dropping the decanter.

"How many English young men have you met?"

Billie met his eye squarely and steadily. "Well, now that I come to think of it, not many. In fact, very few. As a matter of fact, only . . ."

"Only?"

"Well, very few," said Billie. "Yes," she said meditatively. "I suppose I really have been rather unjust. I should not have condemned a class simply because . . . I mean, I suppose there *are* young Englishmen who are not rude and ridiculous?"

"I suppose there are American girls who have hearts."

"Oh, plenty."

"I'll believe that when I meet one."

Ouch. And things *really* go downhill after that.

Of course, it works both ways. In *Galahad at Blandings*, Lord Emsworth has returned from attending Lady Constance's wedding to Jimmy Schoonmaker in New York, where American habits regarding not just tea but boiled eggs have confounded him. He reveals his confusion in a conversation with Gally:

"Well, Clarence, what did you think of America?"

"Extraordinary country. You know it well, don't you?"

"Oh yes, I was always popping in and out of it in the old days. You found it extraordinary, you say?"

"Very. Those tea bags."

"I beg your pardon?"

"They serve your tea in little bags."

"So they do. I remember."

"And when you ask for a boiled egg, they bring it to you mashed up in a glass."

"You don't like it that way?"

"No, I don't."

"Then the smart thing to do is not to ask for a boiled egg."

"True," said Lord Emsworth, who had not thought of that.

Not all English characters share Lord Emsworth's dismay regarding American habits. Some even embrace the American way of life, as Archie Moffam does in *Indiscretions of Archie*:

In their attitude towards America, visiting Englishmen almost invariably incline to extremes, either detesting all that therein is or else becoming enthusiasts on the subject of the country, its climate, and its institutions. Archie belonged to the second class. He liked America and got on splendidly with Americans from the start. He was a friendly soul, a mixer; and in New York, that city of mixers, he found himself at home.

And there are other reasons to love America, as Eggy Mannering discovers in *Laughing Gas*. When told of Sister Lora Luella Stott, “the woman who is leading California out of the swamp of alcohol,” his response is immediate:

“Good God!” I could tell by Eggy’s voice that he was interested. “Is there a swamp of alcohol in these parts? What an amazing country America is. Talk about every modern convenience. Do you mean you can simply go there and *lap*?”

Soul Mates

BY DAVID LANDMAN

When arrant Greeks besieged old Troy
And booked their foes on Charon’s ferry,
Prince Sarpedon, a roaring boy,
Within the stalwart walls made merry,

By vine leaves wreathed, by amours warmed,
At once both giddy and august,
While Greeks on wind-swept beaches stormed
Half-choked with Aeschylean dust.

Though Trojan glory is now cropped
And enterprising hucksters drum
Tart tasteless figs where once there dropped
Syrups of cherry, peach, and plum,

Though fevers rage and times are sick
And fiction reeks like rutting goat,
Prince Sarpedon, if he were quick,
Would say, “What ho!” (the perfect note)

While sipping your ambrosial tea
Diffuse, dear Plum, your influence
That there may be, like you and me,
Unbuttoned wit without offense.

Fix the Cake and Eat It, Too

BY DAVID LANDMAN

David tells us of a harrowing moment at the dedication of the historical marker in Remsenburg. David was able to help facilitate a sweet ending to the potential tragedy, and thereby to prevent anyone from becoming frosted.

IT WAS OWING to a bit of luck and some expert driving by fellow NEWT Lynn Vesley-Gross that my wife Elizabeth and I pulled up at the Remsenburg Community Chapel before the arrival of the bus from New York City carrying the main body of Plummites. We were assembling to attend the dedication ceremony of the marker at the site of Plum and Ethel’s grave.

A heavy rain was falling, and I ducked into the chapel. Four people, strangers to me, had arrived earlier and were seated along a wall opposite a draped table on which sat a cake. As the cake in size (large) and shape (an open book) looked rather like the one that graced my bar mitzvah party, I sauntered over to examine it more closely. What I saw made my left eyelid quiver as it sometimes does when I am experiencing deep emotion. But let the picture speak for itself:



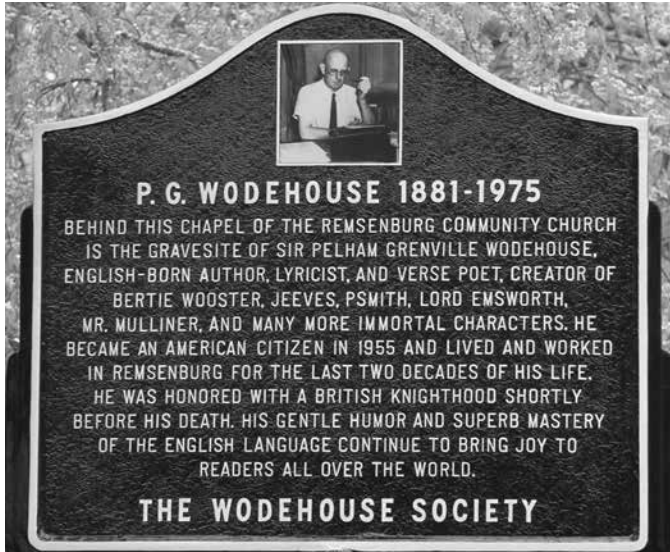
A catering lady was visible through the kitchen hatch. I stuck my head in, coughed discreetly, and said in sugared tones, “Pray do not take it amiss, my dear catering lady, but THE NAME IS SPELLED WRONG!!!” She gasped, stared at me blankly for a second or two, and then, with admirable presence of mind, sprang into action. Before you could slice a salmon-mayonnaise finger sandwich, a young man appeared from nowhere, slid the cake into its parent box, and sped with it down the road. Fortunately, the bakery—obviously run by non-readers—was nearby and open. In about twenty minutes, the cake was back on the table, its cosmetic reconstructive work having been expertly accomplished.

When the bus pulled in and its merry riders debouched, this is the cake they saw, and no one the wiser:



I take no credit for what I did. Any right-thinking Plummie would have done the same. Nevertheless, I took a second helping of cake as a reward. It was delicious.

The Remsenburg Marker



*The Remsenburg Historical Marker
(photo by Tony Ring)*

It was not a cabbage leaf, only a sheet of paper with writing on it, but she ate it with no sense of disappointment. She was a philosopher and could take things as they came. Tomorrow was another day, and there would be cabbage leaves in the morning.

The Empress turned on her side and closed her eyes with a contented little sigh. The moon beamed down upon her noble form. It looked like a silver medal.

Heavy Weather (1933)

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We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, My First Time tales, 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!

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