



"The man is simply delightful. Everything he writes is true humor in good taste. Whether you smile or chuckle or guffaw as each page is turned depends on your head, or perhaps your liver, but Wodehouse is unfailingly funny." ...C. T. Crowell....

IF you are not familiar with the short stories of Saki, OM advises that you hasten to repair this omission. If you appreciate imaginative, polished writing (and your Plummyship proves that you do), you will add Saki (Hector Munro, 1870-1916) to your list of favorite authors. Once, in a letter to Plum, OM put the question: Were you influenced in your writing by Saki? He received the definitive answer: Silence. Of course all authors are influenced, consciously or subconsciously, by all significant writers who preceded them or are their contemporaries; Saki and Plum were contemporaries for at least 16 years. Each may, in some way, have influenced the other. Draw your own conclusions after you read Dr. Hall's supplement to PLUM LINES.....

RETURNS ARE IN on the constitution balloting!!! 14 votes for, 1 against. Since the one negative vote was a protest against calling Plum a master instead of genius, it shall count FOR. The non-voters could have voted negatively, but they didn't; therefore their non-votes were registered as silent approvals. So we now have our very own constitution. It will be printed and distributed one of these days.....

The Heineman-Bensen P. G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration, 1881-1981, (Oxford Univ. Press) has achieved the ultimate recognition: only one year after its publication it has been noticed by PLAYBOY (Oct '82) and rated PG. Serious collectors must have it (as well as Jasen's fine Bibliography and Reader's Guide to the First Editions of P. G. Wodehouse, Archon, NY/Jenkins, London) and non-collectors will find it 25 excellent essays nowhere else.

John Duffie, TWS, of Victoria, B.C., Canada, one of our latest members, sends news of an impending "Wodehouse Evening" in that lovely city. John is a columnist for the MONDAY MAGAZINE there; he sent OM a copy of his August 25th column, a sparkling exposition of "one of my favorite heroes, P. G. Wodehouse." He says that it aroused more favorable reader reaction than anything he had written in several years. Heartening info indeed!

A neat little booklet reached OM recently. It came with this note:



New book: Some Gems from P.G. Wodehouse (49), 78 pages
4 1/4" x 5 1/2", lettering and 34 drawings by Pauline Blanc,
1st printing of 100 (numbered), \$5. postpaid.
\$6. overseas.
1203 Bosworth Street, San Francisco, CA. 94131
(415) 586-4359



to which should be added that the \$5.00 price is for Canadian as well as U.S. purchasers. All prices in US currency, of course. Pauline Blanc, TWS, a water colorist, is equally adept at line drawings. She is the founder of our San Francisco Chapter. A gift for some one whose tastes you respect...

"...WANTED URGENTLY! Niblick-wielding Plumophiles to accept challenge to play 'The Long Hole - Western Section.' Date and time negotiable. All inquiries will be acknowledged. Gutty balls and hickory shafts will be penalized. Other rules may be invoked as game progresses (!). Contact Jeremy Thompson, TWS, Dept of Phar-

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cology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90024. Phone (213) 825-5709....."

This announcement reached the editorial offices of PLUM LINES recently sparked, i doubt, by the Markunas-Marshall exploits and the rumors of a coast-to-coast Long Hole tournament in Australia. Jeremy, you may recall, is that enterprising Plummy who issues The PGW BOOKMART (see May PLUM LINES).

Ms. Geraldine Beare, whose INDEX TO STRAND MAGAZINE was noted in the September PLUM LINES, confesses...spurred, no doubt, by an uneasy conscience...that she omitted an entry of great importance to Wodehouseans: P. G. Wodehouse at Home, by Leonora Wodehouse (Plum's stepdaughter), Jan. 1929, Vol. 77, pp. 19-26. If and when you procure this index, please make the necessary notations; and join me in thanking Ms. Beare for telling us.....

One of Plum's favorite quotations was "...Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,' like the poor cat i' the adage..." (Act I, sc. 7, Macbeth.)

Isaac Asimov, TWS, has more to say on this in his fine Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare, Vol. 2, p. 169: "It is," he writes, "a medieval latin proverb which can be translated 'the cat loves fish but does not wish to wet its foot.' By Shakespeare's time it was so well known through its use by Chaucer as not to require actual quoting."

Ann Smith, TWS, Guy Bolton's secretary for many years (Guy and Plum collaborated on numerous musical comedies) deserves the hearty thanks of all of us. For it is Ann who takes care of Lady Ethel's extensive correspondence, reading her mail to her, and answering it at her dictation. She has found several members for TWS, and OM is proud to call her Fellow Plummy. If we had any medals, plaques, or silver cups to present to deserving members, Ann Smith would be highly eligible.

The Delaware Valley Chapter, TWS, celebrated Plum's Birthday at Missy's Inn, Doylestown, PA, on November 6th. (A bit late, to be sure, but 'better late than never' (Jno. Heywood, 1497-1580) is their cheery motto.) Dr. Robert Hall was the guest of honor; he gave a brief talk about his Feasibility Committee and its efforts to establish a journal for our Society. He seeks ideas from all members. Louise Collins and Ken Thompson arranged the meeting, and Dave Greenwald read "The Aunt and the Sluggard." Another dinner will be held in April.

Last year several members, showing impeccable judgment in their selection of gifts, gave TWS memberships to their friends and/or relatives. Since dues statements will be sent to all members in January, all donors who would like to renew these gift memberships on behalf of the recipients should do so before January 10th. Not a bad idea, these membership gifts. Saves a lot of tiresome shopping.

IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING.....a suggestion, an idea, a complaint, a discovery, know of a new book about PGW, a fact which you think we should all know, a Wodehouse event anywhere,...in short, something which will improve TWS or inform our members, let's hear about it. It's hard to invent news.

OM

The Oldest Member

(UN)REST-CURES IN WODEHOUSE AND SAKI

Robert A. Hall Jr.

Cornell University

ABBREVIATIONS

AG	The Awful Gladness of the Mater	JY	Jeeves And The Yuletide Spirit
BC	Bertie Changes His Mind	MP	Mr. Potter Takes A Rest-Cure
JD	Jeeves And The Dog MacIntosh	PA	The Passing of Ambrose
JO	<i>Jeeves In The Offing</i> (Am.: <i>How Right You Are, Jeeves</i>)	SS	Something Squishy

The similarity between the titles of Wodehouse's short story "Mr. Potter Takes A Rest-Cure" and Saki's "The Unrest-Cure" is obvious. That Wodehouse's story may have owed something to Saki, in more than name, has been suggested by several critics. The question arises, however, in what respects this suggestion is valid: what are the similarities and also the differences between the two stories?

In each story, a character has his placid existence interfered with and badly disrupted, with temporarily disastrous results for his peace of mind. This is accomplished by means which, although more or less unpleasant to contemplate if taken seriously, are presented in a humorous (in Saki) or farcical (in Wodehouse) manner.

The resemblance, however, ends here. In Saki's story, his youthful but cynical hero Clovis Sangrail overhears J. P. Huddle complaining that he seems "to have settled down into a deep groove of elderly middle age," and Huddle's friend suggesting that an "Unrest-cure" is indicated. Two days later, Clovis calls on Huddle and his sister, announcing himself as the Bishop's secretary, and hood-winking them into believing that the Bishop has selected the Huddles' home as the scene for the massacre of all the Jews in the neighborhood. "This thing will be a blot on the Twentieth Century," Huddle exclaims, to which Clovis replies "And your house will be the blotting pad." Clovis informs them of imaginary horrors that he alleges keep taking place, and frightens them into hiding upstairs; then he leaves before dinner-time. After the terrified Huddles have acted as involuntary hosts to a group of eminent local Jews overnight, they discover that the Twentieth Century is "still unblotted." As Clovis returns to Town on an early train, he muses "I don't suppose that they will be in the least grateful for the Unrest-cure." The reader wonders how they could be expected to be grateful in view of the extreme mental anguish caused them and the absence of any positive result.

In Wodehouse's story, on the other hand, there are three positive results, two major and one minor. Mr. Potter, a New York publisher, is a house-guest at Lady Wickham's home, Skeldings Hall, hoping for rest, calm, and freedom from the concerns of his business. He is given no peace, however, either by the imperious Lady Wickham (who plans to brow-beat him into publishing her novels in America) or by a pompous ass of a British politician, Clifford

Gandle. Lady Wickham's daughter Roberta ("Bobbie") is also being pestered by Clifford Gandle and her mother; the former wants to marry her, and the latter (who favors the match) forces her to drop a tennis-date to chauffeur him around. In a series of farcical misadventures, Bobbie succeeds in persuading Gandle that Potter is a suicidal maniac, and Potter that Gandle is the last of a line of homicidal madmen. The story ends with Potter being chased across the lawn by "the last of the mad Gandles," neither of them ever to return. Bobbie has, by clever romancing, accomplished three things: relieving Mr. Potter of the necessity of publishing Lady Wickham's novels, ridding herself of Gandle's unwelcome attentions, and revenging herself on her mother for the latter's domineering rule.

In other stories, Bobbie Wickham is more of a "moppet of misrule," as Wodehouse's festive female instigators of mayhem have been called. In the first two stories in which she appears (SS, AG), Roberta is a reckless driver. In SS, she is fined five pounds for driving forty miles an hour down Piccadilly (easier done, perhaps, in the relatively light traffic of the 1920's than in the 1980's). In the second, she complains that "an idiot of a man driving a dray let me run into him. My car was all smashed up," and it was not insured. In JD, her having smashed the automobile is merely mentioned as one of the reasons for her desire to conciliate her mother. After that, no further mention is made of her reckless driving.

Bobbie is fond of practical jokes, and Bertie Wooster describes her (JO, ch. 1) as having "the disposition and general outlook on life of a ticking bomb," and as being "pure dynamite," ready to land "her nearest and dearest in the mulligatawny." She herself perpetrates only one act of mayhem, by putting Roland Attwater's snake into Sir Claude Lynn's bed (SS). She impulsively gives Bertie's Aunt Agatha's dog MacIntosh to a Hollywood film-magnate (JD), to render him more favorable to the idea of screening her mother's novels. In all the other instances, she manoeuvres the situation so that one feckless young man or another undertakes to perform some act, either to aid her or as a practical joke on some-one else. In general, her beaux lack what Jeeves describes (BC) as "the gift of dealing with the Unusual Situation." They are consequently mistaken for a burglar (AG), landed with the job of handling two unruly small boys (PA), or induced to steal a cow-creamer from some-one else's bed-room (JO). Through their bungling of these tasks, they are faced with farcical contretemps. Bobbie fails to rescue her swains from their predicaments, in that she either evades responsibility (SS, AG, PA), does not take the necessary measures to clear up the situation (AG, JO), or fails to realize the results of her action (JD).

In real life, such a person would indeed be obnoxious, to say the least. Such is Wodehouse's ability to present her actions in a laughable light that we do not take them seriously, in the same way that we are not affrighted by the prat-falls and other mishaps that are the stock-in-trade of stage- and screen-comedians. Bertie Wooster is comically afraid of her, but we must remember that Jeeves was determined from early times to keep Bertie a bachelor (BC), and was responsible (in JY) for keeping Bertie from knowing that Sir Roderick Glossop and his nephew Tuppy had changed rooms, thus causing Bobbie's relatively harmless practical joke to land Bertie in Sir Roderick's bad graces and ever after poisoning Bertie's mind against her. (C. N. Parkinson, in his fictional biography *Jeeves*, sets matters straight by eventually having a maturer Bertie, after he has inherited the earldom of Yaxley,

marry a calmer, wiser Bobbie.)

None of these characteristics, however, are present in Bobbie's behavior in MP. In that story, she simply takes advantage of situations that have already arisen, especially when Mr. Potter and Gandle have fallen into the moat and are grappling with each other. She sets the wheels in motion by romancing, to Gandle about Mr. Potter's supposed suicidal mania, and to Potter about Gandle's imaginary madness. The two men's further misinterpretation of each other's actions (which she helps along by judicious and appropriate interventions) follow naturally, and in the end Bobbie frees herself and Mr. Potter of her mother's and Gandle's unwelcome interference.

Here, too, one might institute a comparison between Bobbie Wickham and some of Saki's equally imaginative "flappers" who have "romance at short notice" as their specialty ("The Open Window"). In that story, the effect of the sad story that Mrs. Sappleton's niece Vera invents and tells Mr. Nuttel is simply to scare away an unwelcome visitor. Others of Saki's mendacious young women, however, cause more specifically unpleasant effects, again without positive benefits, as when another Vera (in "The Lull") keeps an over-serious politician awake all night by inducing him to shelter a rambunctious pigling and a belligerent rooster in his room, on the pretext that a dam has broken and the neighborhood is flooded. Similar rather selfish tricks are played by Matilda Covering (in "The Boar-Pig") and Eleanor (in "Fur").

The basic difference between Wodehouse and Saki comes out clearly in the two "unrest-cure"-stories. As is well known, Saki's humor was definitely sadistic. There are relatively few of his stories which do not have some element of cruelty in them, not infrequently mixed with Victorian / Edwardian anti-Jewish attitudes (as in "A Touch of Realism"). These are present in "The Unrest-Cure" as well, and make it seem callous and sadistic even when viewed from a pre-1930's perspective. Wodehouse's humor, on the other hand, had virtually no cruelty, and, as we have seen, Mr. Potter's rest-cure *manquée* ends with the two likeable characters better off than they were before, and the two less likeable ones made ridiculous but not seriously harmed. The reader puts down "Mr. Potter Takes A Rest Cure" with the feeling that matters have turned out well, after all.