



Plum Lines

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TWS 2021 Convention Postponement

BY TWS PRESIDENT WILLIAM E. SCRIVENER

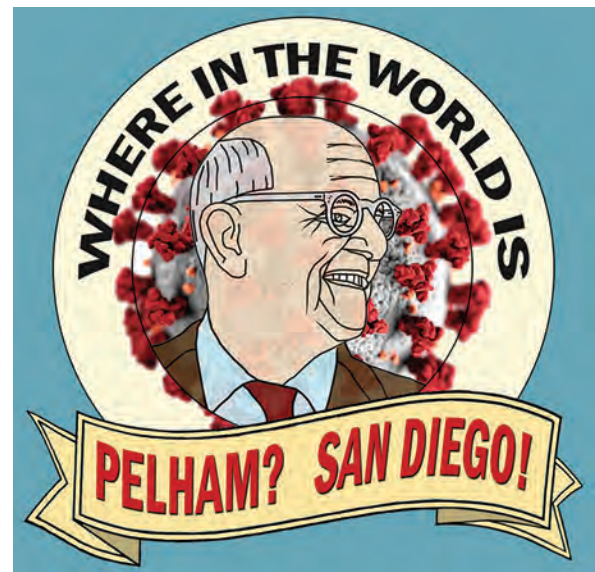
*Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"*

THE CONVENTION COMMITTEE has been hard at work for over a year preparing for events in San Diego. A call for speakers and skits went out, and we were overwhelmed with responses. On October 1, the committee convened a Zoom meeting to discuss issues and make some final decisions. Several members wondered whether the current pandemic would be sufficiently under control to allow a convention. Many members felt sanguine that, in another year, all would be well, but there were enough concerns raised that the majority decided to make the recommendation to the TWS Board of Directors that we not hold a 2021 convention.

After much deliberation, the board, acting on that recommendation, decided to postpone the 2021 biennial international convention of The Wodehouse Society. The board agreed that even if the pandemic was under control, enough concerns would remain to significantly limit the number of attendees.

As this decision was made recently and rather suddenly, the exact details of when and where we will have our next convention have not been formulated at this time. But be assured that, whether it will be 2022 or 2023, there will be a convention. The Convention Committee is working on it as we speak, and I am confident we will have more information by the time the next *Plum Lines* goes to press.

I want to extend a public, special thanks to the folks at the US Grant hotel in San Diego for their incredible



kindness in being so flexible on this issue. Under the terms of our contract with them, they were not obligated to let us out, but they did, so I, for one, am extremely grateful.

I also want to thank the Convention Committee. (This, admittedly, is a little self-serving as I recently joined the committee, but I really mean the other ten very hard-working members.) They put in a lot of work, and the work has now become harder as they plan for a very uncertain future. But I know we will come up with a convention "on a scale calculated to stagger humanity" (*Right Ho, Jeeves*) whenever and wherever that may be.

We understand that there will be some sadness in postponing our gathering, but we believe this is in the best interest of our members and the society.

Remembering Marilyn MacGregor

BY ELIN WOODGER



Marilyn welcomed one and all.

PETITE, PERKY, AND pleasingly particular, Marilyn MacGregor was one of those unforgettable characters who lightened up the lives of everybody with whom she came into contact. In the case of TWS, that was quite a few people, for it was Marilyn who, as our membership secretary, welcomed hundreds to the society between 1989 and 2001. And she continued to lighten our lives with her participation in our conventions, often attending the banquets dressed as Gladys, Lord Emsworth's Girl Friend, happily clutching her bouquet of flarze in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. A familiar and beloved society institution, she was always surrounded by adoring mates, and when age and health issues finally prevented her from coming to conventions, her absence was felt keenly.

On September 16 this year, at the age of 94, Marilyn handed in her dinner pail, leaving behind a memorable

legacy: greatly increased membership rolls for TWS (which at one point during her tenure had members on every continent, including Antarctica, due to her efforts); The Clients of Adrian Mulliner, which she co-founded, a society chapter devoted to fans of both P. G. Wodehouse and the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle; educational activism that promoted the professional advancement of women and people of color; and involvement in community and literary activities on which she left lasting marks. With her Wodehousean and Sherlockian connections, and through her love of travel, she made countless friends all over the world, and I was so fortunate to be one of them.

Marilyn was born on August 1, 1926, in Portland, Oregon, to Dade and Alta Mae Russell, and grew up with her younger brother near the Columbia River in Longview, Washington. Her love of literature was instilled at an early age, and it eventually led to marriage: While on a bus journey home from Oregon State University, she struck up a conversation with fellow passenger Neil MacGregor, who had noticed her reading Emily Dickinson. The two married after Marilyn graduated from Oregon State in 1949, and they settled in Berkeley, building a house on Grizzly Peak in Berkeley Hills.

Those early years saw Marilyn starting her career as a secretary in the German Department at UC Berkeley, then advancing into more important positions, including administrative officer for the Sociology Department. She also consulted for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, developed and taught a course on "Leadership and Women," and eventually began focusing on staff development. In 1976 she transferred to UC Davis, where she taught courses to staff and faculty that included leadership and management skills, time management, effective communication, and group dynamics. She was particularly committed to improving employment and professional opportunities for minorities and women.

By the time Marilyn retired in 1989—the same year she became TWS's membership secretary—she and Neil had long since amicably separated. During the 1990s, she would travel to Berkeley to look after him, and she saw him through his final illness. Thereafter she indulged her love of travelling, particularly to Europe and Japan. She became a member of the Lansdowne Club in London, and her friends in and around that city were often invited to join her there for dinner, or

perhaps just for drinks, whenever she happened to pop in—which was remarkably often. Apparently the long, tiring plane rides from California to London never dented her enthusiasm for wining and dining with her myriad friends. She was small, but she was a dynamo.

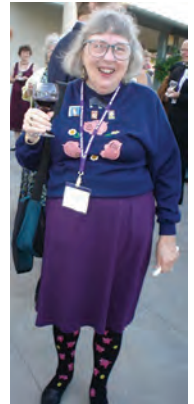
In 2006 Marilyn asked Norman and me to help organize her 80th birthday celebration at the Lansdowne, attended by her close friends in the Wodehouse and Sherlockian worlds. Sir Edward Cazalet was one of those who came, and she was bowled over by his eloquent tribute to her that night. Given her seemingly limitless energy, we all expected her to show up in London for her 90th, but unfortunately by then her age had finally caught up with her, and she was residing full-time at UC Davis's University Retirement Community, where she had moved in 2000 (and where, of course, she had served for two years as secretary of the Resident Council, it being impossible for her not to get involved when needed).

In addition to her extensive travels, Marilyn spent much of her retirement years supporting numerous cultural and artistic institutions as well as environmental causes. But it was her devotion to Sherlock Holmes and to Wodehouse that took up the lion's share of her time. She joined several Sherlockian groups, including the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, the Baker Street Irregulars, the Adventuresses of Holmes, and the Scowers & Molly Maguires of San Francisco. A member not only of TWS but also of the U.K., Dutch, and Swedish Wodehouse societies, Marilyn was an early member of the Blandings Castle chapter, helping to organize their 1993 convention in San Francisco. She was a speaker at our 1997 convention in Chicago, her topic being—not surprisingly—"Plum's Sherlock: Doyle's Influence on PGW," and she wrote or contributed to more than 25 articles for *Plum Lines* ("Plum's Sherlock" can be read in the Winter 1998 issue).

So involved was Marilyn in multiple societies and groups that she had a special business card made up. On one side she had her Davis contact details, on the other her London details, while both sides of the card were crammed with a list of her associations and the pseudonyms she had adopted. In addition to her nom de Plum of Gladys, she was known as Freddie ffinch-ffinch (Clients of Adrian Mulliner), Elizabeth Baskerville (Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes), Bodymaster (Scowers & Molly Maguires, San Francisco), and V.V. 341 (Baker Street Irregulars). She also held memberships in, among others, the Napa Valley Napoleons, the Beekeepers of Tulum, the Persian Slipper Club, Men with the Twisted Konjo, Yokyo (hon.)—and the list goes on.

In 1998 Marilyn invited me to join her on a trip to London, where I was her guest at the Lansdowne. It was a special trip, during which we became even closer than we already were. A year and a half later, at the Houston convention, she came up to me, deeply concerned for our mutual friend Norman Murphy, who was mourning the recent loss of his wife of 38 years, Charlotte. "We must cluster round him," she instructed me. I did as told, and whether or not Marilyn somehow felt responsible when I married him two years later, well, I really can't say.

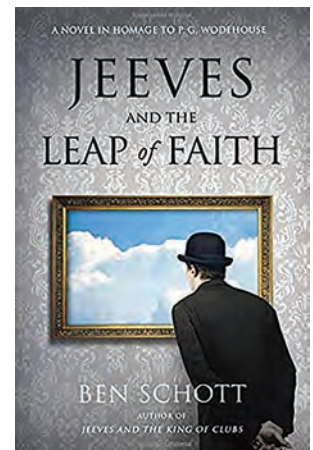
All I can say for sure is that Marilyn was one of the most endearing persons I've ever known: a small woman with an outsized personality, great warmth, infinite charm, and terrific humor. She welcomed me into The Wodehouse Society and into her life, and I'll always be grateful to her for that. And I'm ever so sure that Marilyn, Plum, and Conan Doyle are now enjoying some spiffingly good conversations in heaven. I only wish I could listen in!



Marilyn at the TWS UCLA convention

Leaping into a New J&W

JUST IN TIME for Christmas comes word of a new homage to Wodehouse by Ben Schott, this one entitled *Jeeves and the Leap of Faith*. As with his previous book, *Jeeves and the King of Clubs*, Schott has Bertie and Jeeves working for British Intelligence via the Junior Ganymede Club. In addition to his espionage activities, Bertie gets into



his usual spots of bother as he attempts to help out pals who are in trouble. The book cleverly incorporates crossword clues into the plot. Early reviews of the novel in the U.K. have praised it as "a hoot for Wodehouse fans" (*Publishers Weekly*) and "A masterpiece in every sense" (*Daily Mail*). But there have also been criticisms: "Splendid stuff, but the mixture is too rich. . . . Yet, less homage than upstaging, Schott's razzle-dazzle might blind you to the original" (*Sunday Times*). The new book is now available through Amazon and the usual online retailers.

The Case for Utridge

BY DAVID LEAL, PHD

I REMEMBER THE MOMENT, that glorious moment, when I discovered that Wodehouse wrote stories beyond Jeeves and Wooster. I came to very much enjoy the Utridge, Psmith, and Uncle Fred sagas, though I do still hope to join the Drones Club. Tempering my joy was a growing realization that not all Plum fans shared my Utridge enthusiasm. I began to wonder why this much-enduring man was disparaged or overlooked (and not just by *Who's Who*). While the stories themselves are filled with strong words about his sock borrowing and other behaviors, I found much to like (and even love) about him.

This essay expresses my appreciation of Utridge and argues that we should rally to his defense against a disapproving and unsympathetic society. While we need not condone all his actions and beliefs, we can love him as did his friends (and Wodehouse). We should not imitate Aunt Julia, who chucks him out when he rebels against a conventional, straitened life. Let us appreciate his creative spirit and understand how the problem is not Utridge but England. He is really an American at heart, trying to get out from under a pinching Edwardian collar. He belongs in the land of opportunity, where his presumed vices become virtues, rather than a country-house England.

My interest in writing about Utridge began with discovering Elliott Milstein's essay "Stanley Featherstonehaugh Utridge: Hidden Values and Frozen Assets" (*Plum Lines*, Spring 2002). Milstein is not a fan of Utridge the person but finds the Utridge stories appealing. He brings up many important points, and I will respond to these along with reviewing the perspectives of other writers, providing my own interpretations and showing how Utridge is often misunderstood.

I first want to express my gratitude to Elliott for his lifelong dedication to the world of Plum. I write this essay as an enthusiastic reader who has learned much from a master. To do anything else would be contrary to the spirit of Wodehouse, which should always be sunny and cheerful. Thank you to Milstein and all others who help keep that spirit alive.

"My best pal and all that sort of thing"

WE MIGHT START with the best reason to love Utridge: because Wodehouse loved him. According to Milstein, "[Biographer] David Jasen (*P. G. Wodehouse: A Portrait of a Master*) claims that Utridge

was Wodehouse's favorite character, but he does not say where he got this or why it should be so." Perhaps it is sufficiently self-evident: the two narrators (Garny and Corky) are Wodehouse himself, Utridge incorporates characteristics of his earliest adult friends, and the stories of young men exploring life in Edwardian London are essentially autobiographical.

Jasen's book includes a number of indications that Wodehouse was fond of Utridge, such as a 1923 letter to Bill Townend that reads, "I'm so glad you like the [Utridge] series. Now that I've got well into it, I think it better than any of the others." The date of the letter means that the "others" include Mike, Psmith, early Jeeves/Wooster, and early Blandings. Jasen further notes that Wodehouse thought Utridge "could very well have" attended Dulwich, and the stories eventually reveal that he attended Wrykyn. This is no small detail, given Wodehouse's outsized love for his public school.

While some may recall that Utridge was expelled from Wrykyn, the reason was not for anything illegal or immoral: "Utridge's generous spirit, ever ill-attuned to school rules, caused him eventually to break the solemnest of them all by sneaking out at night to try his skill at the cocoanut shies of the local village fair" ("Utridge's Dog College"). Nevertheless, by "The Long Arm of Looney Coote" he has been restored to good graces in the Old Wrykinian association: "It was only after many years of cold exclusion that he had been admitted to the pure-minded membership of the Old Boys' Society." If Utridge were as bad as his detractors claim, I doubt this august body would have allowed him to join.

Norman Murphy pointed out that the origin of Utridge was Carrington Craxton, the man who actually tried chicken farming, and several people have noted similarities with a character in Arthur Conan Doyle's *Stark Monro Letters*. Nevertheless, the character would come to closely resemble two of Wodehouse's earliest and most formative friends. Murphy found that "all the subsequent stories are based unmistakably on Herbert Wotton Westbrook," with additional story details modeled on William Townend's life. Wodehouse once lodged Utridge on Arundell Street, where Townend and Westbrook lived on different floors of a building.

Benny Green (*P. G. Wodehouse: A Literary Biography*) agreed that Westbrook's "peccadilloes and his generally felonious attitude towards life are perpetuated in the ambitious and piratical get-rich-quick schemes of Utridge." While British writer Robert Graves thought his brother Perceval was "gently caricatured" as Utridge, Green found this unlikely. Perceval "appeared to find the whole subject of Wodehouse distasteful,"

whereas “it is surely affection which lies at the heart of Ukridge’s genesis.”

Murphy pointed out that Wodehouse wrote about Ukridge for sixty years (1906–1966). “Because, like Townend, Westbrook had been a friend, a colleague in those early years, Wodehouse could never ignore him”; the pull of old friends was strong. Murphy argued they ranked in personal importance to Wodehouse only behind Ethel, Leonora, and Guy Bolton. The result is that “when we read a Ukridge story, the background, the atmosphere is still that of a small upstairs room in Rupert Street in London more than a hundred years ago. Three young men, with their lives ahead of them.”

This helps to explain why Wodehouse returned to Ukridge throughout his life. Wodehouse was writing out of love for the character and “the times we all used to have together.”

Milstein implies that the last stories are mistakes: “Wodehouse drags him out of retirement in 1955 and again in ’67. But one is getting tired of Ukridge.” I must respectfully disagree with both claims, as I do not see him as retired, and I cannot imagine growing weary of Ukridge.

First, about the alleged retirement, Milstein argues that Wodehouse intended to finish the saga in 1947 with “Success Story,” which left our man “pretty well off.” However, I do not see Ukridge as overly flush at the end of the story, despite his claim to Corky that he has “enormous capital.” The bribes he took are all to the good but cannot be the sort of thing necessary to start “vast industrial enterprises.” The fact that Corky must pay for dinner at the end of the story because Ukridge “inadvertently” left his money at home suggests his windfall had limits. And while he accidentally ended up in Aunt Julia’s good graces, that never lasts.

In addition, I contend that Wodehouse would not retire a character he loved. When discussing why Wodehouse would not have chosen the title *Sunset at Blandings*, biographer Richard Osborne wrote that “Wodehouse would never have locked, even if only by suggestion, the great gates of the castle. He would have wanted it there, with its sun high in the sky, for another visit if the mood took him.” Wodehouse never closed the door on the possibility of more Ukridge.

Second, who could tire of Ukridge? We are lucky to have twenty stories, one-third as many as we have of Sherlock Holmes, and I wish Wodehouse wrote twenty more. Perhaps the endless army of Sherlockian pastiche writers (which, I must admit, includes me) can turn their attention to this worthy man.

Why did Wodehouse not write more? In Milstein’s and Curtis Armstrong’s *A Plum Assignment: Discourses*

on *P. G. Wodehouse and His World*, Armstrong argues that Ukridge has a “built-in obsolescence.” He sees Wodehouse as congratulating himself in 1955 and 1967 for squeezing a few more drops of juice from a character running dry. This is uncomfortably close to the view of some critics that Wodehouse ran out of juice for all of his characters and plots, simply repeating “all the old Wodehouse characters under different names.” Whether we read of a young couple at Blandings scheming to get married or Ukridge trying to raise money, the plot is not our sole (or main) interest. If Ukridge was running out of juice, then so was Blandings, and this view might result in us being eaten by bears!

Milstein considers Osborne’s idea that Ukridge is like family to the narrators (and thereby to the reader) because they share the old school tie. No matter what Ukridge does, he must be rescued, and we feel the better for it. Milstein doubts this because it cannot explain why we do not feel the same for Stilton Cheesewright and Oofy Prosser. But these are not characters from the Ukridge saga, which is based on the real life of Wodehouse as a young man in London experiencing life, work, and maybe even love. It involves a small group of friends who are acting as an extended family as they struggle together in the early 1900s. They correspond to real people and experiences from Wodehouse’s life, while Prosser (who first appears in 1931) and Cheesewright (1946) are later creations who were not part of this charmed circle. The latter two characters may or may not have been drawn from real life, but it does not seem likely that Wodehouse hung out with them in 1901.

Milstein says we like the narrator and not Ukridge. He argues that “the real value of the Ukridge stories . . . is not in the protagonist, but, rather, is hidden in the sublime style and unique character of his Boswell, Mr. James Corcoran.”

But why not both? I agree that “Corky’s narration is simply perfect prose,” and Corky (and Garny) are undoubtedly autobiographical, and therefore provide valuable insight into the life and views of young Wodehouse. As Milstein observes, “That Corky sure knows how to write! Well, he should, of course; he is, as Osborne says, the young Wodehouse. In fact, in that same letter to Townend I quoted earlier, Wodehouse, discussing the action in one of the stories, actually refers to the narrator as ‘I’ and ‘me,’ as if he, Wodehouse, were Corky.” As characters, however, Corky and Garny function primarily (as Osborne suggests) as straight men and foils, which allows us to experience Ukridge vicariously. I see no contradiction in reading these stories for both Ukridge and the narrators.

In addition, Wodehouse so likes Ukridge that sometimes the character speaks for him. When Ukridge thinks he has finally made it, he says, "In some ways I regret this prosperity. I mean to say, those old careless, impecunious days were not so bad. Not so bad, Corky old boy, eh? Life had a tang them. It was swift, vivid, interesting" ("The Long Arm of Looney Coote," 1923). This sounds as though established Wodehouse is thinking wistfully about his younger, struggling days. As Murphy points out, "His early stories depict London through the eyes of an impecunious writer, the cheap-and-cheerful London of Chelsea, Ukridge, worry about the rent, and celebration dinners in Soho."

Jasen said that Wodehouse's stepdaughter, Leonora, wanted more Psmith stories. The evidence indicates that Wodehouse liked Ukridge better.

Con Artist or Capitalist?

MANY READERS undoubtedly see Ukridge as a morally flexible practitioner of shady business ventures and outright scams. More than anything else, this perspective likely explains the feeling that Ukridge is someone to dislike or at least approach with caution. Is this correct, or are such views exaggerations that obscure Ukridge's good qualities?

If some see Ukridge as a con artist, we might see him as an aspiring capitalist, though it may be a thin line between the two. While some see Plum as parodying the entrepreneurial spirit, he himself was an entrepreneurial scribbler before he left the bank. This parallel may explain his sympathy for Ukridge. We can imagine Psmith reading for the bar, but Ukridge and Wodehouse could not be tied to a traditional career.

In addition, Wodehouse must have known young men about town in Edwardian London who needed to restore the family bank account. This would include members of the public school class, reeling from decades of agricultural recession, free trade, aristocratic decline, and competition from the pushing middle classes. Ukridge and Psmith both fit into this category, although they took different paths. Wodehouse knew all too well the consequences of family financial embarrassment. I see him as sympathetic to Ukridge's efforts.

Some have examined Ukridge's ventures and placed them on a spectrum from legitimate business propositions to outright crimes. Milstein draws a sharp distinction between the "hapless capitalist" who wants to raise chickens and the Ukridge who is "nothing but a scam artist." The former Ukridge may have "a new, doomed hare-brained venture every month" but is more naïve than malevolent. Milstein sees the Ukridge of the short stories as a shadier fellow. After the collapse

of the chicken farm, "it is safe to say that we can retire the Ukridge of 1906 at this point and bid him farewell."

This calls to mind the claim by Ronald Knox (1911) that there were two Watsons in the Sherlock Holmes canon. In a parody of Biblical studies, he explained textual contradictions by claiming they were written by a proto-Watson and a deuterio-Watson. Do we have proto- and deuterio-Ukridges in the Wodehouse canon?

In the short stories, Ukridge hatches a variety of what Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard (*The Millennium Wodehouse Concordance*) called "schemes" that range from legitimate ventures to, as Milstein sees them, "nothing but scams." Milstein sees only two of Ukridge's efforts as "even coming close to being possible business ventures: managing Battling Billson and being a bookie."

Ring and Jaggard evaluate the historical record more positively, listing ten "great schemes." They appear to admire Ukridge's creativity and vision even though two of the schemes might be legally fraudulent (the accident syndicate and fake flag day). And while Corky once says, "His chances of raising a hundred pounds by any means short of breaking into the Mint seemed slight indeed" ("Ukridge Sees Her Through"), Ukridge never ventures into such criminality. He is not a genuine con artist, like the wrestling impresario who got the best of Oofy Prosser. He's just a cheerful opportunist.

Of these ten schemes, Ring and Jaggard found some measure of financial success in seven, five more than Milstein identified. I would add that several further ideas had legitimate business potential. For example, a dog-training school might have worked, especially when he decided to expand the offerings to the general public. Or, selling the "snake oil" of Peppo is not an impossible business model, as he would hardly have been alone in that effort (and Murphy notes that this was not technically illegal at the time). And so on.

Milstein says that Ukridge adds no real value to the Billson venture as he brings not capital, expertise, or good will. I would respond that Ukridge is responsible for introducing "the petted hero of a hundred water-fronts" to the sweet science. Without Ukridge, Billson would not be in the ring. He claims to support Billson's training ("I invest vast sums in this man"), and they do make money in "The Exit of Battling Billson" despite a dishonest partner who tries to steal the receipts.

We might also differentiate a scheme meant to start a business and a scheme meant to raise much-needed capital. The latter was designed to earn money that he could invest in other ventures, not to form long-term enterprises. He did make money selling tickets to the Pen & Ink Club dance. Turning his aunt's house into a hotel was remarkably successful until her fateful early return

(which was not his fault). Also in his favor is the fact that the Pen & Ink Club imbroglio was for the purpose of rescuing “poor little Dora” after he accidentally caused her dismissal from his aunt’s employ.

Even if his fundraising efforts are schemes, are they major schemes? Garry notes that Ukridge’s “whole career, as long as I had known him, had been dotted with little eccentricities of a type which an unfeeling world generally stigmatizes as shady. They were small things, it was true” (*Love Among the Chickens*). I do not see how the invective thrown at Ukridge is justified by the small-scale efforts he makes to raise “a bit of money just at the moment when we are all needing it most.” Paul Kent (*Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, Volume 1: “This is jolly old fame”*) referred to “Ukridge’s many misdemeanors”—Ukridge’s creativity is non-felonious.

The dust jackets of the Ukridge first editions provide clues about how we should interpret his character. On the spine of the American edition (titled *He Rather Enjoyed It*, published by Charles H. Doran in 1925) we see the words “Amusing Adventures in High Finance.” The British edition (Herbert Jenkins, 1924) includes “The Man of Many Schemes.” In addition, the front cover describes the book as “the latest book of laughter by ‘our national humorist,’ the author of *Piccadilly Jim*.” None of this suggests we are to take Ukridge’s activities too seriously. I do not see him in the same light as a truly malevolent fraudster who steals the savings of widows and orphans and is sentenced to decades in prison.

Some readers may wonder: “Why doesn’t he just stay with Aunt Julia, be a good nephew, and live off the fat of the land? Or get a job?” But Ukridge wants more from life, and he is either going to make it big or fail spectacularly. And Corky gets it right—“Wimbledon could no more imprison that great man than Elba did Napoleon.” The browsing and sluicing might be good, but man does not live by bread alone.

Ukridge sees his state of affairs as invigorating, and when he seems to be in the pink, he looks back at it sentimentally. As a Wrykyn old boy, he could probably get a job at the New Asiatic Bank or some other version of the good ol’ 9 to 5. Such a life would undoubtedly put him in the good graces of his aunt, and he would lead a stable but boring life. He chooses to live by his wits, as he would rather gamble on the chance to make “an enormous fortune, laddie” than be a dull clerk with nothing more to look forward to than a mediocre lunch—a life Wodehouse knew all too well.

A Total Immoralist?

MILSTEIN CITES Usborne’s description of Ukridge as “a thief, a blackmailer, a liar and a sponge. . .

a total immoralist, and he dulls the moral sense in others. He is totally selfish.” Usborne sees him as an “arrant rogue,” though he notes “the reader’s relish of his knavery” and describes the Ukridge tales as “some of the best stories that Wodehouse ever wrote,” and concludes that “Ukridge is one of the great Wodehouse creations.”

I find that such criticisms do not do justice to the man. While Ukridge is not above lying and is a world-class sponge, he is not a common thief. He rationalizes his borrowing of clothes by knowing that the owner would have lent them if requested (which is probably true). He pawns his Aunt Julia’s property, but he intends to redeem the items: “It was not my intention to pinch this clock. The transaction presented itself to my mind purely in the light of a temporary loan.” He is not a blackmailer like Charles Augustus Milverton. When he ropes his friends into his “foul schemes,” they are reluctantly helping an old school pal, not acting from a dulled morality.

Corky dismisses the “preposterous suggestion that Ukridge possessed a conscience,” but I see this as another exaggeration. Ukridge is not immoral, especially toward people who need his help. Grocers and insurance companies might beg to differ, but he is no Oofy Prosser trying to deceive and double-cross his friends (“The Fat of the Land”).

If Ukridge is lighthearted about walking away with George Tupper’s clothes or constantly touching Corky for a few bob, he does so for a reason: He is living on the edge and needs to do something about it. Many of his actions are out of necessity. He needs to eat, pay rent, dress for interviews, start a dog college, smoke tobacco, and have an occasional night out, and none of this is free. While some may want him to get a job, Wodehouse knew that this would “crush his proud spirit.”

Milstein argues that, “other than the fact that he is universally loved by all canines, he hasn’t one redeeming quality.” I cannot agree. To the contrary, Ukridge has many positive qualities. For instance, Usborne points out that Ukridge is not class-conscious, and we see that he enjoys the company of butlers, chauffeurs, and barmaids. Corky observes wryly that “London was congested with pals whom Ukridge had met in pubs”—not something that could be said of most Old Wrykynians. Nor would many public-school men rather work on the turf, in tramp steamers, or in the boxing guild than in a bank.

Additionally, Ukridge “never lets a girl down,” as we will discuss below, and almost ends up married to Mabel Price as a result. I count his entrepreneurial spirit as a point in his favor, and, like Wodehouse himself, I

cannot imagine Ukridge expressing racist, nativist, or anti-Semitic views (which were common at the time). He is also an internationalist, to be found in Canada, Argentina, America, Monte Carlo, and probably many other locales. He is no Little Englander, moping around London and pining for the family's lost country estate.

Ukridge is at heart a fair person, even when he is upset at a creditor. In discussing Gooch the grocer (the "six pounds three and a penny" man), he notes that "he is a good husband and father and sings in the church choir and all that." This scene is also notable for its sly criticism of the "nation of shopkeepers" image of England. One can imagine Margaret Thatcher, well known as "the Grocer's Daughter," as the child of Gooch. She would have heard tales of mooching customers who do not understand the importance of paying a little on account. From this upbringing to her opinions about government is but the work of a moment.

I think Ukridge intends to pay his debts one day. He once says to Corky, "Don't worry, you'll get your money back. A thousandfold." I see no reason to doubt him. He may want to get rich, but I do not see him as opposed to sharing the wealth. When he says, "One day, laddie, one day," we might read that as a cynical "never" but I think it reflects an attitude shaped by his constant deficit of spondulicks rather than built-in greed.

About halfway through the saga, in "Ukridge and the Home from Home" (1931), we see him starting to do so. Corky writes, "I had received a letter from him one morning, enclosing ten pounds in bank-notes—part payment, he explained, of loans floated by me in the past, for which, he said, he could never be sufficiently grateful. Of this miracle he had given no other explanation than that his genius and opportunism had at last found the road to wealth." Over thirty years later, in "Ukridge Opens a Bank Account" (1966), he pays back two pounds to a shocked George Tupper and takes Corky to lunch at the Ritz (even if Corky must pay in the end, through no intentional fault of Ukridge).

Ukridge does try to help others, although sometimes with problematic consequences. When he attempts to tithe, albeit in his own unique way, he is almost arrested, loses out on a job, and gets his pocket picked. He tries to help Boko Lawlor run for Parliament but accidentally causes his defeat (although primarily due to a constable's partisan interference).

Milstein believes that while many Wodehouse characters "may not be ideal friends in the flesh," there is nevertheless "something charming or lovable" about them, but not Ukridge. The example he gives is Bingo Little, but if I had to choose between hanging out with that maddening pest or Ukridge, it would be no contest.

Had I "sport on the green" with Ukridge, I would want to keep up with him over the years, just as Wodehouse did. And if I saw Ukridge in public, I would walk over to say hello and hear about his exciting new problems. He would probably touch me for half a crown and drag me into some scaly business, but it would be a nice break from writing essays like "Should Curates Kiss?"

Ukridge and Millie: A Love Story

MILSTEIN ARGUES that "the Ukridge saga is unique in the canon of Wodehouse in that it practically never has a love interest." Perhaps he is remembering the opening lines of "First Aid for Dora," where Corky writes, "Never in the course of a long and intimate acquaintance having been shown any evidence to the contrary, I had always looked on Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge, my boyhood chum, as a man ruggedly indifferent to the appeal of the opposite sex." Of course, the story immediately shows that Ukridge is not indifferent, as our hero displays "a blend of courtliness and devotion" that reminds Corky of Sir Walter Raleigh.

Alternatively, Milstein might have been comparing it with the Jeeves and Blandings stories, which feature many young people trying to start or end an engagement. Yet even in Ukridge, love can find a way. Consider how Dora, Millie, Mabel Price, the other Mabel, and Myrtle Bayliss are courted by Ukridge. As Usborne notes, he never lets them down and always adheres to the public school code of gentlemanly behavior, even when it is against his interests to do so. And how can we forget the epic love affair between Flossie and Battling Billson?

We should also remember that *Love Among the Chickens* is a love story. It begins with newlyweds and ends with a wedding, at least in the first edition. Garny meets Phyllis, and Usborne notes that their romance is the main dynamic. And the Ukridge-Millie relationship seems stronger than many in Blandings and the Drones Club. Bertie even ponders that many apparently "cannot stick each other at any price" once married.

My impression is that readers feel sorry for Millie and discount her as a character. Milstein calls her "pitiful Millie" and Usborne believes the reader feels "pity for his wife." These comments understate her role as a human and deny her agency in deciding her own fate. When she married Ukridge, she was only following the advice given to Eve in *Leave It to Psmith* "to marry someone eccentric. [Cynthia] said it was such fun."

Garny describes her as follows: "She sat on the edge of the armchair, looking very small and quiet. I was conscious of feeling a benevolent pity for her. If I had been a girl, I would have preferred to marry a volcano." Later, "Mrs. Ukridge, looking younger and more child-

like than ever in brown holland, smiled at me over the tea-pot." In "Ukridge Rounds a Nasty Corner," Corky is amazed that she "actually committed herself to the appalling task of going through life" as Mrs. Ukridge. He also admits that "she was the most delightful girl to look at I had ever met. I could not blame Ukridge for falling in love with her." He describes her as "looking very small" and with "eyes exactly like a Persian kitten's."

The word "volcano" implies a volatile temperament, but this seems unfair to Ukridge, who treats her very well. When we first meet her in *Love Among the Chickens*, we read the following: "'Garny, old horse,' said Ukridge with some pride, 'this is her! The pride of the home. Companion of joys and sorrows and all the rest of it. In fact,' in a burst of confidence, 'my wife.'"

These are hardly the words of a volcano—more like those of a loving spouse. He waxes enthusiastic about the institution of marriage, a good sign for their future:

Take my tip. Go and jump off the dock yourself. You'll feel another man. Give up this bachelor business. It's a mug's game. I look on you bachelors as excrescences on the social system. I regard you, old man, purely and simply as a wart. Go and get married, laddie, go and get married.

He also involves her in the business and is enthusiastic about her (initially unsuccessful) efforts to get hens on tick:

"How many hen-letters did you write last week, old girl?"

"Ten, dear."

Ukridge turned triumphantly to me.

"You hear? Ten. Ten letters asking for hens. That's the way to succeed. Push and enterprise."

"Six of them haven't answered, Stanley, dear, and the rest refused."

"Immaterial," said Ukridge with a grand gesture. "That doesn't matter. The point is that the letters were written. It shows we are solid and practical."

Milstein notes that among the financial problems facing the chicken farm is Ukridge's "uxorious excesses" by which he must mean making the house comfortable, albeit on cheerful credit.

For her part, Millie describes Ukridge as "a wonderfully versatile man," which suggests she entered the marriage with some awareness of his characteristics. And she is realistic enough to know that such versatility

is not enough: "Stanley, of course, can turn his hand to anything; but I think experience is rather a good thing, don't you?" This suggests she is a spouse who will guide the domestic ship of state, reining in many of her husband's enthusiasms (as did Uncle Fred's wife, Jane).

I therefore believe that their marriage was a success, even if she may need to endure his creative financial schemes, provide an occasional false name, and sometimes leave town on a moment's notice. While financial problems may arise, the couple should be in clover in the long run. Millie has no problems with her aunt, aside from the grand lady's doubts about Ukridge. Aunt Julia can never stay mad at Ukridge for long. Millie and Ukridge are undoubtedly in their wills.

About the case of the two Millies, Ring and Jaggard are fairly certain there is no mystery. They write that "the coincidence of their names and the description of their meeting inexorably suggests they are one and the same, and she has some of the personal characteristics of his reported wife." They later describe her as exhibiting "a liking for Ukridge (so much so that there is strong circumstantial evidence amounting almost to proof that she married him)." Osborne also sees "beloved and loving" Millie as the same person in both stories.

Their romance did not make the Top 50 in the 2019 Plumtopia poll. This colossal omission may reflect general anti-Ukridge sentiment as well as a worry that Millie has hitched herself to an unreliable con man. If we focus on the relationship itself as described by Wodehouse, then it should be ranked high. I have no doubt that love will prosper despite the obstacles.

Supporting this notion of a gallant, romantic Ukridge is his treatment of "poor little Dora." We cannot criticize his scheme of selling tickets to the Pen & Ink Club dance without understanding his motives. Yes, he profits from the scheme, but it was designed to prevent her from losing the typewriting business deposit. He is compensating for keeping her out late, which caused his aunt to dismiss her. Ukridge must have known that the truth would come out, that his aunt would discover his ticket sales and throw him out. Thus, he shows self-sacrifice, despite the claims that he is selfish. Ukridge gave her the money and did not abscond with it; Corky indicates that she did become a partner in the firm.

Recall that this is Edwardian London, where career options for women are limited. In "A Tithe for Charity," Ukridge selects for his beneficence "a charmingly pretty girl of, I should say, the stenographer class" with cheap clothes that bespeak her "honest poverty." He continues that "I knew exactly what a girl like that would be getting a week. Just about the three or four quid which you or I would spend on a single dinner at the Ritz." Co-

owning the business is the key to Dora's "whole future," as Corky perceives. Ukridge's efforts therefore keep her from possibly sinking into "the submerged tenth."

The Problems of Chronology

MILSTEIN WRITES that "Stanley Ukridge makes his entrance in Chapter Two" of *Love Among the Chickens*, which is true from the perspective of the reading public. He argues that "the character of S. F. Ukridge has changed significantly" from *Love* to the short stories, to the degree that "one may say that he bears less resemblance to his earlier persona than even Bertie Wooster does to Reggie Pepper. . . . The famous yellow mac, the pince-nez with ginger beer wire, his acquisitive habits, and the exclamations of 'Old horse,' 'Laddie,' and 'Upon my Sam' all make their appearance."

I had not noticed this change in my Ukridge reading (and audiobook listening), and I do not believe the evidence bears it out. One might parse minute character shifts and writing styles, but I see more continuity than change. Whether comparing the Ukridge in the 1906 or 1921 *Love* with the Ukridge of the short stories (which begin in 1924), the man is the same. In the 1921 version, the pince-nez with ginger-beer wire is mentioned in the first chapter, as is the borrowing, while the endearment of "old horse" appears in the second chapter. Most importantly, the familiar personality is there from the start. The Ukridge described as "the sort of man who asks you out to dinner, borrows the money from you to pay the bill, and winds up the evening by embroiling you in a fight with a cabman" is the Ukridge we will know and love for twenty stories. Even in the 1906 version, we see the pince-nez attached with wire (although not specifically ginger-beer wire), along with the "old horse" and the mackintosh and the borrowing and the "villainous old suit of grey flannels."

More generally, I am puzzled by some of the anti-*Love Among the Chickens* sentiment. Usborne claims that the Ukridge in this novel "is not the rounded Ukridge or the rounded Wodehouse," and Curtis Armstrong appears to strongly dislike it. In *A Plum Assignment*, we learn he just reread the story and "nothing short of armed force would get me back into that book for at least another three decades." Nevertheless, Armstrong writes that Ukridge is "one of Wodehouse's great characters" and "I've always loved the Ukridge stories." It is notable that he, a very successful and famous actor, says Ukridge is "the only character in the Wodehouse canon that I would have truly loved to play."

Perhaps some fans of Plum discount the book because they see it as an unworthy early work. They may have taken too literally his self-deprecating claim

in the preface to the second edition that "you will notice that I have practically rewritten the book. There was some pretty bad work in it, and it had 'dated.'" When an author raises such doubts about his own work, we might not be surprised if readers overlook all editions.

Others are more generous. As Honoria Plum blogged, "I have just read the 1906 version of *Love Among the Chickens* for the first time, because I was curious to read the original—and found it not so different from the revised 1920 edition as I'd expected. I'm always surprised at how good the early stuff is." Similarly, when I first read the 1906 version, I expected to cringe rather than enjoy a good story.

Ring and Jaggard address the tricky question of chronology, as it is clear that the adventures in the stories did not take place in the order they were published. *Love Among the Chickens* must be the conclusion to the series, while the short stories record Ukridge's early, "sternest of bachelors" life. This also explains the puzzle of the two Millies, who as noted above, are undoubtedly the same person. They meet in "Ukridge Rounds a Nasty Corner," which must therefore be the last short story (in real time, not publication time), and are married offstage before *Love*.

Because *Love* was published first, Ring and Jaggard note that "one has to accept that it was a sort of futuristic tale written by a seer who knew that Ukridge would have married Millie." If we accept this explanation, then perhaps some of the magical fairy dust that covers Blandings must also charm the Ukridge saga. While some readers might see such speculation as fanciful, I'll go with what Milstein wrote in *A Plum Assignment*: "Fanciful speculation is . . . the nice thing about P. G. Wodehouse: he invites fancy."

An alternative possibility is that Wodehouse collected a trove of Ukridge-type incidents, which all took place in the early 1900s, and subsequently published them as his fancy struck and the market demanded. Like Arthur Conan Doyle, he was not anticipating that devotees would examine the details of his stories in order to understand their true chronology.

Lastly, Milstein writes that only one of the stories written after "Buttercup Day" is narrated by Corky. He suggests this is because Ukridge's friends have either abandoned him or will only listen to his adventures, not participate in them. Usborne claims that only one of the short stories published after the *Ukridge* collection is entirely narrated by Corky ("Buttercup Day"). Corky may start the proceedings, à la Mulliner, but the rest of the story is Ukridge speaking in quotations.

Regardless of how you define narration, Milstein's interpretation assumes that the order of publication

was temporally accurate, but I see no reason to believe this. As I suggest above, Wodehouse likely had a store of Ukridge tales and published them as seemed best. Ukridge undoubtedly had many adventures that did not entangle his old school friends, and which he would consequently need to narrate. That Wodehouse saved them for the end does not imply that he ended his days alienated from his friends. My guess is that Garry/Corky grew busy with his own career and family, which probably distanced him from old friends, but he did not set out to boycott Ukridge.

Ukridge the Texan

WHEN THE chicken farm fails, where does he go? Wodehouse provides no resolution.

My guess is that, like so many others, he put up a sign that read *Gone To Texas*. What other part of the world is big enough for a man of Ukridge's spirit? What other place is so entrepreneurial and so rewards the man with "the big, broad, flexible outlook"? No offense to the Buckeye State, but can we see him in Ohio? Only the operatic, larger-than-life grand costume drama that is *TEXAS!* could possibly suit Ukridge. Everything's bigger in Texas, and Ukridge was the biggest thing in London (and Canada, and Argentina, and elsewhere). He foreshadows this move in "Ukridge Sees Her Through" when he discusses that "wobbling, vacillating hell-hound" Hank Philbrick:

Bought a bit of land about the size of a pocket handkerchief in Texas or Oklahoma or somewhere, and one morning when he was hoeing the soil or planting turnips or something out buzzed a whacking great oil well. Apparently that sort of thing's happening every day out there. If I could get a bit of capital together, I'm dashed if I wouldn't go to Texas myself. Great open spaces where men are men, laddie—suit me down to the ground.

I looked through a list of cities and counties in Texas for any hint of Ukridge, but nothing calls to mind the name (except maybe the Rupert Street in both Dallas and Fort Worth). My guess is that he changed his name as "a routine business precaution." He is likely the ancestor of a prominent Texas oil family, although his descendants have understandably refused to cooperate with potential biographers.

Under another name, many locations and entities are undoubtedly named for him. We can visit a Ukridge Museum, drive over a Ukridge Parkway, and be treated at a Ukridge Hospital. His wealth has improved the lives

of many thousands, consistent with his desire to "tithe" after coming into some money (although with better results this time). He likely passed away peacefully, surrounded by Millie and their respectable children and grandchildren, in Fort Worth around 1950.

Wartime for Wodehouse

NICK TOWNEND pointed us to an article that was printed in the *New Yorker* on June 1, 2020, written by Rivka Galchen. Ms. Galchen has "taught the Wodehouse broadcasts for several years now, in a graduate writing seminar on comedy and calamity." She comments on Plum's awareness of the conditions around him in Wodehouse's camp notebook.

The article gives insight into how, despite the conditions, Wodehouse was looking for ways to keep his spirit strong. It shows how difficult it is for those on the outside looking in to truly feel the desperation of his circumstance, and how his unique mindset and capacity for rising above the situation and seeing it objectively helped to prevent a sense of hopelessness.

Wodehouse interacted with many in positive ways. Ms. Galchen says that Wodehouse's notebook "shows an eye for occupation, and especially for occupational contentment. 'Met cook and congratulated him on today's soup . . . He was grateful, because his professional pride had been wounded by grumblers saying there wasn't enough. He said he could have made it more by adding water, which would have spoiled it.'"

Wodehouse writes of bitter wind and snow and biscuits impossible to eat. Yet he's upbeat even in these tough circumstances: "Instance of ingenuity in Camp. Dutch barber is asked by man accustomed to dye his grey hair every month if he can dye it. Later, barber is seen crouching on his bed, holding lighted match under jam jar of water, soft soap, and boot blacking. He sells the stuff to man for 83 pfennigs and man is very satisfied."

Ms. Galchen wonders if Wodehouse sustained that attitude, and notes that, yes, even after months in the camp, Wodehouse writes that he "must make a note of this day as one of the absolutely flawless ones of my life."

His awareness of the situation was matched by his realization of the depth to which his broadcast words were misinterpreted. To the editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, he described how he and his fellow Britishers tried to keep their "simply flippant cheerful attitude . . . It was a point of honor with us not to whine." Stiff upper lip, indeed.

See the entire article at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/01/wartime-for-wodehouse>.

Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Richard Armour

BY BOB RAINS

Good writing, like good cooking, requires shortening.

—Richard Armour

AMONG THE MOST prolific writers of his time in the fields of light verse and prose, Richard Armour is virtually forgotten today. Armour was born in 1906 in San Pedro, California. He hailed from a family of druggists. As recounted in his memoir, *Drug Store Days*, his grandfather Elmer had founded Armour's Drug Store in Pomona, California, in 1890, which he jointly ran with his wife Cora, Armour's grandmother. "A great many people were afraid of my grandmother, including my grandfather." Elmer died in 1912, and although Cora bewailed that she could not live long without him, she somehow managed to hold on for another 38 years. Meanwhile, Armour's father, Harry, had started his own drugstore in San Pedro in 1904, but when Elmer died, Harry moved his family to Pomona and took over management of his father's store under Cora's strict supervision. As a young lad, Armour went into the family business and learned, among other valuable skills, how to grind out suppositories in mid-summer. Fortunately for Armour and his future readers, Harry's drugstore business eventually failed, and Armour went on to other endeavors.

Armour received his bachelor's degree from Pomona College, then pursued a Ph.D. in English philology at Harvard. While working on his thesis, he spent a year each teaching at the University of Texas and Northwestern University. With his newly minted doctorate, Armour was offered and accepted a position as professor of English and head of the Division of Modern Languages, as well as proctor of the Men's Dormitory, at the College of the Ozarks in Clarksville, Arkansas. His proctoring duties required him to live in the dorm. After arriving on campus, he learned that a favorite game of the students was to see if they could drive out the proctor. They had succeeded the previous year with a proctor who was also the football coach. Their gambits included such clever moves as putting a cow in the proctor's bedroom and lighting giant firecrackers outside his door in the middle of the night. It was intolerable, but Armour was contractually bound to live in the dorm. But then he had an epiphany: If he got married, he wouldn't be able to live in the dorm even if he wanted to. So he sent off a wire to Kathleen Stevens, whom he had known since the first grade, when he had listed her as third among girls he most



*Richard Armour in his home office in his later years
(photo courtesy of his son, Geoffrey Armour)*

admired. Being that he was now in love with her, he proposed that they get married over Christmas. She accepted. They got married. And he survived the rest of the school year off-campus. The marriage produced two children and lasted until Armour's death in 1989.

Armour's next academic posting was a year at the University of Freiburg, Germany, which began shortly after Hitler took power. Armour augmented his salary by giving English lessons both to Jewish professors who had been forced out of their jobs and to their children. On returning to the United States, he took his first long-term professorship at Wells College, a girls' school on Lake Cayuga. While at Wells, he published serious works of literary criticism, including two books on the Victorian poet Bryan Proctor (pseudonym Barry Cornwall), a book on Coleridge, and a play on the life of John Milton.

In 1937, Armour began what would become a second career, eventually eclipsing his academics. One day while Kathleen was out of town, he wrote two light verses. He sent one to the *New Yorker* and the other to the *Saturday Evening Post* and sold both of them. "It was a little like making two holes-in-one on a golfer's first round. . . . After making those two sales, I was stuck for life." That first *New Yorker* poem, "The Song of Business," appeared in the March 6, 1937, issue. Armour was in good company in that issue, which included works by James Thurber, Robert Benchley, Mark and Dorothy Van Doren, S. J. Perelman, E. B. White, Peter Arno, and Clifton Fadiman. "The Song of Business" is an atypical Armour verse, unrhymed and consisting mostly of "practically verbatim" excerpts from advertisements for various products. By 1942, Armour had published enough light verse in magazines to bring out his first book collection, *Yours for the Asking*.

Like many people, Armour took a four-year break from his usual endeavors during World War II. He joined the army and rose to the rank of colonel. He trained anti-aircraft artillery troops, then became a member of the General Staff, writing speeches for George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower.

While still in the Army, Armour was offered and accepted a professorship at Scripps College, which is part of the group of Claremont Colleges. This enabled him to return to the Pomona area after the war and teach at both Scripps and the Claremont Graduate School. In addition, he became a very popular speaker on the lecture circuit. In his posthumously published autobiography, *Rhyme and Punishment*, he explained, "No matter how specialized my audience, I drew on my observation of the absurdities of the human race." He held dual positions at both schools until 1963, when he retired from full-time teaching, in part because his writing and outside lecturing had caused his income tax to be greater than his college salary.

To say that Armour's output of light verse was prodigious would be paltering with the truth. His verses appeared in over 200 magazines, including *Look*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping*, and—which shows that he was impartial—both the *Christian Science Monitor* and *Playboy*. He published over ten thousand verses in his lifetime. In his instruction manual *Writing Light Verse*, he explained that "I try to keep forty or fifty poems always in the mail, and have pushed the number up as high as a hundred."

In addition, he wrote a long-running, widely syndicated newspaper column titled *Armour's Armoury*, in which many of his verses first appeared. Nor were his humorous efforts confined to verse: He wrote numerous prose pieces, including many books, often making fun of academia, literature, or history, with titles like *Going Around in Academic Circles*, *Twisted Tales from Shakespeare*, and *It All Started with Columbus*. He also wrote several children's books, including *All Sizes and Shapes of Monkeys and Apes*, *Who's in Holes?*, and *A Dozen Dinosaurs*.

A master of one-liners, Armour opined, "It's all right to hold a conversation, but you should let go of it now and then." And: "A rumor is one thing that gets thicker instead of thinner as it is spread." He once described his aim as a writer was to "sum up in four lines what a pedant would call a universal truth—and to leave it writhing."

Armour mostly wrote verses about everyday life, meant for the general public to enjoy. "Light verse," he said, "is poetry written in the spirit of play." He wrote about pets, as in "Proof of the Puppy":

He sharpened his teeth
On the legs of the table
And left, on the rug,
His inedible label.

He tested his claws
On the arms of the chair
And deep in the sofa
Deposited hair.

And now that he's grown,
As I frequently grouse,
We've a house-broken dog
And a dog-broken house.

He wrote about children, as in "Ear Marks of a Boy":

At times my son has got me fearing
He might, perhaps, be hard of hearing.
When out at play, although I call
He doesn't seem to hear at all,
And when I say, "Go wash your hands,"
Or "Put your toys away," he stands
Around as if he hasn't heard
A single solitary word.

It's only when I tell his mother
Some whispered little thing or other
I'd just as soon he wouldn't learn,
I find his hearing's no concern.

Armour published two golf books. The first was *Golf Bawls*, which consists entirely of verses accompanied with cartoons by Herb Middlecamp. In "For Men Only," Armour opined:

A woman's place is in the home,
As it is often said;
Out on the course she courts divorce,
For we men have a dread
Of being married to a wife
Who either will entreat us
To show her how (and do it now)
Or worse, one who can beat us.

Armour's second golf collection, *Golf Is a Four-Letter Word*, is, sadly, his only book still in print other than by print-on-demand services. The first two-thirds of the book consists of a prose narration of Armour's struggles to master the game. Forced as an adolescent to take a summer vacation trip with his parents, he would have preferred to stay home and go out to the club

every day and work “on some of the weaknesses in my golf game, which were mostly in my drives, long irons, short irons, approaches, and putts.” (Actually, Armour mastered the game well enough to become the captain of the Pomona College golf team.) The remainder of the book is more golf poems, including “Listen to This”:

The locker room’s one
Place at least, where a guy,
When the round is done,
Can improve his lie.

What did other humor writers think of Armour? In his foreword to Armour’s *On Your Marks: A Package of Punctuation*, fellow versifier Ogden Nash wrote that “Richard Armour is a master of his craft—ingenious, witty, and multi-faceted—whose verses I have admired and envied for many years.”

It is fair to say that Armour and Nash formed a mutual admiration society. Reviewing the verse collection *Nights with Armour*, Nash wrote, “Once again I find myself marveling at Richard Armour’s facility, invention, and high wry spirits.” Armour reciprocated in his book *Writing Light Verse*, in which he had warned would-be versifiers against the distortion of spelling and pronunciation of words in order to make them rhyme. He added that there is an exception to every rule, and the exception to this one “is, by name, Ogden Nash. Oddity of rhyme, including the brashest of coinages, is perfectly in keeping with his intentionally irregular meter and his madcap thought.”

In their *Week-End Book of Humor* (1952), Wodehouse and Scott Meredith included Armour’s poem “Money”:

Workers earn it,
Spendthrifts burn it, . . .
Forgers fake it,
Taxes take it, . . .
Gamblers lose it. . . .
I could use it.

Oddly, and unlike the other works in this collection, there is no introductory description of the author.

Some writers have great controversies in their lives. *Plum Lines* readers are familiar with Wodehouse’s troubles during and after his incarceration by the Nazis during World War II. Armour’s life was devoid of any major public controversy. But he did have an ongoing problem of his verses being incorrectly attributed to Nash. This particularly happened with arguably Armour’s most famous poem, “Going to Extremes”:

Shake and shake
The catsup bottle.
None will come,
And then a lot’ll.

[Note to younger readers, if any: in olden times, “ketchup” was often spelled “catsup,” and it came in non-squeezable glass bottles.]

Another Armour poem about a condiment, also often attributed to Nash, reads, “Nothing attracts / the mustard from wieners / as much as the slacks / just back from the cleaners.” [Second note to younger readers, if any: Hot dogs were often referred to as “wieners.” This had something to do with the capital of Austria.]

The only other known brouhaha of note in Armour’s life involved a guest appearance on *You Bet Your Life*, the TV show hosted by his friend Groucho Marx. As usual, Groucho started the show by saying, “Say the secret word, win a hundred dollars.” Armour immediately said “the secret word” and demanded payment. All heck broke loose, but Groucho did, rather grouchily, fork over the cash. Despite this little contretemps, Armour wrote and read a poem to Groucho:

Most poets write of Meadowlarks
I sing instead of Groucho Marx
His lustrous eyes, each like a star
His noble brow, his sweet cigar . . .
His massive shoulders, brawny arms
His intellect, his many charms
In short, unless the truth I stray from
A man to keep your wife away from.

Armour was stricken in his eighties with Parkinson’s disease, which ultimately prevented him from writing. His wife lamented that “he thinks his life has no meaning if he can’t write.” Toward the end, in ill health and with many of his 65 books no longer in print, Armour expressed doubt that his literary legacy was secure. “I really don’t think that my work is lasting.” As of now, he appears to have been prescient. Of course, almost no one, however gifted and diligent, could produce the sheer volume of work that Armour did and have it all be of uniformly high quality. Some of his efforts simply do not hold up. For instance, *Going Around in Academic Circles*, while it humorously reveals a number of truths about academia, is in places sophomoric and, by today’s standards, unacceptably sexist.

Yet there is much in Armour’s oeuvre, especially the verse, that deserves a second look. Perhaps that second look is coming. Happily, in her 1998 collection of humorous poems titled *The Funny Side*, contemporary

British versifier Wendy Cope's first entry was another Armour poem about money: "That money talks / I won't deny. / I heard it once, / It said, 'Goodbye.'" And in 2015, some good person posted on YouTube the Yavapai Concert Choir performing a mostly a capella version of the Armour "money" poem that Wodehouse and Meredith had included in their *Week-End Book of Humor*.

If you like wordplay, as I assume all loyal Wodehouseans do, let me suggest that you while away an hour listening to "Richard Armour at UCLA, 1/8/1971," an audio recording on YouTube, in which Armour explains some of his techniques and theories, richly peppered with examples of his verse and prose. And if you're feeling flush, you might even take the plunge and invest a bit of your precious spondulix in a used copy of *Light Armour* or any other collection of verse by the good professor. I predict that you will end up with some very clever lines stuck in your head.

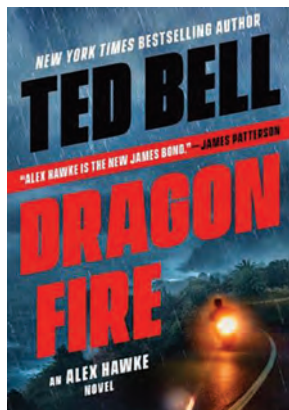
She was a firm believer in a wife's influence for good over her husband, and she held the view that the Duke needed all the influence for good that he could get. Someone who would improve his manner and habits and general outlook on life was, in her opinion, what he ought to be supplied with as soon as possible.

A Pelican at Blandings (1969)

Pelham Rides Again

BY DAVID RUEF

TED BELL is the author of ten consecutive *New York Times* best sellers. In his latest thriller, *Dragon Fire*, his James Bond-like protagonist, Alex Hawke, saves the world, beds beautiful women, and withstands incredible physical pain in typically clichéd, over-the-top manner. On page 6 of the prologue, we are introduced to his beloved "gentleman's gentleman," Pelham Grenville. My wife Karen and I have heard him speak at the local library society, he's a nice guy, and he lives part of the year in our hometown of Charleston, South Carolina, but gee, where was that character so brazenly borrowed from?!



Letters to the Editor

ONE OF THE advantages of being in charge of mailing *Plum Lines* is that I get to read it first. When I picked up the boxes of the Autumn 2020 issue a while ago, I took a copy of the journal and, with it in hand, became well ensconced on my favorite couch. After a few minutes, I suddenly sat bolt upright (it was after all a couch and not a hammock) as if stuck with a pin. I ran to my computer to type this missive to you. I was in the middle of Professor Leal's article on Psmith at Oxbridge and came to the sentence on Mike Jackson that runs, "All we know is he met the fragile Eve when visiting his family . . ." Now, I can understand that the jolly prof might mix up Phyllis Jackson with Eve Halliday—but that this slip-up made it past Gary, Neil, and Elin boggles my imagination. (And yes, I have checked, and it is boggled.) Still, there it is (I just checked again, to be sure), and all I can say is that the three of you need a jolly long (and well-deserved, I know) holiday.

Yours,

Elliott Milstein

AS NEIL MIDKIFF points out in the Autumn 2020 *Plum Lines*, I did fail to verify that the *Playboy* version of "Jeeves and the Greasy Bird" was the same as the book version. Had I checked this out and found that the magazine version did not mention Spinoza, I might have altered the start of my paper to read something like this: "Bertie asks the following in P. G. Wodehouse's 'Jeeves and the Greasy Bird': 'Oh, Jeeves, . . . I hope I'm not interrupting you when you were curled up with your Spinoza's *Ethics* or whatever it is, but I wonder if you could spare me a moment of your valuable time?'"

When the story was published in the December 1955 issue of *Playboy*, the reference to Spinoza was eliminated along with other parts of the story. The thrifty editors missed a chance to raise the tone of the magazine by mentioning the philosopher. But, regardless of the editors' action, as we are aware, this was not the first or last reference to the Jeeves-Spinoza connection in the Jeeves canon.

In the same *Plum Lines*, Noel Bushnell asked if there is any evidence that Wodehouse read Spinoza. I found none, and before my talk I checked with Tad Boehmer, whose paper "Something Borrowed: What Wodehouse Checked Out from the New York Society Library, 1951–1955" was also presented at the convention. Tad reported that there was no evidence that Wodehouse borrowed any of Spinoza's works.

Sincerely,

Michael V. Eckman

The Hot Club—Who?

BY MOLLY SKARDON

I HOPE THAT by the time you read this note, New York City will have returned to something like its usual state of frenzy, but I'm pleased to say that in the meantime, our local lockdown, with all its restrictions, is proving to have its rewards.

It's thrilling not to have to commute, of course, and I've enjoyed extra reading time while in line to enter the food co-op, but I think the topper might be the realization of a long-held ambition of my working life: being able to revel on a weeknight and still function the next day. I can go out on the tiles, so to speak, without the fuss of actually dancing like an untamed gazelle at Ciro's—or without the fuss of getting out of my chair.

Thanks to the magic of Zoom, it has been possible to go online for the weekly gatherings of the Hot Club of New York, a listening and discussion group featuring a bounty of classic 78-rpm jazz recordings from the earliest days of the genre through the 1940s—that is, ragtime to bebop. Such *Jeeves and Wooster* favorites as “Minnie the Moocher” and “Nagasaki” make their appearance in their earliest renditions (Cab Calloway and His Orchestra in 1931 and numerous groups starting in 1928, respectively).



In pre-pandemic times, the club met at Café Bohemia, a legendary Greenwich Village jazz hangout, but the current virtual rendezvous has the advantage of allowing folks to join in from further afield. The participants include jazz historians and record collectors, along with many others who just like the music. The host, Matthew “Fat Cat” Rivera, is also heard (prerecorded, for now) on Columbia University’s radio station WKCR, presenting “Hot Club on the Air,” which has the same musical focus as the Zoom meeting.

The Hot Club of New York is modeled on the Hot Club de France, formed in Paris in the 1930s for members to share recordings of the new and then-underground phenomenon of jazz. Soon it was sponsoring performances by notable artists (Louis

Armstrong was honorary president), publishing one of the first jazz magazines and, incidentally, aiding the French Resistance. Although the Hot Club of New York (est. 2019) has not yet rendered comparable wartime service, it certainly shares the French club’s mission of promoting knowledge and love of the art form.

Apart from the *Woosterish* soundtrack, what, you might wonder, connects Hot Club–related doings to the works of P. G. Wodehouse? Well . . . nothing—except one canon-immortalized song.

“Who (Stole My Heart Away)?” was a hit number from the 1925 musical *Sunny*, composed by Jerome Kern, with book and lyrics by Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein rather than Messrs. Bolton and Wodehouse. After the show ran in London, and Plum had read about Fred Patzel, the hog-calling champion of the Western States, “Who?” found its way into his 1927 story “Pig-Hoo-o-o-ey!” The lyrics of “Who?” (as heard on the Blandings housekeeper’s gramophone, from a 78-rpm record, we’d guess) help move the plot along toward its happy ending.



You might think, then, that when it came to choosing a theme song for an early jazz radio program, “Who?” would be the natural nominee of a Wodehousean. Indeed, it does turn out that Matthew “Fat Cat” Rivera is a Wodehouse enthusiast (as well as a twenty-something—hurrah!), and yes, he did go with “Who?” However, he claimed never to have read “Pig-

Hoo-o-o-ey!” and thus his weekly opening number is the instrumental version by Frankie Newton and His Orchestra from 1939.

It’s a good choice for a multi-era show, he says, featuring jazz pioneer James P. Johnson, swing stalwarts Cozy Cole and Frankie Newton, and pre-beboppers John Kirby and Pete Brown. Besides, he loves the warmth and all-out swing of the performance. This “Who?” also holds pride of place as the first 78 that he heard live and in person.

Matthew told me that jazz greats Hoagy Carmichael and Bix Beiderbecke, who were close friends, were avid Wodehouse fans. It’s cheering to think of their getting a lift and maybe inspiration from a favorite line, just like the rest of us.

While restrictions on social gatherings are in effect, the Hot Club of New York meets on Zoom every Monday from 7 to 10 PM Eastern Time. See www.hotclubny.com for the meeting link. “Hot Club on the Air” is broadcast in the Monday “Out to Lunch” segment from noon to 3 PM on WKCR 89.9 FM in New York, on www.wkcr.org, and on WKCR HD-1.

Paul Kent Scores Again

BY GARY HALL

YOU MAY RECALL my review of the first volume of Paul Kent’s work, *Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, Volume 1: “This is jolly old Fame,”* in the Winter 2019 issue of *Plum Lines*. I was a bit on the complimentary side of the fence. The most sparkling praise I offered was that Paul’s tone stayed true to the Wodehouse style even in this academic work. I commented that “this is not a chore to read but a happy, educational adventure that entertains.” I professed to be eager to read the next two volumes.

Now that I’ve read Paul’s second volume, *Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, Volume 2: Mid-Season Form*, praise must again be heaped. This second work in the trilogy does not disappoint. Quite the opposite, I again dance trippingly through the pages and look forward to each new chapter and revelation.

Paul describes how Wodehouse moved from a more expository form of writing to a more theatrical style (musical comedy without the music), which was obviously influenced by Plum’s immersion in theatre during the period of transition to his “mid-season form.” “Wodehouse World” is the phrase that Paul uses to describe the universe which PGW seemed to settle

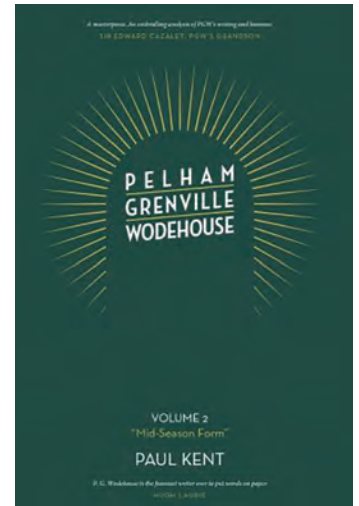
on at the start of this prime period. Much of it hinges on the country-house setting, wherein an almost fantastic set of characters and events was permissible, much like the freedom of the theatre. The reader (or the audience member, one and the same when reading Wodehouse) is fully absorbed in the story, the story ends, the reader snaps back to reality, here comes gravity, and the sweetest and light of the Wodehouse World is a fond remembrance to be visited again soon. As Paul notes, Wodehouse invites us to return again and again to Wodehouse World, like Celia in *As You Like It* when she describes the Forest of Arden: “I like this place / And willingly could waste my time in it.”

Paul ties Wodehouse’s method back to comic theatre and literature of the past, and demonstrates that no writer creates something out of nothing. It is the “*spirit* of what Plum borrowed from his literary heritage [that] is just as significant . . . [as] any specific citations.” Ultimately, Paul convinces us that “Wodehouse was as great a synthesizer of literary cultures as T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*.”

Paul describes how Plum conjoined the ancient classical and romantic traditions, and shows how Chaucer and others before him had concocted that mixture. “Romantic fantasy and classical perspective are held in tension until, as inevitably happens, love wins out in the end.” Shakespeare, too, was on a similar track to Wodehouse, and for similar reasons: Before William S. was “worshipped as some kind of literary god, he was simply a jobbing playwright who needed to connect bums with seats or face bankruptcy.”

As the editor of our society journal, I try to ensure that the voice of the contributors to *Plum Lines* remains intact. Along the way I try to apply a bit of my own style and voice, hopefully as subtle seasoning to the creative recipes of our many contributors. Paul Kent has done much the same on a much grander scale, by adding his joy and light while giving us new insights into Wodehouse.

There is much, much more. In this space, I can’t do justice to the breadth and value of this volume. Your time with it will breeze by, and you will clamor for more. Hear that distant sound? That’s me already clamoring.



The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University

BY ANITA AVERY

THIS ISSUE'S ENTRY highlights the collection's many recordings in which the written word was transformed to the spoken word. The *McIlvaine Bibliography* did not contain a section for the spoken word; however, the *Addendum to the Bibliography* added a "Section R: Audiotapes (Other than music)." The collection's Section R online database includes 85 audiotapes and, in keeping with the times, has been broadened to include ten CDs of more recent recordings.

The holdings include twelve unabridged audiobooks, eight of which are Jeeves novels read by Frederick Davidson and published by Blackstone Audiobooks from 1989 to 1999. The unforgettable Ian Carmichael is superb in an abridged reading of *Summer Lightning* from 1990, licensed by the BBC for use on their serial *The Mind's Eye*.

Well known to Wodehouse fans, Edward Duke is masterful in Buckingham Classics' short-story readings of "Jeeves Takes Charge" (1987) and "Jeeves Comes to America" (1993), while Simon Cadell reads stories from the *Golf Omnibus* for *The Mind's Eye* 1990 cassette. A set of six ca. 1986 recordings produced by the Joyful Arts Production Association includes a nice diversity of short stories read by James Donald Waters: "Jeeves and the Song of Songs," "The Smile That Wins," "Archibald and the Masses," "The Clicking of Cuthbert," "Honeysuckle Cottage," and "Uncle Fred Flits By."

The iconic portrayals of Jeeves and Wooster by James Hordern and Richard Briers in the BBC Radio dramatizations of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1990) and *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* (1992) provide hours of enjoyable listening. Terry-Thomas and Roger Livesey have a splendid outing in *Jeeves* from 1989. Jerry Robbins, J. T. Turner, and the Colonial Players troupe offer more recent 2012 recordings in P. G. Wodehouse's *Jeeves & Wooster*, Volumes I, II, III, on three CDs.

Ian Carmichael and Richard Vernon are at their best in the 1992 BBC Radio version of *Galahad at Blandings*. The fortunate listener will *Meet Mr. Mulliner* and return for *More Mr. Mulliner* with Richard Griffiths holding forth at the Anglers' Rest, telling wonderfully humorous stories on five CDs.

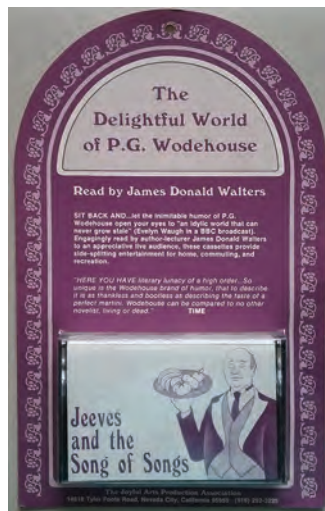
The Wacky World of P. G. Wodehouse, a sturdy wooden boxed set of three titles published by The Mind's Eye in 1990, contains a nice sampling of readers

Simon Cadell (*The Golf Omnibus*) and Ian Carmichael (*Summer Lightning*) plus actors Richard Briers and Michael Hordern (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*).

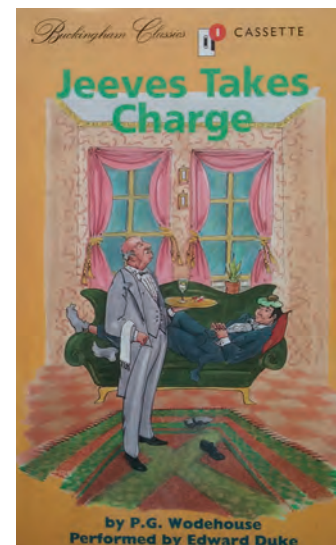
The collection's online database for Section R: Recordings includes only those recordings which have been donated to the collection thus far.

As with all sections of the collection, we welcome additional donations of the spoken word on cassette or CD. There are numerous other recordings, including, among others, BBC Radio pieces, Martin Jarvis's work for L.A. Theatre Works, Argo Dramatisations' *Jeeves*, written by C. Northcote Parkinson, and 33 complete radio series compiled on three CDs by The Radio Lady.

This quarter, 33 items have been added to the collection, reaching a total of 797 across all sections, and there are more than forty TWS documents and ephemera. The online database may be seen at <http://www.wodehouse.org/PGWCVU>. Click on the gold navigation bar for links to all sections.



Various Wodehouse recordings that are now in the Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt



Chapters Corner

WHAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? Please send all news to Gary Hall (see back page). Note that webmaster Noel Merrill keeps chapter items posted on the society website. It's good to send advance info about upcoming events to Noel; his contact information is on the last page of this issue.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)

Contact: Susan Collicott



Birmingham Banjolele Band

(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)

Contact: Caralyn McDaniel



Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)

Contact: Bill Franklin



The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity) Contact:

Amy Plofker



Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Scott Daniels



Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area) Contact:

Mark Reber



THE CHAPPIES met via video on August 25 and were entertained by a sneak peek of a workshop performance by formerly local Chapter One members David and Karen Ruef, who are now “at-large” members in the land of endless barbecued pulled pork (apologies to the Empress!), fried green onions, and pimento cheese: Charleston, South Carolina. They produced a skit of Chef Anatole on a book tour promoting his “quiche and tell” roman à clef to the San Diego Book

Club. Though it's a moot point now, if Dave's toque had stayed erect and his penciled mustache hadn't smudged, their proposed 2021 convention presentation would have been a hoot and would have raised Jeeves's eyebrow by considerably more than the usual eighth of an inch.

—David Ruef

AN ENTHUSIASTIC group of Eggs, Beans, and Damsels gathered for the Chapter One Zoom session on September 29. Longing for the smell of a stiff ocean breeze, we made a collective journey to the beachside resorts of Marvis Bay and Bramley-on-Sea. The theme of the night was “Freddies, beaches, and babies.” We discussed Freddie Bullivant's toddler-assisted courtship of Elizabeth Vickers in the Bertie/Jeeves story “Fixing It for Freddie,” and Freddie Widgeon's recurrent abandonment of Bingo Little's infant son and failure to secure the continued affection of Mavis Peasmarch in the Drones story “Bramley Is So Bracing.” We talked of the humor in both tales and the many lost loves of Freddie Widgeon in decades of Wodehouse stories. There was some disapproval, however, of the consistently negative portrayal of children in the Wodehouse oeuvre. Plum's repeated use of the word “substantial” and several similar adjectives to describe a young blonde woman in “Bramley Is So Bracing” also received some critical comment.

Independent of the discussion, our gathering provided ample time for free conversation, which everyone enjoyed.

—Mark Reber

Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes) Contact: Elaine Coppola



The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine

(Denver and vicinity)

Contact: Jennifer Petkus



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



FOR YOUR ENJOYMENT, the Rangers offer the following from *Highland Fling* (Nancy Mitford, 1931, Vantage Books):

“How like Walter,” said Sally laughing. “Poor angel, he’s quite incapable of working in London, too. He gave up his last job after exactly three days.”

“Shut up, darling. You know quite well who it was that begged and implored me to leave, now don’t you? Sally’s father,” explained Walter, “got me a job in a bank. I can’t tell you what I suffered for three whole days. It was like a P. G. Wodehouse novel, only not funny at all, or perhaps I’ve no sense of humor.”

—Elizabeth Herrold

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



Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham
 (Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)
 Contact: Laura Loehr



A Little More Bertie Than Jeeves
 (Waynesville/Sylva, North Carolina)
 Contact: Beth Baxley



The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society
 (Tennessee)
 Contact: Ken Clevenger



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



The New England Wodehouse Th ingummy So ciety (NEWTS)
 (Boston and New England)
 Contact: Lynn Vesley-Gross



or Roberta Towner

THE NEWTS swarmed online in October. A group reading of “Pig-Hoo-o-o-ey!” was a dramatic success with all, including with various pets present in NEWTS households. Hog calling was intellectually discussed; we reviewed techniques used in past TWS conventions. The next nottle is planned for December.



—Lynn Vesley-Gross

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



THE NORTHWODES have channeled our cabin fever constructively, with monthly Zoom meetings in lieu of actual social contact. The meetings are getting longer because we need the socializing.

On August 11, after voting in the Tuesday primary, fourteen of us discussed *Uncle Dynamite*. Topics included theoretical cocktails based on mangel-wurzel by-products, the artwork on our various book covers, and the socioeconomic improvement of women’s lives in the U.S., from the rather economically powerless examples portrayed in *Uneasy Money* into employed, self-supporting, independent adults.

We then touched on the problems the pandemic has visited upon us, with special concern for how it has impacted our social, spiritual, political, health, and financial outlooks. Maria Jette endorsed www.scribd.com for e-books and encouraged participation in the Facebook “P.G. Wodehouse Book Club” moderated by Honoria Glossop.

During our September 10 Zoom meeting, we discussed *Ukridge* (1925). In the end, Mr. Stanley F. Ukridge was not well liked and not someone we'd invite over for dinner. Though not exactly mad or totally bad, he's surely dangerous to know.

So, for palate cleansing and other reasons, we chose *Right Ho, Jeeves* for our October 3 meeting. We found it very much fun to read. Favorite moments included Gussie Fink-Nottle's drunken award presentation and chef Anatole's diatribe at seeing Gussie through the skylight: "Tell the boob to go away. He is as mad as some March hatters." For some reason, almost everyone gets engaged to Madeline Bassett. We also loved flawed Tuppy Glossop, sporty Aunt Dahlia, the unseen shark, and Bertie's 18-mile bike ride to get a missing key—a painful lesson caused by Bertie's temporary lack of faith in Jeeves's abilities.

On Plum's birthday (October 15), we met, toasted Plum, and chatted about the book clubs in which we are variously members. The Wodehouse group is somewhat more congenial and charming than others. The Military History group is confrontational, and my Mystery/ Crime book club attracts some pretty smart cookies, but every now and then someone drops out and is never seen again. Odd.

—Mike Engstrom

The Orange Plums

(Orange County, California)

Contact: Lia Hansen or Diana Van Horn

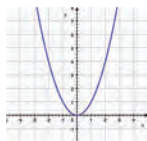


AHOY! Admiral Biffen here, pulling up to the pier to deliver the latest cargo of news from the Orange Plums. Said news? Why, that there's no news, of course! COVID continues to keep us cowed, and we hold our monthly meetings, like most others, via Zoom. It's still fun, assuredly, and we are now reading—and about to discuss the many merits of—*Thank You, Jeeves*. But the one thing we certainly all agree on, inside our chapter and across the breadth of our beloved society, is that the eventual eradication of that nasty little virus is a development devoutly to be wished.

Until next time, I remain faithfully yours,
Admiral George J. "Fruity" Biffen (Jeff Porteous)

The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity) Contact:
George Vanderburgh



The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)

Contact: Doug Kendrick



The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein



THE PICKERINGS have met twice since the last issue of *Plum Lines*. Taking advantage of the dying summer days, we gathered for a (socially distanced) face-to-face and in-person meeting at Ann and Charlie Bieneman's house on September 11.

After browsing, sluicing, and socializing, President for Life Luann called the meeting to order. The reading assignment was *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. This novel seems to have a larger than usual cast: Lord Ickenham, Lord Emsworth, and the denizens of Blandings Castle, plus several characters from other sagas appearing in minor roles. Sir Roderick Glossop of the Jeeves saga, Horace Pendlebury-Davenport—who also appears in a Jeeves novel—and some Drones put in appearances here. One Blandings stalwart who has a very minor role is Beach, who usually plays a bigger part but seems to have been crowded out. Empress of Blandings plays herself and does it very well.

Elliott compared Pongo Twistleton to Freddie Threepwood. Both are idiots until they marry. Someone said that was just like Elliott with Elyse. Your humble scrivener mentioned that his favorite line was when Horace complained that being rich meant his friends were always trying to touch him for money. Uncle Fred said that was the price he had to pay for having an ancestor who could not say "No" to Charles the Second. It is remarkable how many peerages and fortunes were conferred upon the out-of-wedlock sons of monarchs.

With the mercury having dipped substantially by October 16, the Pickerings eschewed an outdoor gathering but convened by Zoom. The reading choice was *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, aka *The Cat-Nappers*. The book was published in late 1974, a few months before Plum's death. Several old characters from other stories put in appearances: E. Jimpson Murgatroyd and Tipton Plimsoll from the Blandings saga and Major Plank from *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*. The book is mostly set in the village of Maiden Eggesford, which first appeared in the short story "Tried in the Furnace." Angelica Briscoe (from that short story) also puts in an appearance, but there is no mention of her fiancé.

Elliott mentioned that he thought Wodehouse was trying something new with this book. He thought that Jeeves is responsible for the repeated return of the cat and that he arranges the deus ex machina solution by having his aunt claim ownership when she really wasn't the owner. The reason we don't know for sure is that Jeeves does not tell Bertie the details of how he saved Bertie from a potential disaster. Dicron shared that he had read that theory in the Wikipedia entry for *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*. Sure enough, when we looked it up, there it was, all properly attributed to Elliott!

Elliott opined that this book was a return to form for Plum after some novels that were less than his best, but most of the other Pickerings disagreed, especially in the final chapter. Bertie wraps up the story by describing a letter from his Uncle Tom Travers that describes the events at the big horse race. If Plum had been a bit younger, he might have written a few more chapters with Bertie describing events as he experienced them. Ah, what might have been! Perhaps Plum wanted to end the book so he could try to finish *Sunset at Blandings*.

The Zoom format is working well for us, but it is not the same as meeting in person. We decided to hold our annual Holiday Party virtually as well, and since we are not able to partake in Larry's superb shakshuka, he has promised to give us each a lesson in making it so we can still carry on the tradition as well as COVID allows.

—Robert Walter

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



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



<https://wodehouse-society.nl>



A GAIN the Knights came together via Zoom, this time meeting on October 17. For two new members, Yvonne Heijkants and psychiatrist Gerben

Hellinga, this was an exquisite chance to mingle with twenty society participants who were celebrating the 139th birthday of P. G. Wodehouse. Next year will be a special jubilee, with PGW's 140th birthday and the 40th birthday of our Dutch Wodehouse society.



Two members, father Dick Vleeskruijer and daughter Marieke, had prepared the first Anatole dish: *Mignonette de poulet petit duc*. The recipe was published in the recent edition of our society journal, *Nothing Serious*. Dick played the role of a butler to serve this superb dish, “God’s gift to the gastric juices.” You were almost willing to “unbutton the waistcoat and loll back, breathing heavily and feeling that life has no more to offer” (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*).



In 1984, Knight Kees de Haan, creator of the name *Nothing Serious* for our journal, earned a bottle of Jeeves Jenever (Dutch gin). Last month this bottle was accidentally smashed, so a brand new one was offered to him. Journal editor Herman van Riel was also rewarded with a bottle for his decade of editorial

services. He showed a famous Mister Mulliner's Old Tawny Portwine, found in the society archive.

The theme of the meeting was My First Wodehouse. All members shared their first contact with the Wodehouse world. Some of them were introduced by their grandmother, father, or other relative; some began as a book collector or by reading Wodehouse at boarding school; some had English teachers who enthusiastically urged their students to read Wodehouse.

The meeting ended with a Wodehouse quiz: Try to guess some of the 22 book covers with blurred titles and various characters drawn by the Dutch cartoonist Peter van Straaten—for example, a cover with a white dinner jacket (answer: *Bravo, Jeeves* [Right Ho, Jeeves]). Dame Josepha Olsthoorn won the contest.

Finally, all the Knights watched the Blandings movie *Hallo to All This* (2014), in which Gally Threepwood refers to the story of the prawns in his reminiscences, based on *Fish Preferred / Summer Lightning*.

—Peter Nieuwenhuizen

Rugby In All Its Niceties

(Rugby, Tennessee Region) Contact: Donna Heffner



The Size 14 Hat Club

(Halifax, Nova Scotia) Contact: Jill Robinson



The West Texas Wooster

(West Texas) Contact: Troy Gregory



“But then everybody says that, though you have a brain like a peahen, you’re the soul of kindness and generosity.”

Well, I was handicapped here by the fact that, never having met a peahen, I was unable to estimate the quality of these fowls’ intelligence, but she had spoken as if they were a bit short of the grey matter, and I was about to ask her who the hell she meant by “everybody,” when she resumed.

“You want to marry me yourself, don’t you?”
Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit (1954)

Edmund Jacobitti

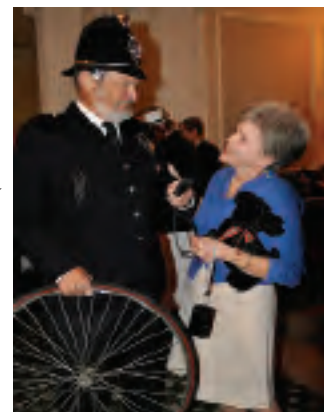
EDMUND “ED” JACOBITTI passed away on October 27, 2020. Ed is survived by his wife, Barbara, and his son, Dante. Ed and Barbara were frequent TWS convention attendees and were part of the joy and jollity of those TWS gatherings at which they were present.

A native of Newark, New Jersey, Ed was appointed as an assistant professor in the Social Sciences Division of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville in September 1970. An active scholar and professor of Modern European Intellectual History, he retired from SIUE at the rank of professor in 1997 but continued to teach as an emeritus professor until August 2000. Ed’s research focused on the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce.

Ed was a founder and editor of *The Journal of Machiavelli Studies*. He had many outdoor interests and was a fan of classical music and grand opera. He was an accomplished chef as well, and wrote cooking columns for the *Alton Telegraph*. In addition to all of this, he enjoyed Wodehouse. Barbara says that “Ed so enjoyed the Wodehouse group. We made such great friends there. We attended several conventions and traveled with the PGW group in England in 2012.” Our sympathies to Barbara and the Jacobitti family.



*Ed Jacobitti
as Constable Oates
and Barbara Jacobitti
as Stiffy Byng
at the 2013 TWS
Chicago convention*



In making love, as in every other branch of life, consistency is the quality most to be aimed at. To hedge is fatal. A man must choose the line of action which he judges to be best suited to his temperament, and hold to it without deviation. If Lochinvar snatches the maiden up on to his saddle-bow he must continue in that vein.

A Gentleman of Leisure (1910)

Cuppy and Plum

BY KAREN SHOTTING

IN WILL CUPPY'S *How to Tell Your Friends from the Apes*, he describes many animals, including the gnu. In his chapter on the gnu, he includes this footnote:

For valuable information regarding the habits and customs of retired Gnu-hunters named Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake, of Bludleigh Court, Lesser Bludleigh, Goresby-on-the-Ouse, Bedfordshire, I am indebted to Chapter V in *Mr. Mulliner Speaking*. . . . It seems likely that the uncontrollable desire to hunt Gnus arises either from a superabundance or a complete lack of Gnus in the infantile environment.

PGW provided the introduction to this work, stating that it was one of the funniest books he'd ever read, and that Cuppy wrote the funniest thing ever said about Pekingese dogs: "I don't see why they should look so conceited. They're no better than we are." PGW also wrote a review of the book for the November 29, 1931, *New York Herald Tribune Books*. It's not one of the funniest books I've ever read, but I am a big fan of Cuppy's writing, with the best (in my opinion) being *How to Be a Hermit; or, A Bachelor Keeps House*.

JOHAN DAWSON'S book *P. G. Wodehouse's Early Years* was mentioned in our Autumn issue with a publication date of October 15. Complications ensued, but John hopes to have it out in December. Updates will be posted at <http://madameulalie.org/jdawson/wey.html> and announced on PGWnet.

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We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, and letters. 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.

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