

P.G. Wodehouse



"It never matters what a Wodehouse caper is about..... merely that it exists."Phoebe Adams, Atlantic.

To commemorate Lady Wodehouse's 99th birthday, May 22d, 1984, a floral tribute was sent on behalf of all members of our Society. We received this LETTER OF THANKS:

"To all members of The Wodehouse Society:

I was overwhelmed when your beautiful bouquet of flowers arrived Tuesday, along with the many lovely cards and loving messages congratulating me on my birthday. I wish I could thank each and every one of you in person, you made me feel so happy.

With love and all good wishes and many, many thanks.

Ethel Wodehouse."

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES: The San Francisco Chapter held its quarterly meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Blanc on May 26th. The guest of honor was our president, Robert A. Hall, Jr. At least two chapter members who own copies of Bob's The Comic Style of P. G. Wodehouse (Archon, 1974) forgot to bring them along to be signed, later lashing themselves with self-recrimination (if that's the word I want). The Delaware Valley Chapter met, on June 10th, at the home of Bette and Ken Thompson, where they enjoyed Ken T's one-acter, "The Clicking of Clara," performed by The Wodehouse Players.

SADNESS PREVAILS in the inner sanctum of TWS this day as ten members are dropped from the rolls and their names in The Tome are redlined. Stamped across their names: N.P.D. for nonpayment of dues. Mr/Mrs OM manfully and womanfully fight back the tears....Pres. Bob and VP Jim are grim but firm in their resolve. They know what manner of deprivation shall now be the lot of The Ten: No longer may the resumes of these folk proudly point to membership in our prestigious Society, nor can it be used to pad their obituaries. Yet, there is hope. If we should receive frantic inquiries: "Why haven't we been receiving that indispensable newsletter, PLUM LINES?" we will happily reinstate them upon payment of dues, past and present. We try to be fair....

A STRONG NOTE OF PROTEST has been received from Jeremy Thompson, TWS, whose auctorial pride was injured by the cloak of anonymity with which we obscured his masterful "BAILS, you bounder, not BALLS!" in the last issue of PLUM LINES. (Slight pause while you dig PL out of File 13.) "I spent," he says, "a whole week polishing that rejoinder, and when mailed was mighty proud." And well he might be. The entire staff of PLUM LINES deeply regrets the unintended stifling of a promising literary career.

QUESTION & ANSWER DEPT....

Dear Sir or Madam, as the case may be: I noticed in the May issue of PLUM LINES a statement to the effect that Jeeves' first name is Reginald. Is there any documentation for this? Curious.

Dear Curious: Isn't Curious rather an unusual name? Is it a first name, middle n., or last? Or is it an alias? A lot of nerve you have questioning statements in PLUM LINES. Yes, Curious, C. Northcote Parkinson fully documented Reginald as factual in his fully documented biographical work, Jeeves - a Gentleman's Personal Gentleman, St. Martin's Press, NY, 1979. What more documentation do you want? OM

Mr. H. B. Quoyoon, TWS, is a full-time purveyor of magazines of the 1900-1960 era. He tells us that first-appearances of Plum's fiction, along with critical essays about his life and works, have become a specialty.

ABOUT OUR SUPPLEMENT: Florence Cunningham, TWS, our Pacific Northwest Correspondent, tells of her visit to The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York City, on the occasion of its P. G. Wodehouse Centenary Exhibit and Celebration, October 15th, 1981. Unfortunately, Florence had not learned of the event in time to buy tickets for the entire evening, so she missed the dinner, speeches, and entertainment. But her account of the exhibit will pleasantly refresh the memories of those Plumies who were there and arouse the envy of those who were not. The exhibit was based on the collection of Jimmy Heineman, TWS, augmented with loans from Ella and Charles Palmer, David Jasen, Charles E. Gould, Jr., and others. The exhibit was later displayed at the National Theater, London, for two months.

ON A PLEASANT JUNE AFTERNOON (having motored to Michigan for their granddaughter's high school graduation ceremonies) Mr/Mrs OM enjoyed the hospitality of Isabel and Edward Galligan in Kalamazoo. Dr. Galligan, in addition to teaching in the English Dept at Western Mich. Univ., does a dab of literary work: H. L. Mencken - The Best Days, Knopf, NY, 1980, selected and with an introduction by Edward L. Galligan. It carries the OM Seal of Approval. Ed has an upcoming essay on Plum, soon to be published by a well-know periodical (OM, whose mind refuses to store minute detail, has forgotten which periodical), and may be able to let us use it as a supplement.

UNSOLICITED TESTIMONIAL:

"I have never been associated with nicer people than those I have met through The Wodehouse Society. Doug Stow."

OM
The Oldest Member

P.S. This newsletter could be much better if we only had a few contributing correspondents..... it is difficult to manufacture a newsy newsletter when we receive so little from YOU!

Last-minute addendum: Another Member! Morehouse Merrifield, Box 104, Philmont, NY 12565

15 July 1984 WCY + 3

SEE WHAT YOU MISSED.....

A personal account of the Wodehouse Exhibit at The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, NY, as part of the Wodehouse Centenary Celebration, on October 15th, 1981.....

From the moment I walked through the grillwork double doors of The Morgan Library, I felt that I was entering Blandings Castle itself. David Low's famous caricature of P. G. Wodehouse in a red-checked jacket, standing with hands in his pockets and looking pleasantly at the long line of visitors through a pair of very bright eyes, gave a warm welcome from the opposite wall. "It's all here," he seemed to say, "everything I devoted my life to. I am so glad you enjoy my books. Have a good time."

As I turned to go into the exhibit, a large oil painting of the Empress of Blandings looked contentedly at me from across the room. Her shiny fat blackness was radiant against the inset of red velvet in the ornate gilt frame. Lord Emsworth's pig man had fed her well for that portrait. But how did Lady Constance allow an artist to paint at the sty? Perhaps Lord Emsworth slipped the Empress into London one dark night and up fourteen flights of stairs to the "suitable" artist's studio. We'll never know.

"Shall we start from the left and go around the room?" my cousin (Helen Walling, TWS) asked. That brought me back to reality, and we began our trek to examine the lighted display cases filled with manuscripts, first editions, personal letters, notes, television plays, magazine articles, stage plays, movies, school stories, musicals, and honors.

Splashy playbills used to advertise Those Three French Girls, A Damsel in Distress, Oh, Kay!, Picadilly Jim, and other shows, displayed on the wall, drew our attention to the theater programs, sheet music, and manuscripts of his books used for movies in the cases below.

I looked up from my perusal to see the steady flow of people of all ages and nationalities who were enjoying each part of the exhibit as much as we. I wanted to know who they were, where they came from, what they did.

A girl in jeans and running-shoes with green pompoms poking over the heels looked intently at the display labeled "Wodehouse with an Accent," showing his novels translated into Finnish, German, Hungarian, Italian, Ukrainian, Esperanto, Norwegian, Portugese, Swedish, Turkish, French, and Czechoslovakian.

A librarian (I asked her what she did) with a pixi haircut visited with us in front of a group of James Montgomery Flagg's original illustrations mounted on the wall.

As we moved along, an attractive young Japanese woman in a red suit and slender red sandals called our attention to the dis-

play of the original manuscript for the novel The Girl in Blue, with revisions in Plum's handwriting. Also written in his own hand on a 1968 Westhampton Agency diary was a preparatory note for this same novel. We laughed as we read:

"This was not just a girl, but one of such surpassing beauty that one blinked when beholding her. The sort of girl who makes men catch their breath and straighten their neckties. A girl sheiks of Araby go into tents after."

Three slim, trim, impeccably dressed young men bent over the display labeled "Wodehouse Biographies and Critical Works." Herbert Warren Wind's The World of P. G. Wodehouse, published by Praeger in 1972, was brought out in England during the centenary year, and Portrait of a Master, by David A. Jasen, came out in a revised edition, published by Continuum. Other books published to coincide with the One Hundredth Anniversary Celebration included A Wodehouse Companion, by Richard Usborne, Wodehouse on Crime, edited by D. R. Bensen, with a foreword by Isaac Asimov, Wodehouse at War, by Ian Sproat, and P. G. Wodehouse - A Centenary Celebration, edited by James H. Heineman and Donald R. Bensen, published jointly by The Pierpont Morgan Library and Oxford University Press. (Ed. note: Also published in 1981 were Thank You, Wodehouse, by J. H. C. Morris, London, and In Search of Blandings, by N. T. P. Murphy, privately printed. P. G. Wodehouse, a Biography, by Frances Donaldson, Knopf, NY, was published in 1982.)

We passed displays devoted to the Psmith, and Mr. Mulliner; and to the magazines which bought Wodehouse stories. From bright covers beamed the names: Cosmopolitan, Good House-keeping, Colliers, Woman's Home Companion, Observer, Saturday Evening Post, Judge, Strand, and Punch, to name a few.

Another lighted case revealed P. G. Wodehouse's own copy of The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, lying open to the back end paper where, in pencil, he methodically recorded each day he was imprisoned by the Germans during World War II. He wrote of this same Shakespeare volume in his camp diary, published in part in The Performing Flea by William Townsend:

"To make a really luxurious plank bed you need four planks. Owing to a shortage of wood, we got only three. We could arrange these as we liked - a solid mass of planks in the middle, if we pleased or, if we preferred it, a plank here, a plank there. The great thing was to get the springy one in the middle. Getting the pillow just the right height was always a difficulty. Some men used suit-cases for bolsters, but I found that I obtained the best results with a sweater, a cardigan, a pair of trousers, and The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. Shakespeare, who wrote not for an age, but for all time, produced exactly the amount of stuff to make him an ideal foundation."

This testimonial of grim times was loaned for the exhibit by Lady Wodehouse.

The last area we visited in that large room displayed honors received by P. G. Wodehouse during the ninety-three years of his life. Among them were an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Oxford University, a place in Mme Tussaud's Wax Museum, and the sparkling regalia marking

his knighthood.

I looked for some display testifying to the time and place of P. G. Wodehouse's birth. Then I remembered that, by the front entrance, behind an arrangement of flowers, were some documents and a photograph of a house. There we looked at a glossy photograph of a three-story brick home with gingerbread trim over the entrance and decorating two of the gables. The card alongside read: "It is here at 59 Epsom Road, Guildford, Surrey, on October 15th, 1881, that Pelham (Plum) Grenville Wodehouse was born, the son of Henry Ernest Wodehouse and Eleanor Wodehouse (née Deane). The house in which Wodehouse was born still stands, only the address has changed. A plaque distinguishing this house as his birthplace was unveiled in a ceremony, October 15th, 1981, by Mrs. S. Hornby, a granddaughter, who seems to be the only member of the family not in New York at the time."

Near this picture were the certificate of birth and the baptismal certificate of P. G. Wodehouse, and a group of drawings. These drawings (Ed. note: loaned by Ella and Charles Palmer) were done by his artist mother, the first done when Plum was one week old. The card alongside read: "Drawings of P. G. Wodehouse from birth to nine years of age, executed by his mother, Eleanor Deane Wodehouse." These beautiful line drawings, painted in delicate watercolor, captured our hearts. Perfect in detail. The same quintessence in her artistry is in P. G. Wodehouse's writing, as elusive to definition as quicksilver to the touch. She labeled one drawing in fine lettering: "Baby trying to climb in chair by himself - such a pleasant baby."

For one hundred years, I thought, he has made the earth a pleasanter place in which to live. We left with reluctance. We had a luncheon engagement with a friend from our home town. We had to be on time.

As we stepped out of The Morgan Library into the October sunshine, I thought: This is the same feeling one gets when opening a Wodehouse novel...as if you are in warm sunshine. Let's hope that his books will be around as long as the sun, to cheer up the world.

.....Florence Cunningham.