



"Where else...is [there] a humorist of fairly long service whose work shows no sign of diminution but actually gets better and better?" Will Cuppy, 1930

If you received one of those over-sized ten-dollar bills with your February PLUM LINES and didn't recognize it as a dues statement...well, it was. Happily, we report that 56% of those 'billed' sent their checks or money orders; 44% have yet to do so. Consult your consciences...TWS cannot live on enthusiasm alone....

RESIGNATION - EFFECTIVE 31 DEC 1987, WCY 8:

LAST APRIL SIXTH, IN '87, AT 15 MINUTES PAST ELEVEN, OM (ADMIRER BY ALL HIS PEERS) ATTAINED THE AGE OF EIGHTY YEARS. NOT SO AWF'LY HARD TO DO; WITH PATIENCE, YOU MAY DO IT TOO. OM HOPES TO HAVE A LITTLE LEISURE TIME TO SIT AND WHITTLE, READ MORE BOOKS, AND COGITATE, BEFORE IT * GETS TOO DOGGONE LATE.....SERIOUSLY, AND WITHOUT THE DOGGEREL, OUR MOM-AND-POP ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATION IS FAST BECOMING INADEQUATE FOR THE NEEDS OF A STEADILY GROWING SOCIETY. CHAPTER TEAMWORK MAY BE THE ANSWER. GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT. [*UNCOÖPERATIVE TYPEWRITER]

HEADSTART PROGRAM:

Jason Joseph Knox, TWS, ten months of age, is our youngest member, having displaced Master Robert Stow (6 years) as the holder of that distinction. Jason was enrolled by his mother, Linda Knox, on the solemn promise that he shall be inculcated with a keen sense of humor and a deep appreciation of stories by Plum.

BOOKS RECEIVED:

The World of Mr. Wodehouse, a Bibliography, Bjarne Nielsen, Antikvariat Pinkerton, Nansengade 68, 1366 Copenhagen, DENMARK. @\$10 (airmail add \$1) £7 (airmail add £1). In English by a competent Wodehousean. P. G. Wodehouse's Danske Verden by the same author, same address. This is a bibliography of PGW books which have been translated into Danish. \$4 (airmail, \$1), £3 (airmail £1).

P. G. Wodehouse in Nederlanse Vertaling, Rob Kooy, TWS, privately printed. A bibliography of Wodehouse books translated into Dutch, with English titles shown. Last 2 pp (folded) display all titles in English, making a handy checklist for collectors. \$7 (airmail \$1), £5 (airmail £1). Address: Mr. Rob Kooy, TWS, Postbus 146, 1400 AC Bussum, THE NETHERLANDS.

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NOTE: P. G. Wodehouse, A Pictorial Biography, Joseph Connolly, TWS, will be reissued in June as a large-format paper-covered volume in the 'Literary Lives' series by Thames & Hudson, 30-40 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1, England. Priced at £5.95 (about \$9.00 U.S. plus 15% for handling and shipping).

"A man isn't poor if he can still laugh." Raymond Hitchcock

Q/A DEPT: It has been said that Plum's frequent use of 'Bill' in his stories may be traced to Bill Townend, a classmate and close friend. Whence 'Sally?' ...Knowledge Seeker. Dear Knolly, The Townend connection may be exaggerated; 'Bill' and 'Sally' were popular nicknames with the stage-going and story-reading public, and still are. OM

OM

The Oldest Member

THE SEARCH FOR THE EMPRESS OF BLANDINGS

by Col. N. T. P. Murphy, TWS

When I finished the first edition of In Search of Blandings, I was conscious that I had left three questions unanswered:

Where was Bertie's flat, in real life?

Where did Lord Emsworth come from?

Where did the Empress of Blandings come from?

I have managed to answer the third question at long last. However, I only found the details as the new hardback edition of In Search of Blandings was being printed and I had to squeeze the story into a few lines. Readers of PLUM LINES deserve the full treatment, especially since the new edition has a superb appendix by Walter S. White, TWS, on the Wodehouse golf stories.

In June, 1985, I arranged to meet Tom Sharpe at Hunstanton Hall so that we could find the famous Octagon where Bertie was besieged by the swan. Tom Sharpe, probably England's best-selling humorous novelist, and I hadn't met but had corresponded; we found the Octagon and walked around the grounds of Hunstanton.

As we came through the old kitchen gardens, Tom noticed an old chicken-run, a small wired enclosure, and suggested light-heartedly that it might be the Empress' old pig-sty. We argued amicably over this, and I noticed a few yards further on the remains of what clearly had been a brick-built sty. If there had been an Empress at Hunstanton, I claimed, this is where she would have lived. And as we continued discussing the point, I realised that I wasn't that far wrong.

The argument runs like this:

- a. The Empress first appears in Summer Lightning (UK)/Fish preferred (US) in 1929.
- b. From Performing Flea, we know that Wodehouse was having difficulty with the plot in 1925-26. He couldn't get it as he wanted and didn't produce the final draft till 1927-28.
- c. In Summer Lightning/Fish Preferred, Lord Emsworth is no longer the rose grower or pumpkin enthusiast he had been previously; he became the pig-fanatic we all remember.
- d. Where, in the 1926-28 period, would he have got the idea?
- e. All true enthusiasts know that, in 1981, a man discovered a book on pig-breeding published in 1919 which included a superb illustration of a black Berkshire sow - and, in one corner, the signature of the artist - 'Wipple.' But where would PGW have seen such a book?

It suddenly struck me that the timing was the important thing. Wodehouse is looking for a twist/turn to improve Summer Lightning in 1926, he has the answer in 1927-28 and we read of the Empress for the first time. And, from the letters he wrote in that period, Hunstanton was the only country or rural address he had. Would he have got the

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idea in London or New York? I doubt it.

The next step was to look more closely at the owner of Hunstanton at that time - Charles LeStrange. From the invaluable Times obituaries, I discovered that he was a bachelor, that he came back from the First World War to Hunstanton and that he had taken up the breeding of Jersey cattle, in which he had been very successful.

No mention of a pig anywhere - but....Wodehouse was a friend of LeStrange's. Would he parody or satirize him directly? In any event, what was I really looking for? I wasn't looking for an earl obsessed with a pig. I was looking for a land-owner, preferably a bachelor (married men normally aren't as obsessive as bachelors), very keen on some type of animal breeding, and whom Wodehouse would have come into close contact in 1926-27. And Charles LeStrange fitted exactly.

So I had found a reasonable theory. Wodehouse in close contact with the right sort of man at exactly the right time; but I needed the last piece of information. Was there one special animal that LeStrange cosseted above all others?

The present owners of the estate were unable to help me but, luckily, England is full of enthusiasts able to provide information on the most unusual of subjects - if one is able to find them. I'm delighted to say that the Jersey Cattle Society of the United Kingdom had no difficulty in telling me what I wanted to know. LeStrange did have one special animal - Glenny 2nd. Look at her record and remember that the Empress first appeared in print in 1929:

Glenny 2nd

- 1927 1st Prize Open Class Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely;
- 1928 1st Prize Open Class Eastern Counties Show, Blythwood Bowl Champion Royal Norfolk Show, Champion Suffolk Show.
- 1929 Reserve Champion and Reserve Blythwood Bowl winner at Essex Show, 3rd Prize at (National) Royal Show;
- 1930 Champion Kent Show.

And, sometime during that visit of 1925, I am certain that Wodehouse escaped from his host's urging to come and admire once more this wonder-animal, hid himself in the library, picked up the first book to hand and found himself looking at the picture of the Berkshire sow 'by Wipple' - that's where the Empress came from.

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Lest we be too prone to believe Lord Emsworth to be the top prize winner in the History of Eccentricity, let us consider an earlier Noble of the Realm, one Francis Gardner, Lord Gardenstone (b.?-d.1793) whose fondness for swine far outshone that of Emsworth's. Hone's Year Book, William Hone, London, 1832,* tells us that "...He had a predilection for pigs. A young one took a particular fancy for his lordship, and followed him wherever he went, like a dog, reposing in the same bed. When it attained the years and size of swinehood, this was inconvenient. However, his lordship, unwilling to part from his friend, let it sleep in his bedroom and, when he undressed, laid his clothes upon the floor as a bed for it. He said he liked the pig for it kept his clothes warm till the morning."