



Plum Lines

A Quarterly Publication of The Wodehouse Society

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WCY + 7

A Thank-You Note for Bill and Mary Blood

As Bill Blood announced in the November 1987 issue of Plum Lines, he has stepped down after eight years as editor and publisher. In that time he not only founded and promoted the Society, but produced a newsletter that for most of us is the Society. All of us are greatly in his debt for giving us a fellowship of laughter and fun and goodwill. But we are only deprived of his editorship. His wit and wisdom will continue to delight and guide us, if we are fortunate, for many years to come. We look forward to his future contributions to Plum Lines. The present editor wishes to express his gratitude for the many ways in which Bill Blood has helped him assume his new duties.

The financial report appearing below is our last from Mary Blood, our first and only financial secretary until very recently. Her job was unglamorous but vitally necessary, and Mary performed it with scrupulous care for many years. We are indebted to her for this and her many other contributions to the life of our Society, alone and with her husband Bill.



Thank you, Bill and Mary!

"We just happened to be sitting in a cemetery, and I asked her how she would like to see my name on her tombstone."

If I Were You

Plum Speaks

This issue of Plum Lines has a very special treat for all of us: the previously unpublished text of a talk by P. G. Wodehouse himself, made not long before his death. I understand he recorded the talk for British radio at his home in Remsenberg somewhat earlier than October 1974. (I would be glad to receive any other information about the circumstances of the talk.) Pauline Blanc, TWS, provided this copy of the talk, with the following note.

Grateful acknowledgment must be given to our good friend Alex Hemming, O.A., for lending me a tape of Plum's 1974 talk for British radio (to listen to but not to re-tape.) Those who attended the San Francisco convention will remember Alex's witty "Back to Dulwich" after-dinner speech.

It was a joy to transcribe Plum's last talk, particularly to hear his voice. Sometimes I would flounder over a word though, and it was at such a time that I sent an appeal to Dr. Dan Garrison, who came to my rescue with patience and humor, and being a word-processing expert (when not teaching Classics and publishing his Wodehouse Who's Who!), he presented us with this finished transcript of the talk. Plum was in his ninety-second year and was about to become Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. We hope this paper will make him come alive in a special way for all of you.

Editor's note: The drawings in this Plum Lines are by Pauline.

The Empress Imperiled!

Our esteemed colleague Rob Kooy, TWS, of the Dutch Wodehouse Society sadly notes that "Lord Emsworth doesn't pay attention for five minutes, and someone else gets the prizes". Rob reprints a recent newspaper account of a debacle:

Mermaid and her daughter Gertrude, the pigs of the Archbishop of Canterbury, received prizes at a big farm show in Kent. Mermaid was second in the mixed class and Gertrude first in the class of almost grown piglets. She was also crowned in the category of promising pigs.

Clearly, the Archbishop of Canterbury is sound on pigs, for which we must all be grateful. But these youthful animals will pose a threat for years to come. Your diligent editor will forward this news at once to The Bridgnorth, Shifnal and Albrighton Argus (with which is combined the Wheat-Grower's Intelligencer and Stock Breeder's Gazeteer). Perhaps it will arouse Lord Emsworth to a renewed sense of his responsibilities.



"I am Lord Tilbury", said His Lordship, looking like a man unveiling a statue of himself.

Sam the Sudden

A Plum in The Abbey?

The following item is from a column by Godfrey Smith in The Sunday Times, London, December 20, 1987.

The Queen Mum is known privately to favor the idea. Graham Green is keen, and William Douglas Home is leading the campaign. All P. G. Wodehouse fans will welcome the plan to put a memorial slab to the master on the floor of Westminster Abbey. It would simply give his name and dates. After all, Hilaire Belloc, who described Plum as "the head of my profession" back in 1936, lies there already. Let's persuade the Dean (who may not need much persuasion) and chapter to do it forthwith.

Wouldn't letters from us be helpful?

Address:

The Very Reverend the Dean
Westminster Abbey
London W1
England

The correct salutation is Dear Sir:. We are once more indebted to Alex Hemming, who sent this newspaper clipping to Pauline Blanc. She kindly passed it on to me.



"I have no desire to be a deputy," said the butler, with the cold subtinkle in his voice which had once made the younger son of a marquess resign from his clubs and go to Uganda.

The Small Bachelor

With this issue we begin what we hope will be a regular contribution by Len Lawson, TWS, on new and current books, articles, and other material on Wodehouse entitled:

Something New

Did you know that a number of Wodehouse stories are available for rent or purchase on audio cassettes? Did you realize you can get a book with all the Mulliner stories for under \$10? How about a book with five Wodehouse novels for about the same price?

How many of you saw the mention of that great team of Wodehouse and Bolton in "The Way They Used to Make Them" in the November 2nd issue of Time? I have also seen two very nice articles on N. T. P. Murphy and his fantastic book In Search of Blandings. One was "Bertie Wooster's London" in Country Life, an English periodical, on November 8, 1984. My informant forgot the source of the other article, "The Wodehouse Man", by Tom Sharpe. If someone will let me know the magazine and date I'll tell the rest of you. It looks like Punch to me.

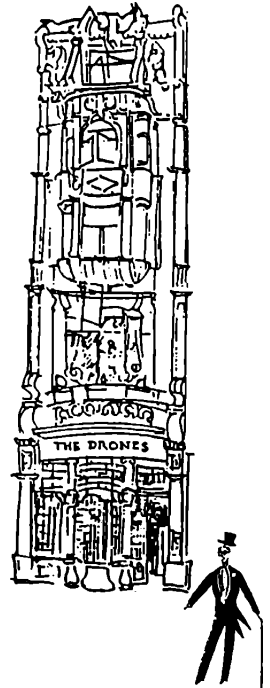
I mustn't overlook the recently published Who's Who in Wodehouse by Dan Garrison, TWS, the noted prosopographer. Sounds as if he is about to be arrested for nameless crimes, but he is in fact a fine stalwart fellow who performed the heroic task of listing the names and descriptions of virtually all the Wodehouse characters, with references to the stories in which they appear. He informs us in his preface that "By any reasonable reckoning, there are over 2100 characters in Wodehouse, half again as many as in Dickens and more than double the number in Shakespeare". An extremely useful reference with entertaining character descriptions. New York: Peter Lang, 1987.

It's worth noting that the excellent In Search of Blandings by N. T. P. Murphy, TWS, is still in print and available from Salem House Publishers.

Charles E. Gould, Jr. has just issued a catalog of eight Wodehouse items, chiefly first editions.

Will anyone who is actively selling new or used copies (reading copies or first editions) please contact me and I will list you in a future column for the convenience of readers.

I just wanted to give you a little flavor of what I have in mind for this column. I would like to keep current on what is available and where it can be found. I need cooperation from you, however. If you find something by or about P. G. Wodehouse or anything pertaining to his writing, let me know. I in turn will put it into this column for everyone. Most libraries keep periodicals for at least a few years, so even if a magazine article seems out of date, we can often find it. I would also like to know where audio and video tapes can be rented or purchased and how much they cost. If there is enough interest I'll make up lists of these items and make the lists available.



... said Gertrude with a significant gnash of her teeth.

Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin

Financial Statement for 1987

Balance on Hand Jan 1, 1987		\$1928.59
Receipts (dues)		<u>1328.00</u>
Total		\$3256.59
 Expenditures		
Copying and printing	\$703.10	
Postage	424.30	
Telephone	60.09	
Bank Exchange Fee	<u>1.50</u>	
		\$1188.99
 Balance on Hand Dec. 31, 1987		\$2067.60

*Plum Lines Moves to Felton
(try and find it on your map!)*

With this issue I have become editor and publisher of Plum Lines. My name, address (I moved very recently), and phone number are as follows:

If this seems rather formal I should say that for TWS purposes, and most others, I'm called Ed.

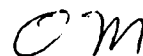
I'm taking this job with trepidation and a great desire to do well. I trepitate (not in public, of course) because I've never written for publication or edited, and I know that the life of the Society depends greatly on what I put into this newsletter. I also know that Bill Blood is a hard act to follow.

I'm convinced that for most of us Plum Lines is The Wodehouse Society. Very few of us belong to a local chapter or attend conventions. It can be pretty lonely out there, surrounded by people who have never heard of Wodehouse. And then, one happy day, Plum Lines arrives in the mail and assures us that we are members of a sturdy band of Wodehouse followers and all is

well with the world. I want Plum Lines to be as lively and as interesting and as much fun as we can make it. I'd like it to be a communication among members, not just a letter from me. I want it to involve you - I hope you will respond to it now and then.

I'll solicit your first response by asking what you want to see in Plum Lines. This is an official, earnest (I'm perspiring freely) appeal for ideas, suggestions, and proposals of all kinds. I won't come beating on your door if you make a suggestion; if you don't want to write I'll tiptoe quietly away and beat on someone else's door. This is our newsletter. Let me hear from you!

A few words about myself: I'm 63 years old and before my recent retirement I calculated physics on computers. I've read Wodehouse since I was in high school and joined the Society and its San Francisco chapter four years ago. I must admit I've never played golf - the implements provided seem wholly inadequate for the task. Nevertheless, by kind permission of Bill Blood, I make free to sign myself



The Oldest Member

"One does so wish, does one not, to avoid rannygazoo."

"Anselm Gets His Chance"

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

P.G. Wodehouse at 92,
speaking in 1974

I was asked the other day how I'd like to make a hit record. It made me smile because I don't trust the sound of my own voice. I wonder if everyone feels this way. I always feel one's voice comes out entirely different than anything you'd expected. There was a time when my wife bought me a dictating machine--oh, you know, one of those things Edgar Wallace used to have--and I started talking on a Jeeves novel and I had to stop after the first paragraph: it sounded too awful, like a very pompous clergyman. I suppose the first part of this novel was rather amusing, you know, a rather light sort of comedy thing, and then this awful voice came out [laugh]. Still, it's the only one I've got, so the public will have to bear it as best they can.

Can't remember a time when I didn't want to write. I was writing at the age of five. Don't know what I was doing before that: just loafing, I suppose. If you're an author you are supposed to have had a hell of a time at your public school, but I didn't. I simply loved my six years at Dulwich.

Originally, I was supposed to try for the Navy, but would have been killed for my poor eyesight, and I fell in love with the grounds of Dulwich when I went to see my brother there and I asked my father if I couldn't give up all ideas of the Navy and go to Dulwich.

Before that, I was rather lucky. My parents went to Hongkong and I was left with some people in Croydon and rather like Kipling--only Kipling had an awful bad time but I enjoyed my time there. Anyway then, I finally got to Dulwich. An excellent time there!

Then the trouble was what was to become of me when I left school. The wolf was not actually waiting at the door: there was always something in the kitty for the butcher and grocer, but the finances would never run to anything in the nature of a splash. My father

had retired and was living on a pension, and it was paid to him in rupees. And of all the earthly tricks, being paid in rupees was the worst. It was always jumping up and down and throwing fits. Just about the time when I was leaving Dulwich, I was going to try for a scholarship at Oxford. I think I would probably have got it. Suddenly the rupees started going down. Besides, there wasn't enough cash to send me to Oxford even if I got a scholarship, so I went into the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank.

You may think this is a bit of luck for the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank, but it wasn't so because I think I must have been about the worst clerk there ever was. I became a sort of legend in the place. Whenever there was a discussion in the manager's office about a new clerk and the idea that he's rather bad at his work, somebody was bound to say "But oh, you ought to have seen P.G. Wodehouse! They don't make them like him now: they lost the pattern." I was all right when they put me--started me off--in the postal department. I was meant to stamp and address letters and I was very well fitted for that, but then they took me out and put me into the inward bills and cash and all that sort of thing. I was no good for it ever.

The cross all young writers have to bear is that while they know they are going to be spectacularly successful some day, they find it impossible to convince their nearest and dearest they are ever going to amount to a row of beans. "Write in your spare time, if you must" parents say. They pull that old one about literature being a good something but a bad crutch.

I do not blame mine for feeling that a son in a bank making his eighty pounds a year just like finding it in the street was a sounder commercial proposition than one living at home and spending a fortune on stamps.

So for two years I continued to pass my

days in Lombard Street and write at night in my bed-sitting room--and a testing experience it was, for all I got out of it all was a collection of rejection slips. I could have papered the walls of a good-size banqueting hall with them. Best thing you could say of them is that some of them were rather pretty. The thing about rejection slips that I can say is that the glamor soon wears off. When you've seen one, you've seen them all. The handicap under which most beginning writers struggle is that they don't know how to write. I was no exception to the rule. Worse bilge than mine may have been submitted to the editors of London, but (it was then 1901 and 1902) I should think it's really unlikely. I was sorry for myself at the time when the stamped and addressed envelopes came home to me, but now I am sorry for the men who had to read my contributions.

My parents were living in Shropshire. Nothing would have suited me better than to have withdrawn to that earthly paradise and apply myself to turning out short stories, as I used to do at that time at the rate of one a day.

Rather a bit of luck--one of the masters at Dulwich, Beach Thomas, subsequently knighted in the First World War as a correspondent, was working then on the *Globe*: the "By The Way" column, which was a sort of--oh, supposed to be--funny: paragraphs, verses, and so on. I asked him if he could get me any holiday work there, and occasionally he took a day off and I was able to take a day off from the bank.

Then came a time when he was going away for a summer holiday and that meant of course that somebody would have to fill his spot for five weeks and if I didn't do it the job would go to somebody else. It took some thought, but I decided to resign from the bank and I went and worked for the *Globe*. It worked out all right; I made enough to live on for the first year. After that I made quite a bit. Well, there were two of us: there was the head of the column who got five pounds, and me who got three pounds a week. Eventually, the top man went off somewhere else and I got his job at five pounds, which of course was wealth in those days. I got a room (which of course was bed and breakfast) for twenty-one shillings a

week, and getting five pounds was just like buying cars and things like that.

That must have been about 1902--yes, 1902--and then after I had been there about eight years I went off for my holiday to New York, and when I got there the first thing that happened was that I sold two short stories, one for \$300 and one for \$200. Most I had in England for a short story was ten pounds. This was the place to be, so I resigned from the *Globe* and settled down in Greenwich Village to write. One of my short stories sold to *Colliers* and one to *Cosmopolitan*, so I thought I'd got two very fine markets there. I can rely on at least \$500 a week (for a couple of weeks), and they [laugh] never took another story of mine. I suppose I absolutely lacked confidence. The only time I really did feel that I was going to get somewhere was when I sold my first serial to the *Saturday Evening Post* for \$3500, which of course was enough to live on for a couple of years in those days. When I came over here after I sold those two short stories, I settled down in Greenwich Village and worked mostly for the pulps.

There was a chap called Bob Davies; I don't know how many magazines he edited, but there were an awful lot. He had one great quality: he would always supply you with a plot. You went to him and said "Bob, I want a plot." He'd take a couple of steps up and down and then give you one--probably something frightful, but he'd buy it. He supplied a plot of mine--I often recall. What was the--I think it was *The Coming of Bill* about seventy years ago. Jenkins did publish it as a book, but I have always been rather ashamed of it. That was my Bob Davies plot.

I got to working for *Vanity Fair*, a swank magazine for those days, edited by a chap called Crowninshield. I must have had a half dozen pseudonyms. J. Walker Williams was one--two famous comedy team names. Oh, a half dozen others. I practically wrote the magazine in those days. It was a *good* magazine; it certainly had some good contributors, Robert Benchley and Dorothy Parker. I eventually became the dramatic critic and then I left that job and Dorothy Parker got it. But everything happened with a rush. I had just got married. I had about fifty dollars and my wife had seventy dollars, and we went down to the country--we

got a house for twenty dollars a month and I was working on a thing called *Something New*--it's called *Something Fresh* in England. That is the one that sold to the *Saturday Evening Post*. It never occurred to me that I had any chance of getting into the *Saturday Evening Post*, and then shortly after that Guy Bolton and Jerry Kern started a series of shows at the Little Princess Theatre and they wrote a show called *Very Good, Eddie* and in my capacity as drama editor of *Vanity Fair* I went to watch it, and there I met Jerry again.

I had met him in 1906 and I had worked together with him for Seymour Hicks and Eileen Terris at the Old Aldwych, it was. We did a song called "Mr. Chamberlain" at the Aldwych and we did this song. It was a great success. I hadn't seen him since then.

He suggested that I should join him and Guy Bolton in doing the next piece, and we did a thing called *Oh, Boy!* which was a smash hit and then we did another called *Oh, Lady! Lady!* which was also a very big hit--in fact a bigger hit than *Oh, Boy!* It played in two theaters at the same time--the Princess, and the Hills Square Theater: another company. Those were the great days for writing shows because you didn't make so much money in New York but you made a fortune on the road. For instance, *Oh, Boy!* and *Oh, Lady! Lady!* had four companies out on the road while they were playing in New York. But at the same time the Chicago company was playing in a big theater and doing a very big business, and the Boston company--and there were the one-night stand companies, so a lot of money was coming in.

I worked with practically all the composers of those days. Ivan Caryll did a couple of shows with Harry Tierney the *Irene* man. Mostly with Jerry, of course.

Jerry was the most delightful chap in those days. He was sort of just starting. We--his situation was rather peculiar because he'd contribute about two or three songs to one of these Viennese musicals and they would be about the only thing worth listening to [laugh]. Remember like he did "They Wouldn't Believe Me" and things like that. Wonderful chap to have with you. No manager could boss you while Jerry was around. Charles Dillingham was about the biggest going those days. He (Jerry) went to a rehearsal and heard his

number being played and he said "Is that the way you are going to play my number?" They said "Yes" [laugh] and he just went and picked up all the music sheets--and we would give an eye tooth to get a song in a Dillingham production.

Jerry was the most wonderful man to work with. He was a great showman, to start with. That song of mine "Bill" that's in *Showboat*, that was written for *Oh, Lady! Lady!* That was a farcical story and we thought my "Bill" was too slow and not the right tone for that sort of show, so we cut it out. Then Jerry, years after--about six or seven, I forget how many--Jerry came to me in Hollywood. I can see him now coming up the garden, and he asked me if he could use "Bill" for *Showboat*. I said yes of course he could, and this was a great hit.

Curious thing--when *Oh, Dolly!* was in rehearsal, Harold Prince told that his partner in putting it on said "One thing you must cut out: that 'Hello, Dolly!' song." Nothing to do with the show--perfectly right, of course. Dolly was planted as a sort of belle of the town. I mean she was an ordinary bit of floss, and why would everyone in the restaurant welcome her like that? A problem, of course: he was quite right, but that was what made the show, of course.

Ages ago Guy and I and Jerry wrote a show review for a theater that has ceased to exist now for Ziegfeld and Dillingham. The boy who played the piano at rehearsals was George Gershwin. I remember George coming up to me on Broadway and saying he had a song accepted by somebody, I forget who, and could I get ... [here unintelligible] He made a very quick success. I suppose he was always a great composer but hadn't arrived by then. But George is dead, aged thirty-seven--tremendous shock. I have always been a great friend of Ira's. We correspond. He usually sends me something for Christmas, usually a magnum of champagne. This year a book about George--equally welcome, of course. Ira and I--we were working about the same time--he was beginning to get shows just about the time I was. We've been friends for fifty years or so.

Easiest job I ever had was *The Play's the Thing*. Gilbert Miller wanted me to do the adaptation and he gave me this condensation to do and it was frightfully easy. All I had to do, you know--put in an occasional laugh line but I

think it took me three days to do the thing and it was an enormous success. It was revived here this last season--a sort of stock company. The Molière shows depend so much on the acting. You have to have something very, very good. It was done in London. Gerald Du Maurier played it but he didn't like it [laugh], and he--I don't know--he didn't try or what; but there he was. It really was dismal the way he did it.

[We did] *Sitting Pretty* for the Duncan Sisters with an original song written by Irving Berlin, but I don't know, it kind of fell through. I don't think he liked doing music for which he didn't do the lyrics--anyway, he dropped out and Jerry Kern did the score finally. That was rather an instance of the sort of troubles you get into in the theater. We wrote all this show for the Duncan sisters. They probably were never heard of in England, but they were great stars in those days. Everything was fixed. They were going to play in our show, then they asked the manager Sam Harris if he would mind if they just went to Chicago for a few weeks to do a little thing they'd written themselves about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and he said no, for we wouldn't be starting our show for another month or two, and so they went there and their show ran for about two years. So we lost them. The show turned out all right in some respects, but it was written for these two girls and one of the girls we put in wasn't very good. Once you get your cast messed up like that it is very difficult to get ahead.

But I've had good luck in the theater because I very seldom had that happen to me. Any show I've been connected to has been quite straightforward. There was--you know--no crisis coming along at all.

* * * *

It's awfully difficult to say how a novel actually starts. I suppose it's largely a question of getting an idea. You have to see which group of characters will fit in; I mean, a Lord Emsworth story requires quite different treatment from a Jeeves story. The difficult thing about a Jeeves story is to give him his big scene at the end. When you've got that you've got everything. Lord Emsworth is rather different--the different types of construction

for an Emsworth story. I always write a very elaborate scenario for a story, especially if it's a novel. I have about 400 pages of notes: mostly absolutely incoherent and having nothing to do with the story as it finishes up. That's the only way I can work, I think. I don't know if other authors do the same, but I always have to get the end before I start writing. I'm just finishing a new Jeeves novel [*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen / The Cat Nappers*]. One more chapter to do and it's a very short chapter. The scenario for that changed very radically while I was writing. One gets ideas: you want to get to a certain point but there are several ways of getting to that point, and it's a job to choose the best one. I always have done this scenario. I suppose most authors have some sort of scenario. Mine is particularly elaborate.

You see, the thing is in a novel the characters change rather as you go along. Suddenly you get an idea for improving a character or making him a different character entirely. Some of us say the characters write the book by themselves, but I have to keep rather rigidly to my original idea. It's largely a question of confidence. I had no confidence in my stuff whatever, up until the time of *Something Fresh/Something New*. That one gave me confidence, feeling that the *Saturday Evening Post* thought that worth buying as a serial. The magazine collapsed in the curious way magazines collapse [laugh]. It had a circulation of about seven million, but that apparently wasn't good enough.

I think one generally finds you have too many characters. It is a good thing to drop one or two if you can. Yes, I remember--I forget which one it was, but the *Saturday Evening Post* said they liked the story, but it would be better if I dropped one or two of the characters. It took some doing, of course.

Now my last book, a thing called *Bachelors Anonymous*: that came very easily because the whole story was about how to prevent this motion picture magnate from getting married again.

I can think of one of my books that came out really easily and that was the one I wrote when I was a prisoner in a German camp--I think it was called *Money in the Bank*--because I had the plot practically complete when I went into the camp and it didn't give me any trouble

in the writing at all. Sometimes of course one gets absolutely stuck with this horrible--but I've had good luck in that way generally. I find that if I've got my scenario out I can always manage. Always I'm a little wary when I get near the end, especially this one I'm doing now. I wasn't at all certain about the end till I got right up to it. Then something used to happen to the momentum, I don't know what it is. In my early days, I tended to make myself a little too long. My trouble now is making it too short. I suppose really one gets to the point one wants to be quicker--that's what it is.

I'm complimented sometimes for the names of my characters, and I must say I do take a great deal of trouble over them. The comic ones are easy, but the straight ones always give me a lot of trouble. I don't know where I got the name Blandings. It just came to me. The great difficulty about names is you get a good name and you find it belongs to somebody you know very well and you don't like to use it. The name Jeeves--I got that while I was watching Warwickshire playing Gloucestershire at cricket and the Warwickshire bowler was a man called Jeeves. So I called him that and the Warwickshire Cricket Club presented me with this tie which I am wearing now [chuckle]. I am a sort of honorary member of the Warwickshire Cricket Club. But he grew gradually. Warwickshire was more or less of an inspiration.

I was writing a show story at the time about--he was called Reggie Pepper then. He became Bertie Wooster later and he gradually grew from that. Started with a few short stories, rather long intervals, and then some novels about him. I'm forced to admit it's not true to life: it's probably Edwardian. A fellow like Bertie, well, there wouldn't be any Berties now, would there? Not a bachelor with valets like Jeeves. Of course in my day they all did. That type was very prevalent in the days when I was in and about London. Later, Anthony Mortmoncy: he was very much the type of Bertie Wooster.

Of course with my stuff I always try to get the love story set first, I think it was Guy Bolton used to say "Get your love story right and the comedy'll take care of itself." It doesn't, actually, but it is a very good rule to go by. I mean it makes a solid foundation for a book. That is a thing I've never seen the

necessity of doing. I mean the necessity of having my characters keep up with my own age. I mean obviously if you do that--I mean Jeeves started in 1916, so presumably he'd be about ninety. But I never can see why one's got to do that.

Usborne wrote a thing in *Punch* some years ago about my stuff translated into French, and he showed how they--whenever they came to a difficult bit they rather were apt to dodge it, you know. They put down something that was much straighter than what I'd written; couldn't get the slang, I suppose. Occasionally they'd get the Jeeves from Japan or Yugoslavia or somewhere like that. I should think they must read them just as fast. I suppose they think they are just sort of satirical stuff. Now I was banned in Hungary. Do you remember a few years ago a great number of English authors were banned in Hungary? I was one of them. I suppose they thought my stuff was too little about the proletariat and too much about the earls and dukes. I know my Blandings is entirely out of date now. I don't suppose anyone could keep up an establishment like that any more, but I don't feel like spoiling it.

If I get an idea for a Jeeves story I don't even seem to have much trouble in writing the book. One of my difficulties in writing Jeeves stories is I've built up Aunt Dahlia so much now she has to have a part, just as Lord Emsworth's pig has to have a part. I can't do a Lord Emsworth story without his pig. Funny how one's methods change. I used to do all my stuff at the typewriter but now what I like to do is lie back in an armchair with a pad and do a page or two by hand. Then when I've done about ten pages--then get to the typewriter and type it all down. It's amazing how one can improve it. But I'm a slow writer--used to be a very quick writer, but recently I am rather slow and I think it rather good if I can do three pages in a day, whereas in the old days I used to do about five or six. When I was writing one of the Jeeves novels I was living down in the south of France and I got towards the end and I suddenly wrote the whole of the last twenty-six pages in one day, which I suppose is about 6000 words. Don't believe even Edgar Wallace could beat that.

Talking about Edgar Wallace, I went out to

dinner once; sat next to an old lady and she said how proud she was to be sitting next to me because her son has read everything I've written and they couldn't put my books down once they'd picked them up. She ended up and said "When I tell them I've been sitting next to Edgar Wallace, I don't know what they'll do!"

Edgar Wallace, now, is a most peculiar writer. The way he could just sit down and dictate his stuff onto a machine, I don't know how he did it. Of course it was all very coherent. I mean all his plots--his plots were pretty elaborate but I don't think he ever made a really bad mistake. I never found one.

One of the writers I knew very well was Conan Doyle. I always admired him, not do much the Sherlock Holmes stories, which I liked of course, but other stories. He wrote a thing called *The Stark Monroe Letters* which was very good and *Round the Red Lamp*--short stories. Great cricketer--I used to play cricket with him. He used to have a house party in the summer--cricket house parties, very pleasant. That's another thing you probably could not do nowadays, I think.

When Conan Doyle was in America he saw an ad in a paper about Conan Doyle's writing school--forget what the actual name of it was--about how Conan Doyle could teach you to write if you send twenty dollars or something. When he was telling me the story he said "I said to myself 'there's villainy afoot.'" [laugh] I always thought to myself he's the only man in the world who would have put it like that. I mean the ordinary man would have said "Pretty bad stuff going on here" or something or "Don't like the look of this." But if you notice, Sherlock Holmes always used an expression like that: "Come, Watson, the game is afoot." He started at a time when people did write like that, in that rather literary style. He was a wonderful man.

Kipling I didn't know at all. I met him a couple of times when he paid me the compliment of asking me how I ended my stories. Said he always had the trouble about ending a story and wanted to know how I did it. That was very nice of him. One of my favorite writers is Rex Stout. He is really awfully good. But we're all getting a little bit older: he's eighty-five now, I think. I don't know how many more novels he's got left in him. I shall be ninety-

three in October [laugh].

I haven't really any real thought of a formal thing of reading. I just read what happens to be there. I never miss an Agatha Christie or a Rex Stout, but at the same time the next day I may be reading Shakespeare. But you find you grow out of books. I don't myself: I find lately I've been re-reading a tremendous lot. I like essays very much and biographies and autobiographies--especially if they deal with people of my own time of life. That's the sort of book I can always read: a thing like that Stanley Holloway family book. For instance, I found the A.A. Milne autobiography book fascinating. Of course he and I were sort of running pals for quite a time. By gosh, what a thing reading is, isn't it?

I had two visits to Hollywood. I enjoyed them very much, but I rather put my foot into it the first visit. I was interviewed by some woman on the *Los Angeles Times* about some entirely different subject and I happened to mention that I enjoyed my stay in Hollywood very much but the only trouble was I had been given practically nothing to do and of course she spread this all over the paper and I believe it caused a great deal of trouble. Things were really lax up to that time. I mean, you know, no sort of definite hours when you had to be working. But I believe after that interview you had to be at the studio at nine or something like that, or half past eight or sometime, and do all your work there. Any work I did I used to do at my house.

I liked Hollywood very much, but I never got the hang of picture writing. Couldn't do it properly. The only impact I made on Hollywood was that I walked everywhere. Irving Thalberg would ring me up and tell me to come round to the studio. I'd be working at home, and then about three quarters of an hour later he'd ring up my house again and ask what had become of me and they'd say oh, I was walking to the studio. MGM was in Culver City, which was miles away from anywhere. I had a lot of fun writing stories about Hollywood inventing the various job people had, like the "Yes sir" and the "Vice-yes sir" and the "Nodder." The "Yes sir" was the man who had to say "Yes, sir" when he said yes. The "Vice-yes sir" said yes and then this was the cue for all the noddors to nod. They weren't important enough to say

yes--they just had to nod, but I'm afraid all that's over now.

It's very sad to think that Hollywood is collapsed--it was a very jolly place when I was there. I came back again about six years later to do a book of mine called *A Damsel in Distress* with music by George Gershwin. That was a very pleasant experience. After doing the *Damsel in Distress* my wife and I went back to Le Touquet where we'd been living since about 1925, I think, and everything was fine for a year and then suddenly the war came. Everything happened very suddenly then. The Germans broke through. We never thought anything like that would happen, but suddenly German soldiers appeared everywhere. We went on living for two or three days and then we were all summoned to the Prefecture and told we were going to be interned. That was a very nasty shock, for we didn't know what would happen then. First we were taken off to Lille prison, which was very unpleasant, apart from being imprisoned there. I mean the whole place was a mass of broken glass. You know, if one went to one's cell there would be a great pane of glass would fall off behind one and we were there just for a few days, I think. Clearly, there was no arrangement for feeding us--just there was soup but we hadn't been given anything to put it in and so you had to go and hunt around 'til you found an old can. I managed to get one, I forget what it contained. I always felt my can had something the others hadn't got. It has a sort of very individual taste.

From Lille we took a train to this place Tost which was in upper Silesia and that really was a genuine camp. It was the first one we'd had. You know, the commandants and internees looking after things some. Here in a few simple words is an explanation of how an internment camp is run. First you get your internees. These are indispensable, for nothing looks sillier than a prison camp without prisoners. Internees are all sorts and kinds and sizes and may be readily obtained at little cost and trouble. They come in every shade from midnight black to yellow or like me, a pretty pink. Having slopped up with internees, buy plenty of barbed wire. You can have lots of fun decorating a place with this. It will bring back old memories of the days when you used to hang up the mistletoe at

Christmas. Lice: these may be provided, but probably the internees will bring their own. We had great good luck to have an awfully nice commandant, a man called Buchelt, who did all sorts of things for us that he needn't have done. It really was quite pleasant there.

As regards the food: for breakfast we had what we had been able to avoid eating of our bread ration overnight, and a mug of coffee. The luncheon menu was more varied. There were always potatoes--three per man during the first two months and then increased to eight or nine. But different days brought different things to go with them. The great danger was that the cook, a man of lethargic mentality, would lose his inspiration and fall back on soup. If he did not we would get a fish course once a week, an odd sort of barley porridge twice a week and on other days cabbages, carrots, sauerkraut, or black pudding. Before lunch, we would speculate as to what we were going to get for lunch. After lunch we would discuss what we had had for lunch in a derogatory spirit, for we were not easy critics. You may take as a fact that no matter how apparently absorbed an internee may be in some passing task or recreation, his thoughts are really on his last or his next meal. When he talks, he talks of nothing else.

A man told me once that sickening of the universal topic, he followed Father Reeves the Roman Catholic and myself around the park one morning, hoping to hear a bit of mental and spiritual uplift. What he actually drew was a discussion of the respective merits of sauerkraut and those peculiar slices of sausage that he used to call rubber heels.

From the start to the finale of my career as an internee, I lost forty-two pounds in weight. I don't mean to say it does not make me feel better and look better. It makes me feel terrific, and I look like Fred Astaire. I had my writing to do; I was writing all the time. We played cricket and football and so on. I mean it was nothing like what generally you think of when you think of a German prison camp.

At eight in the morning and at eight in the evening we paraded, and as far as parades were concerned I did not object to having to stand for fifty minutes or so, for they provided solid entertainment for the thoughtful mind. You might think that fifty minutes was rather a

long time for eight hundred men to get themselves counted, but you would have understood if you had seen us in action. I don't know why it was we could never get the knack of parading. We meant well, but we just didn't seem able to click. It was the same at Huy and at the early days at Tost, but there we never managed to reach quite the same heights of pure delirium. To catch us at our best, you would have had to catch us at Liège. The proceedings would begin with the sergeant telling us to form fives, whereupon some of us would form fours, some of us sixes, and others eights. I think our idea was to form something promptly and zealously without bothering about trivial technicalities. You could see that we were zealous by the way those who had formed sixes regrouped immediately and formed fours, while those who had formed fours instantly formed sixes. Nobody could accuse us of not trying to enter into the spirit of the thing. At long last we would manage to get into fives, and a very pretty picture we made. But was this the end? Far from it! It was not an end but a beginning. What happened was that old Bill in row twenty would catch sight of old George in row four and disorganize our whole formation by shuffling across to him to see if he had heard the one about the travelling salesman. Presently old Bill, having had a good laugh with old George, decides to shuffle back, only to find his place has been filled up like a whole rising tide. This puzzles him for a moment, but the solution soon presents itself. He forms himself as the seventh man of a row just behind old Perce, who has been over chatting with old Fred just come back and lined up as number six. There comes old Joe, who has been having a quiet smoke at the other end of the yard. He comes strolling along with a cigarette hanging from his lower lip and eyes us in an indulgent way as who would say "Hello boys, playing soldiers? May I join in?" He is thoroughly cursed in German by the sergeant and corporal, in French by the interpreter, and in English by us, and takes his place in the ranks.

The place we were in was a converted lunatic asylum--quite extensive grounds, managed to get games and things. Altogether it wasn't too bad at all. It was from there that I made the famous broadcasts. Never occurred to

me that there was anything wrong about it. I made a very great sensation. I remember it came as a very great surprise to me to find there was any trouble. I don't know: it never occurred to me there would be. After various vicissitudes I found myself in Paris where Malcolm Muggeridge came to interview me. He was then an officer in the intelligence. I don't think he liked it much from what he has written about it, but that was his job and he was awfully good. Fancy he had just come to sort of inquire about things, and he was succeeded by a lawyer--I forget his name now--from England, who put me through various questionings, but it was a long time ago. I've practically forgotten about it.

After the war we went to New York for some years and then one weekend we came to stay with the Boltons, who stayed in a place called Remsenberg on Long Island. I was writing a play with Guy at the moment. They all went out in the morning while Guy and I worked and Ethel came back to lunch and said "I've bought a house." And that's where we are now, with six cats and two dogs, enjoying life very much.

Well, I think that about cleans up the Wodehouse story. I shall be ninety-three next October the fifteenth, if you are thinking of sending me some presents, and I am still ticking over reasonably briskly. I eat well, sleep well, and do not tremble when I see a job of work. In fact, I'm fine. All the same, one does rather feel that one is not the bright-eyed youngster when one is considering oneself. And the shades of the prison house are beginning, as one might say, to close upon the growing boy. The rude awakening of course--I had always supposed I was immortal. Now I see these are the limits, and it will come fairly soon. Not that I like the new arrangement, but still there it is. A rude awakening of course, to find one's ninety-two getting on for ninety-three--and one that must have come to my housemaster at school who recently died at the age of ninety-six. He said to a new boy on the day of term "Walkshot? Walkshot? Wasn't your father in my form?" "Yes, *and* my grandfather."

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