

# BY THE WAY



Occasional Newsletters from The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

Number 34

June 2008

## Wodehouse's Russian References: History and Spirit

Following BTW 28 and 31, we are presenting the final selection of Wodehouse's Russian references to accompany Masha Lebedeva's recent series of articles in Wooster Sauce.

### From *Excelsior in Nothing Serious* (1950)

He looked like a Volga boatman who has just learned that Stalin has purged his employer.

### From *The Swoop*, pt 2, ch 5 (1909)

Nor were the invaders satisfied and happy. The late English summer had set in with all its usual severity, and the Cossacks, reared in the kindlier climate of Siberia, were feeling it terribly. Colds were the rule rather than the exception in the Russian lines.

### From *Summer Lighting*, ch 8 (1933)

"Let's hope this girl of Johnnie Schoonmaker's will cheer us up. If she's anything like her father, she ought to be a nice, lively girl. But I suppose, when she arrives, it'll turn out that she's in mourning for a great-aunt or brooding over the situation in Russia or something."

### From *Something Fishy*, ch 4 (1957)

"Good God! You put a private eye on him?" [said Mortimer Bayliss]

"It was the simplest method of keeping myself *au courant* with his affairs." [replied Keggs]

"God bless you Keggs! You ought to be the head of the secret police in Moscow."

"I doubt if I would care for residence in Russia, sir. The climate."

### From *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, ch 9 (1963)

"Well, how can you blame the poor angel [the dog Bartholomew]? Naturally he thought you were international spies in the pay of Moscow. Prowling about the house at this time of night."

### From *Summer Moonshine*, ch 14 (1938)

The barking of James and John [two spaniels], who had never seen a man sitting on a roof before and suspected a Red plot, diverted [Sam Bulpitt's] attention.

### From *The Swoop*, pt 1, ch 7 (1909)

Vodkakoff carelessly flicked the ash off his cigarette.

"So I hear," he said slowly. "But in Shropshire, they tell me, they are having trouble with the mangel-wurzels."

[Prince Otto] frowned at this typical piece of shifty Russian diplomacy.

### From *Thank You, Jeeves*, ch 13 (1934)

All the householder awoke in me. I forgot that it was injudicious of me to allow myself to be seen. All I could think of was that this bally Five-Year-Planner was smashing up the Wooster home.

### From *The Purification of Rodney Spelvin in The Heart of a Goof* (1925)

Also, they began to avoid one another in the house. Jane would sit in the drawing-room, while William retired down the passage to his den. In short, if you had added a couple of ikons and a photograph of Trotsky, you would have had a *mise en scène* which would have fitted a Russian novel like the paper on the wall.

### From *Without the Option in Carry On, Jeeves* (1925)

"The case of the prisoner Leon Trotzki – which," he said, giving Sippy the eye again, "I am strongly inclined to think an assumed and fictitious name – is more serious."

### From *Thank You, Jeeves*, ch 22 (1934)

"Retain [Brinkley] in my employment? After what has occurred? After finishing first by the shortest of heads in the race with him and his carving knife? I do not intend, Jeeves. Stalin, yes. Al Capone, certainly."

### From *Galahad at Blandings*, ch 5 (1965)

With a reflex action which would have interested Doctor Pavlov his fist shot out and there was a chunky sound as it impinged on the constable's eye with all the weight of [Sam Bagshott's] muscular body behind it.

### From *A Prince for Hire*, ch 2 (1931)

[Benjamin Scobell] had, fearfully and reluctantly, let some of [his money] slip into Soviet Russia; he didn't approve of the Bolsheviks, but he liked the high returns they were willing to allow foreign capital – for a while – to enjoy, and he had an idea that he could outsmart the Bolsheviks when it was time to withdraw.

### From *The Adventures of Sally*, ch 6 (1922)

"And then I bought Russian Roubles for the fall, and they rose. So that went wrong."

**From *Full Moon*, ch 7 (1947)**

[Tipton Plimsoll] made his way with faltering footsteps to the sitting-room of the Garden Suite and, drawing the flask from his pocket, placed it on the table with something of the sad resignation of a Russian peasant regretfully throwing his infant son to a pursuing wolf pack.

**From *Joy in the Morning*, ch 3 (1947)**

I could still recall some of the things he had said about my stomach, which – rightly or wrongly – he considered that I was sticking out. It would seem that when you are a Volga boatman, you aren't supposed to stick your stomach out.

**From *The Swoop*, pt 2, ch 7 (1909)**

Price of entrance to the gallery and pit was served out at daybreak to the Eighth and Fifteenth Cossacks of the Don, those fierce, semi-civilised fighting-machines who know no fear.

**From *Tried in the Furnace in Young Men in Spats* (1964)**

They would insist on singing this thing about 'Give yourself a pat on the back', and, apart from the fact that Barmy considered that something on the lines of the *Volga Boat-Song* would have been far more fitting, it was a tune it was pretty hard to keep time to.

**From *Something Fresh*, ch 2 (1915)**

Freddie, chafing at captivity, had mooned about [the park and gardens of Blandings] with an air of crushed gloom which would have caused comment in Siberia.

**From *Keeping in with Vosper in The Heart of a Goof* (1926)**

"Was I!", he cried. "You bet your Russian boots I was! You bet your diamond tiara I won a cup."

**From *Uncle Dynamite*, ch 1 (1948)**

"As neat a vanishing act as I ever witnessed," said Lord Ickenham cordially. "It was like a performing seal going after a slice of fish. You've done this sort of thing before, Bill Oakshott. No? You amaze me. I would have sworn that you had had years of practice on race trains. Well you certainly baffled them. I don't think I have ever seen a Silver Band so nonplussed. It was as though a bevy of expectant wolves had overtaken a sleigh and found no Russian peasant aboard, than which I can imagine nothing more sickening. For the wolves, of course."

**From *Something Fresh*, ch 3 (1915)**

"Aline, my pet, it's no good arguing. You might just as well argue with a wolf on the trail of a fat Russian peasant."

**From *The Clicking Of Cuthbert in The Clicking Of Cuthbert* (1921)**

His first glance at the novelist surprised Cuthbert. Doubtless with the best motives, Vladimir Brusiloff had permitted his face to become almost entirely concealed behind a dense zareba of hair.

**From *The Clicking Of Cuthbert in The Clicking Of Cuthbert* (1921)**

[Vladimir Brusiloff] wished that he had stayed at his quiet home in Nijni-Novgorod, where the worst thing that could happen to a fellow was a brace of bombs coming in through the window and mixing themselves up with his breakfast egg.

**From *Best Seller in Mulliner Nights* (1930)**

Jno Henderson Banks was now in control of Evangeline's affairs. This outstanding blot on the public weal was a sort of *charlotte russe* with tortoiseshell-rimmed eye-glasses and a cooing, reverential manner towards his female clients.

**From *Cocktail Time*, ch 9 (1958)**

"And how you [*i.e. Peasemarch*] belted the stuffing out of it! It was like hearing the Siberian wolf-hound in full cry after a Siberian wolf. I [*i.e. Lord Ickenham*] remember thinking at the time how odd it is that small men nearly always have loud, deep voices."

**From *The Clicking Of Cuthbert in The Clicking Of Cuthbert* (1921)**

There was a rush and swirl, as the effervescent Muscovite burst his way through the throng and rushed to where Cuthbert sat. He stood for a moment eyeing him excitedly, then, stooping swiftly, kissed him on both cheeks before Cuthbert could get his guard up.

**From *Spring Fever*, ch 17 (1948)**

It seemed to me, thinking quick, that the only way of solving the am-parce was to sacrifice Shorty. Like Russian peasants with their children, you know, when they are pursued by wolves and it becomes imperative to lighten the sledge.

**From *The Mating Season*, ch 6 (1949)**

[Esmond Haddock] refilled his glass, and I think that as he did so he must have noticed the tense, set expression on my face, rather like that of a starving wolf giving a Russian peasant the once-over, for he started, as if realizing that he had been remiss.

**From *The Juice of an Orange in Blandings Castle* (1933)**

Wilmot stared. His manner resembled that of a wolf on the steppes of Russia who, expecting a peasant, is fobbed off with a wafer biscuit.