

## Readerships and Literary Cultures 1900–1950 Special Collection

Literary and cultural references in *The Heart of a Goof*:

Wodehouse (in the person of the narrator, The Oldest member) comments on current 'popular' literature (similar to Mills and Boon titles?):

**p 76** Fiction heroines: 'His tastes had always lain in the direction of spirited women. . . . the one holding office at the moment was perhaps the most spirited of the whole platoon. For one long instant ... Bradbury Fisher was conscious of a regret that he had not married one of those meek, mild girls who suffer uncomplainingly at their husband's hands in the more hectic type of feminine novel.'

**p 88/99** 'It has always seemed to me a strange and unaccountable thing that nowadays, when gloom is at such a premium in the world's literature and all around us stern young pessimists are bringing home the bacon with their studies in the greyly grim . . . '

**p 127** (Chester's proposal of marriage has been turned down by Felicia) 'It is at moments such as these that a man reaps the reward of a good upbringing.

In similar circumstances those who have not had the benefit of a sound training in golf are too apt to go wrong. Goaded by the sudden anguish, they take to drink, plunge into dissipation, and write *vers libre*.' (*viz* Rodney Spelvin)

**p 215** (Jane Packard has been reading *The Love that Scorches*, a torrid, exotic novel: ) 'These novelists, I felt, ought to be more careful. They put ideas into girls' heads and made them dissatisfied.'

P219 Jane finds Spelvin's poetry 'too beautiful for words'. Spelvin protests 'a mere *morceau*. One of my juvenilia. . . . I could wish there were more like you Miss Packard. Only last week . . . a coarse editor asked me what my sonnet, 'Wine of Desire', *meant*. . . . I gave him answer, 'twas a sonnet, not a mining prospectus.'

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**p 224** Rodney proposes to Jane Packard, who has been ‘stimulated by exotic literature’ and therefore ‘committing many follies’:

Jane relates, ‘He took me in his arms, gazed deep into my eyes, and cried, “I love you! I worship you! I adore you! You are the tree on which the fruit of my life hangs.”’

William proposes to Jane:

‘I say, old girl. What about it?’

**p 253** Rodney Spelvin’s novel, *The Purple Fan*

‘In deciding not to read *The Purple Fan* I had, I was to discover, over-estimated my powers of resistance. RS’s novel turned out to be one of those things which it is impossible not to read. Within a week of its appearance it had begun to go through the country like Spanish influenza; and, much as I desired to avoid it, a perusal was forced on me by sheer weight of mass-thinking. Every paper that I picked up contained reviews of the book, references to it, letters from the clergy denouncing it; and when I read that three hundred and sixteen mothers had signed a petition to the authorities to have it suppressed, I was reluctantly compelled to spring the necessary cash and purchase a copy.

I had not expected to enjoy it, and I did not. Written in the neodecadent style, which is so popular nowadays, its precocity offended me; and I particularly objected to its heroine, a young woman of a type which, if met in real life, only ingrained chivalry could have prevented a normal man from kicking extremely hard. Having skimmed through it, I gave my copy to the man who came to inspect the drains.’

Jane Packard pictures herself as the heroine Eulalie French with dire consequences for her marriage to stolid William. Scenes in the book ‘took place either in moon-light terraces of in beautifully furnished studios beneath the light of Oriental lamps with pink silk shades.’

Similar comment on **films** typical of the day (not necessarily actual films):

**p 45** Ferdinand has just proposed to Barbara:

‘... they strolled together over the scented meadows, while in the trees above them a thousand birds trilled Mendelssohn’s Wedding March. ‘ “ . . . my angel!” said Ferdinand. He folded her in his arms, using the interlocking grip.’ (Reference to the silent movies? And a

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reference to a golf club grip recommended by the golfing champion Vardon, to humorous effect!)

**p 269** William begins to regret having stormed out of the London flat, leaving Jane. ‘He was in exactly the position of the hero of the movie when the sub-title is flashed on the screen: “Came a Day When Remorse Bit Like An Adder Into Roland Spenslow’s Soul.”’ (Silent movie)

**p 287** Jane goes to the cinema twice a week: ‘The title of the picture, “Tried in the Furnace,” had suggested nothing to her. Being a regular patron of the silver screen, she knew that it might quite easily turn out to be an educational film on the subject of clinker-coal.’ She doesn’t take much of it in, ‘but the part which remained graven upon her mind was the bit where Gloria Gooch goes by night to the apartment of the libertine, to beg him to spare her sister, whom he has entangled in his toils.’

**Authors** quoted, mentioned or alluded to:

**p 129 Browning** – poem of rejected lover used to illustrate the situation when Chester attempts to curb his ‘uneducated wart-hog’ behaviour on the course in order to appeal to the refined Miss Felicia Blakeney. She does not care for the mealy mouthed suitor that results and she rejects his proposal of marriage. However, ““She has promised to play a last round with me this morning,” he said. It was a pretty poetic idea, not unlike Browning’s ‘Last Ride Together.’

**p135** Chester, over-doing his attempt to stop using heated language on the course, is compared in Felicia’s mind to dour Soames Forsyte (**Galsworthy**) and Sir Willoughby Patterne (**Meredith**).

**p159 Pope** quoted to illustrate how Chesney takes to his gaudy (and magic) plus fours. At first he ‘recoiled from them as any decent-minded man would have done’ but shortly he takes to them with enthusiasm, finding they give him confidence.

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*Vice is a monster of so frightful mien*

*As to be hated needs but to be seen:*

*Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,*

*We first endure, then pity, then embrace.'*

**p 188 Arnold Bennett** – Essay giving advice to young batchelors to take matters of the heart slowly, in stages. Unlike Rollo Podmarsh, the coddled son of a widow, who 'one may say, was in love before he had come within two yards of the girl.'

**p190 Henley (William Ernest)** best known for his poem 'Invictus' (part quoted here – 'the night that covers me, black as the pit from pole to pole'). He struggled against physical debility and was known for endurance. Podmarsh is in a 'Job-like condition of despondency, being hopelessly in love'.

**p 232 Tennyson 'Idylls of a King'**. Rodney Spelvin (the *vers libre* poet) looks out over the landscape beyond the golf course, and exclaims, "'That vista there . . . that calm, wooded hollow, bathed in the golden sunshine. It reminds me of the island valley of Avilion – where falls not rain nor hail nor any snow, nor ever wind blows loudly.'"

**p302 Ethel M Dell** Jane goes to confront Rodney Spelvin in his flat in her mission to save her sister-in-law from his clutches. 'It comforted her a little in this crisis to reflect that Rodney was not one of those massive Ethel M. Dell libertines who light make things unpleasant for an intruder.'

**Vardon** (*The gist of golf*) **and Braid** – champion golfers, authors on golf– frequently quoted throughout. William and Jane's child is named Braid Vardon Bates.

**P.G Wodehouse** also wrote a book on golf which he mentions in *The Heart of a Goof*.

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**Spoof authors**, invented by Wodehouse in order to ridicule contemporary literature.

**p 117 (and elsewhere) Wilmot Royce**, female novelist, mother of Felicia Blakeney, with titles to her name such as: *Sewers of the Soul*, ('jerked before a tribunal by the Purity League') *Grey Mildew*, *The Stench of Life*.

**p 214 Luella Periton Phipps** (Periton= peritonitis, pain in the gut??) author of *The Love That Scorches*, the romance that so impresses Jane Packard. Jane – 'It is all about the desert and people riding camels and a wonderful Arab chief with stern yet tender, eyes, and a girl called Angela, and oases and dates and mirages.' The title may be an oblique reference (or a half remembered reference) to a love letter written to Victor Hugo by Juliette Drouet. Quote, 'only a love that scorches and dazzles is worthy of the name.' Wodehouse suggests a torrid, exotic novel but has the Oldest Member advising William Bates to adopt some of the Sheikh's flare to win Jane Packard.

There are also non-specific references to writings on fad diets, sociology, race migration of the middle ages (!) all, no doubt, preoccupations of the time.