

Ye Olde Plum News

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CROSSWORD PUZZLES

UNEXPECTED FLASH

The steward's face suddenly cleared. He looked like a man who has been poring over a clue in a crossword puzzle, at a loss to divine what 'large Australian bird' can possibly be, and in an unexpected flash has had it come to him. Just as such a man will quiver in every limb and cry 'Emu!' just as Archimedes on a well-known occasion quivered in every limb and cried 'Eureka!' - so now did Albert Peacemarch quiver in every limb and cry 'Coo!' (The Luck of the Bodkins, 1935)

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### ONLY PALLIATIVE

When he returned with the restorative, Gally had settled down to The Times crossword puzzle. 'Thanks,' he said. 'You don't know what a large Australian bird in three letters beginning with E is, do you?' 'I do not, sir,' said Binstead icily, and withdrew. For some minutes after he was alone, Gally gave himself up to the crossword puzzle, concentrating tensely. But crossword puzzles are only a palliative. They do not really cure the aching heart.' (Pigs Have Wings, 1952)

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TWO OF A KIND

George spent a not unhappy life, residing in the village where he had been born and passing his days in the usual country sports and his evenings in doing cross-word puzzles. By the time he was thirty he knew more about Eli, the prophet, Ra, the Sun God, and the bird Emu than anybody else in the country except Susan Blake, the vicar's daughter, who had also taken up the solving of cross-word puzzles and was the first girl in Worcestershire to find out the meaning of stearine and crepuscular. ... George was always looking in at the vicarage to ask her if she knew a word of seven letters meaning 'appertaining to the profession of plumbing', and Susan was just as constant a caller at George's cosy little cottage - being frequently stumped, as girls will be, by words of eight letters signifying 'largely used in the manufacturing of poppet valves'. The consequence was that one evening, just after she had helped him out of a tight place with the word disestablishmentarianism, the boy suddenly awoke to the truth and realized that she was all the world to him. (The Truth about George, 1926)

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### ITALIAN COMPOSER

Lady Abbott lay on the settee in her boudoir with her shoes off - her habit when at rest. She was doing a crossword puzzle. Through the open window at her side, the cool evening air poured in, refreshing to a brain which was becoming a little heated as it sought to discover the identity

of 'an Italian composer in nine letters beginning with p'. She had just regretfully rejected Irving Berlin because, despite his other merits, too numerous to mention here, he had twelve letters, began with an 'i', and was not an Italian composer, when ... Sir Buckstone came bursting in. ... 'Buck, do you know an Italian composer in nine letters beginning with p?' ... 'Puccini!' cried Lady Abbott. She started to write, then checked herself with a placid 'Tut!' ... only seven,' she said wistfully. ... Lady Abbott, whose brow had wrinkled thoughtfully for a moment, wrote down Garibaldi and rubbed it out. ... Lady Abbott, who had just thought of Mussolini, poised pencil over paper for an instant, the shook her head. ... Sir Buckstone picked up the paper and scanned the crossword puzzle which his Toots had been trying to solve. 'An Italian composer in nine letters beginning with p' was, he gathered, what had been stumping the dear girl and bringing to the problem the full force of his intellect he took the pencil and in a firm hand wrote down the word Pagliacci. Buck misled Lady Abbott. Pagliacci is an opera by Leoncavallo. Maybe the solution was Pergolesi? (Summer Moonshine, 1937)

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HOT CLUE

There was a time when this worthy housewife (Dahlia Travers) tackling the Observer crossword puzzle, would snort and tear her hair and fill the air with strange oaths picked up from cronies on the hunting field, but consistent inability to solve more than about an eighth of the clues has brought a sort of dull resignation and today she merely sits and stares at it, knowing that however much she licks the end of her pencil little or no result will result. As I came in, I heard her mutter, soliloquizing as someone in Shakespeare, 'Measured tread of saint round St. Paul's, for God's sake', seeming to indicate that she had come up against a hot one.

Dahlia Travers to Mrs. McCorcadale: 'Do you do the Observer crossword puzzle by any chance?' 'I solve it at breakfast on Sunday mornings.' 'Not the whole lot?' 'Oh yes.' 'Every clue?' 'I have never failed yet. I find it ridiculously simple.' 'Then what's all that song and dance about the measured tread of saints round St Pauls?' 'Oh, I guessed that immediately. The answer, of course, is pedometer. Dome, meaning St. Paul's, comes in the middle and Peter, for St. Peter, round it. Very simple.' (Much Obligated, Jeeves, 1971)

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### HUMILIATED

I have finally and definitively given up the Times crossword puzzles. The humiliation of only being able to fill in about three words each day was too much for me. I am hoping that what has happened

is that they have got much more difficult, but I have a gloomy feeling that it is my brain that has gone back (Letter to Denis Mackail, 1945)

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In conclusion may I commend your public spirit in putting the good old emu back into circulation again as you did a few days ago? We of canaille know that the Sun-God Ra has apparently retired from active work - are intensely grateful for the occasional emu. (Letter to Times, 1934)

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### SHREWED EMU

She looked at me like someone who has just solved the crossword puzzle with a shrewed Emu in the top right-hand corner. (The Code of the Woosters, 1938)

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RELAXATION

'Your life will be quiet?' 'Practically unconscious.' 'No late hours?' 'None. The early dinner, the restful spell with a good book or the crossword puzzle and so to bed. (Aunts Aren't Gentlemen, 1974)

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### PASTIME FOR WOOSTER

It's a paper (The Times) I don't often look at, preferring for breakfast reading the Mirror and the Mail, but Jeeves takes it in and I have occasionally borrowed his copy with a view to having a shot at the crossword puzzle. (Jeeves in the Offing, 1960)

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ABSTRUSE

And Gally, left alone, lit another cigar and turned his attention to the Times crossword puzzle. He found it, however difficult to concentrate on it. This was not merely because these crossword puzzles had become so abstruse nowadays and that he was basically a Sun-God-Ra and Large-Australian-bird-emu man. (Sticky Wicket at Blandings, 1966)

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### USELESS KNOWLEDGE

'Isn't he marvelous?' said Elsa, with affectionate pride. 'He always wins the question games, and crossword puzzles are just pie for him. Of course, he has no useful information whatever, but ...' (A Prince for Hire, 1931)

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