



# **Tales of St. Austin's**

*P.G. Wodehouse*

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St Austin's school (as featured in *The Pothunters*) is the setting for twelve delightful early Wodehouse stories. The familiar ingredients – and some of the same characters – are present: cricket and rugby loom large, school colours are gained, tricks are played, exams avoided, revenge wreaked upon enemies, and the honour of School and House upheld. A nostalgic look at English public-school life at the turn of the twentieth century, made enjoyable today by the young Wodehouse's gentle humour and witty turn of phrase. 'Pillingshot was annoyed. He was disgusted, mortified; no other word for it. He had no objection, of course, to Mr Mellish saying that his work during the term, and especially his Livy, had been disgraceful. A master has the right to say that sort of thing if he likes.

## Tales of St. Austin's Details

Date : Published May 29th 2008 by BiblioLife (first published 1903)

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Author : P.G. Wodehouse

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## From Reader Review *Tales of St. Austin's* for online ebook

### Shawn Cooke says

Short stories are one of early Wodehouse's greatest strengths. He sets up memorable characters, puts them in conflict, and delivers a satisfying ending with great economy of words. In *Tales of St. Austin's*, we find a collection of school stories set in the same location as *The Pothunters*, and featuring many of the same characters. Whereas that earlier novel did not do much to distinguish the various characters, these stories provided much needed depth.

My biggest complaint was that the last few stories were not stories at all, but rather humorous essays about various aspects of school life. What that meant is that two-thirds of the way through the book, we have already said goodbye to all of the characters we met along the way. The essays are fine as far as they go, but I'd have preferred if they were interpolated between the earlier stories.

Overall, this was a fun and lighthearted collection. I'm looking forward to launching into *The Gold Bat* next.

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### Michael Arnold says

Plenty of uses of public school vocabulary and references to the classics. This is a charming little collection of stories depicting a nostalgic view of public school life at about the turn of the last century. It's such a shame it just isn't very funny.

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### A.J. says

A mixed bag, from my perspective. Absolutely loved Wodehouse's review of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (which completely tallied with my feelings about the book) and enjoyed 'The Maneuvres of Charteris' but found some of the other stories too focused on cricket and rugby, to the point where I was skimming great chunks of them. Although having said that, I did enjoy the 'Now, Talking About Cricket-' essay...

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### Illiterate says

The highlights are the satirical flourishes on Thomas Hughes and classical education.

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### Joe Stevens says

I chuckled half a dozen times and laughed out loud once while reading this collection of stories and articles. This is one more chuckle and one more laugh than in the previous three school stories I've read (including the Gutenberg collection), so things are looking up. I'm reading through the PG Wodehouse books in order and having been accustomed to Blandings and Jeeves and Wooster, they are a rough go.

There was a touch more of the writer that Wodehouse would become in this collection. The hero of the longest of the short stories was actually interesting and there were a few clever twists of phrase. Mr. Mulliner would have given more entertainment in two minutes than this book does in an hour and a half, but still there is entertainment here if wildly diluted.

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## Scott says

*Long study of the classics had quickened his faculty for seeing sense in passages where there was none.*

Is there any sense in Wodehouse? Let's hope not too much! How rare to find someone who can take you to cloud cuckoo land and let you flit around with the broadest smile possible stretched from ear to ear ... and do it again, and again, and again. Even though the *Tales of St Austin's* (1903) are not the madcap masterpieces of Bertie & Jeeves, Psmith, or Blandings, they still pull the curtain back on Wodehouse's sheer glee in writing a sentence. Is there any other author who puts so much snicker into his prose?

Over the course of five years, I picked up *Tales of St. Austin's* at least ten times before I finally settled into the book. The paper-thin plots and nearly indistinguishable characters (all "fine, strapping specimens of sturdy young English manhood") showed just enough personality to hold my interest. What hobbled me, though, was the lingo. All this schoolboy *swotting*, *bucking up*, and *giving the beans* had me perplexed. Just what is the difference between a *beak* and a *bargees*? Where is the *crease* and can someone please explain a *leg before* ... something or other? And how is it that the word *rot* can function as any part of speech? Too lazy in former days to look these words up in Websters, I've lately discovered a new world of meaning just a touch away in my iPod's dictionary.

Wodehouse first published the stories in a *Boys Life* sort of magazine. He set out to refine Young England, but with a Mephistophelean smirk. These are stories about how to break the rules, enjoy the experience, and accept the consequences. The moral, though not always foremost, is never hard to find: cheaters get "touched up," effort is rewarded, justice in the end prevails, and the rotter gets his due ... most of the time. But they were also written to craft literary taste by subverting the idolized station of a Greco/Latin education and giving resounding thumbs up to humorists and adventure writers, and all the other writers whose stories don't require notes.

What fun, though, some day, to annotate a critical edition of Wodehouse's early works and highlight his gems of timeless wisdom. I don't believe anyone has ever charged Wodehouse with being the wellspring of a liberal education, but there are enough literary allusions, parodies, and references in a few chapters of these *Tales* to build a satisfactory reading list for a college entry exam. Within thirty pages Wodehouse bemoans Euripides and Livy, recommends Rider Haggard, Dicken's *Pickwick Papers*, and James Payn, parodies Thucydides, Horace, and the Psalmist, and tweaks *Hamlet* and Isaiah for comic relief.

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## Karthik Thrikkadeeri says

Bad. Real bad. I did not expect this. At all. From Wodehouse. I agree, I haven't read that many of his works but I have read some, and have also heard others praising his books. So I was thoroughly disappointed when

I appeared to be in wet sand while I was reading it. I literally couldn't move. I was reading the book so slowly that I think I used to read faster when I was in KG! Okay, some stories in the middle were kind of good. But the ones at first and most prominently the last ones were B O R I N G. It took some miracle for me to complete it. I was actually praying to God to let me finish it, I believe.

I can't say any more. I don't think I would even give this 1 star. But just for the rare good stories, and for the Wodehouse label, I give it 2.

I just hope future ones are not this bad.

Oh, by the way, I have been seeing Wodehouse books in my library whose covers are out of the ordinary Wodehouse covers. I was hesitant to pick these up at first. And now I know that my instinct was right.

Wouldn't recommend it to anyone, except anyone who just waiting for some thing to catch on to to criticise Wodehouse.

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### **Judy says**

Younger versions of Bertie Wooster but no Jeeves to get them out of the trouble they manage to create -- they are forced to rely on their own ingenuity to save themselves from being expelled from St Austin's. Their scrapes are clever and carefully carried out; their "rescues" are even better. I really enjoy any and all of Wodehouse's tales; this book is no exception.

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### **Usfromdk says**

This book is not nearly as good as is Wodehouse' later work, in my opinion. Ukridge is the only book by Wodehouse I've read which I liked less than this one. If you do not know anything about cricket a couple of the stories will be somewhat harder to read/understand than they perhaps ought to be, but the main problem I had with the book was simply that the stories included really aren't all that funny/entertaining.

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### **Misty says**

Some of Wodehouse's earlier writing, this was a set of boarding school stories he published in magazines between 1900 and 1903.

This is the first time I've read any of his earlier stuff, and it's pretty interesting to see how far he's come. Compared to his later writing, these are pretty simple stories; the plots are funny but straightforward and the characters are uncomplicated. In his later writing, Wodehouse is the master of the convoluted plot; even in his short stories, he's a master at building up ridiculous situations that get resolved at the last minute. By comparison, these older stories seem to finish right around the time his later stories would be getting started.

St Austin's is funny, but it's definitely not up to what I expect from Wodehouse.

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## **Ian Wood says**

Tales of St Austin's is a collection of stories about the inhabitants of St Austin's public school that Wodehouse had published in various magazines for the entertainment of small boys. The stories themselves are all of a similar theme, temptation to do wrong thrown in the way of boarders but with love of the school song and the house steering the boy on the path of righteousness.

A book very much of its time, at the turn of the twentieth century this was no doubt as exciting as life got for a school boy to be reading with a torch under the sheets whilst matron searched the adjacent dormitory of illicit 'tuck'.

Nothing of the dialogue or writing that makes P G Wodehouse one of the most highly regarded humorists of the twentieth century but a historical record that he was a schoolboy in the previous century.

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## **Monty Ashley says**

I love P.G. Wodehouse, and I love English School Stories, which are all basically Harry Potter but without magic. Just replace Quidditch with Cricket, Soccer, and Rugby to fill the "incomprehensible British Sport" slot. And Wodehouse is easily the best writer of standard school stories, even though he quickly graduated to writing his own style of book.

(Rudyard Kipling was arguably a better writer, but Stalky & Co isn't as formulaic)

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## **Libbeth says**

I will use this "review" for all the P. G. Wodehouse I have read. I read them all so long ago and enjoyed them so much that I have given them all 5 stars. As I re-read them I will adjust the stars accordingly, if necessary, and add a proper review.

When I first discovered P. G. Wodehouse I devoured every book I could find in the local library, throughout the eighties and early nineties. Alas, this means that I have read most of them and stumbling across one I have not read is a rare thing. I'm sure that through this great site I will joyfully find at least a few I have not read, and be able to track them down.

My records only began in 1982, so I do not have a note of any I read before then. I'm sure I will enjoy re-reading them.

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## **Mailis Viind says**

When i started reading this book i was sure of the stars it was going to get, because like Tolkien i have a holy matrimony of never ending love for Wodehouse, due to their ability and circumstance being the originals of revolutionary time. You'll always remember your first loves and they are it for me. But this is a collection of stories, and some of them are so short that the moment i started to get into them, they ended already. So in

comparison to some of those utter genius books of his, this gets only four stars.

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## **Dave says**

“Tales of St. Austin’s” returns to the scene of P. G. Wodehouse’s first book, though to be fair, several of the included short fictional works were written and published prior to “The Pothunters”. “Tales of St. Austin’s” was first published in the U.K. on November 10, 1903, and contains 12 short stories and four essays. Prior to their publication in book form, all but one of the short stories appeared in either the Public School Magazine, or Captain” between July of 1901 and August of 1903. After reading “The Pothunters”, I had been hoping that this series of stories would do a good job of introducing the cast of characters, but the reality is that it expands the cast greatly and it does not help in understanding “The Pothunters”, though reading “The Pothunters” first did help several of these stories.

The book opens with “How Pillingshot Scored” which was first published in “Captain” in May of 1903. Pillingshot is a student who is worried about a test on Livy. He is worried to do just about anything for it; anything but study that is.

“The Odd Trick” was first published in “Captain” in August of 1902. In this story Philip St. H. Harrison is a young student who is pretty good at looking out for himself, but sometimes it is better to accept what you have coming.

“L’Affaire Uncle John” was first published in “Public School Magazine” in August of 1901. This story is written as a series of letters between the members of the Venables family regarding Richard’s rudeness towards his uncle John.

“Harrison’s Slight Error” was published in “Captain” in January of 1903. In this story Harrison returns and again gets into trouble when he elects to get revenge on someone without knowing who it is.

“A Shocking Affair” is the one story included which had not been published previously. In this story a student, Bradshaw, is very good at working to avoid work. In this case, the work he decides to avoid is a Thucydides exam.

“The Babe and the Dragon” was first published in “Captain” in February of 1902. In this story McArthur (a.k.a. The Babe) has been a home student who is now trying to decide which house to join. Being a sought-after athlete his choices are down to Merevale’s and Dacre’s. As it turns out Dacre is getting engaged, and because McArthur knows the woman he finds the decision to be easy.

“The Manoeuvres of Charteris” was originally published in “Captain” in August of 1903. In this story, Charteris gets some revenge on a player for the Old Crockfordians who knocked Tony Graham out of the game on a vicious play. From that point on the other person tries to get Charteris in trouble, though he skillfully avoids it, at least most of the time.

“How Payne Bucked Up” was originally published in “Captain” in October of 1902. Feeling that Payne has been slacking off due to being certain of getting his colours, Walkinshaw comes up with a plan to embarrass Payne into playing harder. The plan works, much to the misfortune of the rest of the team.

“Author!” was originally published in “Public School Magazine” in October of 1901. Abington decides to

avoid a punishment and instead take in a matinee at the theatre. After the show he gets an opportunity to meet the author, whom he discovers to his dismay is the very man who gave him his punishment.

“The Tabby Terror” was originally published in “Public School Magazine” in February of 1902. Hungry schoolboys fight back against the new house cat which is making a habit of stealing their food.

“The Prize Poem” was originally published in “Public School Magazine” in July of 1901, and was his first story published. This story deals with how the poetry contest meets its end, thanks to a willing participant who is not eligible writing a poem for an unwilling participant who is required to enter.

There are also four essays titled “Work”, “Notes”, “Now, Talking About Cricket”, and “The Tom Brown Question” which close out the book. The essays all deal, as do the stories, with the life of schoolboys, although the last one actually has to do with a book about the life of schoolboys.

For the most part, these stories are examples of Wodehouse without the interesting characters and without the humorous situations. The storylines are very simple, and while some of the characters are known a bit either from other stories in the collection or from “The Pothunters”, Wodehouse again creates far too many new characters with not enough understanding of their personalities. I can easily mark this as the worst of the Wodehouse books that I have read, so while it may be of interest to those who want to read everything he published, the audience that is simply looking for a good Wodehouse book to read would do well to avoid this one.

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