

# A HISTORY OF DIPLOMACY



JEREMY BLACK

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Jeremy Black

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*For Harvey Sicherman*

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# Preface

'So I made up my mind that you should be the next American Ambassador to France. I should like to see Mabel's face when she reads the announcements in the papers. A nobody, she called you. Well, the Ambassador to France isn't a nobody.'

J. Wellington Gedge does not subscribe to his wife's use of him to pursue her rift with her late husband's sister. Far from seeking honours or wearing 'uniforms and satin knickerbockers' and cocked hats, he wishes to spend time in California, but his wife seeks to soothe him:

'There's nothing to being an Ambassador . . . It's just a matter of money. If you have money and there are important people like the Vicomtesse de Blissac and Senator Opal behind you . . .'

And so the plot of *Hot Water* (1932) is set in motion. Being a Wodehouse, it dealt more with the course of true love, as mediated by jewel thieves; and the details of the diplomatic life did not feature. Instead, they could be taken as read by a public used to diplomacy as a set of established practices, indeed rituals. Such was the situation which underlay the presentation of diplomats and diplomacy on stage and in fiction, whether serious or satirical, as with Terry-Thomas's central role in the British comedy film *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* (1959).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, to take the Wodehouse link further, distinguished retired British Ambassador Sir Nicholas Henderson at the lunch on 3 June 1988 following the unveiling of a blue plaque in London honouring Wodehouse, claimed that most foreigners expected British diplomats to behave like Bertie Wooster and that he had aspired to be a mixture of Jeeves and Wooster in order to achieve success.

This world did not exhaust the public perception of diplomacy. Indeed, there was a popular board game of that name, created by Allan

