



# BY THE WAY

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## Offprint from Thursday Review

At the Society Dinner held at Gray's Inn on 25 October 2012, the theme of the post-dinner entertainment was *The Early Life of Bobbie Wickham*.

Members may recall that Bobbie is one of Wodehouse's most spirited young poppies, and she appeared in short stories in more than one of his main groups of books before playing an important part in the novel *Jeeves in the Offing*. She is also one of the few significant characters to feature in a story which has only appeared in a magazine.

If you want to follow her adventures, the starting point is 'Something Squishy' in the collection *Mr Mulliner Speaking*, closely followed by 'The Awful Gladness of the Mater' from the same collection and 'Mr Potter Takes a Rest Cure' from *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere*.

Bobbie played a practical joke on Bertie Wooster in 'Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit' (*Very Good, Jeeves*) before providing raw material for another Mulliner tale, 'The Passing of Ambrose', again in *Mr Mulliner Speaking*. Two further encounters with Bertie, in 'Episode of the Dog McIntosh' and 'Jeeves and the Kid Clementina', were also recounted in *Very Good, Jeeves*, but her final appearance in a short story, 'Dudley Is Back to Normal', was only published in the elusive July 1940 edition of *Strand* magazine.

Her final (but longest) appearance described the events of a period a few months after meeting and falling in love with Bertie Wooster's old friend Reginald ('Kipper') Herring. Her description of their first meeting in *Jeeves in the Offing* set the scene for the unorthodox evolution of their relationship:

"We were in the same hotel in Switzerland last Christmas. I taught him to ski. I shall

never forget the day I helped him to unscramble himself after he had taken a toss on the beginners' slope. He had both legs wrapped around his neck. I think that is when love dawned. My heart melted as I sorted him out."

Naturally, being a Wodehouse novel, matters did not proceed smoothly. Kipper Herring was a writer, amongst other work contributing book reviews to the monthly journal *Thursday Review*. One book to which he was assigned was on the subject of preparatory schools; it had been written by Rev. Aubrey Upjohn, MA, the headmaster who administered to the needs of Bertie Wooster, Gussie Fink-Nottle, Freddie Widgeon, Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright, and Kipper himself at Malvern House.

Kipper had not enjoyed his time there, and he allowed his personal prejudices to influence his review of the book. Some might suggest this was unprofessional, but Kipper would surely have argued that it was entirely justified. He was sufficiently aggrieved by his recollection of his sojourn at Malvern College to describe its worst aspects in very clear English to Bobbie, who was mightily impressed by his clarity.

So much so that when he asked her to put his typed review in an envelope and post it to the Editor, and she read it through and discovered that he had omitted the most telling phrases, she added them on to the bottom of the Review, where they were included on publication.

The Rev. Aubrey, of course, did not allow this affront to go unchallenged, and sued the *Thursday Review*. Kipper's article has never before been published, but Society Patron Simon Brett reconstituted it as a gift to our Entertainers, and has kindly agreed that it can be reprinted here for the benefit of all Members.

## Book Review

THE MOULDING OF BRITAIN'S YOUTH IN THE FORGE OF THE  
PREPARATORY SCHOOL SYSTEM

by The Rev. Aubrey Upjohn, M.A.

The Rev. Aubrey Upjohn clearly approves of the preparatory school system. And to express that approval he has written a book that is by some measure thicker than the average preparatory school pupil.

There exist forward-thinking theorists in this country who believe that the British educational system could benefit from reorganisation and change. Aubrey Upjohn is not one of them. He believes that the British preparatories are the best of schools in the best of all possible worlds. And he goes to great lengths to prove his point. Very great lengths.

The author's views on the efficacy of corporal punishment in the formation of young personalities might seem to some people perhaps excessively enthusiastic. Indeed they might have been thought excessively enthusiastic by Ghengis Khan and Vlad the Impaler. The Rev. Upjohn's theory that 'the timely administration of "six of the best" inculcates respect in juvenile minds' is, to put it at the very least, arguable. In the opinion of the current reviewer it is far more likely to inculcate in the juvenile mind a deep loathing of the one administering the punishment.

What is striking in this book is that, despite its great length, it contains very little on the subject of education. While he clearly plumes himself as an expert on matters such as discipline, punishment and the skills of bringing misery into young lives, Aubrey Upjohn does not seem concerned about what is actually taught to preparatory school pupils. So long as they stay quietly in their desks copying vast screeds of unintelligible material from the blackboard into their exercise books, he appears to feel that their teacher has done his duty by them. So long as open warfare in the classroom has been avoided, so long as blotting paper bombs soaked from the inkwells have not been flicked from desk to desk, all is well. It is a matter of indifference to Upjohn whether pupils leave their preparatory

institutions with anything in their head more intellectually stimulating than strings of rote-learned Latin Conjugations and Times Tables. And his description of the means by which pupils move on to the next stage of their education - usually Eton - seems to involve no academic attainment on their part, but rather an intimate and not entirely healthy knowledge on the part of their teachers of old boys' networks.

The author's prose style does not suggest that his own education was entirely up to the mark. If he has even read the major prose writers of the English language, he has certainly learned nothing from them. He appears to believe that the only standard of quality by which a sentence should be judged is its length. And if Aubrey Upjohn is even aware of the names of the great orators, he has learned nothing from them either. The mode of argument he favours is the hectoring. He writes in the manner of someone in love with the sound of his own voice. His pontifications are those of a man who has never been interrupted or listened to counter-arguments - perhaps a man whose only audiences have been comprised of schoolboys cowed into silence by the threat of the cane.

The one positive recommendation I can make on the subject of *The Moulding Of Britain's Youth In The Forge Of The Preparatory School System* is that it is a far more effective soporific than ether. But its author does not convince me that the institutions he describes are as perfect as he maintains.

Aubrey Upjohn might have taken a different view of preparatory schools if he had done a stretch at the Dotheboys Hall conducted by him at Malvern House, Bramley-on-Sea, as we had the misfortune to do. We have not forgotten the sausages on Sunday, which were made not from contented pigs but from pigs which had expired, regretted by all, of glanders, the botts and tuberculosis.

*'Alumnus Sapiens'*