

Ye Olde Plum News

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ON CURATES

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

'Remarkable ... how fashions change, even in clergymen. There are very few pale young curates nowadays.' True, I agreed, 'Most of them are beefy young fellows who rowed for their colleges. I don't believe I have ever seen a pale young curate.' (Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo, 1927)

'I have known some quite respectable curates.' Have you ever known one who had any money?' (Service With a Smile, 1962)

The curate had sprained his ankle and Barny Fotheringay-Phipps replaced him as the leader of the annual outing of the Church for The Village Mothers. Soon Barny regretted his commitment. *Curates are specially trained to handle this sort of situation. A tough hard-boiled curate, spitting out of the corner of his mouth, would soon have subsided these mothers, he reflected.* (Tried in the Furnace, 1932)

In all villages, of course, there must of necessity be an occasional tough egg – in the case of Blandings Parva the names of Willie Drake and Thomas (Rat-face) Blenkiron spring to mind – but it was seldom that the local infants offered anything beyond the power of a curate to control. (Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend, 1935)

Every curate throughout the English countryside keeps tucked away among his effects a special sermon designed to prevent him being caught short, if suddenly called upon to preach at evensong. (Anselm Gets His Chance, 1937)

I have heard Percy say that his trust in Bodmin is like the unspotted faith of a young curate in his Bishop. (The Amazing Hat Mystery, 1932).

England was littered with the shrivelled remains of curates at whom the lady bishopess had looked through her lorgnette. He had seen them wilt like salted snails at the episcopal breakfast table. (Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo, 1926)

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### AUGUSTINE MULLINER

*He was as meek and mild a young man as you could meet in a day's journey.* He was secretly engaged to Jane, daughter of Rev. Stanley Brandon, once a heavy-weight boxer at Cambridge. Like so many vicars, Rev. Brandon had a poor opinion of curates, and he had always regarded Augustine as rather below than above the general norm or level of the despised class. Augustine hadn't the guts to ask for her hand. The miraculous elixir Mulliners Buck-U-Uppo however gave him courage to intervene in a quarrel between Rev. Brandon and his visitor, the Bishop of Stortford. *As a curate, I cannot stand by and see two superiors of the cloth, who are moreover old school-fellows, forgetting themselves.* After this he also dared to ask for Jane's hand. Rev. Brandon was indebted to Augustine for his intervention and consented. The

grateful Bishop asked Augustine to become his secretary and later on he was appointed vicar at Walsingford-below-Chiveney-on-Thames. (Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo 1926, The Bishop's Move 1927, Gala Night 1930)

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HAROLD 'STINKER' PINKER

He was a student at Magdalen College in Oxford together with Bertie Wooster. *I had watched Harold Pinker through the formative years of his life, and I knew him for what he was - a large, lumbering, Newfoundland puppy of a chap - full of zeal, yes - always doing the best, true; but never quite able to make a grade; a man, in short, who if there was a chance of bungling an enterprise and landing himself in the soup, would snatch at it ... He played Rugby football not only for his University, but also for England, and at the art of hurling an opponent into a mud puddle and jumping on his neck with cleated boots had had few, if any superiors.* (The Code of the Woosters, 1938)

Harold was secretly engaged to Stephanie 'Stiffy' Byng. *The way I look at it is that when a fellow has had plug-uglies in cleated boots doing a Shuffle-Off-To-Buffalo on his face Saturday after Saturday since he was a slip of a boy, he must get to fear nothing, not even marriage with a girl like Stiffy.* (Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves, 1950)

Stiffy had a bone to pick with Constable Oates, and she demanded Harold to pinch the constable's helmet. *'But Stiffy, you can't ask a curate to go about pinching policemen's helmets.'* 'Why not?' ... He (Harold) still remained the same galumphing man with two left feet, who had always been constitutionally incapable of walking through the great Gobi desert without knocking something over ... *Stinker's was a face which in the old College days had glowed with health and heartiness. The health was still there - he looked like a clerical beetroot. ... In one hand he was carrying the helmet which I had last observed perched on the dome of Constable Eustace Oates.... What people expect from a curate is a zealous performance of his parochial duties.... When they find him de-helmeting policemen, they look at one another with raised eyebrow of censure, and ask themselves if he is quite the right man for the job.* (The Code of the Woosters, 1938)

Under normal conditions lions could have taken his correspondence course, and had he encountered Spode on the football field, he would have no hesitation in springing at his neck and twisting it into a lover's knot. The trouble was that he was a curate, and the brass hats of the Church look askance at curates who swat the parishioners. Sock your flock, and you are sunk.... Incensed at what I suppose seemed to him (Spode) this unwarrantable interference with his aims and objects, he hit Stinker on the nose, and all the doubts that had been bothering that man of God vanished in a flash.... There was a brief mix-up, and the next thing one observed was Spode on the ground,

looking like a corpse which has been in the water several days. (Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves, 1950)

'The Pinker I'm after is a curate.' 'I'm a curate.' 'You are? Yes, by Jove you're perfectly right. I see your collar button at the back, You're not H. P. Pinker by any chance?... Prop forward for Oxford and England a few years ago?' 'Yes.' 'Well, would you be interested in becoming a vicar?... My chap at Hockley-cum-Meston is downing tools now that his ninetieth birthday is approaching, and I've been scouring the countryside for a spare. Extraordinarily difficult the quest has been, because what I wanted was a vicar who was a good prop forward.' (Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves, 1950)

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### ANSELM MULLINER

This young man was secretly engaged to Myrtle Jellaby who lived with her uncle, Sir Leopold Jellaby, a famous collector of stamps. Anselm did not dare to ask him for her hand, because of his meagre stipend. Anselm inherited a stamp album and asked Sir Jellaby if he wanted to buy it. Sir Jellaby offered him ten pounds although the album was insured for five thousand. Myrtle suggested that it should be stolen so they could collect the insurance money. Anselm could not contemplate such an unethical course, but Myrtle gave a tip to Mr. Joe Beamish, who stole the album. The vicar was injured at the break-in and Anselm got the chance to give a sermon at evensong. His sermon was a roaring success. Joe Beamish was so moved that he returned the album and Sir Leopold, equally moved, offered ten thousand dollars for it, and approved of the marriage between Anselm and Myrtle. (Anselm Gets His Chance, 1937)

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CUTHBERT 'BILL' BAILEY

He was in Oxford with Pongo Twistleton. *'What sort of chap is he? Pale and fragile, I suppose, with a touch of consumption and a tendency to recite the collect for the day in a high tenor voice?'* 'Pale and fragile, my foot. He boxed three years for Oxford.' ... *'Large chap with a face like a gorilla.'* (Service With a Smile, 1962)

Bill loved Myra Schoonmaker, daughter of an American millionaire who had left her in charge of Lady Constance. Connie considered Bill an impossible suitor and deported Myra to Blandings. Myra planned to elope to London and marry Bill at a registry office. Bill: *'Twas a bit doubtful of this idea of hers.... I mean, I've so little to offer her. I thought we ought to wait till I got a vicarage.'* He overcame his scruples but they went to different registry offices. Lord Ickenham fixed a happy end for the young lovers. (Service With a Smile, 1962)

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