

The Accidental Ecumenist

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I.

Sir Reginald Piddleby-Squeak was in a pickle. The pickle he was in was no ordinary pickle, but a pickle of the most unusual size and sourness, a pickle from which he had no prospects of being rapidly extracted. He expected at any moment that he would begin turning green and breaking out in small garlicky lumps.

It all started a week ago Monday, Monday of course being the day when Sir Reginald met at the golf club with his schoolfellows, Sir Allan Pennymain and the Right Rev. Harold Puffmelon. Harold was wearing his clerical collar under a worn wool sweater, and Sir Allan was questioning him closely about his attire.

“Why must you wear that holy shirt when we’re on the golf course? Does the Archbishop forbid you to remove it?”

“Not at all.”

“Well, why must you wear it then?”

The Right Rev. Harold Puffmelon looked Sir Allan in the eye and replied, not without pride, “I have important pastoral duties after our morning round.”

“Do you?” Sir Reginald asked incredulously. He didn’t like to butt into a conversation that was not his own, but this was too much. It was well-known throughout the diocese that Harold was rarely seen doing anything that could be classified as pastoral. He liked to spend his days puttering in his flower garden, checking the progress of his peas and lettuce, taking long afternoon

naps in what he called his study.

“Of course I do,” he replied. “I have been charged, you know, with the cure of souls.”

Sir Reginald proved to be more disciplined than Sir Allan, for the latter snorted out the very guffaw that Sir Reginald had successfully pushed back into my gut.

“Since when have you cared a wit for souls? You’re far more interested in bodies, and indeed in only one body, your own.” It was quite true that the Right Reverend had been growing considerably more rotund of late, but Sir Reginald had been far too polite to point out the fact.

“You obviously know nothing about my calling, my vocation.” The word “vocation” was pronounced with such an air of mystery that Sir Allan almost felt that he was serious. Taking another look at Harold’s nicely rounded belly, his smooth rounded laughing face, his bright bulging eyes, however, was enough to convince Sir Allan that the Right Reverend was the same good fellow who had helped him raid the buttery when both were at Christchurch. Something was up, to be sure, but what was up was not Harold’s sense of pastoral obligation.

Before Allan could pursue the matter, Sir Reginald broke in again. “Why can’t you bring that shirt in a shopping bag, and change in the lockers after our round?”

“Does my shirt offend you?”

“Certainly not,” Sir Reginald said hastily, “but it does inhibit me.”

“Hear, hear,” said Sir Allan, reentering the conversation that had locked him out.

“Inhibit you how?”

“Come, come, old man,” Sir Reginald began. “Surely you know how the game of golf works. We set the ball on a tee, take a couple of elegant practice swings, step up to the ball, and take a whack. What follows is this: The ball bounces sideways into a pile of leaves or the long

grass, we curse loudly, throw our club, and move to the next shot.”

“Yes?” The Right Rev. was not known for being quick on the trigger.

“Don’t you see that we can’t do this with you wearing that shirt of yours?” asked Sir Allan.

“Whyever not?”

“Let me be blunt, Harold,” said Sir Reginald, fighting for his life to get control of the conversation that Sir Allan kept interrupting. “It’s the cursing part. We don’t feel comfortable cursing when you’re out here in that collar.”

“But I have no problem cursing,” said the Right Rev. This was perfectly true. Harold was the worst golfer of the three, and he always cursed like a soldier whenever he hit a bad shot, which meant every time he hit the ball.

“Yes, of course, but you’re a clergyman. That makes all the difference.”

“I fail to see how my being a clergyman makes any difference. If anything, it should mean that I’m more concerned about cursing than you.”

It was the first time that Sirs Reginald and Allan had considered this novel theory. A clergyman more concerned with holy behavior than the average person was almost too much for them to ponder.

“You mean, you don’t get a ‘bye’?” Sir Reginald was struggling to find the correct theological term.

“A ‘bye’?”

“You know, a break, some latitude, some extra leeway. After all, you devote yourself entirely to the church and the service of God, and doesn’t that count for something? Doesn’t that mean that you can get away with little blue sins like cursing on the golf course?”

“Not at all. The pastoral vocation demands a high degree of personal holiness.” There was that word “vocation” again, and it sent shivers through Sirs Reginald and Allan.

Unfortunately, this high-level theological discussion was cut short by the astonishing transformation that suddenly overtook the Right Rev. Harold Puffmelon. His protruding eyes shrank to small and suspicious slits, his rounded body withered like a raisin, and his smooth round laughing face creased with worried wrinkles.

Sir Reginald feared his friend was having a heart attack. “Harold, should we get you back to the clubhouse?”

“Anything but that,” he said in a shaky voice.

“What is the problem?” Sir Allan had sauntered away to the tee, and had now returned. “I say, Harold, you don’t look well.”

“I don’t feel well. Not well at all.”

“Then we should take you home.”

“No. I can’t go back there. I can’t.” Sir Reginald feared that Harold might start stomping his feet like a toddler, and perhaps even throw himself on the ground and roll around in a full-scale tantrum. As he considered this possibility, it occurred to him, not for the first time, how precisely like a toddler the Right Rev. looked. He had no time, however, to draw suitable implications from this insight, for Harold was pointing with quivering finger, like the grim reaper on an anti-smoking poster, toward the parking lot. Sirs Reginald and Allan could do nothing but follow the direction of the finger to discover the source of the Right Rev.’s unease.

To the untrained eyes of Reginald and Allan, the parking lot disclosed no appalling secrets. Two middle-aged men had emerged from a black Mercedes and were pulling clubs from the trunk.

One was very tall and wiry and had a tidal wave of very white hair on top of his thin, gray-skinned face. The other was half as tall, square-built and swarthy, and moved with quick elegant steps around the car.

“Appalling,” said Sir Allan.

“What’s that?”

“Appalling, I say,” repeated Sir Allan.

“Yes, but what’s appalling?”

“That, of course.” Sir Allan’s finger, which was not quivering and which looked more like Uncle Sam’s finger in a U.S. army recruiting poster than like the grim reaper’s finger in an anti-smoking poster, joined the Right Rev.’s in pointing toward the two newcomers. Sir Reginald turned and looked again at the parking lot.

“Have you ever seen anything so crude, so outrageous, so awful?”

“Hmm,” was all that Sir Reginald could muster.

“Just look at those trousers.”

It was true. The tall wiry man was wearing the most shocking plaid trousers, a checkerboard of screaming yellows, reds, greens, and purples, arranged in no particular order and without concern for the viewer. The trousers were an assault upon, an act of battery against, a prosecutable offense to the visual organs, the ocular capacity, of the observer. Above the trousers the tall man was wearing a bright lime green shirt with a mauve collar. In attire, the short swarthy man was exactly the reverse; he wore tight lime green trousers and a screaming plaid shirt. They looked like mirror images one might see in trick mirrors at the carnival.

The scene was enough to turn anyone philosophical, even someone with as little

philosophical bent as Sir Allan. “There was a time,” he began wistfully, his eyes tearing slightly, “when golf was a gentleman’s game, when the courses were full of modestly dressed gentry who walked the course with a gentleman’s leisurely gait and who cursed with a sense of tradition and decorum. Ahh, the world we have lost. Today, golfers buzz around in electric carts, curse in that awful modern way, and wear *that*.”

Sirs Reginald and Allan both sighed, and turned toward the tee. They were halfway there before they realized that the Right Rev. was still fixed in his position, his quivering finger still pointing at the pair from the black Mercedes.

“I say, Harold, are you ready to play?” Sir Reginald asked.

“Yes, Harold, we’ve seen the appalling costume. The clowns,” Sir Allan growled.

“I-I-I-It’s not their at-at-at-attire,” the Right Rev. finally sputtered out.

“What, then?” queried the Sirs in chorus. They looked at each other with irritation.

“It’s who it is.”

“Who is it?”

“Yes, who it is.”

“No, I’m asking, who is it?”

“Who is what?”

“Who is that?”

“That what?”

“That being at the end of your finger.”

Right Rev. Harold Puffmelon was neither an intelligent man nor a brave man, but he summoned sufficient intelligence and courage at this moment to blurt out in a rather loud voice.

“It’s the Archbishop! It’s Archbishop Quesada, and the Dean Panzard.”

“Splendid! Perhaps they can join us for a round. Are they good?” Sir Reginald was impatient to begin the game.

“You don’t understand. I can’t let him see me here.”

Light was dawning in the dark brains of Sirs Reginald and Allan. “Ahh,” they said in unison, and looked at each other with irritation. “Ooh,” said Sir Reginald again, this time beating Sir Allan, who was left spluttering nonsensical vowels. Reginald looked at Sir Allan triumphantly.

“This is no time for oohing and ahing. This is impossible. This will cost me my living. This will mean the end of all my hopes and dreams.”

“You have hopes and dreams?”

“Of course. Dreams of quiet afternoons napping in the garden, dreams of quiet mornings pattering with my flowers”

“But no dreams of golfing with the Archbishop?”

“This is a nightmare.”

“Pray,” said Sir Allan, putting a reassuring arm around the chubby shoulders of his friend.

“This is no time for prayer,” the Right Rev. said angrily.

“No, No. I was not suggesting that you pray. I was using ‘pray’ in the archaic sense, in which it has a meaning close to the modern usage of ‘please.’ It has always been a great sorrow of mine that the word ‘pray’ has gone so out of currency. No one uses it anymore except to talk about praying.”

“Enough!” The Right Rev. was in no mood for a lecture in historical philology, and Sir Allan brusquely removed his arm from the shoulders of his friend.

“Pray, hum, er, please, my dear Harold,” Sir Reginald intervened, “tell us why it is that you cannot be seen on the golf course by the said Archbishop?”

The Right Rev. swallowed hard. “Right-o. I’m wearing my collar. . . .”

“We had noticed.” It was another chorus.

“Yes, well. I’m wearing my collar because I had been sent on an important mission. I was supposed to represent the bishop at the Roman Catholic-Anglican colloquy at Salisbury. The colloquy was finishing work on a joint statement on baptism, eucharist, and something or other, and I’m supposed to be there right now.”

“Why, then, are you here on the golf course?” asked Sir Reginald.

“Yes, pray, why here?” Sir Allan put in.

The Right Rev. Puffimelon took a deep breath. “Because Monday is golf day, and I haven’t missed a golf day with you two for three years running. I thought I could pop in for an hour or so, play a round, and then run on to Salisbury in time for the final consultations. These colloquies are so populous, you know, that I would not be missed.”

Sirs Reginald and Allan furrowed their brows and pursed their lips and scratched their chins and did several other things to their faces in an effort to make themselves look thoughtful and sympathetic. Secretly, they were thinking how happy they were that they were not in their friend’s position, which both would have described, if given the opportunity, as a terrible pickle. Despite the radiant sun twinkling on the still-dewy grass, despite the daffodils along the fairway, despite the fact that it was a day on which one could say without irony that God is in his heaven and all is right with the world, despite all this, they realized that storm clouds and fearsome weather were in store for their dear Harold.

“There is only one thing to be done,” Harold was saying. “One of you could put on my collar.”

Sirs Reginald and Allan were so engrossed by their relief that they were not in the same pickle as their friend that they did not hear this.

“I say,” Harold repeated. “One of you could put on my collar.”

Sir Reginald started as if awakened from a deep and satisfying slumber. “Oh?”

“Hmm?” added Sir Allan.

“I say,” Harold began to repeat again, this time in desperation, for the Archbishop had just finished paying green fees and was walking toward the cart barn to pick out a golf cart, with the swarthy thick Dean walked elegantly behind.

“Whatever would that solve?”

“We could switch clothes.”

“But we look nothing alike,” objected Sir Reginald. “I am tall and well-preserved, and you are short and increasingly fat.”

“Precisely.” The Right Rev. looked positively smug.

“Precisely?”

“Precisely.”

“Precisely what, precisely?”

“Precisely, we don’t look anything alike.”

“Then what will my impersonating you accomplish, precisely?”

“You won’t be impersonating me, not precisely.”

“Then why will I be wearing your collar, precisely?”

Sir Allan had as much of this precision as he could take. “Look here, Reginald, it’s all quite simple. If you put on the collar, and Harold here puts on your shirt, then the Archbishop will see Harold wearing your shirt, and think that he’s just come out for a round of golf. No doubt, he’ll completely forget that Harold was supposed to be at the colloquy. What *is* a colloquy, anyway?”

“That’s not it at all.” Harold was turning slightly pink, a color that, given his round face, made him look extraordinarily like a pig. “Not what I meant at all.”

“Well, perhaps *you* could explain the plan, then.”

Harold looked quickly in the direction of the cart barn. The Archbishop had sat down behind the wheel of a sleek red golf cart. As he pushed the pedal, the cart lurched forward and grazed the side of a royal blue golf cart that was parked nearby. He tried to stop, but instead swerved sharply in the opposite direction. Harold watched in wonderment as Dean Panzard rolled out the side of the cart, and his lime pants and screaming plaid shirt disappeared under two large golf bags, several dozen clubs, and an avalanche of golf balls of various colors. By this time, the pro was running from the clubhouse, hands waving in the air, while the Archbishop had been able to stop the cart by guiding it head-on into a tree. Perhaps, Harold thought piously, God does answer prayer.

“This buys us some time,” he said hastily. “Listen. This is my plan. The Archbishop has seen me only once or twice. Mostly we talk by phone or correspond, and on the few occasions that we have been face to face I have always been decked out in my clerical garb or some other absurd regalia. If Reginald and I exchange shirts, then he won’t recognize me at all.”

“Ahh.” Yet another chorus, followed by more irritated glances.

There was a pause.

Then, "Say, who I am supposed to be then?" Reginald asked.

"Whoever you please," Harold said, his face returning to its normal color and his mouth turning up in its normal grin.

"But if I say I'm C of E, he's sure to catch me. He'll ask me where my parish is, who my bishop is, and then he'll probably ask me to recite the Thirty-Nine Articles."

"He probably doesn't know them himself," Harold replied. "But I see your point. Say, you went to parochial school, right? Trained by nuns and Jesuits, correct? Learned the catechism, what? Why not pretend to be Roman Catholic?"

"I haven't been to mass since before Vatican II," Reginald objected. "Last time I went, it was all in Latin and the priest was standing with his back to me. Very rude, I thought."

"Yes, yes. That's all changed now. But that won't harm you. At your age, you could pass for one of those Tridentine hardliners who thinks that Vatican II was the fall of the church."

Reginald posed further objections to the plan, but at last it was agreed to. Harold and Reginald snuck behind the bushes, and emerged a few minutes later, each transformed, one might almost say transfigured. Observing them emerge from behind the bushes, Sir Allan could not help but admire the courage and cunning of his friends. The Right Rev. was now wearing a tight-fitting brightly colored Hawaiian shirt, open at the collar and for three buttons down, revealing a hairless chest of quite striking whiteness. On his bald head was a gray fishing cap. He looked like an Icelandic mafioso on holiday. Sir Reginald was now wearing the purple clerical shirt, which was too short and hung on him as if he were a skeleton. The collar was too large by several sizes, and gaped loosely around his neck. He looked like one of the desert fathers making an unexpected and no doubt prophetic appearance on a sun drenched golf course in central Wiltshire. A

voice interrupted Sir Allan's meditations. "Good morning. Perhaps we can join forces and play as a fivesome."

It was the Archbishop.

II.

Introductions all around.

"I am the Archbishop Quesada, and this is Panzard, Dean of Canterbury." Panzard gave a slight bow, and Sir Reginald expected him to click his heels.

"Sir Allan Pennymain," said Sir Allan Pennymain. "And this is my dear friend, um, yes, er. . . ."

"Arnold Muffleberry," Harold quickly said. "Ah ah. My dear old and lifetime friend Sir Allan 'ere is such a joker, always pretendin' to forget me name, 'e is. Most pleased to meet you, gov'nor." Harold had put on the most disturbing cockney accent, dropping h's like an extra from *My Fair Lady* and winking and twitching as if a fly were stuck in the corner of his eye.

The Archbishop looked carefully at Harold, opened his thin lips slightly as if to say something, but turned to Sir Reginald. "And you, sir? It looks as if we share the same vocation." It was the third time Sir Reginald had heard the word "vocation," and it was not yet nine o'clock. He shivered slightly, but forced a smile.

"The Rev. Reginald Piggledy-Snout, at your service, sir."

"Piggledy-Snout?"

"You have it, sir, the first time."

The Archbishop wrinkled his nose in thought. "Irish?" he asked. "Are you of the Dublin

Piggledy-Snouts?”

“I am afraid not, sir. I am London born and bred. Soho. I’m of the Soho Piggledy-Snouts.”

Dean Panzard had during this time said nothing, but stood impatiently leaning on his driver.

“What say we begin playing? May we play together?”

“O’ course, mate,” said Harold, with a broad wink and laying a hand of Panzard’s broad shoulder. “It’d be a great ‘onor to ‘ave someone of your station to play along with the likes o’ us.”

The Dean, it seemed to Sir Allan, was not keen about having hands laid on his broad shoulders.

“Indeed.” The Archbishop’s mouth moved again as if he were going to speak further, but all that came out was, “Let’s tee up, then.”

The Dean was the most eager to play, and he shouldered his way to the tee. The Archbishop turned to Sir Reginald, and said in a hushed golfing voice, “I don’t believe that we have met before, have we? Is your parish close to here?”

“No, no,” said Sir Reginald. “As I said, I’m a Londoner through and through. I grew up and stayed in Soho, where I can minister to my own kind.”

“You don’t sound as if you’re from Soho. You sound more like, what?, Balliol?”

“Christchurch, sir,” Sir Reginald said hastily. “I did get out of Soho for a year or two to attend university. I suppose I picked up the Oxbridge twang.”

“Soho? Soho? Then you must know the Rev. Dr. Honeyhouse? Are you his assistant?”

“I know no man of that name, sir.”

“How is that possible? You must have run across one another a time or two. He has been in Soho for years.”

“You see, sir,” Sir Reginald drew himself up into his most Vatican-esque stature, “I am Roman Catholic.”

“Are you?”

“I am.”

The Archbishop pondered this for a few moments as he watched Harold slice his drive far off the fairway. He let out a stream of invective and threw his club at the ball washer.

“Your friend is rather a serious golfer.”

“He is indeed.”

Archbishop Quesada was contemplating his fortune in running across a London Catholic on the golf course in Wiltshire. “But how is it that you’ve not met Rev. Honeyhouse? I understood you Catholics were making every effort to pursue ecumenism.”

“Ecumenism? Bah!” Sir Reginald thought of spitting, but decided it would be too melodramatic, and besides the wind might carry his spittle in unforeseen directions. He contented himself with a “Bah,” then added another “Bah!” and another disgusted “Ecumenism!”

The Archbishop was shocked. “But surely your attitude is quite out of step with the position of the magisterium?”

Sir Reginald was on the verge of saying “Magisterium! Bah!” when some dim memory of his catechetical training held him back, some niggling reminder that “Magisterium” and “Bah” were not words that a Catholic, much less a Catholic priest, would yoke together in a single sentence.

He opted for a more careful, more scholarly approach. “I believe that if you read the recent encyclicals with care, that you will find that Rome’s commitment to ecumenism is much different

than many Protestants believe.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“You really believe that?”

“I really do.”

“Really.” This was said not as a question but as a statement, and Sir Reginald decided that it was sufficient to bring closure to that portion of this theological conversation. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

“Ah, but what about Vatican II? *Lumen gentium* and all that? Surely that was clear enough?”

Sir Reginald had been preparing himself for this one. “Vatican II? Bah!” He was confident he could get away with this, and said it with relish.

“You don’t accept Vatican II?”

“I do not, I never will. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. I’m all for Trent and Vatican I and transubstantiation and papal infallibility and anathemas and burning heretics and the whole bit. I’m a died-in-the-wool Tridentine. But Vatican II,” he paused dramatically, “Vatican II was the fall of the church.”

“But surely you must agree that it was necessary for Rome to open itself to the modern world, to adjust to today’s realities?”

“I certainly do not agree. Rome, open to the modern world? Rome, adjust to today’s realities?” Sir Reginald knew enough of rhetoric to realize that a third question of the same structure would be an effective device, and he paused for a moment to construct such a climactic

sentence. Nothing came to him, and with a slight shrug he continued, “No, I say the modern world must open itself to Rome, and that today’s realities must bend themselves to the will of the Holy Father, may he be blessed forever. It is a badge of honor for the Catholic to be out of step with the times. That is the essence of Catholicism. Because she is eternal, because our Holy Mother Church is unchanging, it is inevitable that the times will be different from the eternities of our eternal and unchanging”

Sir Reginald was losing track of his point, and his voice trailed off. It did not matter, for the Archbishop had long since ceased to listen, his attention being fixed on elegant arch of Dean Panzard’s drive. Reginald thought he heard the Archbishop curse under his breath.

Suddenly, Archbishop Quesada turned to Reginald again. “What, then, of your separated brethren?”

“Separated brethren! Bah! O, I see it’s my turn to tee off.” Sir Reginald walked as clerically as he could manage to the tee, leaving the Archbishop to ponder, with not a little astonishment, the fossil that he had just discovered.

The fivesome proceeded from tee to green and thence to another tee and so on. Dean Panzard was by far the best golfer of the group. He hit drive after drive of textbook perfection, stroked his irons from the fairway with grace and took up the most delicate divots, read the breaks of the green like a professional topographer. Archbishop Quesada for his part might have been flailing at windmills, and in fact on several occasions he actually resembled a windmill -- he pulled his club back with a long and slow backswing, rushed forward like a propeller, completely missed the ball, and the force of his swing was such that his follow through brought his club nearly back to where it began, as his body twisted into the shape of a loaf of challah. Bad as he was, the

Archbishop resolutely refrained from cursing.

“He must have some sense of vocation,” Reginald thought.

At the fourth tee, while Sir Allan was preparing for one of his jerky, middle-aged drives, the Archbishop sidled up to Harold and nudged him with an elbow.

“We have met, haven’t we?”

“Oh, no, gov’ner. We’ve never met afore today.”

“You look terribly familiar to me.”

“Ah ‘ave one of those faces, I guess. A face to launch a thousand chips, eh?”

“Do you have a relative in the ministry, by any chance?”

“Ah, no, sir, not the church o’ England. My family and me ‘ave been Unitarians for generations, all the way back to the Unitarian Reformation, I do believe.”

“Oh?”

“That’s right, sir.”

“What did you say your name was again?”

Harold fumbled through his memory files, getting paper cuts all the way.

“Arnold,” he said at last with relief.

“No, no. Your surname.”

“Oh. Well. Yes.”

“Yes?”

“Oh, my surname?”

“Your surname.”

“That’ll be Muzzleberg, sir.”

“Really? I was sure you said Muffleberry before.”

“Muffleberry? I don’t know the man, sir.”

“No, I mean you said your name was Muffleberry. Didn’t you?”

“Don’t believe so, sir. And, beggin’ your pardon, I do believe I’m capable of rememberin’ me own name. No offense, sir, but I do believe I’m capable o’ that.”

“Certainly, certainly. I must have misheard.”

“Likely that’s the case, sir. I do speak in what me friend calls a dielect, and it’s not always easy to understand if you don’t ‘ear it everyday.”

“Indeed.”

Harold was confident he had dodged that bullet, and became bolder. “Now, there’s the thing, sir.”

“The thing?”

“Yes, sir, the thing. I mean, you just answered me by saying ‘indeed.’ That’s part of a dielect too, isn’t it? You wouldn’t ‘ear me goin’ around sayin’ ‘indeed’ now would you? I thought not. We almost can say we speak different languages altogether. We are a people separated by a common language, as they say.”

“Indeed.”

At the eighth tee, the Archbishop chose Sir Reginald to sidle up to. His every movement was a sidle. “My dear Rev., I have a proposal for you.”

“Indeed?”

“Indeed.”

“And what might that be, sir?”

“After this golf game, I’m on my way to Salisbury, where we are finishing up work on a joint Anglican-Catholic statement about baptism, eucharist, and something or other. I’d be very pleased if you would accompany me. You might find it interesting.”

“As I told you, sir, I do not go in for this ecumenical thing. I’m a Tridentine, a Tri-den-tine Catholic.” Reginald spoke the word as if he were speaking to a deaf old lady or a very small child. “And as a Tri-den-tine Catholic, I consider you a heretic destined for eternal flames unless you return to mother church and kiss the feet of the Holy Father, may he be blessed forever.”

“Yes, I know that.”

“And you still want me to come?”

“Yes, of course. Yours is a position that is, shall we say, underrepresented at gatherings like this. Everyone is so overly nice, muting their real disagreements. I believe that you could add a dash of spice to the proceedings, a bit of adventure. It would be like the old days, at the dawn of the movement, when excitement was in the air and danger was the name of the game.”

“You are, I suspect, still talking about an ecumenical gathering?”

“Of course.”

“And you used the words ‘adventure’ and ‘danger’ and ‘excitement’?”

“Precisely. Back in the old days, we thought we were overcoming half a millennium of mutual suspicion and hostility, and opening up the possibility of a new Christian age, with a newly reunified church.”

“Sounds keen. What happened to it?”

“Well, I hope you don’t mind my saying it, but it was the Catholics, you see. Until Vatican II, there was one thing that was forcing all other churches together, and that was our mutual

hostility to Rome. At least we could depend on the Catholics to be arrogant, stand-offish, superior, Romish. But then suddenly they wanted to play the game with us -- ‘separated brethren’ and mutual recognition were in, anathemas and papal bulls were out. How were we supposed to get our team working together when the opposing team wants to be on our side? Talk about dirty play.”

While the Archbishop was speaking, Panzard had snuck up behind Reginald, and drawn his finger slowly across his throat. Still the Archbishop talked, and Panzard stuck out his tongue and pinched it between his index and middle fingers as if he were cutting it out with a pair of scissors. Still the Archbishop talked, and Panzard had no choice but to interrupt.

“I believe, your eminence, that you have made your point.” It was one of the few times he had talked all morning, and Reginald noted that his accent was vaguely Mediterranean.

“Yes, I suppose I have offended our Roman brother. Still, you must consider coming to the colloquy. I insist upon it.”

Sir Reginald offered every excuse that he could think of: Colloquies were for Protestants, colloquies gave him a rash, he was on vacation, he was not on vacation, he was heading to an important meeting, he was heading home, the weather was too bright, the weather was too gloomy. On and on it went, but the tall gray Archbishop and the short dark Dean found an answer to his every excuse. He had almost found a way of escape by protesting that his mother was in hospital, when Harold walked up to the trio to offer his contribution to the discussion.

“I do ‘ope you’ve convinced ‘im, sir, since ‘e is known throughout these parts as the very best preacher among the Catholic clergy. Catholics aren’t known for their preaching, except me friend Reginald here.”

Reginald turned to glare, and his glare said, “After all that I’ve done for you! And now this is how I am repaid!”

Harold’s words were coming fast and thick, and he brushed off the glare without a thought. “Ah recall one very memorable sermon, on Easter it was. Why, it was like we was at the door of the tomb itself, ‘e was so vivid. ‘Today, new life burst from the grave. Today, a new world began. Today, it is your chance to share in that new life. Today is the day that the Lord has made.’ Old ladies were swoonin’, hardened old men weepin’, prostitutes and curpurses convertin’ on the spot. Oh, ‘twas like a Protestant camp meetin’.”

“Excuse me, Har-, Arnold, may I speak to you in private?”

Sir Reginald grabbed Harold by the arm, pulled him a few feet away, and hissed, “What do you think you are doing?”

“Reginald, now. Don’t be upset. I need you to do me this one last favor. You need to go to that colloquy. The old coot has almost recognized me twice, and I need something to deflect his interest from me.”

“Some way you choose to deflect interest, going on with stories about revivals. I can’t preach!”

“You were in the Balliol oratorical society, what?”

“That’s very different.”

“Oh, no. I can assure you that they are very similar. If you can orate on the dangers of admitting women to the common room -- which I believe I remember you did -- then you can preach.”

Sir Reginald was not convinced, and Harold realized that he had to play his trump card.

“They’ll feed you.”

“Eh?”

“Food. Delicious food. A lot of food. More than a lot.”

“Hmm.”

“And beverages.”

“Really? At a colloquy?”

“I suppose it started with the Lutherans, but the Catholics can drink a fair bit themselves.”

“Well”

“And tobacco.”

“Oh?”

“But no cursing, unless it is to make a rhetorical point.”

“Of course.”

“And believe me I will owe you a huge favor, I will be indebted for life, or longer.”

“Well”

“It’s settled then. ‘E’d be most ‘appy to go along.” Harold leaped with both feet back into his imitation cockney, as he saw Panzard approaching. “‘E just wanted to know that I ‘ad me a way to get ‘ome.”

And so it was decided. After the Archbishop and Dean had changed to more sober attire, Sir Allan and the Right Rev. Harold stood by the black Mercedes as it backed out of the parking lot and sped down the road, with Reginald tucked uncomfortably in the back seat. The last thing they saw was a desperate face looking at them through the back window, and Sir Allan thought he saw Reginald scraping against the window with his fingernails, like someone buried alive in a Poe

short story.

“Now I’m in a pickle,” said Sir Reginald.

Indeed he was, and a very sour and garlicky one at that.

III.

The Salisbury Anglican-Catholic Colloquy was destined to go down in history as the colloquy that reinstated the wars of religion. Not that war literally broke out in the aftermath of the colloquy, of course. No one at the colloquy cared enough about religion or war to carry on anything that combined the two, but the colloquy set the cause of ecumenism back by several decades according to some experts, by several centuries according to the more historically minded commentators. Not since Luther pounded the table at Zwingli chanting “hoc est, hoc est” had any church meeting designed to bring unity brought so much division.

At the bottom of this was, of course, our very own Reginald Piddleby-Squeak, acting under the alias of the Rev. Reginald Piggledy-Snout, of Soho, London.

When Reginald arrived, he was determined to keep his mouth shut, except to fill it with the delicacies that Harold had promised. In this, he was quite disappointed. It had not occurred to Reginald to ask if Harold had ever actually been to a colloquy, but it was clear that, if he had, it was a much more luxuriant one than the present. When Reginald arrived, the colloquy was taking a break for tea. Hungry from his round of golf, Reginald made straight for the table, only to find it covered with dry, wrinkled fruit, stale digestive biscuits, and slices of Swiss cheese that looked and tasted like bark chips with holes bored in it. He took a bite of cracker and cheese and felt crumbs tumble down the front of his shirt. Suddenly, a large hand slapped him on the back.

“So, you are our special guest, the guest of honor, as they say?” Reginald turned around to an unfamiliar face. It is often said that the eyes of certain people are always atwinkle, and that is true for some of the cheerier sorts of people, and it was true of the face that went with the hand that had slapped Reginald on the back. But this face went far beyond the norm. Not only were the eyes a blaze of twinkling light, but the whole face looked as if it glittered with a thousand stars. The broad nose twinkled, the teeth twinkled, the cheeks twinkled, the forehead twinkled, the clerical collar seemed to be illuminated from behind with some sort of electrical contraption. Reginald felt an urge to shade his eyes from the blaze that confronted him, but decided against it on the grounds that it would have been impolite.

“Umph, yumph,” Reginald replied, trying to keep some of the cracker in his mouth long enough to chew and swallow.

“I hear you’re prepared to offer a very, shall we say, unique perspective on the proceedings today. That, to my mind, is something that -- how to say it -- needs to be done and done soon. The whole colloquy has descended into -- what to call it? -- terminal niceness. We need some spice, or so it seems to me. All this unity, unity, unity -- it’s not honest and, if you ask me, it’s not Christian.”

“Umph, yumph,” Reginald returned, smiling. As he smiled, a fine spray of cracker crumbs escaped from his mouth.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I’m Trevor Brooks, and I serve a parish in Liverpool, church of England you see. There are a lot of, what shall I call them, your kind in Liverpool, are there not?”

“My kind?” It came out as a croak. Reginald had finally forced the cracker down his gullet,

but he was gasping for something to drink.

Trevor Brooks twinkled. “You know, Catholics, Romanists, Papists, whatever you will. Terribly competitive, you know, but a healthy sort of competition, don’t you think?”

Reginald was about to respond when a cadaverous deacon in a moth-eaten tuxedo rang a large bronze bell that was set up at the west end of the nave, calling the colloquy back to its colloquizing.

“That’s our cue, as they say,” Trevor Brooks twinkled. “I hope to see some, how shall I say it, fireworks from you, my dear fellow. Fireworks, if not worse, if not, say, a nuclear bomb!” With a twinkling laugh, Trevor Brooks twinkled his way through the commissioners to find his seat.

The colloquy was taking place in a largish chapel that stood within sight of the impressive spires of Salisbury Cathedral. The commissioners crushed into the pews, each having been provided with a small board to use as a desk, and what looked like a table tennis paddle emblazoned with a number. When any commissioner wanted to speak, he would raise his paddle, be recognized by the chair, and then climb over arms and legs to an aisle to make his way to a microphone.

At the front of the chapel sat the chairman, a young Roman Catholic with large, dark-rimmed eyeglasses and bushy eyebrows that made him look like an owl. Reginald had heard someone say that the chair lectured at Oxford. Reginald found an empty space near the back of the chapel, settled between two Anglicans, and prepared to make himself as invisible as possible.

“Please come to order,” said the chair. To Reginald, the chair certainly sounded like an Oxford lecturer, and Reginald instinctively began to feel the same pleasant drowsiness that had so often overtaken him during his own days at Oxford. “Please come to order. I remind you that this

is the fifth and final plenary session. I am happy to inform you that all the committees have reported back their revisions of the original documents, with the exception of the committee on women's ordination, which I'm told has recessed to a local pub to discuss such issues on a more informal basis."

Titters through the gallery, though to Reginald the idea sounded perfectly sensible.

"Our procedure from this point on, then, will be to read out the final drafts of each portion of the joint statement, and allow any comments or proposals for further revision to be made directly from the floor. Remember, this will be your last chance to propose revisions. After that, you must vote the whole document up or down. Is that clear?"

There was no immediate response from the commissioners, and the chair began to read out the first section of the joint statement. Before he could get a word out, a duet of voices arose from opposite sides of the room, one of them vaguely Mediterranean: "Mr. Chairman, a point of personal privilege."

The chair looked over the rims of his glasses. "Archbishop Quesada? Dean Panzard? Which spoke first?"

"I yield to my colleague." It was another duet, and more titters rippled through the crowd.

"Which of you is going to speak, then?" asked the owl.

"I most humbly yield to my superior, the Archbishop," Panzard said. He bowed elegantly and sat down.

"Thank you, Dean," the Archbishop began. He stood for a moment surveying the assembly with a mixture of disdain and pity, as if he were Constantine looking out at the Nicean council and wearily shaking his head over the tedium of theological debate.

“I rise to speak on behalf of diversity,” the Archbishop finally began. Sir Reginald, stirred to waking consciousness by a familiar voice, realized that the Archbishop had adopted a very different tone, apparently his “colloquy voice,” a tone of high seriousness, moderation, apostolicity and catholicity, that, even more than the Archbishop’s normal voice, reminded Reginald of high vaulted ceilings and flying buttresses. “I hope,” Sir Reginald thought, “that he doesn’t say the word ‘vocation.’ I’ve had quite enough of that for one day.” And he shuddered.

“Diversity, I submit, is just another word for catholicity. For a church that is catholic is by definition one that is diverse, and a church that welcomes diversity is ipso facto one that is catholic. It is certainly one of the wonders of our mother, the church, that incorporated into its bosom are men and women from all walks of life, all colors, all sorts and conditions of men.”

Nods and grunts of agreement all around. Or, they seemed to be grunts of agreement. Reginald wondered if some grunts were not from agreement but the product of a chemical reaction from the mixture of soda water, digestive biscuits, and Wensleydale. Several of the Anglicans brightened slightly, recognizing a phrase from the Prayer Book.

“But often we are terrified by the very catholicity that we claim to celebrate. For, my brothers and fathers, my fathers and brothers, the catholicity and diversity that we celebrate is not only a diversity of color or condition. That, to be sure, is something to be celebrated. But the diversity we should celebrate goes deeper, and is more fundamental, and we should not shrink back from this diversity. The diversity, the catholicity of which I speak, is catholicity of creed.”

Nods and grunts of approval, though fewer than last time. The Catholics in the colloquy were becoming suspicious. Something was up, something that smelled peculiarly Anglican, and the Catholics were wrinkling their noses and sniffing trying to discern the odor.

“Within my own communion, you know, we have a rich diversity of belief and creed. Some of my fellow priests are fundamentalists of the most strident sort, men so gripped by the tradition of the church, that they believe that God created the world in the course of a week and that Adam was a real man.”

Nods and grunts, but it seemed that most of these were disapproving, though to be honest, it is very difficult to discern the different between and approving and an unapproving grunt. In most circumstances, further inquiry is required.

“I am not of their mind,” the Archbishop continued, “but I respect their right to exist, I welcome them into the communion of the Anglican church, as fellow priests and brothers. That, fathers and brothers, is catholicity in action.

“Others in the Anglican church, I should say perhaps at the opposite pole of our communion, are those who have ceased to believe in God. At least, they claim that God is unknowable, the incarnation is a myth, the Bible is an absurd collection of fables and legends, the liturgy has no religious meaning, despite its moving aesthetic appeal. Some would conclude that such priests should hand in their collars and find honest work, but I say that they too are part of the rich tapestry of the church. The church is the one place in all the world where fundamentalist and atheist, orthodox and heretic, believer and unbeliever can embrace one another as brothers, can commune together in one body, can eat and drink together at one table.”

The Archbishop paused, apparently for effect, and the owl seized the opportunity. “With all due respect, Archbishop Quesada, and however much we may share your sentiments, your words at this time hardly seem to the point. If we did not believe in the catholicity of the church, we would not be here. Now, do you wish to speak to any of the proposed affirmations of the joint

statement?”

“I do not,” the Archbishop had raised his voice to a booming. This must be his “prophetic voice,” Reginald thought. “I do not wish to speak to the joint statement because the statement fails to represent the full range of opinion, either in the Roman church or in my own communion. We have ignored, as I say, some of our brothers. We have failed to take account of every permutation of opinion that is present in our respective churches. And therefore I say that the joint statement is not at all a catholic document, and does not deserve the title ‘ecumenical.’”

Grunts but no nods followed this statement. This time, Reginald was certain that the grunts were grunts of disapproval for they were accompanied by looks of astonishment, whisperings, nervous shufflings and scufflings and whufflings. An ancient Anglican priest, who had been snoring contentedly next to Reginald, jerked up, leaned over and whispered in Reginald’s ear.

“What’s that?” Reginald asked.

“I said, did he say something about acute medical conditions?”

“No,” Reginald whispered back. “He said that the document is not ‘ecumenical.’”

“Eh?”

“Ecumenical.” Reginald was nearly speaking in a voice of normal decibels by this time.

The ancient priest looked uncertainly at Reginald, but before he could explain further, the drama on the floor of the colloquy continued.

“Quiet, please,” the owl was saying. “Order please.”

Shufflings and scufflings died away, but the whufflings continued, though quietly enough for the owl to speak.

“Archbishop Quesada,” the owl was saying. “You have made an astonishing charge, at

this late hour of our colloquy. Certainly, you must know that every effort has been made to invite representatives of all the different factions within our respective churches. You are not seriously claiming that we have overlooked a crucial element in the church, are you?"

"That is precisely what I am saying."

"If your fundamentalist Anglicans are not represented, it is by their own decision. They were invited and refused to come."

"No, Mr. Chairman, I speak of members of your own church."

"Catholics, you mean? Surely you jest."

"Not at all. Yes, I speak of Catholics. No, rather, I speak of Romanists, Papalists, Tri-den-tine representatives of your own church."

"I dare say that no such dinosaurs exist, and if they did exist they would not find their way into a joint Anglican-Catholic colloquy."

"There, Mr. Chairman, you are quite wrong. Here today, in this very room, sits one such 'dinosaur' as you call him. A fossil or relic he may seem to you, but I daresay he represents a viewpoint that is widely held among Catholics, though perhaps no such rough beast has ever slouched close to the precincts of the Oxford Divinity School."

The owl was already perturbed, and the suggestion now that the Oxford Divinity School might be out of touch with the common folk of the church pushed him past perturbation to the borders of anger.

"Archbishop Quesada," he said, controlled himself with a great effort. "Perhaps you would like to introduce this friend of yours, and perhaps he would like to address the body. Once we have heard him, we can certainly continue with our business." The owl was regaining control.

“I would be most happy to introduce the man, who, by a most magnificence stroke of luck -- rather, of Providence, as our Puritan forbears would have it -- I happened to meet this very morning while stopping for a pastoral visit on the way to the colloquy.”

Reginald was amazed. How could the Archbishop have found the time to make a pastoral visit between the golf course and the colloquy, without Reginald even noticing from the back of the Mercedes? Perhaps, Reginald thought, he had drifted off during the ride.

“He is a learned man, but most of all he is a man of the people, a priest who has ministered among the lower classes of our society and has his finger on the pulse of the nation’s religion. I am very pleased to introduce to this most august and distinguished body. . . .”

The Archbishop paused again. Reginald felt his stomach beginning to growl and realized that he had had nothing to eat all day. After skipping breakfast and a vigorous round of golf, he had made his way to the colloquy with promises of ambrosial refreshments, only to find stale digestives. His stomach growled, certainly not a grunt of approval, and Reginald realized that he must leave for a moment to get a bite at the local pub.

“ . . . the Most Very Reverend. . . .”

Reginald half-rose from his seat, and started climbing over the ancient priest toward the side aisle. The priest was asleep again, snoring softly with his mouth open, a stream of saliva streaming down the side of his face.

“ . . . Reginald. . . .”

At the sound of his name, Reginald snapped straight up and looked at the Archbishop. As he did so, his leg became tangled in the leg of the ancient priest, who instinctively straightened his leg and sent Reginald sprawling into his lap.

“ . . . Piggledy-Snout, of Soho, London.” The Archbishop pointed toward the back of the church, looking for all the world like the grim reaper in an anti-smoking advert.

Several hundred clerical heads turned to where the Archbishop had pointed. Several hundred pairs of clerical eyes gazed in confusion at the sight of Reginald sitting in the lap of an ancient Anglican. Several hundred pairs of clerical ears awaited the words that would tumble from his lips.

Truly, Reginald was in a pickle, more sour and pickley than ever.

And the only positive feature of his current position was that the ancient Anglican priest never woke up.

IV.

Sir Reginald was less than completely honored by the prospects of addressing the colloquy; indeed, he was quite petrified, frightened out of his wits, scared stiff, and completely overwhelmed with deathly terror. He was, in short, a nervous fellow, and an uncomfortable one at that, for the ancient priest on whom he was sitting was not the puffy, soft, comfortable kind of priest, but the stiff, angular, ascetic kind of priest, all bones and knobby joints, and surely not suited to serve an easy chair. No doubt he preached law and believed in hell, and he was probably a fundamentalist.

“I am in a pickle,” thought Sir Reginald. And, if the reader has been paying attention, he will have noticed that Sir Reginald’s assessment of his situation precisely corresponds to and wonderfully confirms our own.

“How did I ever get into this pickle?” he asked himself. The answer to that, dear reader, is

found in the preceding pages of this chronicle, which has been conveniently recorded above for your review.

“How am I ever to get out of this pickle?” he asked himself again. The answer to that, dear reader, is found in the following pages. If you would be so kind as to proceed.

Sir Reginald rose from the ancient Anglican priest and leaned heavily against the pew in front of him. He looked up to see rows of indistinct, nondescript clerical faces looking at him with a range of expression, everything from eager anticipation to horror to quite shocking opposition. He made out the figure of Archbishop Quesada, standing and smiling radiantly in his direction. He opened his mouth to speak, and a strange voice came out of it.

It was a strange voice because he was not his. Maybe he was possessed, and a demon was speaking through him, he thought, and he felt a drip of sweat trickling down his collar.

“Mr. Chairman, may I say a word on behalf of my friend?” the voice was saying, the voice that was not Sir Reginald’s.

The owl had apparently given his assent, for the voice continued. “I have known the distinguished guest from my youth and from my university days. I can attest that he will bring a most incisive, most insightful, and most unique perspective to bear on the proceedings.”

Sir Reginald desperately searched the room for the source of the voice, and finally decided that it was coming from a rather rotund figure standing toward the front of the church, and as his eyes began to focus, he noted the nicely rounded belly, the smooth rounded laughing face, the bright bulging eyes, and recognized the speaker as none other than the Right Rev. Harold Puffmelon, no longer incognito but perfectly cognito in clerical collar and a large silver crucifix necklace. Archbishop Quesada seemed to be studying Harold closely, but did not interrupt.

“And so I second his eminence’s proposal that we hear a statement from the Right Rev. Reginald Piggledy-Snort.”

“Piggledy-Snout, you mean,” the Archbishop corrected.

“Piggledy-S, we use to call him,” Harold replied, laughing nervously. “And I always forgot whether he was a Snout or a Snort. Sometimes I even wondered whether he might not be a Piggledy-Squirt or a Piggledy-Squawk.”

“Piggledy-Squawk?” came a new voice from the back of the church.

“That’s right.”

“But how could that be? Pigs don’t squawk,” it was yet another voice.

“Piggledy-Squawk? Is that Irish?”

“No, no,” Harold held out his hands to calm what he feared would become an uprising against his distinguished friend’s name. “I meant that I sometimes believed his name was Piggledy-Squawk.”

“But how could such a name ever have arisen?” It was a new voice entirely.

“Yes, suggest an etymology.” This was the voice of the ancient Anglican priest, who had come alive, but had not yet noticed that Reginald was sitting in his lap.

The owl was not pleased. “Gentlemen, fathers and brothers. This is not the time nor the place to discuss such matters. We have matters of great moment before us, and the Archbishop has kindly invited Mr. Piggledy-Snoot to address us.”

“Piggledy!”

“Snout!”

“Not Piggledy!”

“Not Snoot!”

“Very well, the distinguished visitor. Pray, proceed.”

Sir Reginald felt a surge of affection for the owl, who had used the word “pray” in its archaic and lamentably abandoned sense. At that moment, he might have embraced the owl, if he had not been so distant from the chair’s chair.

“I rise to speak,” Sir Reginald finally blurted out, rising to speak.

“Can’t hear you.” Reginald turned to see the ancient priest cupping his ear in his direction.

“Yes, do please find your way to a microphone,” the owl put in.

There are moments in a man’s life when the weight of significance that lies upon the action is so heavy that time itself slows with the inertia. It might be a child’s first day at school, a young man’s first real kiss, an unexpected award at the club, the first annual review with the C.E.O. At such times, everything seems fixed in place, every nuance and detail stands out in its full color and sharpness, every sound echoes endlessly in the mind, and the event becomes so firmly etched in the memory that it can be erased only with death. Nonegenarians forget their birth dates, their wife’s name, the faces of their children -- but they do not forget such moments.

This moment in Sir Reginald’s life was nothing at all like that. In fact, he forgot everything from the moment he climbed over the ancient Anglican, who was again sleeping peacefully, to the moment that the first large print Prayer Book hit the side of his head. Only much later, after consultations with Harold and other witnesses, was he able to determine exactly what happened, exactly what he said and did. These same witnesses, be it said, are our sources for the following reconstruction.

“I rise to speak,” Reginald began, as the microphone screeched. “I rise to speak against the

unity of the church.”

Loud grunts that may have been gasps greeted him. He was most pleased.

“Or, I should say, I rise to speak against the notion that we can unify the church by colloquies such as this. What are we doing here, I ask?”

He looked around at the assembly expecting an answer to what they all considered a rhetorical question. For Reginald, it was anything but rhetorical, and he considered asking again in a plaintive, meeker tone, “What *are* we doing here, will someone please tell me? What am *I* doing here?” Seeing that no one was going to help him answer these pressing existential questions, Reginald decided to treat it as rhetorical, and continued.

“Yes, I ask, what are we doing here? I will tell you.”

The assembly expected no less.

“We are wasting precious time and energy, quarreling over words and phrases, pretending to agree and to love one another. But I say that it is all a charade, an act, a deception, a”

Reginald suddenly realized that he should have stopped at three parallel terms, since he was unable to think of a fourth. He let it trail off, and to cover his lapse, he forced himself into a coughing fit.

“TB,” he said, when he had calmed down. “Working among the poor exposes one to enormous risks.”

A few sympathetic glances, a few men sitting close by shifted away from his microphone. Most of the faces were impatient for him to continue, or, rather, to conclude.

“Where was I?”

Again, not a rhetorical question, for Reginald had completely lost his place. Since,

however, his entire speech displayed a complete absence of coherence, it little mattered, and he boldly went on.

“A deception, I was saying. We come up with these documents, these scraps of paper, that are supposed to express our unified confession. I say that they are not worth the paper they are written on. They are worth nothing.”

More grunts and gasps, and a hint of a hiss from one corner of the room.

“Nothing, I say. For what sort of unity do they express? What kind of common vision is contained therein? What manner of”

Another coughing fit covered the fact that he had again been left on the platform while his train of thought pulled out of the station.

“We sit here for a week, perhaps two, perhaps three, perhaps more. We sit here discussing baptism, eucharist, and something or other. And in the end we have a piece of paper that says we believe that water should be used in baptism, bread and wine in the eucharist, and so on and so forth. That is not progress. We all knew that before we came here for a week, perhaps two, perhaps three to discuss baptism, eucharist, and something or other.

“But I ask you, do we really agree on such things?” Reginald’s early training in catechism class was paying off. “Do we all believe that the water of baptism implants a seed of grace in our hearts, imprints an eternal character on our souls, washes us clean from all stain of original sin and protects us from actual sin? Do we all believe that the bread and the wine really and truly do become the very body and blood of Christ? If we all believe that, then let us join hands, stand in a circle, and sing “It’s a Small World.” But I daresay we do not all believe that. I daresay that very few of us believe that. I daresay. . . .”

Another coughing fit.

“I appeal to my Catholic brothers. I stand here as a committed Tri-den-tine Catholic, and embrace with joy transubstantiation and anathemas and the whole bit. But, my Catholic brothers, my Catholic colleagues, can you say the same? Or have you sold out your heritage, the heritage of your fathers, the heritage of Mother Church, for the sake of an anemic unity with ‘separated brethren.’ Bah!”

That “Bah!” Reginald thought most effective, and he paused to admire its effects. The once quiet colloquy was becoming increasingly restive. Clergy are, by their vocation, required to take a lot, but there are limits even to clerical patience, and Reginald was fast approaching those limits. Reginald was unaware of the depths of passion he was arousing; he was having more fun than he had had since he threw spitballs at the priest during catechism classes.

“I say there is only one way to bring unity to the church, and that is to bring back those who are separated to the fold of Mother Church, and to obedience to the Holy Father, may he be blessed forever. The only way to unify the church is on the basis of truth, and we Catholics have the truth while you Anglicans have only a counterfeit of the truth. What is your ‘Prayer Book’ compared with the venerable Roman Mass? What is your Archbishop compared with the Roman Pontiff, maker of kings and emperors, ruler of the world, may he be blessed forever? What is Canterbury -- Canterbury! -- compared to Rome? Nothing! Your Prayer Book is an oddity in the liturgical history of the West, your Archbishop presides over a sliver of the world, Canterbury is a wasteland. I do not appeal to you as ‘separated brethren.’ I appeal to you as heretics, apostates, schismatics, but I do appeal to you. Come home to the Mass, come home to your father (may he be blessed forever), come home to Rome, sweet Rome.”

“Now, I grant you that Canterbury has a decent pub or two, but it is nothing to the magnificence of the world capital, Rome.” This last qualifying sentence, Reginald realized, reduced the rhetorical power of his plea, but he felt he had to give some concessions to the Anglicans in the colloquy.

Reginald paused in reverie, remembering the last time he had visited Rome. He had avoided the Vatican like the plague, with its gaudiness and Baroqueishness and over-the-topishness. He preferred the ancient ruins, stolid monuments to the enduring appeal of empire and strength, of law and justice.

It was during this reverie that Reginald saw a dark object hurtling toward him from the side. Before he had time to react, a large print Prayer Books had hit him squarely in the right temple and knocked him sideways, his eyes blurring and his legs buckling under him. He staggered and nearly fell, but the wall held him up.

“There’s a Prayer Book for ya,” a voice shouted. “Maybe it’s not the Roman Mass, but it makes a good weapon against you Papists.” This shout was followed by what sounded like a war cry from an American Indian, a Sioux or, better, a Mohican.

Reginald had recovered well enough to search out the source of the missile. An ancient Anglican priest was standing at the back of the church, waving his arms and dancing a jig and whooping like a savage. It was the same ancient priest which had served Reginald as a chair in the moments before his electrifying speech.

“Papists?” It was the owl, struggling to maintain a calm demeanor. “We are not Papists, we are. . . .”

“Papist, Papist, Paaapist!” the ancient priest chanted. “Or, try this on for size: Romanist!

Idolator! Servant of Antichrist!”

“Lutheran!” It was the owl, whose struggle to maintain a calm demeanor had ended in a total victory for passion, and truth. “Schismatic! Heretic! Rebel against Holy Church!”

By this time, the large print Prayer Books were thicker than Japanese bombers at Pearl Harbor. Several Anglicans found they could throw the smaller, pocket-sized Prayer Books with more zing, and they flung them with glee at the owl and any other Catholic they could find. A row of Catholic priests, finding themselves under assault, pulled their pew over to form a barricade. Unwilling to employ Prayer Books to fight back, they began a counter-offensive using Books of Hours. One let fly by swinging his Book of Hours above his head by the bookmark; he looked like David swinging his sling against Goliath. It hit the ancient Anglican on the bridge of his nose, and he sank back into his seat, and was soon sound asleep.

After he recovered his feet, Reginald looked for a means of escape. Getting down on hands and knees, he crawled under the rain of Prayer Books to a side door. As he exited, he looked back at the scene, and was astonished to see Archbishop Quesada and Dean Panzard, sitting quietly in their pews, watching the fracas with equanimity, smiling contentedly. The Dean caught Reginald’s eye, winked, and made an OK circle with his thumb and index finger, and held up his thumb.

V.

It was Monday again, another sun-drenched Monday on a golf course in Wiltshire. Sir Allan Pennymain and the Right Rev. Puffmelon were smacking balls on the driving range getting ready for their regular Monday morning round. The most noteworthy thing about them was that

there were only two of them.

“He’s not coming, then?” Sir Allan asked.

“For the fourth time, he’s not coming.”

“Something of an overreaction, don’t you think?”

“Not at all,” Harold said gravely. “After those stories in the Anglican press and then the *Times*, he knows he’s a marked man. There will be photographers and journalists hiding behind every bush, along every fairway. They found out pretty quickly that he golfs here, and they would want to find out more about him.”

Sir Allan watched a drive skip across the driving range. “Yes, I suppose. Still, I’ll miss him terribly today.”

“As will I, and to think it was all my fault, suggesting that disguise and all.”

“You know,” Sir Allan added, “I think the saddest thing is the fact that the Vatican had to denounce him. They defragged him, or something, didn’t they?”

“Defrocked is the correct term, Allan. But it really meant nothing, you know, since Reginald was never frocked to begin with. It was just a formality.”

They stood in silence for a moment contemplating whether they had the strength to go ahead with their round of golf. They decided that they had.

“What’s to become of him, then? Are there civil penalties for impersonating a clergyman?”

“I don’t know,” Harold said. “I’ve never been charged.”

“Yes, well, and you of all people deserve to be charged.”

“But I’ll tell you what I’ve heard, through the grape vine as it were. Reginald apparently

is going to join forces with some French Catholic priest who was also defrocked, and they are going to start their own splinter church.”

“Bravo for him,” Sir Allan said. “Bravo for him. Leave it to Reginald to turn a situation to his advantage. He has a spectacular gift for getting himself into pickles and then getting himself out again. I suppose he’ll be making crusade tours and appearing on television and such.”

“No doubt, no doubt.”

Beaming, Sir Allan Pennymain and the Right Rev. Harold Puffimelon strolled to the first tee and began their round of golf.