Barbour Ralph Henry

# Weatherby's Inning: A Story of College Life and Baseball

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# Содержание

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## CHAPTER I
## COWARD!

> University Baseball. – All men who wish to try for the team report in the cage on Monday, February 25th, at 3.30 sharp.
> *Jos. L. Perkins, Capt.*

Jack Weatherby, on his way out of the gymnasium, paused before the bulletin-board in the little drafty hall and read the call.

"That's next Monday," he muttered. "All right, I'll be there."

Then, putting a shoulder against the big oak door, he pushed his way out on to the granite steps and stood there a moment in scowling contemplation of the cheerless scene. Before him the board-walk was almost afloat in a shallow rivulet of melted snow that filled the gravel-path from side to side. A few steps away the path ended at the Washington Street gate in a veritable lake. The crossing was inches deep in water and the Common was a dismal waste of pools and streams out of which the soldiers' monument

reared itself as though agonizedly searching for a dry spot to which to move. There was an incessant and monotonous dripping and trickling and gurgling as the snow, which two days before had covered the ground to a depth of over a foot, disappeared as by magic under the breath of an unseasonable south wind. The sky was leaden and lowering, and against it the bare branches of the numberless elm-trees swayed complainingly. The Common and so much of the college grounds as was in sight were deserted. Altogether it was a dispiriting prospect that met Jack's eyes, and one little likely to aid him in the task of fighting the "blues," which had oppressed him all day.

He went listlessly down the steps, heroically striving to whistle a tune. But the tune had died out ere the sidewalk was reached. He looked with misgiving from the crossing to his shoes – shoes which even when new had been scarcely adapted to wet weather – and after a moment of hesitation gave up the idea of taking the usual short cut across the Common, and went on down Washington Street. As he began to pick his way gingerly across the wet pavement at the corner of Elm Street, two men ran down the steps of a boarding-house. They were talking in high, excited tones, and Jack could hear them until they had gone some distance toward the railroad.

"The water's away up to the road, they say," one of them declared loudly, "and it's still rising. They're afraid the bridge'll go. There's a lot of ice coming down."

"Should think it might go," said the other. "The old thing looks

as though you could push it over if you tried."

"Yes, don't it? Let's get a move on. We had a flood once up home that – "

Then a heavy gust of wind, sweeping around the corner of the tumble-down livery-stable, drowned the conversation. Jack paused and silently weighed the respective attractions of a dark and not overcomfortable room in the green-shuttered house a few steps away, and a swollen river which might, if there was any such thing as good luck – which he had begun to doubt – sweep away the tottering old wooden bridge. Well, his feet were already wet, and so – He retraced his steps to the corner and went on down Washington Street in the wake of the others. They were a block or so ahead, splashing their thick boots through all kinds of puddles. They were evidently the best of friends, for one kept his hand on the other's shoulder. Once the prankish wind bore a scrap of merry laughter up the street, and Jack, plodding along behind, wary of puddles, as befits a fellow who is wearing his only pair of winter shoes, heard it and felt gloomier and more forlorn than ever.

He wondered what it was like to have real friends and a chum; to be well known and liked. He had come to Erskine College in September fully expecting such things to fall to his share. But he had been there five months now and during that time his life had been very lonely. At first he had tried to make friends in a diffident way. Perhaps he had tried with the wrong men; perhaps his manner had been against him;

the result had been discouraging, and after a while, smarting under what to his oversensitive feelings seemed rebuffs, he had ceased looking for friends and had retired into a shell of pessimism and injured pride, masking his loneliness under simulated indifference. Since then he had undoubtedly lost many a chance to find the companionship he craved; but he had learned his lesson, he told himself bitterly, and so he rejected advances as though they were the deadliest of insults.

He didn't look the least bit like a misanthrope. He was seventeen years old, large for his age, lithe, muscular and healthy-looking, as is proper in a boy who has never been pampered, with a face which even at the present moment, in spite of the expression of settled bitterness that marred it, was eminently attractive. His eyes were well apart and gray in color; his hair was light brown, and his mouth, which of late had formed the unfortunate habit of wearing a little supercilious sneer in public, looked generous and honest, and, with the firmly rounded chin beneath, suggested force and capability. On the whole he was a clean-cut, manly-looking boy to whom fortune, you would have said, owed much.

When Jack Weatherby reached the river he found that the report of its depredations was not exaggerated. To be sure, River Street was still above water, but the flood was well over the bank in places, and farther along, in front of the coal-yards, several of the wharves were awash. The broad stream, usually a quiet, even sluggish body, was sending up a new sound, a low, threatening

roar which, without his having realized it, had reached Jack's ears long before he had sighted the river.

He wormed his way through the crowd of townfolk that lined the street, and, passing through an empty coal-pocket, found himself on a spray-drenched string-piece a foot above the water. To his right and left piers ran some distance into the river. They were untenanted. But beyond them the open spaces used by the coal company as storage ground for wagons were black with watchers. A short way off was the bridge, a low, wooden structure connecting Centerport with the little village of Kirkplain across the river. Jack was on the up-stream side of the bridge and could see the havoc that the drifting ice was making with the worn spiling and hear the crashing and grinding as cake after cake was hurled and jammed against it. Several of the supports were already broken, and the entrance to the bridge was barred with a rope and guarded by a member of Centerport's small police force.

Jack drew back as far as he could from the edge of the beam and with his shoulders against the boards of the big bin watched in strange fascination the black, angry water rushing past. It frightened and repelled him, and yet he found it difficult to remove his gaze. For as long as he could remember he had been afraid of water. Once, when he was only five years old, he had fallen into the brook that crossed his father's farm and had almost drowned before his mother, hastening after the runaway, had dragged him out. His recollection of the escapade was very hazy,

but it had left him with a dread of water that was almost a mania. All efforts to combat it had proved futile. He had never learned to swim, and had never in all his life trusted himself in a boat. And yet, as a boy, he had devoured ravenously all the stories of the sea he could lay hands on, and had shuddered over shipwrecks and similar disasters, at once repelled and fascinated.

Suddenly his contemplation of the river was disturbed by shouts of alarm from up-stream. With an effort he withdrew his gaze from the water and looked in the direction of the cries. At that instant, around the corner of the pier to his right, floated something that thrashed the water wildly and sent up shrill appeals for help. After the first second of bewilderment Jack saw that it was a boy of thirteen or fourteen years. The white face, horribly drawn with terror, turned toward him, and, for an instant, the frightened, staring eyes looked into his. Jack sickened and groped blindly for support. A trick of the current shot the struggling body into the little harbor afforded by the two piers, almost at his feet. In his ears was a meaningless babel of shouts and in his heart an awful fear. He leaned back with outstretched hands clinging to the planks behind him and closed his eyes to avoid the sight of the appealing face below. Then, with a gasp, he sank to his knees, seized the string-piece with one hand, and with the other reached downward. But he was too late. The current, sweeping out again, had already borne the boy beyond reach. There was a final despairing shriek, then the arms ceased to struggle and the eddies closed over the body. Jack

joined his voice impotently with the others and looked wildly about for a plank or a rope – anything that he could throw into the water. But there was nothing. Sick and dizzy he subsided against the timbers.

Then, just at the corner of the down-stream wharf, the body came to the surface again, the eyes sightless, the lips silent. And, almost too late, came help.

Jack, leaning near the opening in the coal-bin, felt rather than saw some one push by him. The rescuer, a man several years Jack's senior, had discarded his coat and vest, and now, stooping and placing a hand lightly on the string-piece, he dropped into the water. A half dozen strokes took him to the end of the pier, and just as the drowning boy was again sinking he caught him. Turning, he struck out toward Jack, swimming desperately against the swirling current. For a minute it was difficult work; then he reached stiller water, and Jack, leaning over the edge, stretched forth eager hands to help. But ere he could do so he was pushed aside, narrowly saving himself from pitching head foremost into the water, and a middle-aged man, whom Jack a moment later saw to be Professor White, relieved the rescuer of his burden.

By that time the narrow foothold along the edge of the river was thronged with students and townfolk. Quickly the apparently lifeless body was borne past them through the yard and into a small office. Jack, trembling in every limb, followed. But near the door he suddenly became aware of a hostile atmosphere.

The crowd, which had grown every minute, were observing him curiously, contemptuously, muttering and whispering. The blood rushed into his face and then receded, leaving it deathly pale. For a moment he faced them. Then a small boy somewhere on the edge of the throng sent up a shrill cry:

"That's him! That's the feller that didn't make no try ter save him! 'Fraid of wettin' his feet, he was!"

Jack looked about him and read in the faces that confronted him only merciless condemnation. Something in his throat hurt him and refused to be dislodged. With head up he turned and made his way through the crowd, the old sneer on his lips. But there was worse in store. He felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to find Professor White beside him.

"What's your name?" asked the professor sternly.

"Weatherby, sir," muttered Jack.

"Are you a student?"

"Yes, sir."

"What class?"

"Six."

The professor looked at him searchingly, then dropped the hand from his shoulder.

"I find that hard to believe," he said contemptuously. "I didn't think we had any cowards here at Erskine!"

He turned away, and Jack, after a moment of hesitation, a moment in which his first inclination to protest against the injustice of the verdict was drowned in a sudden dumbing surge

of anger, made his way out of the throng and stumbled back to his room through the gathering twilight.

# CHAPTER II
# AN INTERRUPTION

Erskine College, at Centerport, is not large. Like many another New England college its importance lies rather in its works than in wealth or magnificence. Its enrolment in all departments at the time of which I write was about 600. I am not going to describe the college, it would take too long; and besides, it has been done very frequently and very well, and if the reader, after studyingthe accompanying plan, which is reproduced with the kind permission of the authorities, feels the need of further description, I would respectfully refer him to Balcom's Handbook of Erskine (photographically illustrated) and May's History of Erskine College. And if in connection with these he examines the annual catalogue he will know about all there is to be known of the subject.

Leaving Washington Street and going west on Elm Street, he will find, facing the apex of the Common, a small white frame cottage profusely adorned with blinds of a most vivid green. That is Mrs. Dorlon's. It is by far the tiniest of the many boarding- and lodging-houses that line the outer curve of Elm Street, and, as might be supposed, its rooms are few and not commodious. Mrs. Dorlon, a small, middle-aged widow, with a perpetual cold in the head, reserves the lower floor for her own use and rents

the two up-stairs rooms to students. Between these second-floor apartments there is little to choose. The western one gets the afternoon sunlight, while the one on the other side of the hall gets none. To make up for this, however, the eastern room is, or was, at the time of my story, the proud possessor of a register, supposed, somewhat erroneously, to conduct warm air into the apartment; while the western room, to use the language of Mrs. Dorlon, was "het by gas."

Aside from these differences, apparent rather than real, the two chambers were similar. In each there was a strip of narrow territory in which it was possible to stand upright, flanked on either side by abruptly sloping ceilings whose flaking expanses were broken by dormer-windows, admitting a little light and a deal of cold. It was the eastern room that Jack Weatherby at present called home, a feat which implied the possession of a great deal of imagination on his part. For when, having escaped the hostile throng by the river and made his way up Washington into Elm Street, and so to the house with the painfully green blinds, the room in which he found himself didn't look the least bit in the world like home.

The iron cot-bed, despite its vivid imitation Bagdad covering, failed to deceive the beholder into mistaking it for a Turkish divan. The faded and threadbare ingrain carpet, much too small to cover the floor, was of a chilly, inhospitable shade of blue. The occupant had made little attempt at decoration, partly because the amount of wall space adapted to pictures was extremely

limited, partly because from the first the cheerless ugliness of the room discouraged him. The green-topped study table near the end window was a sorry piece of furniture. Former users had carved cabalistic designs into the walnut rim and adorned the imitation leather covering with even more mysterious figures; there were evidences, too, of overturned ink-bottles. A yellow-grained wardrobe beside the door leaned wearily against the supporting angle of the ceiling.

The brightest note in the room was a patent rocker upholstered in vivid green and yellow Brussels carpet. If we except a walnut book-shelf hanging beside the end window and a wash-stand jammed under one dormer, the enumeration of the furnishings is complete. Even on days when the sun shone against the white gable of the next house, the apartment could scarcely be called cheerful, and this afternoon with the evening shadows closing down and the wind whipping the branches of the elms outside and buffeting the house until it creaked complainingly, the room was forlorn to a degree.

After slamming the door behind him Jack tossed aside his cap, and subsiding into the rocker stretched his legs and stared miserably through the window into a swaying world of gray branches and darkening sky. The overmastering anger that had sent him striding home as though pursued dwindled away and left in its place a loneliness and discouragement that hurt like a physical pain. Things had been bad before, he thought, but now, branded in public a coward and despised by his fellows, life

would be unbearable! He pictured the glances of contempt that would meet him on the morrow in hall and yard, or wherever he went, and groaned. He recalled the professor's biting words: "I didn't think we had any cowards here at Erskine!" and clenched his hands in sudden overmastering rage. The injustice of it maddened him. Would Professor White, he asked himself, have gone into the river after the drowning boy if, like himself, he were unable to swim a stroke and sickened at the mere thought of contact with the icy flood?

Presently his thoughts reverted to the morrow and the punishment he must undergo. His courage faltered, and the alternative, that of packing his few things there and then and leaving college by an early train in the morning, seemed the only course possible. Well, he would do it. It would mean disappointment to his parents and a loss of money they could ill afford. To him it would mean five months of study wasted. But better that than staying on there despised and ridiculed, to be pointed out behind his back as The Coward.

With a gasp he leaped to his feet, his cheeks tingling and his eyes moist with sudden tears. The room was in darkness. He fumbled over the desk until he found the match-box. When the gas was lighted he remembered the condition of his feet, and drawing a chair before the register he removed his wet shoes and placed them against the warm grating that they might dry overnight. His battered silver watch showed the time to be a few minutes before six. He found dry socks, and drawing them

over his chilled feet donned a pair of carpet slippers. Then he washed for supper, bathing his flushed face over and over, and got back into his coat just as a weak-voiced bell below summoned the small household to the evening meal. As he went out he noted with surprise that the door of the opposite room was ajar, allowing a streak of light to illumine the upper hall with unaccustomed radiance. The room had been vacant all the year, but now, evidently, Mrs. Dorlon had found a tenant. But the fact interested him little, for his mind was firmly made up, and on the morrow his own room would be for rent.

When he entered the tiny dining-room Mrs. Dorlon and her daughter, a shy wisp of a girl some twelve or thirteen years of age, were already seated at the table. Jack muttered greetings and applied himself silently to the cold meat and graham bread which, with crab-apple jelly and weak tea, comprised the meal. But his hostess was plainly elated, and after a few pregnant snuffles the secret was out. The western chamber was rented!

"And such a nice, pleasant-mannered young man he is," she declared. "A Mr. Tidball, a junior. Perhaps you have met him?"

Jack shook his head.

"Well, I'm sure you'll like him, and it'll be real pleasant for you to have another student in the house. I know what it is to be alone" – she sniffed sadly – "since Mr. Dorlon died, and I guess you feel downright lonely sometimes up there. If you like I'll introduce Mr. Tidball after supper?"

The widow appeared to find a mild excitement at the thought,

and her face fell when Jack begged off. “Not this evening, please,” he said. “I’m going to be very busy, Mrs. Dorlon.”

“Oh, very well. I only thought – ” What she thought he never knew, for excusing himself he pushed back his chair and returned to his room. As he closed his door he heard the new lodger whistling cheerfully and tunelessly across the hallway.

He dragged a steamer trunk from under the bed, threw back the lid and unceremoniously hustled the contents on to the floor. Then he took a valise from the wardrobe and proceeded to pack into it what few belongings would serve him until he could send for his trunk. The latter he couldn’t take with him. In the first place, there was no way of getting it to the depot in time for the early train; in the second place, as he was not now able to pay Mrs. Dorlon the present month’s rent, he felt that he ought to leave something behind him as security. The prospect of going home raised his spirits, and he felt happier than he had for many months. He even hummed an air as he tramped busily between the wardrobe and the trunk, and the result was that the first knock on the door passed unheeded. After a moment the knock was repeated, and this time Jack heard it and paused in the act of spreading his Sunday trousers in the till and looked the consternation he felt. Who was it, he wondered. Perhaps Mrs. Dorlon come to hint about the rent; perhaps – but whoever it might be, Jack didn’t want his preparations seen. He softly closed the trunk lid and wished that he had locked the door. He waited silently. Perhaps the caller would go away. Then, as he began to

think with relief that this had already happened, the knob turned, the door swung open, and a lean, spectacled face peered through the opening.

"I thought maybe you didn't hear me knock," said a queer, drawling voice. "I've taken the room across the way, and as we're going to be neighbors I thought I'd just step over and get acquainted."

The caller came in and closed the door behind him, casting an interested look about the shabby apartment. Jack, after an instant of surprise and dismay, muttered a few words of embarrassed greeting. As he did so he recognized in the odd, lanky figure at the door the hero of the accident at the river.

# CHAPTER III
# MR. TIDBALL INTRODUCES HIMSELF

The caller looked to be about twenty-one or two years of age. He was tall, thin, and angular, and carried himself awkwardly. His shoulders had the stoop that tells of much poring over books. His hands and feet were large, the former knotted and ungainly. His face was lean, the cheeks somewhat sunken; the nose was large and well-shapen and the mouth, altogether too broad, looked good-natured and humorous. He wore steel-rimmed spectacles, behind which twinkled a pair of small, pale-blue eyes, kindly and shrewd. His clothes seemed at first sight to belong to some one very much larger; the trousers hung in baggy folds about his legs and his coat went down behind his neck exposing at least an inch of checkered gingham shirt.

And yet, despite the incongruity of his appearance, he impressed Jack as being a person of importance, a man who knew things and who was capable of turning his knowledge to good account. Tidball? Where had he heard the name of Tidball? As he thought of it now, the name seemed strangely familiar. Recollecting his duties as host, Jack pushed forward the patent rocker.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked.

The visitor sank into the chair, bringing one big foot, loosely encased in a frayed leather slipper, on to one knee, and clasping it with both knotted hands quite as though he feared it might walk off when he wasn't looking.

"Queer sort of weather we're having," he drawled. He talked through his nose with a twang that proclaimed him a native of the coast. Jack concurred, sitting uncomfortably on the edge of the cot and wondering whether Tidball recognized him.

"Mrs. Thingamabob down-stairs said you were from Maine. Maine's my State. I come from Jonesboro; ever hear of Jonesboro?"

"No, I don't believe so." The visitor chuckled.

"Never met any one who had. Guess I'm about the only resident of that metropolis who ever strayed out of it. There's one fellow in our town, though, who went down to Portland once about forty years back. He's looked on as quite a traveler in Jonesboro."

Jack smiled. "My folks live near Auburn," he said.

"Nice place, Auburn. By the way, my name's Tidball – Anthony Z. Z stands for Zeno; guess I'm a sort of a Stoic myself." The remark was lost on Jack, whose acquaintance with the Greek philosophers was still limited.

"My name's Weatherby," he returned. "My first name's Jack; I haven't any middle name."

"You're lucky," answered the other. "They might have called you Xenophanes, you see." Jack didn't see, but he smiled

doubtfully, and the visitor went on. “Well, now we know each other. We’re the only fellows in the hut and we might as well get together, eh? Guess I saw you this afternoon down at the river, didn’t I?”

Jack flushed and nodded.

“Thought so.” There was a moment’s silence, during which the visitor’s shrewd eyes studied Jack openly and calmly and during which all the old misery, forgotten for the moment, came back to the boy. Then —

“Guess you can’t swim, eh?” asked the other.

“No, not a stroke,” muttered Jack.

“Thought so,” reiterated Tidball. There was another silence. Then Jack said, with an uneasy laugh:

“There’s no doubt but that you can, though.”

“Me? Yes, I can swim like a shark. Down in Jonesboro we learn when we’re a year old. Comes natural to us coasters.”

“It was lucky you were there this afternoon,” said Jack.

“Oh, some one else would have gone in, I guess!”

“He – he didn’t – he wasn’t drowned, was he?”

“The kid? No, but plaguy near it. He’s all right now, I guess. Teach him a lesson.”

“Did the bridge go?” asked Jack after a moment, merely to break another silence.

“No, water was going down when I left. Guess I’m in the way, though, ain’t I?”

“In the way?”

"Yes; weren't you doing something when I came in? Packing a trunk or something?"

"Oh, it – it doesn't matter; there's no hurry."

"Going home over Sunday?"

"Y – yes."

"You're lucky; wish I was. But don't let me interrupt; go ahead and I'll just sit here out of the way, if you don't mind my staying."

"Not at all; I – I'm glad to have you." And the odd thing about it, as Jack realized the next moment, was that he meant what he said. The visitor drew a little brier pipe from one pocket and a pouch from another.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"No," answered Jack.

"Mind if I do?"

"Not a bit." Tidball stuffed the bowl with tobacco and was soon sending long clouds of rankly smelling smoke into the air.

"Don't begin," he advised. "It's a mean habit; wastes time and money and doesn't do you any good after all. Wish I didn't."

"But couldn't you break yourself of it?" asked Jack.

Tidball chuckled again and blew a great mouthful of gray smoke toward the gaslight.

"Don't want to," he answered.

"Oh!" said Jack, puzzled.

"Going to take your trunk?" asked the other, waving his pipe toward it.

"No, just a bag. I'll send for the trunk later." Then, as he

realized his mistake, the blood rushed into his cheeks. He looked up at Tidball and found that person eying him quizzically. "I – I mean – that – "

"No harm done," interrupted the visitor. "Thought when I came in you meant to cut and run. Why?"

"Because – because I can't stay," answered Jack defiantly. "You – you were there and you saw it. Everybody thinks I'm a coward! Professor White said – said – " He choked and looked down miserably at his twisting fingers.

"Well, you aren't, are you?"

Jack glanced up startledly.

"Why – why – no, I'm not a coward!" he cried.

"Didn't think you were. You don't look it."

Jack experienced a grateful warmth at the heart and looked shyly and thankfully at the queer, lean face across the room.

"But – but they all think I am," he muttered.

"I wouldn't prove them right, then, if I were you."

"Prove – What do you mean?"

"Mean I wouldn't run away; mean I'd stay and fight it out. Any one can run; takes a brave man to stand and fight."

"Oh!" Jack stared wonderingly at Tidball. "I hadn't thought of that."

"'Tisn't too late."

"N – no," answered Jack doubtfully. "You – think I ought to stay?"

"Yes, I honestly do, Weatherby. You've got nothing to be

ashamed of; 'twouldn't have done any good if you'd gone into the river; guess you'd been drowned – 'tother chap, too. White jumped at conclusions and landed wrong. Can't much blame him, though. You see, the fellows here at Erskine come from the country, or the coast, or some small town, and swimming's as natural as eating, and I guess it didn't occur to them that maybe you couldn't swim. But when they learn the truth of the matter – "

"But they won't know," said Jack.

"Bound to. I'll see White myself, and I'll tell all the chaps I know; 'twon't take long for the facts to get around."

"I'd rather you didn't, if you don't mind," said Jack. "It's awfully kind of you – "

"Didn't what?"

"See Professor White."

"Well – of course, I know you're feeling kind of sore at him, Weatherby, and I don't much blame you; still, there's no use in allowing the misunderstanding to continue when a word or two will set things right."

"I don't care what he thinks," said Jack, bitterly.

"All right," replied Tidball calmly. "How about the others?"

Jack studied his hands in silence for a minute. Then he threw back his shoulders and got up.

"You're mighty kind," he said, "to want to take all this trouble on my account, and I'm awfully much obliged to you, but – if you don't mind – I'd rather you didn't say anything to anybody."

Tidball frowned.

"Then you mean to run away?" he asked disappointedly.

"No, I'll stay and – and fight! Let them think me a coward if they like; only some day I'll show them I'm not!"

"That's the stuff," said the other approvingly. "I guess you're making a mistake by not explaining, but – maybe you'll change your mind. If you do, let me know."

"Thanks," answered Jack, "but I sha'n't." He took up his valise and holding it upside down emptied the contents on to the cot. "I wish you'd tell me one thing," he said.

"All right."

"Did you – I mean – Well, did you just happen to come in, or – did you know I was – The Coward?"

"Well," drawled the other, smiling gently at a cloud of smoke, "Mrs. Thingamabob told me yesterday when I engaged that room that she had a very nice young man, a freshman named Weatherby, living with her. The name isn't common, I guess, and so when I heard it again down at the wharf I remembered. And I just thought I'd come in and see what silly thing you'd decided to do. Kind of cheeky, I guess, but that's my way. Hope you're not offended?"

"No, I'm awfully glad. If you hadn't come I'd have gone away, sure as anything."

"Glad I came. Hope we'll be friends. You must come over and see me. You won't find things very palatial in my place, but there's an extra chair, I think. I don't go in much for luxuries. I was rooming in a place on Main Street until to-day; very

comfortable place it was, too: folding-bed, lounge, rocking-chair, and a study desk with real drawers that locked – at least, some of them did. My roommate was a fellow named Gooch, from up my way. His father died a week or so ago, and yesterday I got a letter from him saying he'd have to leave college and buckle down to work. Couldn't afford to keep the room alone, so I looked round and found this. Well, I must be going."

He pulled his long length out of the chair, and, producing from a chamois pouch a handsome big gold watch, oddly at variance with his shabby attire, held it nearsightedly to the dim light.

"Don't be in a hurry," begged Jack. And then, "That's a dandy watch you have," he added. "May I see it?"

"Yes," answered Tidball, holding it forth at the length of its chain, "it's the only swell thing I own. It's a present."

"Oh!" said Jack. "Well, it's a beauty. And it's got a split-second attachment, too, hasn't it?"

"Yes, and when you press this thing here it strikes the time; hear it? Guess it cost a heap of money."

"It must have. Was it a prize?"

"Something like that. A New York fellow gave it to me summer before last. He came up to Jonesboro in a steam-yacht about a thousand feet long. Well, I've got a lot of studying to do yet." He moved toward the door.

"But why did he give it to you?" asked Jack. "But maybe I'm asking impertinent questions?"

"Oh, no; there's no secret about it, only – Well, you see, this

steam-yacht man had his son with him, a kid of about eleven or twelve, I guess, and one day the kid fell out of the naphtha-launch. There was a good sea running, and they couldn't get the launch about very well. I happened to be near there in a dory, and so I picked the youngster up. His daddy seemed a good deal tickled about it, and after he got home he sent this to me. That's all. Some people seem to have money to burn. Well, good night. Glad to have met you. Come over and call as soon as you can."

And Anthony Z. Tidball nodded, blew a parting cloud of smoke in Jack's direction, and went out, closing the door softly behind him.

# CHAPTER IV
# CATCHER AND PITCHER

"Well, it wasn't such a bad showing, was it?"

Joe Perkins tossed his purple cap adorned with a white E on to the table and threw himself among the cushions of the window-seat in the manner of one who has earned his rest. He was a jovial-looking fellow of medium height, rather inclined toward stoutness. His hair was undeniably red, and despite that his features were good, none would have called him handsome. But his blue eyes were alert and his mouth firm. He had the quick temper popularly believed to accompany red hair, but it was well under control, and Joe's usual appearance was one of extreme good nature. He was popular, perhaps the most popular fellow in college, and he knew it, and was not spoiled by the knowledge. His friends believed in him and he believed in himself. Perhaps it was the latter fact that made him such a wonderful leader. Ever since his freshman year he had been among the foremost in all college affairs. Last spring, after the disastrous 7 – 0 baseball game with Robinson, the selection of Joe, whose catching had been a feature of the contest, as captain, was unanimous and enthusiastic, and the supporters of the Purple, mourning overwhelming defeat, felt their sorrow lightened by the knowledge that Joe Perkins, in accepting the

office, had pledged himself to retrieve Erskine's lost prestige on the diamond. The whole college firmly believed that what Joe Perkins promised he would perform.

Joe's companion was Tracy Gilberth. Like Joe, he was a senior and a member of the nine. Unlike Joe, he did not impress one as being particularly good-natured; nor did he resemble that youth in appearance. He had straight dark hair and black eyes. His cheeks were ruddy and his mouth straight and thin. He was of middle height and weight, and pitched the best ball of any man in college. In age he was a year Joe's senior, being twenty-three. He had none of the other man's popularity, although he was not disliked. Acquaintances suspected him of arrogance; in talking he had a tone that sounded patronizing to those not used to it. His parents were immensely wealthy; rumor credited his father with being a millionaire several times over. At all events, Tracy had the most luxuriously furnished rooms at Erskine, and spent more money than the rest of his class put together.

At the present moment he was sitting in Joe's Morris chair with his hands in his pockets and his golf-stockinged legs sprawled before him. He replied to Joe's question with a negligent nod that might have meant either assent or denial. Joe took it to express the former, and continued:

"A heap better than last year, anyhow. Thirty candidates at this time of year means sixty when we get outdoors."

"Yes, but it isn't quantity that counts, Joe," said Tracy. "Look at the sort of greenies you had to-day. I'll bet there isn't a decent

player among them, outside of the few last-year men that were there. If I were captain I'd rather have fifteen good players than fifty would-bes."

"You're an awful croaker, Tracy. For goodness' sake, let me be happy while I can. To-morrow I shall be quite ready to believe that to-day's bunch is merely a lot of hopeless idiots; but this evening I am an optimist; I see phenomenal pitchers, star catchers, wonderful first-basemen, in short, an aggregation of brilliant players destined to wipe Robinson off the face of the earth. Leave me to my dreams, old man."

"All right; only when you wake up you'll find you've fallen out of bed," answered Tracy. "Have you heard from Hanson?"

"Yes, he's coming up Wednesday to look around."

"I hope he'll like what he sees," said Tracy, grimly. "I suppose you saw that fellow Weatherby there to-day? That chap must have the sensibilities of a goat. Think of his having the cheek to show up in the cage as a baseball candidate after what happened Friday! Why, if I were he I wouldn't have the courage to show my face outside of my room. Not a fellow spoke to him to-day, but he didn't seem to mind a bit."

"I spoke to him," said Joe.

"Oh, you had to!"

"And I think you're mistaken about his not caring. He kept a pretty stiff upper lip, but I have a hunch that he wasn't happy."

"Happy! I should say not. If he expects to be happy as long as he stays at Erskine he's going to be awfully fooled. The chap

ought to be driven out of college."

"It's an unfortunate affair," answered Joe dispassionately, "and I don't pretend to understand it. But I must confess that I'm a bit sorry for the chap. It may just be that there was some reason for his not going in after that boy. Maybe he got rattled; you can't tell."

"Oh, poppycock! Maybe he was blind or asleep! Why didn't he spunk up, then, and say something? He just walked off with his head in the air, as proud as you please, without a word. The plain fact of the matter is that he's a coward clean through."

"Well – but if he is, why did he report to-day? Seems to me that took something a good deal like courage. He knows plaguy well what the college thinks of him. Great Scott, if I had been in his boots I'd no more have thought of coming there among all those fellows – !"

"That's what I say. He's got just about the same sensibilities as a billy-goat. I dare say he's rather proud of himself. But don't you worry, Joe, you won't be troubled with him long; we'll soon show him that the baseball team doesn't want cowards. You leave him to us, old man."

"No, you don't, Tracy; you leave him to me. I'm bossing this outfit, and I'm quite capable of getting rid of any one I don't want. The fellow says he can play ball, and it's fellows who can play ball that I'm after, and not life-saving heroes."

Tracy stared across at his friend in disgust.

"Well, I can tell you one thing, Joe, and that is that you'll find

that there will be lots of fellows who simply won't go on to the team if you keep Weatherby; and one of 'em's me!"

"Nonsense," answered the other, quite undisturbed. "Your precious morals aren't going to be hurt by playing on the same acre of green grass as Weatherby. Nor by sitting at the same table with him, for that matter. At any rate, don't get excited yet; it's a fair guess that Weatherby doesn't know enough about the game to make the team. But as long as he's trying for it I won't have him bullied." Joe sat up suddenly and punched a purple and white cushion viciously. "I tell you candidly, old man, I'm going to turn out a winning team this spring, and just as long as a fellow plays good ball and does as he's told, I don't give a continental if he's ostracized by the whole State! I gave my solemn word to Tom Higgins last year, after the game, that I'd win from Robinson, and I'm going to keep that promise!"

"I'll never forget old Tom that day. The poor duffer was crying like a baby all the way back to the yard. 'You'll be captain, Joe,' he said, 'and you've got to promise to wipe this out. You've got to give me your word of honor, Joe.' 'I'll do everything that I can, Tom,' said I. And we shook hands on it. 'If you don't beat them next year, Joe,' he blubbered, 'I'll come back here and I'll lick you until you can't stand. I swear I will!' And he would, too," laughed Joe.

"That's all well enough," answered Tracy, "but you don't want to go too far, Joe; the fellows won't stand everything even from you."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, there's lots of 'em now who think you've made a mistake in choosing Hanson for coach; you know that. They say that Hanson lost everything when he was captain three years ago, and that year before last, when he coached, we lost again. They think you should have got a coach who had something to show. And now if you insist on putting it on to the fellows with this coward, Weatherby, you'll have to look out for squalls."

"Good stuff!" Joe's blue eyes sparkled, and his mouth set itself straightly. "I'm open to all the squalls that come my way. I like squalls. And when they've blown over the other chaps may be surprised to find that they're a considerable distance from the scene of operations. Oh, no, my boy, you can't scare me by talking that way! I know what the fellows said – some of them, that is – about my selecting Hanson, and I don't give a continental. Hanson is all right. When he was captain here he had the poorest lot of players that any man ever had to contend with; anybody who was in college will tell you that. They couldn't field and they couldn't bat; the only thing they could do was kick; they kicked about the schedule, and they kicked about the amount of work they had to do, and they kicked about the training-table. Nobody on earth could have won with that team. As for year before last, Hanson coached and we didn't win, I know. We didn't win last year, for that matter, but nobody lays the blame on the coach. Hanson is all right. He knows the game all through; he's a gentleman, and he gives every minute of his time to the team.

The best judge of whether what I say is true is 'Baldy' Simson. You go and ask 'Baldy,' and if he doesn't tell you the same thing I'll eat my hat. And when you hear a trainer say that a coach is all right, there's something in it."

"Oh, well, I don't know much about it myself! I'm only saying what the fellows in general think, Joe."

"I know; there's no harm done. Only, if there are any squalls, Tracy, you take your friends and get into a cellar somewhere until they've blown over," said Joe suggestively.

"Oh, I'm not scared!" Tracy replied, laughing uneasily. "I'll stand by you."

"All right," answered Joe gravely. "That'll be safest."

There came a knock at the door, and Joe shouted, "Come in!" When he saw who his caller was he arose from the window-seat and stepped forward.

"How are you, Weatherby? Want to see me?"

"Yes, if you have a minute to spare." Jack looked calmly at the occupant of the Morris chair, and Joe understood.

"Certainly," he answered. "Sit down." Then, "I don't like to put you out, old man," he said, turning to Tracy, who had so far made no move toward withdrawing, "but I guess I'll have to ask you to excuse me a moment."

"That's all right," replied Tracy, lazily pulling himself out of his seat and staring insolently at the newcomer. "I'm a bit particular, anyway." He lounged to the door, carefully avoiding contact with Jack. "See you in the morning," he added. "So long."

When the door had closed, Joe glanced at the caller, instinctively framing an apology for the insult. But Jack's countenance gave no indication that he had even heard it. Joe marveled and pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, won't you?" he asked politely.

The other shook his head.

"No, thanks. What I've got to say will take but a minute," he answered calmly.

# CHAPTER V
# AN ENCOUNTER IN THE YARD

"Oh," said Joe, vaguely, "all right." He wondered, rather uncomfortably, what was coming.

"It's just this," Jack continued. "I tried to get a word with you in the cage, but there was always some one around. I wanted to know if – if after what happened the other day at the river, you have any objection to my trying for the nine. You see," he went on, hurriedly, "I know what the fellows call me, and I thought maybe you'd rather I didn't come out. You just tell me, you know, and it'll be all right. I won't show up again."

"I see," said Joe. "No, I haven't the least objection; in fact, I'm glad to have you. I don't pretend to judge that – affair at the river, Weatherby; it's none of my business. And the fact is, I want every man that can play baseball to report for practise. That's plain, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'll keep on then for the present."

"Of course, Weatherby, I can't guarantee that you'll be made welcome by the other candidates; you can understand that. They may act unpleasantly, or say ugly things. I'm not able to restrain them. You'll have to risk that, you know."

"I understand," answered Jack calmly. "They've already called me a coward. I don't believe they can say anything worse."

"No, I guess not." Joe looked curiously at the other. Then, "I say, Weatherby," he exclaimed, impulsively, "what was the trouble, anyway, the other day? I've only heard one side of it, and I fancy there's another, eh?"

"I'd rather not talk about it, if you please," answered Jack coldly.

"Oh, all right! I beg pardon." Joe felt somewhat huffed. His sympathy for the other was for the moment snuffed out. Jack moved toward the door.

"By the way," said Joe, in business-like tones, "I think you told me you'd played ball some. Where was it?"

"At home, on the high-school team. I played three years."

"What position?"

"I pitched the last year. Before that I played in the outfield, generally at right."

"I see." Joe's hopes of the other's usefulness dwindled. He had seen a good many cases of ambitious freshmen whose belief in themselves as pitchers was not justified by subsequent events. Every year there reported for practise a dozen or so of hopeful youngsters, who firmly believed themselves capable of filling all such important positions as pitcher and catcher, merely on the strength of having played such positions with more or less success on some fourth- or fifth-rate team. Joe mentally assigned Jack to this class of deluded ones.

"Well," he said, "of course you may count on having a fair trying-out, but I wouldn't hope for too much. You see, a fellow

has to be something of an expert to get in the box here; it's different from playing on a high-school team. Besides, we're rather well fixed for pitchers: there's Gilberth and King and Knox, all of whom are first-class men. Of course, we want new material wherever we can find it, and if you prove that you can pitch good ball we'll give you all the chance you want. But if I were you I'd try for something else this spring, for some position in the field. We're long on pitchers and short on out-fielders. Of course, you could keep your hand in at twirling; there'd be plenty of opportunity for that at practise."

"I'll take whatever I can get," answered Jack. "I don't lay any claim to being a wonder at pitching. I was the best we had in Auburn, but, of course, that doesn't mean very much."

"Auburn, Maine? Do you live there?"

"Two miles outside of town."

"Is that so? Maybe you know a cousin of mine there, Billy Cromwell? His father has a big tannery. He graduated from here three years ago this coming spring."

"I know him quite well," replied Jack, smiling for the first time since he had entered the study. "It was Billy who persuaded me to come here. He used to tell me about Erskine a good deal. Of course, he's seven or eight years older than I am, but he was always very nice to me."

"Think of that!" said Joe. "The idea of you being a friend of Billy's! He's fine chap, is Billy. What's he doing now?"

"Why, he's assistant superintendent. Every one likes him very

much, and he's awfully smart, I guess. Well, I'll report again to-morrow. I'm glad I saw you, and – thank you."

"Of course you'll report. And if I can help you at any time, just let me know." He opened the door and Jack passed out. "See you to-morrow, Weatherby."

"Yes. Good afternoon."

When Jack reached the head of the stairs he heard Joe's voice again and paused.

"I say, Weatherby," the baseball captain was calling, "come around and see me sometimes. I want to hear more about Billy."

"Thank you," was the non-committal reply.

Joe closed the door, took up a Greek book, and went back to the window-seat. When he had found his place he looked at it frowningly a moment. ""Thank you,' says he," he muttered. "As much as to say, 'I'm hanged if I do!' That youngster is a puzzle; worse than this chump, Pausanias!"

The warm spell of Thursday and Friday had been succeeded by a drop in temperature that had converted the pools into sheets of ice. The board-walks and the paths still made treacherous going, and when, after leaving Sessons Hall, in which Joe Perkins roomed, Jack had several times narrowly avoided breaking his neck, he left the paths and struck off across the glistening snow toward the lower end of the yard. It was almost dusk, and a cold, nipping wind from the north made him turn up the collar of his jacket and walk briskly. There were but few fellows in sight, and he was glad of it. To be sure, by this time he should have been

inured to the silently expressed contempt which he met on every side, to the barely audible whispers that greeted his appearance at class, to the meaning smiles which he often intercepted as they passed from one neighbor to another. Yet despite that he was schooling himself to bear all these things calmly, and with no outward sign of the sting they inflicted, he was not yet quite master of himself, and was grateful that the coming darkness and the well-nigh empty yard promised him present surcease from his trials.

Until he had entered Joe Perkins's study a quarter of an hour before he had met with no voicing of the public contempt. He had managed to accept Tracy Gilberth's veiled insult with unmoved countenance, yet it had required the greatest effort of any. He didn't know who that man was; he only knew, from observation in the practise-cage, that he was the foremost candidate for the position of pitcher, and so must be, in view of Perkins's remark, either Gilberth or King or Knox. Whoever he was, Jack vowed, some day he would be made to regret his words. For although Jack was accepting his fate in silence, he was very human, and meant, sooner or later, to even all scores.

When he had almost reached College Place and had taken to the board-walk again, footsteps crunching the frosty planks ahead of him brought his mind suddenly away from thoughts of revenge. He looked up and saw that the man who approached and in another moment would pass him was Professor White. Jack stepped off the boards and went on with averted eyes. The

professor recognized him at that instant, and as they came abreast spoke.

"Good evening, Weatherby."

There was no answer, nor did Jack turn his head. The professor frowned and stopped.

"Weatherby!" he called sharply. Jack paused and faced him.

"Well, sir?" he asked, quietly.

"What does this mean? Are you trying to add boorishness to – to your other failings?"

"No, sir, I was only trying to spare you the unpleasantness of speaking to a coward."

"Very thoughtful of you," said the other, sarcastically. "But allow me to tell you, sir, that if you want to remove the – ah – the sorry impression you have made you will have to adopt a less high-and-mighty manner."

"It's a matter of indifference to me what impression you hold, sir," replied Jack simply. "Good night."

The professor stood motionless and looked after the boy until he had crossed the street, the anger in his face slowly fading before a grudging admiration of the other's clever, if extremely impolite, retort. Presently he swung his green bag of books under his arm again and trudged on.

"I wonder if I wasn't too hasty the other day," he muttered. "For a coward he's got a surprising amount of grit, apparently. He'll bear watching."

Jack sped homeward, feeling rather pleased with himself.

His score with the professor wasn't by any means even, but the encounter had put something to his credit, and as he remembered the professor's look of amazement and anger he chuckled.

There was a light in Tidball's room as he crossed the corner of the Common, and as he looked a grotesque head showed in gigantic silhouette against the yellow curtain. Jack ran up the stairs and knocked at his neighbor's door.

"Come in!" drawled the occupant of the western chamber, and Jack entered on a scene that caused him to pause just inside the door and stare in silent surprise.

# CHAPTER VI
# IN DISGRACE

Anthony Tidball confronted Jack with a pewter spoon in one hand and a small tin coffee-pot in the other. He was in his shirt-sleeves and a bath-towel was fastened around his neck, descending in wispy folds to his knees. On one end of the study table a second towel was laid, and upon it rested a plate of bread, a jar of preserves, a wedge of cheese, a can of condensed milk, a bowl of sugar, and cellars containing salt and pepper. Besides these Jack saw a plate appropriately surrounded by knife, fork, and spoon, and flanked by a cup and saucer. There was a perceptible, and not ungrateful, odor of cooking present. Anthony waved the coffee-pot hospitably, but carefully, toward the rocking-chair.

"Hello, Weatherby," he said. "Sit down."

"Wha – what are you doing?" gasped Jack.

"Cooking supper. Have some? You're just in time." He took the towel from his neck and, going to the gas-stove, used it to remove a pie-plate from above a tiny frying-pan.

"Supper?" echoed Jack. "Do you mean that you – cook your own meals?"

"Yes," responded Anthony, calmly. He approached the table with the pan, and from it dexterously transferred six small

sausages on to the empty plate. Then he put a spoonful of milk and two spoonsful of sugar into the bottom of the cup and filled it to the brim with steaming and very fragrant coffee. "Yes, I've been my own chef," he continued, "ever since I came here. When Gooch and I were together it was a good deal simpler. I got breakfast and he got supper; our lunches were just cold things. You see, Weatherby, we're poor folks, and I couldn't stay in college three months if I had to pay four dollars a week for meals. As it is, it's a close haul sometimes."

"Everything looks very nice," murmured Jack, taking the chair and observing the proceedings with frank curiosity.

"Well, if you don't object, I'll just begin operations while things are hot," said Anthony. He tucked a corner of the bath-towel under his chin and began his repast. "There's nothing sinful in poverty, they say, and of course they're right; but it's pretty hard sometimes not to be ashamed of it. I don't tell every one that I cook my meals in my room. It wouldn't do. But you were certain to find it out sooner or later, and it might as well be sooner. I say, would you mind turning off the gas over there? Thanks."

"Do you mean that you can save money this way?" asked Jack as he sat down again.

"You better believe it. When Gooch and I kept house together our food cost us about one dollar and five cents apiece every week. I guess now it'll cost me nearer two dollars."

"But even then you're saving two dollars by not going to a boarding-house," said Jack reassuringly.

"Yes, I know," replied Anthony, as he started on his second sausage, "but four dollars a week is my limit. And I'm paying more for this room than I did for my half of the other one. I guess I'll have to retrench a while. Dad pays my tuition and I look after the rest myself. I earn enough in the summer taking out fishing parties and the like of that to last me. Last summer was a poor season, though; fish wouldn't bite and folks wouldn't go out with me. However, I got a scholarship, and that helped some. But I'm sailing a good deal nearer the wind than I did last year. And next week I've got to go over to Robinson, and I guess that will just about bankrupt me for a while."

"What are you going there for?" Jack inquired.

"Debate."

"Of course!" cried the other. "I remember now! I couldn't think where I'd heard your name. Why, you're the president of the Lyceum, aren't you? and the crack debater? The fellow who won for Erskine last year when every one expected to be beaten?"

"Well, something of that sort," replied the junior. "Anyhow, I've got to go to Robinson next week. If we're defeated after I've gone and paid five dollars and eighty cents in railroad fares – !"

Words failed him and he finished the last of the sausages with a woful shake of his head.

"What are our chances?" asked Jack.

"About the same as last year, I guess. We may and we mayn't. Robinson's got a fellow, named Heath, this year that's a wonder, they say. We've lost Browning and Soule, and that leaves us sort

of weak."

"I'd like to go," said Jack, "but I don't believe I could afford it."

"Wish you could," Anthony responded heartily. "We need all the support we can get. If it was a football game, now, I guess the whole college would go along. As it is, I suppose we'll have about two dozen beside the speakers. Did you ever try condensed milk with raspberry jam?"

Jack had to acknowledge that he never had.

"It's right good," said Anthony, spreading a generous spoonful of the mixture on a slice of bread. "If you kind of shut your eyes and don't think about it the condensed milk tastes like thick cream."

Jack watched in silence a moment. Then —

"I took your advice," he announced.

"Saw Perkins, you mean? What did he say?"

"Said it was all right; said he was glad to have me."

"That's good."

"And I met Professor White in the yard."

"What happened?" asked Anthony, turning his lean, spectacled face toward the other in evident interest. Jack recounted the conversation and Anthony grinned.

"Pretty cheeky, though, weren't you?"

"I suppose I was," Jack acknowledged. "But I don't care; he had no business saying I was boorish. He – he's a cad!"

"Easy there! Don't call names, Weatherby; it's a mean way to fight. White's not as bad as he seems to you. He's made a mistake

and when he discovers the fact he'll be the first to acknowledge it. You'll see."

Anthony produced his brier pipe and began to smoke.

"Bother you much to-day, did they?" he asked.

"Some. I can stand it, I suppose."

"They'll get tired pretty soon and forget it," said the other kindly. "Keep your hand on the tiller, take a couple of reefs in your temper, and watch out. There's your supper bell."

"Yes, I must wash up. Are you going to be busy to-night?"

"Not to hurt. Come in and bring your knitting."

"I will," said Jack gratefully.

The growing friendship with the new lodger was the one bright feature in Jack's existence at this time, and during the next few weeks he frequently found himself viewing with something that was almost equanimity the occurrence at the river and its results, since among the latter was his acquaintance with Anthony Tidball. Anthony had hosts of acquaintances, but few friends; friends, he declared, were too expensive. But he adopted Jack during the first week of their acquaintance, and at once became guardian, mentor, and big brother all rolled into one. Jack went to him with his troubles – and he had a good many in those days – and listened to his advice, and generally acted upon it. It was a new and delightful experience to the younger boy to have a chum, and he made the most of it, resorting to Anthony's room whenever he wanted society, and interrupting the junior's studying in a way that would have summoned a remonstrance

from any one save the good-hearted victim. Anthony always laid aside his books and pens, filled his pipe, took one foot into his lap, and listened or talked with unfailing good nature. And after Jack had taken himself off, Anthony would discard his pipe and buckle down to work in a mighty effort to make up for lost time, not infrequently sitting with the gas-stove between his knees long after the village clock had struck twelve, and every one else in the house was fast asleep.

Sometimes they took walks together, for both were fond of being outdoors, and it became a common thing to see the tall, awkward junior striding alongside the freshman and leaning down near-sightedly to catch his words. For a while the college world wondered and exclaimed. Tidball was a person of vast importance, a queer, quiet, serious sort of fellow, but a master at study and debate, a man whose counsels were asked for and hearkened to with deep respect, and in general opinion a person who would be heard from in no uncertain way in the future. Hence, when the college saw that Tidball had taken up Weatherby, the college began to suspect that it had very possibly been overhasty in its judgment of the latter youth. Indications of this began to be apparent even to Jack; fellows were less uneasy when lack of other seats made it necessary for them to sit beside him at Chapel or at recitations; several times he was greeted by name, rather shamefacedly to be sure, by members of his own class; and baseball practise became less of an ordeal for him, since the candidates generally showed a disposition to recognize

his existence and speak him fair. But if these condescending ones looked for evidences of gratitude from Jack they were doomed to disappointment. He returned greetings politely but without cordiality, and made not the least move toward grasping the hand of fellowship so hesitatingly and doubtingly advanced.

"If I was not good enough to associate with before," he told himself, "I'm no better now, merely because one man of prominence walks across the yard with me."

He had never accepted Joe Perkins's invitation to call. He was grateful to the captain for the friendliness the latter had shown him, and continued to show him on every occasion. But Perkins believed him a coward, just as the others did. Joe repeated his invitation twice and then gave it up. Yet the more he saw of Jack the more he was inclined to doubt the fairness of the general verdict, and so, in spite of duties that took up practically every minute of his waking hours, he found time to write a letter to his cousin, Billy Cromwell, in Auburn. Eventually he received a reply. There were eight sheets of it altogether, as was natural, considering that Billy hadn't written to Joe previously for something over six months, but only a small portion of the epistle is of interest here.

"I know Jack Weatherby very well [Billy wrote]. His folks and mine are old acquaintances. His father has a farm near here, but never has done very well with it, I believe. You know what some of our farms hereabout are; the Weatherby place is like them, only more so. Jack's a smart, plucky youngster; a good sort all

through. If you can help him along you'll be doing me a favor. And I think you'll like him if you know him better. And if you can get him on to the nine you'll be doing well for the nine, I promise you. Jack's one of those dependable chaps that you meet about once in a thousand years; if he says he'll knock out a two-bagger, he'll do it. And he isn't afraid of work or anything else. That's about all, I think. You said you wanted to know all I could tell you about Jack, and I think I've told it. Remember me to him when you see him."

Joe folded the letter and put it back in the envelope.

"I never knew Billy to get taken in by any one yet," he said to himself, "and so I fancy we've sized up young Weatherby all wrong. I'll have another talk with him. Only – how to get hold of him?"

# CHAPTER VII
# AT THE BATTING NETS

Meanwhile Erskine had won a victory over Robinson, a victory which did not, perhaps, occasion as much enthusiasm as would have a triumph on the gridiron or the diamond, but which, nevertheless, pleased everybody greatly, and added new laurels to the wreath, encircling the brow of Anthony Zeno Tidball. Erskine won the debate. The result was never in doubt after Anthony delivered his argument, and when the last word had been said the judges did not even leave their seats, but, after a moment of whispered conference, awarded the victory to the visitors.

The debaters and their small company of supporters did not return to Centerport until noon the next day, and long before that the morning papers had arrived and the college at large had proudly read their account of the contest. That explains why when Anthony, attired in a long, yellowish plaid ulster of great antiquity, and carrying his nightgown and toothbrush wrapped in a piece of brown paper, lurched from the train to the station platform and looked about him, his jaw dropped in ludicrous dismay, and he made a hurried effort to retreat. But his companions were crowding down behind him and he was forced forward into the ungentle hands of the cheering students,

who filled the platform. Somehow, he never knew quite how, he was thrust and lifted to a baggage truck, from which, since his legs were securely pinioned by several enthusiastic jailers, he found it impossible to make his escape. So he hugged his bundle desperately and beamed good-humoredly about him, recognizing the advisability of making the best of things. The other debaters were hustled to his side in a wild medley of cheers, and then, clutching each other madly in an effort to maintain their balance, they were wheeled up and down the long platform in the vortex of a swirling throng and cheered to the echo, individually and collectively. For his part, Anthony was filled with a great relief when the train with its long line of grinning faces at the windows drew away, and with a greater relief when one of the occupants of the truck, losing his hold, tumbled between the framework, and so brought the triumphal procession to an end.

The prey were allowed to escape, and Anthony drew his long ulster about his thin shanks and scuttled ungracefully into Town Lane and so out of the rabble of still cheering students. But he hadn't escaped Jack, for that youth, somewhat out of breath, overtook him before he had reached the corner and showered fragmentary congratulations upon him.

"I got up – almost before – light," panted Jack, bravely trying to keep up with Anthony's long strides, "and went – down and – got a – paper – and – read – read – Oh, don't go so fast, please!"

Anthony moderated his pace and put an arm affectionately over the other's shoulders.

"Did you?" he asked. "Well, now, that was real friendly."

"And when I – saw – that you'd won – I danced a jig in – the – middle of Main Street!"

"And haven't got your breath back yet?" laughed Anthony.

"But – aren't you glad?" asked Jack.

"I should say so," answered the other. "So tickled that I don't mind the money it cost."

Another event, important to a large part of the college, took place a day or two later. March, which had raged in with a big snow-storm, relented and attempted the rôle of April. The ground dried and became firm and springy and little warm breezes almost induced one to believe that he had somehow lost track of the months and had torn one too few leaves from his calendar. Erskine Field, given over during the winter to snow and winds, clothed itself in a new green livery and suddenly became the Mecca for more than half the college. One Thursday morning the following welcome notice hung in the window of Butler's bookstore:

> University Baseball. – Outdoor practise on the Field at 4 sharp. Candidates must bring their own togs.

Jack went out to the field early and, having got into his baseball clothes, threw his white sweater over his back, and sat down on the steps of the locker-house in the sunshine. Many fellows passed him, going in and out of the building, some according him a word of greeting, others a mere nod, while still others pretended not to see him. But Jack was beyond slights

to-day. The spring was in his blood and he would have liked to throw himself down on the grass and roll over like a colt for mere joy of living. Instead, he only beat a restless tattoo with his heels and watched the passers. Presently the varsity squad trotted out; King, who played left field and was substitute pitcher; Billings, third-baseman; "Wally" Stiles, second-baseman; Knox, last year's shortstop and substitute pitcher; "Teddy" Motter, crack first-baseman; Lowe, center-fielder, and several more, with Gilberth emerging last of all in talk with Joe Perkins.

Jack watched Gilberth as he went by, much as a cat watches a mouse beyond its present reach. He had a score to even with Tracy Gilberth, and he was convinced that in good time the opportunity would come to him to even it. Meanwhile he waited patiently, observing Gilberth like a calm, inscrutable Fate. Gilberth had a firm grasp on the pitcher's place, while Jack was only one of the second squad, and so, of late, their paths seldom crossed, and the senior had had no chance to give expression to his sentiments regarding the freshman. Of this Jack was glad, since Gilberth's contemptuous glances roused his hatred as nothing else could.

The varsity squad took possession of the diamond and began practising. Presently Bissell, the varsity center-fielder, made his appearance and took the second squad in charge. Bissell was out of the game for the while with a sprained ankle, and Hanson, the head coach, had placed the second squad under his wing. There were sixteen of them in all, for the most part upper

classmen who had failed to make the varsity the year before, with a sprinkling of sophomores and two freshmen. The freshmen were Jack and a small, wiry chap, named Clover, who was trying for shortstop. Bissell led the way to the batting nets and soon they were hard at work. A third squad, made up of some twenty more or less hopeless candidates, many of them freshmen who would later form the nucleus of their class nine, were occupying an improvised diamond at the farther end of the football field. The scene was animated and interesting. The sharp crack of bat meeting ball, the shrill cries of the coachers, and the low thud of flying spheres against padded gloves filled the air.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.