

# PARSON HARWOOD'S CURVES

By Bert Estes

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GALLIA CITY, like most Ohio river towns, had a mixed population full of sharp antagonisms, social, political and religious. Notwithstanding, there was one local institution about which there was only one mind. The Gallia City Baseball Club, the apple of the municipal eye, was felt to be set for the city's defense against the world in general and the nine from Centerport in particular.

Centerport, a few miles down the river, was a high headed little town given to vaunting itself unseemly and challenging other towns to come out and meet their doom. Worse than that, Centerport had in hand a large stock of doom and was liberal in applying it—over the diamond. The mutual scorn of Centerport and Gallia City had something tragic in its intensity. To beat Centerport was the chief aim of Gallia achievement. Centerport lived only to repeat its victories over the hated foe. In both business of all sorts was transacted as a sort of adjunct to the larger mission in life.

Brent Harwood came to Gallia City to supply Dickson's pulpit while Dickson, poor man, was away in hospital. Dickson was the Presbyterian minister. Harwood was to live in the vacant parsonage and take his meals over with the Potters. Dickson had arranged all that. Harwood hoped he had arranged also for some one to meet him, but when he stepped off the boat from Cincinnati early one Saturday morning and looked about he found none to welcome him.

When the dock had been deserted by all but constabulary and chronic loungers, Harwood made up his mind that there was some hitch—his letter of announcement had possibly miscarried—so he walked up to an old river man in the freight house and said:

"I believe I am to board with a family here named Potter. Do you know of any such people?"

"Know 'em? Why, sonny, they ain't man, woman nor child—doggone it, even er oreary yaller purp nor sense er flea on that purp—live in these here parts that I don't know! You bet I know 'em—hell family, includin' the cat—ole chap, with bills on his nose; niver ole gal fer his misson, son, the gol-darnedest cuss in seventeen states fer sell planners an' orgins, an' the son's wife, Annie, who is jest er great big hunk of the salt of the earth. Say, what d'ye want with 'em? Be ye one o' them drummer chaps tryin' ter sell Pot some more goods?"

Harwood shook his head. "I've come to spend the summer here," he said. "I shall take my meals with the Potters and live at the parsonage."

"Why, it's about up! Dickson's gone ter New York ter have some big doctor cut him open an' right him up inside," the river man said.

"I did hear that was a—say, young fellow, you ain't the new preacher that's comin'?"

"I am going to try and preach," Harwood said modestly. "My name is Harwood."

"Brother Harwood," faltered the river man, "lemme beg your pardon the darndestest worst way. I had no idee you don't look like a parson, you don't dress like a parson, you don't let on you was a parson—how in tunkit was a fellow to know? I hope you'll ferget I called you sonny. If you will, by grab, you can lick me if I don't come to church—next Sunday, but some time before you go."

"That's a bargain," Harwood said, shaking hands before he made his way to breakfast at the hotel.

Upon his second Monday morning at Gallia City Harwood strolled down to Stevenson Potter's music store. Ste-

venson had found a fine fellow, although everybody but his own family did call him Pot. Pot, on his part, had at first been doubtful of the young preacher just out of seminary, but after a little had said of him to a friend: "Our parson is all right from the ground up, not one of those white chokered fellows who go around with faces as long as a small track, as if they had given up the world, the flesh and the devil and were almighty sorry they had to. Harwood is none of that sort. He's a man first and a minister afterward."

As Harwood stepped inside the music store a strong voice called across the street: "Hey, there, Pot!" "Comin', colonel," Potter answered, picking his way across the newly sprinkled street to a big crockery store opposite. A muscular young fellow leaned against the doorjamb.

"Here's the devil to pay and no pitch hot, and mighty far to water," he said. "Centerport has challenged us to play 'em Saturday, and Tom Jordan is off on a big, big bat. You know, there ain't another man in the whole darn town that can pitch a ball within four feet of the plate. Centerport knows it too—that's just why they've run this challenge on us."

"Round up Tom. He can get in shape," Potter said confidently. Colonel snorted. "Round nothin'! Tom's a holy terror when he's on a spree—besides, he's gone. Maybe the Lord knows where he is—I don't, for sure. It's the very cussedest luck—I'd rather lose a hundred dollars, than have them fellows come and wallop us—and we've got to play 'em. If we refuse they'll crow over it forever and the day after."

"Great mud!" said Potter—he never said anything stronger—"that mustn't happen. Can't we import a pitcher? What's the matter with Stevens of the Riversides? He's a bird—no mistake." Colonel shook his head. "Never do in the world," he said. "Twouldn't be a square deal for one thing; for another, they'd be sure to get on to it—and then—"

"Well, we've got to accept the challenge," Potter said. "Do it right away and throw in a big bluff. Tell 'em we've got a new pitcher that will take all the kinks out of 'em. Then we must rustle for a pitcher—we've got to—that's all."

"Lord, Pot, it makes me sick abed thinkin' of the luck of those Centerport scrubs," Colonel said. "They've beat us and beat us on dukes this way—we've not had a fair show in the longest time. And now, just as Tom Jordan was pitchin' in such great shape, off he goes and gets full again. Wish the old man Jordan would pitch him in the river, neck and crop—it's less than he deserves."

"Well, whinin' nor cussin' don't help us, as I see. I'm going back to talk with the preacher," Potter said.

"Preacher be hanged!" Colonel said irreverently. "Are you going to get him prysin' against the Centerports?" "I did not answer—the last word caught him half way across the street. "Who is your military friend?" Harwood asked, smiling.

Potter explained briefly that Colonel was not a military man. He had been baptiz'd that way and was the "son" of Roddick & Son. Moved by an impulse he did not understand, he told also of the challenge and of Gallia City's predicament. Harwood listened, drumming softly on the strings of a fine guitar. At the end he said:

"I'm feeling pretty dull and blue this morning. Do you think your friend Colonel would let me toss ball to him long enough to set my blood circulin'?"

"Great mud, parson! Do you play ball?" Potter asked.

"I did at college, also at the seminary; whenever I had the chance," Harwood answered. Potter whistled. "Dickson almost had fits if you named baseball to him," he said. "Why, he preached against it and came near leavin' his job. He did lose half the congregation. But come on, I want Colonel to see you."

Colonel stared a little at Harwood's request, but invited his two visitors out into the ally back of the store, where they might toss balls to their hearts' content and not a soul be the wiser. "But to Harwood's suggestion of gloves he only said, 'If it gets too hot, awake nights thinkin' of Bill Reed. He'll put 'em on, but I reckon there won't be any long whisks on the balls you pitch.'"

Harwood's eye twinkled wickedly, but he said nothing, only stripped off coat, vest and collar and began to toss. He played lightly, but easily. Colonel caught with an air of condescension and returned the ball with a great show of consideration for the minister's soft hands. After a little Harwood asked if Colonel would mind catching a bit while he tried his hand at pitching.

"Blaze away, parson," grinned Colonel. In a minute or two a square box cover was in place as a "home plate" and Colonel behind it, caricaturing the man at the bat. Harwood pretended not to see the implied satire. He stepped into the pitcher's place, which he had marked at the proper distance. A ball or two went over the plate true as an arrow.

"Good, enough, parson!" Colonel laughed, still patronizingly. "You've got the ball under bully control, sure." Harwood said over his shoulder to Potter: "Open your eyes and get right behind me. You'll see something. So will Colonel!" Then in a louder voice: "Do you mind if I pitch a few stiffer ones? I want to see if I have lost the hang of it."

"Let 'em come, parson!" Colonel shouted back, almost convulsed that a little man, whom he could fling over his shoulder, should be so considerate. Harwood nodded, saying:

"Thank you. Of course I would not put twist in them unless I knew you did not object. I wish you'd put on gloves, though. I hate to pitch hard to a man in bare hands."

"Gloves, nothin'!" Colonel said, almost nettled. "Maybe I don't look contagious, but you can bet your last nick you'll find me catchin'."

"Very well, my Christian friend!" Harwood called back. "Catchin' as you may be, you are not entirely immune. Mind out! Here goes!"

Bill! sizz! the ball went out of the parson's right hand like a rifle shot, flipping off the ends of his fingers with a crack like a whiplash. It started to the right of Colonel so fast the eye could scarcely follow it. Colonel darted to get behind it, when suddenly it changed its mind, plunged to the left, passed him entirely and writhed, hissing, far down the alley.

"Sufferin' jimmies! What was that?" gasped Colonel.

"Oh, only one of the things you didn't catch—not exposed enough, I fancy," Harwood grinned. "Now let me give you another."

Whizz! A great, outshoot went whistling through the air. Colonel did his little dance again—only this time he reversed. As he brought up standing, empty handed, he said in awe-struck tones:

"For the love o' God, parson, nobody but a cross-eyed man could catch those dum things! Get one right at me—right here!" folding his hands in front of his stomach.

"That's right where they would go if you didn't get out of the way. Stand still and keep your eyes open," Harwood commanded. "Now!"

Bill! Another sizzling inshoot. Crack! Colonel was in the air dancing like a wild Indian, trying to blow on his hands and rub his elbows at the same time.



"I'm very sorry," Harwood said demurely.

The ball had gone as Harwood said. The concussion of it had jarred Colonel from finger tips to shoulder blades.

"If you'd only put on the mitts," Harwood said, with a tantalizing grin. "I'd like to throw you a few speedy ones. Otherwise I'm really afraid I might hurt you."

"Hurt me?" Colonel's tone was abject. "And then parson feeling like a full-crocker crate had smashed 'em in my gut, parson. I know when I've had enough. But, say, you're the deevintest package ever I struck."

"Mr. Harwood," said Potter, "if you don't mind I'll go get Bill Reed to come and catch for you."

"I should like it of all things," said Harwood. "The little I have done makes me feel a new man."

"Me, too, and a durned poor one," Colonel added, but he plucked up spirit to grin heartily when Potter came back with Bill Reed, catcher to the Gallias, two or three other members and several "fans" besides.

When Harwood suggested gloves, Bill snuffed even more disdainfully than Colonel had done. Harwood smiled as he took position in the box and said softly: "Say where you want the balls, Mr. Reed. I'll try to put them over the plate about right."

Bill squatted back of the plate, spat tobacco juice on his hands and said, "Give us a low ball."

Harwood gripped the leathern sphere, leaped the length of the box, gave a twist of the wrist and let drive a straight drop over the middle of the plate. Reed put up his hands; but under his fingers and wrist skipping down the alley. He was chagrined, of course, but when Harwood again named gloves he said almost roughly: "Don't you lay awake nights thinkin' of Bill Reed. He'll put 'em on, but I reckon there won't be any long whisks on the balls you pitchin'."

Harwood nodded and pitched the same inshoot he had sent to Colonel. Bill leaped to this side and that in a vain attempt to get behind the ball. As it passed him and went hurtling through the dust he cried:

"Fellows, did you see that thing? If I hadn't quit drinkin', I'd swear I had 'em again!"

Potter lined up his forces behind the Parson. Harwood winked at Potter; then, with a motion like the uncoiling of a steel spring, he sent another inshoot to Reed so swift that Reed had no time to dodge it. Bill managed to get his hands up in the instinctive movement of self defense. He caught, and long as he pitched a cannon ball, though his fingers did not feel it, they were so jarred and numb.

"Whoop!" roared Bill, sitting down suddenly and staring with eyes at the parson. "Bos, he went on solemnly, 'that wuz a close shave. If I hadn't caught the durned thing I'd have gone plumb through my innards. Say,' looking ruefully at his hands, 'no more ball today, thank you! I've got to see Doc Johnson about them things.'"

"I'm very sorry," Harwood said demurely, "but you wouldn't put on gloves for a parson's pitching, you know. Soak your hands in very hot water; it will set them all right. Now, is there an other gentleman who cares to play ball?"

In the soft, warm twilight of that eventful day Harwood sat content and comfortable in the parsonage study. He was smoking and trying hard to keep cool. He was also very lonely and it must be confessed, blue from staying alone in the deserted house. So he was genuinely glad to hear heavy steps upon the gravel and a little later to welcome Potter, Colonel, Reed and some more men he did not know.

"This isn't exactly a social call," Potter began, "yet we can't exactly call it business and the fact is we're all afraid to begin."

"Oh, ho! Somebody going to commit matrimony? Who is it—Colonel or my friend Reed?" Harwood asked, his eyes twinkling. Reed grinned broadly. The day before he would have thrashed the man who had named him friend to a parson. But a man who could play such ball—that was another matter altogether.

"You're dead wrong, parson. That sort of thing comes right in your line and ours is way off it," Potter said. "We are in a hole. We want your help, but we don't know how you'll take our proposition."

"But you do know—at least you ought to—at if I can legitimately help you or any one in this town I shall be proud and happy to do it," said Harwood.

"But this is clean outside ministerial duty," Potter began. Harwood smiled. "I am a man as well as a minister," he said.

Bill Reed broke in: "Now, looky here. Ain't no use chawin' longer on that rag. Parson has give out fair an' square he wants to be took on the dead level—a man same as we are, only a dashed slight—excuse my French, parson—it gits this best of my United States before I know it. The case is this—we want you to help us lick them da—er, then meanly Centerport chaps. We can do it if you pitch for us. Nothin' in this county 'aint in the game with you. If you'll do it, every man Jack o' us 'll stick to you like a leann tick to a hog. That's what's the matter with us, and there ye be."

Harwood's face was a study. He was amused, pleased, beyond everything touched by this recognition of common manhood. It was the passion of his life to help men realize their own possibilities. He yearned to preach to the neighborhood rather than dogmas. His heart was warm, and he smiled as he said:

"I thought you had come for that, and am glad you came. If you had not, I should have volunteered—that is, if you had agreed to my conditions."

"We'll fix all that, parson," two or three began eagerly.

Harwood held up his hands. "You don't understand. I don't want money," he said. "I do want—your—something on which your hearts are set, you ought to do something for me. That is to say, if I play ball you come to church. Is it a bargain?"

"You help us everlastingly lick them Centerports," Bill burst out, "and you can say, 'Boys, come roost on the church steps from sunset to sundown every Sunday,' and gamble on our side—it's every dashed one of us. Hey, boys? Oh, do excuse me, parson. I've been a tough sort all my life, but I'll be hanged if I don't quit swearin' right now."

"Ah," said Harwood. "Gentlemen, this brings up something else. You know, and I know, how ill I can afford to have it said I belong to an organization of toughs. I want to belong to an organization of gentlemen. In the best sense of the word. If I am to be a club member, you must give me your word that drunkenness and swearing shall stop. Now we understand each other. There's my hand. If you shake it, I shall know you take me—conditions and all."

Every man in the room gave him a hearty grip, then took leave to, but about Saturday's game. All agreed the new pitcher had best be kept dark; also that Harwood should wear a baseball suit. "I have my own with me. A 'V' on the shirt will make it all right," Harwood said. And so the little company went away, exultant beyond words.

Saturday was fair and hot—the very weather for great ball. But, hot as the sun shone, it was mild compared to the baseball enthusiasm of Gallia City. Firsters all about announced the coming contest. The local press under the headline "Baseball mania," possible to the pitcher's box for the home team. Harwood also warned citizens to do their Saturday buying before, as every shop would be shut during the hours of the game. The little City buzzed and seethed. Local patriotism had risen to a passion and swept through it in a tidal wave.

Still mystery lay thick and murky over the pitcher and some other things. One of them was why not one of the nine had showed his face at Mike Grogan's saloon, which theretofore had been baseball headquarters. Beyond that there were incredible rumors of no beer on the grounds—not even the customary two kegs for the team. The Dutchman who had commonly owned that profitable privilege had been warned off. There was talk also of sweating in extra deputy marshals whose business it should be to suppress swearing and all sorts of riotous language.

The visiting club was amazed at its reception. There were no white clad players in wait to drag them off to Grogan's for a social guzzle. Instead Colonel and Bill Reed met them and took them to the hotel, while the Gallia City band went along playing its loudest strains.

The strains came to Harwood as he was slipping into his suit. He was not to go with the procession, but to meet the team at the grounds.

It was a great procession, the band at the head puffing doggedly through a Sousa march; next the bus bearing Centerporters in white, with blue caps and hose; after them another busful of Gallias, also in white, but red on hands and feet; then swarms of buggies, hacks and farm wagons, packed with friends of both nines; last of all a fray-ed out drizzle of small boys intent upon finding cracks or knotholes in the fence through which they might at length view the promised land.

It would be hard to say whether there was more curiosity or anxiety in the glances which Gallia City folk bent upon their champions. Interest, of course, centered on the "phenom." The strain was not relieved when careful counting showed in the Gallia bus only eight regular players and two substitutes. Gloom deepened perceptibly. Those who had given odds on Gallia felt their coin already as good as lost. They began to feel also that they had been badly sold, and by their own.

Without new blood in the home team the game was a gift to Centerport, and so far there was no sign of new blood.

About a minute after the appointed hour the umpire sent the Gallias to the field and the Centerports to the bench. Their short stop spat loyally upon the gleaming new ball and rolled it in the dirt, so the pitcher might easily grip it. There had been preliminary practice by both teams. Gallia partisans were amazed and somewhat cheered to see the substitute pitcher go to the bench, not the box. The points were empty. Almost before anybody could remark it, out from the dressing room beneath the grand stand shot a slight, wiry figure in white, with red stockings and red cap. When the figure walked briskly into the pitcher's place, a buzz rippled clean around the ground. Centerport's captain seemed to kick, but at a low word from the umpire dropped back, saying to himself:

"Fer Gawd's sake!" "Batter up!" called the umpire. A modern Goliath, big Jim Bunker, stalked up to the plate.

"Play ball!" cried the umpire. The ball was passed. Brent faced the mighty slugger with a little irritating smile.

"Say, Jim," bawled the captain, "either this here 'phenom' is young, or it was picked mighty green. Anyway it ain't big enough to send a ball across the rubber. It oughter be set playin' marbles. This ain't no place for children. Now, then, Jim, swat 'er over the fence and break the 'phenom's heart."

"You just watch my smoke," Jim said. "When I hit 'er a lick, she'll look like a saucer." "I'm going to knock the dished thing flat."

"Excuse me, but that ain't to be no swearin' this game," a deputy marshal said, touching the big batsman's elbow. "All right, boss. I didn't know this was a prayer meetin'." Jim said, amaze-ment in every line of his face.

All eyes were fast on the pitcher, the "phenom." He certainly looked too slight for the game he was up against. Would he fail? Harwood screwed the ball into the palm of his right hand, sprang forward, then lightly, swiftly, as an archer might loose a lance low string, loosed his arm and sent the ball hissing across the plate to raise a puff of sand between the plate and Reed.

"One strike!" cried the umpire. "Thunder!" shouted Jim. "I didn't see it!"

Harwood silently pitched a writhing rise that wound over the plate to the utter confounding of the batter.

"Two strikes!" said the umpire. "Thought it was goin' to be a low ball," Jim said apologetically to his captain. The captain glowered. Bill Reed put on the must and squatted close up behind the bat. Harwood gripped the ball peculiarly, a sign to Bill that the pitch would be a wide out curve. The ball started apparently for Jim's stomach. Jim dodged it would be a wide out curve.

Harwood screwed the ball into the palm of his right hand. He agreed with him—so jumped very far back from the plate just as the ball was coming. "Swamp," called right over the middle of the rubber.

"Three strikes! Batter up!" bawled the umpire. "Batter up!"

The crowd was at first too amazed to applaud. It could hardly believe its eyes. A striding ball struck out the luvable Jim Bunker. Jim slunk to the bench, growling at what he called "the empire." He was promptly silenced by the assertion that the "empire" was all right; it was himself, Jim Bunker, who had an oyster in his forehead in place of an eye.

When Centerport's captain had said that, he went to the bat himself. Harwood smiled. Back at college it had been said that Brent Harwood won at ball as much by his grin as by his curves. The grin was slow, insinuating, exasperating, calculated to drive the coolest batter wild. Harwood stood a half minute rubbing the ball and grinning at the captain.

"Aw, git a move on ye, there, kid," snarled the batter. Harwood grinned. "Nothin' to 'fraid I'll bust the durned thing. Gimme er crack at 'er, an' I'll show ye a trick with a hole in it. Ye ain't pitchin' no no blind man this trip," the captain went on.

The parson kept on grinning. The batter got explosively red. Harwood's snigger dropped out of his nerveless lips, and he made a shivering sound as if he were cold or freezing. I pitched him.

He finished and spread himself along the bars for support. He did not say a word. I could not lift my eyes to his and turned away.

Then I heard a sound that made a chill run up my back. "Pst! Pst!" The noise that people often make to attract attention in a crowd.

I glanced around, and such a sight I saw! Roach had one arm stretched at full length through the cage across the narrow passage to the left. There was a stand of Springfield rifles there close against the wall.

Have you ever seen a person reach for something on a high shelf, something he could just touch with his fingers? "Tip it, Tommy" (he never called me by that name before). "Tip it," he said in a cowering entreaty. "Go ahead; you can do it," he added, with a hide-

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as to function. "I could not stay there longer, I became so weak. In my mind now as I write I can see a big hunched, hairy man, with a diamond flashing on the middle finger, reaching—reaching. Almost as I went through the swing- ing doors the report came to me. I heard voices inside the building, and a reporter rushed past me, his face ablaze with news. The papers were all wrong. They who remember it and read this will learn the truth.

A GOOD STORY ON GOV. NORTHERN. —People in Tampa, Fla., tell a story at the expense of ex-Governor Northern, of Georgia. The genial Georgian has a beautiful home at Clearwater, on the bay, where he enjoys freedom from the political strife of his own State. The Governor's place fronts on the bay, where there is a considerable rise and fall of the tide. As the house was ready furnished, the first thing the Governor did this year when he came down was to open the building and air it and its contents thoroughly. The bedding came in for special attention, and it struck him that the smooth, white, sandy beach in front of the house was just the place on which to spread the mattresses for a sun bath. He came from a region where the vagaries of old ocean are not known, and the question of tide was something new to him. Acting up in his thought of a sun bath for the bedding, the Governor gathered up seven or eight big mattresses and spread them out on the sand for a nice sun bath. Going back again into the house and pursuing his labors, he forgot all about the mattresses. When he came out several hours later he was puzzled to find that the incoming tide had floated off his fine bedding. Reports from Clearwater do not state what the Governor said, but possibly his thoughts were too vivid for words. He always turns the subject now when a friend asks him about "sun baths for household goods."

SPRINKLING WITH OIL. One of the benefits growing out of the enormous supply of crude oil which is now found in so many parts of the country, says the Railway and Engineering Review, is the possibility of using it for sprinkling and thereby not only laying the dust on railroads but in cities, and perhaps most of all in the country roads in those sections where rain occurs only at wide intervals. Its success upon railroads has been thoroughly demonstrated, and although at first its use in cities was objected to because of the supposed deleterious effects upon rubber-tired cars, it has been claimed that this objection has been overcome. (This a number of the tips in California are using it for sprinkling purposes, and it is much cheaper than water. The advantage to the railroads came from the laying of the dust on the right of way, so that a general use for sprinkling will add materially to the life of the road and from that standpoint should be encouraged.

Ex President Cleveland is complaining, but not strong enough to open doors until the weather is milder.

The Washington Post asserts that the negro, socially considered, is as welcome at the North as at the South.

Mississippi is stirred by the report of the penitentiary committee, which charges wholesale corruption in its management of the convicts.

Trains collided in a New York city tunnel. Fifteen were killed and thirty injured. The responsibility for the accident has not been fixed.

France is seeking to induce Southern negroes to emigrate to Tunis. Thousands of circulars will be distributed offering every negro—male or female—two acres of land.

Achar Fastidious has been named by the House of Representatives as a member of