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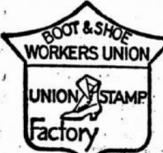
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PENROD

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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thought ole Herman bad man. No, sub I uz dess talkin' 'cause I nev' would cut nobody. I ain' tryin' git in no jail—no, sub!

Penrod looked at the scythe; he looked at Herman; he looked at the lawn-mower, and he looked at Verman. Then he looked out in the yard at the rake. So did Sam Williams.

"Come on, Verman," said Herman. "We ain' got 'at stove wood f' supper yet."

Giggling reminiscently, the brother disappeared, leaving silence behind them in the carriage house. Penrod and Sam retired slowly into the shadowy interior, each glancing, now and then, with a preoccupied air, at the open, empty doorway where the late afternoon sunshine was growing ruddy. At intervals one or the other scraped the floor reflectively with the side of his shoe. Finally, still with out either having made any effort at conversation, they went out into the yard and stood, continuing their silence.

"Well," said Sam at last, "I guess it's time I better be gettin' home. So long, Penrod."

"So long, Sam," said Penrod feebly. With solemn gaze he watched his friend out of sight. Then he went slowly into the house and after an interval occupied in a unique manner appeared in the library holding a pair of brilliantly gleaming shoes in his hand. Mr. Schofield, reading the evening paper, glanced frowningly over it at his offspring.

"Look, papa," said Penrod; "I found your shoes where you'd taken 'em off in your room to put on your slippers and they were all dusty." So I took 'em out on the back porch and gave 'em a good brushing. They shine up fine, don't they?"

"Well, I'll be a d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d!" said the startled Mr. Schofield.

Penrod was zigzagging back to normal.

The midsummer sun was stinging hot outside the little barber shop next to the corner drug store, and Penrod, undrugging a toilet-primer, made his way slowly, approaching with birth day, was adhesive enough to retain upon his face much hair as it fell from the shears.

There is a mystery here. The torsional processes are not unagreeable to manhood—in truth, they are soothing—but the hairs detached from a boy's head get into his eyes, his ears, his nose, his mouth and down his neck and he does everywhere itch exultantly. Wherefore he blinks, winks, weeps, twitches, condenses his countenance and squirms, and perchance the barber's scissors clip more than intended—belike an outlying fringe of ear.

"Um-muh-ow!" said Penrod, this thing having happened.

"D' I touch 'y up a little?" inquired the barber, smiling falsely.

"Ooh-uh!" The boy in the chair of fered inarticulate protest, as the wound was rubbed with alum.

"That don't hurt," said the barber. "You will get it, though, if you don't settler," he continued, nipping in the bud any attempt on the part of his patient to think that he already had "it."

"Puff!" said Penrod, meaning no disrespect, but endeavoring to dislodge a temporary mustache from his lip.

"You ought to see how still that little George Bassett sits," the barber went on reprovingly. "I hear every body says he's the best boy in town."

"Puff! Phurr!" There was a touch of intentional contempt in this.

"I haven't heard nobody around the neighborhood makin' no such remarks," added the barber, "about nobody of the name of Penrod Schofield."

"Well," said Penrod, clearing his mouth after a struggle, "who wants 'em to Ouch!"

"I hear they call George Bassett the 'little gentleman,'" ventured the barber provocatively, meeting with instant success.

"They better not call me that," returned Penrod truculently. "I'd like to hear anybody try. Just once, that's all. I bet they'd never try it ag- Ouch!"

"Why? What'd you do to 'em?"

"It's all right, what I'd do! I bet they wouldn't want to call me that again long as they lived!"

"What'd you do if it was a little girl? You wouldn't hit her, would you?"

"Well, I'd— Ouch!"

"You wouldn't hit a little girl, would you?" the barber persisted, gathering into his powerful fingers a mop of hair from the top of Penrod's head and pulling that suffering head into an unnatural position. "Doesn't the Bible say it ain't never right to hit the weak set?"

"Owl! Say, look out!"

"So you'd go and punch spots, yeah, little girl, would you?" said the barber reprovingly.

I'd fix her, though, all right. Much can be done with it, no matter what its condition. Penrod lingered by the caldron, though from a neighboring party could be heard the voices of comrades, including that of Sam Williams. On the ground about the caldron were scattered shins and sticks and bits of wood to the number of a great multitude. Penrod poured quantities of this refuse into the tar and interested himself in seeing how much of it he could keep moving in slow swirls upon the open surface.

Other surprises were arranged for the absent workmen. The caldron was almost full and the surface of the tar near the rim. Penrod endeavored to ascertain how many pebbles and brick bats dropped in would cause an overflow. Laboring heartily to this end, he had almost accomplished it when he received the suggestion for an experiment on a much larger scale. Embellished at the corner of a grass plot across the street was a whitewashed stone the size of a small watermelon and serving no purpose whatever save the questionable one of decoration. It was easily pried up with a stick, though getting it to the caldron tested the full strength of the ardent laborer. Instructed to perform such a task, he would have sincerely maintained its impossibility, but now, as it was unbidden and promised rather destructive results, he set about it with unconquerable energy, feeling certain that he would be rewarded with a mighty splash. Perspiring, grunting vehemently, his back aching and all muscles strained, he progressed in short stages until the big stone lay at the base of the caldron. He rested a moment, panting, then lifted the stone and was bending his shoulders for the heave that would lift it over the rim when a sweet, taunting voice close behind him started him cruelly.

"How do you do, little gentleman?" Penrod squawked, dropped the stone and shouted, "Shut up, you dern fool!" purely from instinct, even before his about face made him aware of who had so spitefully addressed him.

It was Marjorie Jones. Always dainty, and prettily dressed, she was in speckles and starched white today, and a refreshing picture she made, with the new shorn and powerfully scented Mitchy-Mitch clinging to her hand. They had stolen up behind the toiler and now stood laughing together in sweet merriment. Since the passing of Penrod's Rupe Collins period he had experienced some severe qualms at the recollection of his last meeting with Marjorie and his Apache behavior—in truth, his heart instantly became as wax at sight of her and he would have offered her fair speech. But, alas, in Marjorie's wonderful eyes there shone a consciousness of new powers for his undoing, and she denied him opportunity!

"Oh, oh!" she cried, mocking his pitiful outcry. "What a way for a little gentleman to talk! Little gentlemen don't say wicked!"

"Marjorie!" Penrod, enraged and dismayed, felt himself stung beyond all endurance. Insult from her was bitter to endure than from any other. "Don't you call me that again!"

"Why not, little gentleman?"

He stamped his foot. "You better stop!"

Marjorie sent into his furious face her lovely, spiteful laughter.

"Little gentleman, little gentleman, little gentleman!" she said deliberately. "How's the little gentleman this afternoon? Hello, little gentleman!"

Penrod, quite beside himself, danced eccentrically. "Dry up!" he howled. "Dry up, dry up, dry up, dry up!"

Mitchy-Mitch shouted with delight and applied a finger to the side of the caldron—a finger immediately snatched away and wiped upon a handkerchief by his fastidious sister.

"Little gellamun!" said Mitchy-Mitch.

"You better look out!" Penrod whirled upon this small offender with grim satisfaction. Here was at least something male that could without dishonor be held responsible. "You say that again and I'll give you the worst!"

"You will not!" snapped Marjorie, instantly vitriolic. "He'll say just what ever he wants to, and he'll say it just as much as he wants to. Say it again, Mitchy-Mitch!"

"Little gellamun!" said Mitchy-Mitch promptly.

"Ow-yah!" Penrod's tone production was becoming affected by his mental condition. "You say that again and I'll—"

"Go on, Mitchy-Mitch," cried Marjorie. "He can't do a thing. He don't dare! Say it some more, Mitchy-Mitch—say it a whole lot!"

Mitchy-Mitch, with his small, fat face shining with confidence in his immunity, complied.

"Little gellamun!" he squeaked meekly. "Little gellamun! 'Tittle gellamun! 'Tittle gellamun!"

The desperate Penrod beat over the whitewashed rock, lifted it and then, outdoing Porchus, John Ridd and Ursus in one miraculous burst of strength—beaved it into the air.

Marjorie screamed.

But it was too late. The big stone descended into the precise midst of the caldron and Penrod got his mighty splash. It was far, far beyond his expectations.

Spontaneously there were grand awful effects—volcanic spectacles of nightmare and eruption. A black sheaf of eccentric shape rose out of the caldron and descended upon the three children, who had no time to evade it.

After it fell, Mitchy-Mitch, who stood nearest the caldron, was the thickest though there was enough for all. Bre's Rabbit would have fled from any of them.

When Marjorie and Mitchy-Mitch got their breath, they used it coolly, and wisely.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Little Gentleman."

MEANWHILE the brooding Penrod pursued his homeward way; no great distance, but long enough for several one-sided conflicts with malign insulters made of this air. "You better not call me that!" he muttered. "You just try it, and you'll get what other people got when they tried it. You better not ack fresh with me. Oh, you will, will you?" He delivered a vicious kick full upon the shins of an iron fence post, which suffered little, though Penrod instantly regretted his indiscretion. "Oof!" he grunted, hopping, and went on after bestowing a look of awful hostility upon the fence post. "I guess you'll know better next time," he said in parting to this antagonist. "You just let me catch you around here again, and I'll—"

His voice sank to inarticulate but ominous murrings. He was in a dangerous mood.

Nearing home, however, his belligerent spirit was diverted to happier interests by the discovery that some workmen had left a caldron of tar in the cross street close by his father's stable. He tested it, but found it inedible; also as a substitute for professional chewing gum it was unsatisfactory, being incessantly belled down and too thin, though of a pleasant lukewarm temperature. But it had an excess of one quality—it was sticky.

It was the stickiest tar Penrod had ever used for any purposes whatsoever and nothing upon which he wiped his hands served to rid them of it neither his polka dotted shirtwaist nor his knickerbockers; neither the fence nor even Duke, who came unthinkingly waddling out to greet him and rubbed

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Penrod tar is tar. Much can be done with it, no matter what its condition. Penrod lingered by the caldron, though from a neighboring party could be heard the voices of comrades, including that of Sam Williams. On the ground about the caldron were scattered shins and sticks and bits of wood to the number of a great multitude. Penrod poured quantities of this refuse into the tar and interested himself in seeing how much of it he could keep moving in slow swirls upon the open surface.

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