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## PENROD

By **BOOTH TARKINGTON**

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### SYNOPSIS.

Penrod, fearing the ordeal of playing the part of the Child Sir Lancelot, seeks forgetfulness in the composition of a dime novel.

He breaks up the wrong piece of putting on a pair of the janitor's overalls over his costume.

A visit to a moving picture show gives him an idea and he loafs away his time in school, dreaming dreams.

The teacher reproves him. He seeks to attract attention from himself by alleging loss of sleep because of a drunken uncle.

The teacher sympathizes with Penrod's aunt because of her wayward husband, and it then develops that Penrod has been stung.

Penrod, Sam Williams and two colored boys, Herman and Verman, get up a big show to entertain the town.

Verman makes a decided hit, but Roderick Magworth Bits, Jr., says the show is a failure. Penrod asks him if he is a relation of Rena Magworth, a murderer.

Roderick, seeking fame, says she is his aunt. Roderick's mother finds him posing as a nephew of the murderer and hopes the circus.

Rupe Collins, a very tough boy, bullies Penrod and at once becomes a great hero in Penrod's eyes.

Penrod tries to be a tough boy himself. He arouses fear in the hearts of Sam Williams, Herman and Verman by describing Rupe's bullying tactics.

Rupe tries to fitmate Herman and Verman, and the two little colored boys speedily drive him off the place.

Mitchy-Mitch, Marjorie's little brother, infuriates Penrod by calling him "little gentleman," and a great tar fight starts.

Penrod is punished. The Rev. Mr. Kinoshing calls and unwisely refers to Penrod several times as "little gentleman."

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

Penrod looked upon him darkly, but for the moment held his peace.

"Married!" jeered Sam Williams. "Married to Marjorie Jones! You're the only boy I ever heard say he was going to get married. I wouldn't get married for—why, I wouldn't get married for—Unable to think of any indifference the mere mention of which would not be ridiculously incommensurate, he proceeded: "I wouldn't do it. What you want to get married for? What do married people do except just come home tired and worry around and kind of scold? You better not do it, Mr. Rice. You'll be mighty sorry."

"Everybody gets married," stated Maurice, holding his ground. "They gotta."

"I'll bet I don't," Sam returned hotly. "They better catch me before they tell me I have to. Anyway, I bet nobody has to get married unless they want to."

"They do, too," insisted Maurice. "They gotta."

"Who told you?"

"Look at what my own papa told me!" cried Maurice, heated with argument. "Didn't he tell me your own papa had to marry your mamma or else he'd never'd got to handle a cent of her money? Certainly people gotta marry. Everybody. You don't know anybody over twenty years old that isn't married—except maybe teachers."

"Look at policemen!" shouted Sam triumphantly. "You don't s'pose anybody can make policemen get married. I reckon, do you?"

"Well, policemen maybe," Maurice was forced to admit. "Policemen and teachers don't, but everybody else gotta."

"Well, I'll be a policeman," said Sam. "Then I guess they won't come around telling me I have to get married. What you going to be, Penrod?"

"Chief police," said the laconic Penrod.

"What you?" Sam inquired of quiet George Bassett.

"I am going to be," said George consciously, "a minister."

This announcement created a sensation so profound that it was followed by silence. Herman was the first to speak.

"You mean preachub?" he asked in credulously. "You go preach?"

"Yes," answered George, looking like St. Cecilia at the organ.

Herman was impressed. "You know all 'at preachub talk?"

"I'm going to learn it," said George simply.

"How loud kin you holler?" asked Herman doubtfully.

"He can't holler at all," Penrod interposed with scorn. "He hollers like a girl. He's the poorest hollerer in town."

Herman shook his head. Evidently he thought George's chance of being ordained very slender. Nevertheless a final question put to the candidate by the colored expert seemed to admit one ray of hope.

"How good kin you clln' a pole?"

"He can't climb one at all," Penrod answered for George. "Over at Sam's turning pole you ought to see him try to."

"Preachers don't have to climb poles," George said with dignity.

"Good ones do," declared Herman. "Bes' one ev' I hear, he climb up 'em down same as a circus man. One 'em big 'rivals outen whens we livin' on a farm, preachub cllm big pole right in a middle o' the church, what was to

hol' roof up. He cllm way high up, an' holler: 'Goin' to heavum, goin' to heavum, goin' to heavum now. Halle-luhah, praise my Lawd!'"

Herman possessed that extraordinary facility for vivid acting which is the great native gift of his race, and he enthralled his listeners. They sat fascinated and spellbound.

"Herman, tell that again!" said Penrod, breathlessly.

Herman, nothing loath, accepted the encore and repeated the Miltonic episode, expanding it somewhat, and dwelling with a fine art upon those portions of the narrative which he perceived to be most exciting to his audience.

The effect was immense and instant. Penrod sprang to his feet.

"George Bassett couldn't do that to save his life," he declared. "I'm goin' to be a preacher! I'd be all right for one, wouldn't I, Herman?"

"So am I!" Sam Williams echoed loudly. "I guess I can do it if you can. I'd be bette'n Penrod, wouldn't I, Herman?"

"I am, too!" Maurice shouted. "I got a stronger voice than anybody here, and I'd like to know what!"

The three clamored together indistinguishably, each asserting his qualifications for the ministry according to Herman's theory, which had been accepted by these sudden converts without question.

"Listen to me!" Maurice bellowed, proving his claim to at least the voice by drowning the others. "Maybe I can't climb a pole so good, but who can holler louder'n this? Listen to me—o!"

"Shut up!" cried Penrod, irritated. "Go to heavum; go to —!"

"O-o-oh!" exclaimed George Bassett, profoundly shocked.

Sam and Maurice, awed by Penrod's daring, ceased from turmoil, staring wide eyed.

"You cursed and swore!" said George.

"I did not!" cried Penrod hotly. "That isn't swearing."

"You said, 'Go to a big H!'" said George.

"I did not! I said, 'Go to heavum,' before I said a big H. That isn't swearing, is it, Herman? It's almost what the preacher said. Ain't it, Herman? It ain't swearing now any more—not if you put 'go to heavum' with it. Is it, Herman? You can say it all you want to, long as you say 'go to heavum' first. Can't you, Herman? Anybody can say it if the preacher says it. Can't they, Herman? I guess I know when I ain't swearing. Don't I, Herman?"

Judge Herman ruled for the defendant, and Penrod was considered to have carried his point. With fine consistency the conclave established that it was proper for the general public to "say it" provided "go to heavum"

be one," said Sam.

"She would too," retorted George. "Ever since I was little she!"

"He's too sissy to be a preacher!" cried Maurice. "Listen at his squeaky voice!"

"I'm going to be a better minister," shouted George, "than all three of you put together. I could do it with my left hand!"

### CHAPTER XX.

#### Conclusion of the Quiet Afternoon.

THE three laughed bitingly in chorus. They jeered, derided, scoffed and raised an uproar which would have had its effect upon much stronger nerves than George's. For a time he contained his rising cholera and chanted monotonously over and over: "I could! I could! I could! I could!" But their tumult wore upon him, and he decided to avail himself of the recent decision whereby a big H was rendered innocuous and unprofane. Having used the expression once, he found it comforting and substituted it for "I could! I could!"

But it relieved him only temporarily. His tormentors were unaffected by it and increased their howlings until at last George lost his head altogether. Badgered beyond bearing, his eyes shining with a wild light, he broke through the besieging trio, hurling little Maurice from his path with a frantic hand.

"I'll show you!" he cried in this sudden frenzy. "You give me a chance, and I'll prove it right now!"

"That's talkin' business!" shouted Penrod. "Everybody keep still a minute—everybody!"

He took command of the situation at once, displaying a fine capacity for organization and system. It needed only a few minutes to set order in the place of confusion and to determine, with the full concurrence of all parties, the conditions under which George Bassett was to defend his claim by undergoing what may be perhaps intelligibly defined as the Herman test. George declared he could do it easily. He was in a state of great excitement and in no condition to think calmly or probably he would not have made the attempt at all. Certainly he was overconfident.

It was during the discussion of the details of this enterprise that George's mother a short distance down the street received a few female callers, who came by appointment to drink a glass of lead tea with her and to meet the Rev. Mr. Kinoshing. Mr. Kinoshing was proving almost formidably interesting to the women and girls of his own and other flocks. What favor of his fellow clergymen a slight preclusiveness of manner and pronunciation cost him was more than balanced by the visible ecstasies of ladies. They blossomed at his touch.

He had just entered Mrs. Bassett's front door when the son of the house, followed by an intent and earnest company of four, opened the alley gate and came into the yard. The unconscious Mrs. Bassett was about to have her first experience of a fatal coincidence. It was her first, because she was the mother of a boy so well behaved that he had become a proverb of transcendence. Fatal coincidences were plentiful in the Schofield and Williams families and would have been familiar to Mrs. Bassett had George been permitted greater intimacy with Penrod and Sam.

Mr. Kinoshing sipped his lead tea and looked about him approvingly. Seven ladies leaned forward, for it was to be seen that he meant to speak.

"This cool room is a relief," he said, waiting a graceful hand in a neatly limited gesture, which everybody's eyes followed, his own included. "It is a relief and a retreat. The windows open, the blinds closed—that is as it should be. It is a retreat, a fastness, a bastion against the heat's assault. For me a quiet room—a quiet room and a book, a volume in the hand, held lightly between the fingers—a volume of poems, lines metrical and cadenced, something by a great Victorian. We have no later poets."

"Swinburne?" suggested Miss Beam, an eager spinster. "Swinburne, Mr. Kinoshing? Ah, Swinburne?"

"Not Swinburne," said Mr. Kinoshing chastely. "No."

That concluded all the remarks about Swinburne.

Miss Beam retired in confusion behind another lady, and somehow there became diffused an impression that Miss Beam was erotic.

"I do not observe your manly little son," Mr. Kinoshing addressed his hostess.

"He's out playing in the yard," Mrs. Bassett returned. "I heard his voice just now, I think."

"Everywhere I hear wonderful reports of him," said Mr. Kinoshing. "I may say that I understand boys, and I feel that he is a rare, a fine, a pure, a lofty spirit. I say spirit, for spirit is the word I hear spoken of him."

A chorus of enthusiastic approbation affirmed the accuracy of this proclamation, and Mrs. Bassett flushed with pleasure. George's spiritual perfection was demonstrated by instances of it related by the visitors. His piety was edifying, and wonderful things he had said were quoted.

"Not all boys are pure, of fine spirit, of high mind," said Mr. Kinoshing, and continued with true feeling: "You have a neighbor, dear Mrs. Bassett, whose household I indeed really feel it quite impossible to visit until such time when better, firmer, stronger handed, more determined discipline shall prevail. I find Mr. and Mrs. Schofield and their daughter charming, but—"

(To be continued next week)

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