

Bingism - And Its Cure

Proves a Thriller for Penrod and Sam While It Lasts

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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Penrod Schofield, having been "kept in" for the unjust period of twenty minutes after school, emerged to a deserted street. That is, the street was deserted so far as Penrod was concerned. Here and there people were to be seen upon the sidewalks, but they were adults, and they and the shade trees had about the same quality of significance in Penrod's consciousness. Usually he saw grown people in the mass, which is to say, they were virtually invisible to him, though exceptions must be taken in favor of policemen, firemen, street-car conductors, motormen and all other men in any sort of uniform or regalia. But this afternoon none of these met the roving eye, and Penrod set out upon his homeward way wholly dependent upon his own resources.

To one of Penrod's inner textures, a mere unadorned walk from one point to another was intolerable, and he had not gone a block without achieving some slight remedy for the tedium of life. An electric-light pole at the corner, invested with powers of observation, might have been surprised to find itself suddenly enacting a role of dubious honor in improvised melodrama. Penrod, approaching, gave the pole a look of sharp suspicion, then one of conviction; slapped it lightly and contemptuously with his open hand; passed on a few paces, but turned abruptly and, pointing his right forefinger, uttered the symbolic word, "Bing!"

Early childhood is not fastidious about the accessories of its drama—a cane is vividly a gun which may instantly, as vividly, become a horse; but at Penrod's time of life the lath sword is no longer satisfactory. Indeed, he now had a vague sense that weapons of wood were unworthy to the point of being contemptible and ridiculous, and he employed them only when he was alone and unseen. For months a yearning had grown more and more poignant in his vitals, and this yearning was symbolized by one of his most profound secrets. In the inner pockets of his jacket he carried a bit of wood whittled into the distant likeness of a pistol, but not even Sam Williams had seen it. The wooden pistol never knew the light of day, save when Penrod was in solitude; and yet it never left his side except at night, when it was placed under his pillow. Still, it did not satisfy; it was but the token of his yearning and his dream. With all his might and main Penrod longed for one thing beyond all others. He wanted a Real Pistol!

At this moment a shout was heard from the alley, "Yay, Penrod!" and the sandy head of comrad Sam Williams appeared above the fence.

"Come on over," said Penrod. As Sam obediently climbed the fence, the little old dog, Duke, moved slowly away, but presently, glancing over his shoulder and seeing the two boys standing together, he broke into a trot and disappeared round a corner of the house. He was a dog of long and enlightening experience; and he made it clear that the conjunction of Penrod and Sam portended events which, from his point of view, might be unfortunate. Duke had a forgiving disposition, but he also possessed a melancholy wisdom. In the company of either Penrod or Sam, alone, affection often caused him to linger, albeit with a little pessimism, but when he saw them together, he invariably withdrew in an unobtrusive manner as haste would allow.

"What you doing?" Sam asked. "Nothin'. What you?" "I'll show you if you'll come over to our house," said Sam, who was wearing an important and secretive expression.

"What for?" Penrod showed little interest.

"Well, I said I'd show you if you came on over, didn't I?" "But you haven't got anything I haven't got," said Penrod indifferently. "I know everything that's in your yard and in your stable, and there isn't a thing—"

"I didn't say it was in the yard or in the stable, did I?"

"Well, there ain't anything in your house," returned Penrod frankly, "that I'd walk two feet to look at—"

"Oh, no," Sam assumed mockery. "Oh, no, you wouldn't! You know what it is, don't you? Yes, you do!"

Penrod's curiosity stirred somewhat. "Well, all right," he said, "I got nothin' to do. I just as soon go. What is it?"

"You wait and see," said Sam, as they climbed the fence. "I bet your eyes'll open pretty far in about a minute or so!"

"I bet they don't. It takes a good deal to get me excited, unless it's something mighty—"

"You'll see!" Sam promised.

He opened an alley gate and stepped into his own yard in a manner signaling caution—though the exploit, thus far, certainly required none—and Penrod began to be impressed and hopeful. They entered the house, silently, encountering no one, and Sam led the way upstairs, tiptoeing, implying unusual and increasing peril. Turning in the upper hall, they went into Sam's father's bedroom, and Sam closed the door with a caution so genuine that al-

ready Penrod's eyes began to fulfill his host's prediction. Adventures in another boy's house are trying to the nerves; and another boy's father's bedroom, when invaded, has a violated sanctity that is almost appalling. Penrod felt that something was about to happen—something much more important than he had anticipated.

Sam tiptoed across the room to a chest of drawers, and, kneeling, carefully pulled out the lowest drawer until the surface of its contents—Mr. Williams' winter underwear—lay exposed. Then he fumbled beneath the garments and drew forth a large object, displaying it triumphantly to the satisfactorily dumfounded Penrod.

It was a blue-steeled Colt's revolver, of the heaviest pattern made in the seventies. Mr. Williams had inherited it from Sam's grandfather (a small man, a deacon, a dyspeptic) and it was larger and more horrible than any revolver either of the boys had ever seen in any picture, moving or stationary. Moreover, greenish bullets of great size were to be seen in the chambers of the cylinder, suggesting massacre rather than mere murder. This revolver was real and it was loaded!

Both boys lived breathlessly through a magnificent moment.

"Leave me have it!" gasped Penrod. "Leave me have hold of it!"

"You wait a minute!" Sam protested, in a whisper. "I want to show you how I do."

"No; you let me show you how I do!" Penrod insisted; and they scuffled for possession.

"Look out!" Sam whispered warningly. "It might go off."

"Then you better leave me have it!" And Penrod victorious and flushed, stepped back, the weapon in his grasp. "Here," he said, "this is the way I do: You be a crook; and suppose you got a dagger, and I—"

"I don't want any dagger," Sam protested, advancing. "I want that revolver. It's my father's revolver, ain't it?"

"Well, wait a minute, can't you? I got a right to show you the way I do, first, haven't I?" Penrod began an improvisation on the spot. "Say I'm comin' along after dark like this—look, Sam! And say you try to make a jump at me—"

"I won't!" Sam declined this role impatiently. "I guess it ain't your father's revolver, is it?"

"Well, it may be your father's but it ain't yours," Penrod argued, becoming logical. "It ain't either of us revolver, so I got as much right—"

"You haven't either. It's my father's!" Penrod urged vehemently. "I'm not goin' to keep it, am I? You can have it when I get through, can't you? Here's how I do: I'm comin' along after dark, just walkin' along this way—like this—look, Sam!"

Penrod, sulking the action to the word, walked to the other end of the room, swinging the revolver at his side with affected carelessness.

"I'm just walkin' along like this, and first I don't see you," continued the actor. "Then I kind of get a notion something wrong's liable to happen, so I—"

"No; that isn't it. You wouldn't notice that I had my good ole revolver with me. You wouldn't think I had one, because it'd be under my coat like this, and you wouldn't see it." Penrod struck the muzzle of the pistol into the waistband of his knickerbockers at the left side and, buttoning his jacket, sustained the weapon in concealment by pressure of his elbow. "So you think I haven't got any; you think I'm just a man comin' along, and so you—"

Sam advanced. "Well, you've had your turn," he said. "Now, it's mine. I'm goin' to show you how I do—"

"Watch me, can't you?" Penrod waived. "I haven't showed you how I do, have I? My goodness! Can't you watch me a minute?"

"I have been!" You said yourself it'd be my turn soon as you—"

"My goodness! Let me have a chance, can't you?" Penrod retreated to the wall, turning his right side toward Sam and keeping the revolver still protected under his coat. "I go to have my turn first, haven't I?"

"Well, yours is over long ago."

"It isn't either!"

"Anyway," said Sam decidedly, clutching him by the right shoulder and endeavoring to reach his left side—

"—anyway, I'm goin' to have it now."

"You said I could have my turn out!" Penrod, carried away by indignation, raised his voice.

"I did not!" Sam, likewise lost to caution, asserted his denial loudly.

"You did, too!"

"You said—"

"I never said anything!"

"You said—"

"You said—"

"You said—"

"You said—"

"You said—"

"You said—"

"It sounded like it. What was the matter?"

Both boys returned her curious glance with meekness. They were summoning their faculties—which were needed. Indeed, these are the crises which prepare a boy for the business difficulties of his later life. Penrod, with the huge weapon beneath his jacket, insecurely supported by an elbow and by a waistband which he instantly began to distrust, experienced distressful sensations similar to those of the owner of too heavily insured property carrying a gasoline can under his overcoat and detained for conversation by a policeman. And if in the coming years, it was to be Penrod's lot to find himself in that precise situation, no doubt he would be the better prepared for it on account of this present afternoon's experience under the scalding eye of Mrs. Williams. It should be added that Mrs. Williams' eye was awful to the imagination only. It was a gentle eye and but mildly curious, having no remote suspicion of the dreadful truth, for Sam had backed upon the chest of drawers and closed the daminary open one with the calves of his legs.

Sam, not bearing the fatal evidence upon his person, was in a better state than Penrod, though when boys fall into the stillness now assumed by these two, it should be understood that they are suffering. Penrod, in fact, was the prey to apprehension so keen that the actual pit of his stomach was cold.

Being the actual custodian of the crime, he understood that his case was several degrees more serious than that of Sam, who, in the event of detection, would be convicted as only an accessory. It was a lesson, and Penrod already repented his selfishness in not allowing Sam to show how he did, first.

"You're sure you weren't quarreling, Sam?" said Mrs. Williams.

"No, ma'am; we were just talking."

"I'm glad you weren't quarreling," said Mrs. Williams, reassured by this reply, which though somewhat baffling, was thoroughly familiar to her ear. "Now, if you'll come downstairs, I'll give you each one cookie and no more, so your appetites won't be spoiled for your dinners."

She stood, evidently expecting them to precede her. To linger might renew vague suspicion, causing it to become

more definite; and boys preserve themselves from moment to moment, not often attempting to secure the future. Consequently, the apprehensive Sam and the unfortunate Penrod (with the monstrous implement bulking against his ribs) walked out of the room and down the stairs, their countenances indicating an interior condition of solemnity. And a curious shade of behavior might have here interested a criminologist. Penrod endeavored to keep as close to Sam as possible, like a lonely person seeking company, while, on the other hand, Sam kept moving away from Penrod, seeming to desire an appearance of aloofness.

"Go into the library, boys," said Mrs. Williams, as the three reached the foot of the stairs. "I'll bring you your cookies. Papa's in there."

Under her eye the two entered the library, to find Mr. Williams reading his evening paper. He looked up pleasantly, but it seemed to Penrod that he had an ominous and penetrating expression.

"What have you been up to, you boys?" inquired this enemy.

"Nothing," said Sam. "Different things."

"Oh—just different things."

Mr. Williams nodded; then his glance rested casually upon Penrod.

"What's the matter with your arm, Penrod?"

Penrod became paler, and Sam withdrew from him almost conspicuously.

"I said, 'What's the matter with your arm?'"

"Which one?" Penrod quavered.

"Your left. You seem to be holding it in an unnatural position. Have you hurt it?"

Penrod swallowed. "Yes, sir. A boy bit me—I mean a dog—a dog bit me."

Mr. Williams murmured sympathetically: "That's too bad! Where did he bite you?"

"On the—right on the elbow."

"Good gracious! Perhaps you ought to have it cauterized."

"Sir?"

"Did you have a doctor look at it?"

"No, sir. My mother put some stuff from the drug store on it."

"Oh, I see. Probably it's all right, then."

"Yes, sir," Penrod drew breath more freely, and accepted the warm cookie Mrs. Williams brought him. He ate it without relish.

"Was it your own dog that bit you?" Mr. Williams inquired.

"Sir? No, sir. It wasn't Duke."

"Penrod!" Mrs. Williams exclaimed. "When did it happen?"

"I don't remember just when," he answered feebly. "I guess it was day before yesterday."

"Gracious! How did it—"

She was interrupted by the entrance of a middle-aged colored woman. "Miz Williams," she began, and then, as she caught sight of Penrod, she addressed him directly. "You'n telephonin' if you here, send you home right away, 'cause they waitin' dinner on you."

"Run along, then," said Mrs. Williams, patting the visitor lightly upon his shoulder; and she accompanied him to the front door. "Tell your mother I'm so sorry about your getting bitten, and you must take good care of it, Penrod."

"Yes'm."

Penrod lingered helplessly outside the doorway, looking at Sam, who stood partially obscured in the hall, behind Mrs. Williams. Penrod's eyes, with a veiled anguish, conveyed a pleading for help as well as a horror of the position in which he found himself. Sam, however, pale and determined, seemed to have assumed a stony attitude of detachment, as if it were well understood between them that his own comparative innocence was established, and that whatever catastrophe ensued, Penrod had brought it on and must bear the brunt of it alone.

"Well, you'd better run along, since they're waiting for you at home," said Mrs. Williams, closing the door. "Good night, Penrod."

Ten minutes later Penrod took his place at his own dinner table, some-

something repellent and threatening to the heavy blue steel.

Thus does the long-dreamed real misbehavior—not only for Penrod!

More out of a sense of duty to bingism in general than for any other reason, he pointed the revolver at the lawn-mower, and gloomily murmured, "Bing!"

Simultaneously, a low and cautious voice sounded from the yard outside.

"Yay, Penrod!" and Sam Williams darkened the doorway, his eyes falling instantly upon the weapon in his friend's hand. Sam seemed relieved to see it.

"You didn't get caught with it, did you?" he said hastily.

Penrod shook his head, rising.

"I guess not! I guess I got some brains around me," he added, inspired by Sam's presence to assume a slight swagger. "They'd have to get up pretty early to find any good ole revolver, once I got my hands on it!"

"I guess we can keep it, all right," Sam said confidentially. "Because this morning papa was putting on his winter underclothes and he found it wasn't there, and they looked all over and everywhere, and he was pretty mad, and said he knew it that those cheap plumbers stole it that mamma got instead of the regular plumbers he always used to have, and he said there wasn't any chance ever gettin' it back, because you couldn't tell which one took it, and they'd all swear it wasn't them. So it looks like we could keep it for our revolver, Penrod, don't it? I'll give you half of it."

Penrod affected some enthusiasm. "Sam! we'll keep it out here in the stable."

"Yes, and we'll go huntin' with it. We'll do lots of things with it!" But Sam made no effort to take it, and neither boy seemed to feel yesterday's necessity to show the other how he did. "Wait till next Fourth o' July!" Sam continued. "Oh, oh! Look out!"

This invited a genuine spark from Penrod.

"Fourth o' July! I guess she'll be a little better than any fencer's! Just a little 'Bing! Bing! Bing!' she'll be goin'." "Bing! Bing! Bing!"

The suggestion of noise stirred his comrade. "I'll bet she'll go off louder'n that time the gas-works blew up! I wouldn't be afraid to shoot her off any time."

"I bet you would," said Penrod. "You aren't used to revolvers the way I—"

"You aren't, either!" Sam exclaimed promptly. "I wouldn't be any more afraid to shoot her off than you would."

"You would, too?"

"I would not."

"Well, let's see you then; you talk so much!" And Penrod handed the weapon scornfully to Sam, who at once became less self-assertive.

"I'd shoot her off in a minute," Sam said, "only it might break something if it hit it."

"Hold her up in the air, then. It can't hurt the roof, can it?"

Sam, with a desperate expression, lifted the revolver at arm's length. Both boys turned away their heads, and Penrod put his fingers in his ears—but nothing happened. "What's the matter?" he demanded. "Why don't you go on if you're goin' to?"

Sam lowered his arm. "I guess I didn't have her cocked," he said apologetically, whereupon Penrod loudly jeered.

"Try'n' to shoot a revolver and didn't know enough to cock her! If I didn't know any more about revolvers than that, I'd—"

"There!" Sam exclaimed, managing to draw back the hammer until two chilling clicks warranted his opinion that the pistol was now ready to perform its office. "I guess she'll do all right to suit you this time!"

"Well, why'n't you go ahead, then; you know so much!" And as Sam raised his arm, Penrod again turned away his head and placed his forefingers in his ears.

A pause followed.

"Why'n't you go ahead?"

Penrod, after waiting in keen suspense, turned to behold his friend standing with his right arm above his head, his left hand over his left ear, and both eyes closed.

"I can't pull the trigger," said Sam indistinctly, his face convulsed as if in sympathy with the great muscular efforts of other parts of his body. "She won't pull!"

"She won't?" Penrod remarked with scorn. "I'll bet I could pull her."

Sam promptly opened his eyes and handed the weapon to Penrod.

"All right," he said, with surprising and unusual mildness. "You try her, then."

Inwardly disinclined to a disagreeable extent, Penrod attempted to talk his own misgivings out of countenance.

"Poor little baby!" he said, swinging the pistol at his side with a fair pretense of carelessness. "Ain't even strong enough to pull a trigger! Poor little baby! Well, if you can't even do that much, you better watch me while I—"

"Well," said Sam reasonably, "why don't you go on and do it then?"

"Well, I am going to, ain't I?"

"Well, then, why don't you?"

"Oh, I'll do it fast enough to suit you, I guess," Penrod retorted swinging the big revolver up a little higher than his shoulder and pointing it in the direction of the double doors, which opened upon the alley. "You better run, Sam," he jeered. "You'll be pretty scared when I shoot her off, I guess."

"Well, why don't you see if I will? I bet you're afraid yourself."

"Oh, I am, am I?" said Penrod, in a reckless voice—and his finger touched the trigger. It seemed to him that his finger no more than touched it; perhaps he had been reassured by Sam's assertion that the trigger was difficult. His

intentions must remain in doubt, and probably Penrod himself was not certain of them; but one thing comes to the surface as entirely definite—that trigger was not so hard to pull as Sam said it was.

Bang! Wh-a-ack. A shattering report split the air of the stable, and there was an orifice of remarkable diameter in the alley door. With these phenomena, three yells, expressing excitement of different kinds, were almost simultaneous—two from within the stable and the third from a point in the alley about eleven inches lower than the orifice just constructed in the planking of the door. This third point, roughly speaking, was the open mouth of a gayly dressed young colored man whose attention, as he strolled, had been thus violently distracted from some mental computations he was making in numbers, including, particularly, those symbols of ecstasy or woe, as the case might be, seven and eleven. His eye at once perceived the orifice on a line enervatingly little above the top of his head; and, although he had not supposed himself so well known in this neighborhood, he was aware that he did, here and there, possess acquaintances of whom some such uncomplimentary action might be expected as natural and characteristic. His immediate procedure was to prostrate himself flat upon the ground, against the stable doors.

In so doing, his shoulders came brusquely in contact with one of them, which happened to be unfastened, and it swung open, revealing to his gaze two stark-white white boys, one of them holding an enormous pistol and both staring at him in stupor of ultimate horror. For, to the glassy eyes of Penrod and Sam, the stratagem of the young colored man, thus dropping to earth, disclosed, with awful certainty, a slaughtered body.

This dreadful thing raised itself upon its elbows and looked at them, and there followed a motionless moment—a tableau of brief duration, for both boys turned and would have fled, shrieking, but the body spoke:

"'At's a nice business!" it said reproachfully. "Nice business! Tryin' blow a man's head off!"

Penrod was unable to speak, but Sam managed to summon the tremulous semblance of a voice.

"Where—where did it hit you?" he gasped.

"Nemmine anything 'bout where it hit me," the young colored man returned, dusting his breast and knees as he rose. "I want to know what kind o' white boys you think you is—man can't walk 'long street 'bout you blowin' his head off!" He entered the stable and, with an indignation surely justified, took the pistol from the limp, cold hand of Penrod. "Whose gun you playin' with? Where you git 'at gun?"

"It's ours," quavered Sam. "It belongs to us."

"Then you pa ought to be 'rested," said the young colored man. "Lettin' boys play with gun!" He examined the revolver with an interest in which there began to appear symptoms of a pleasurable appreciation. "My goodness! Gun like 'iss blow a team o' steers t'w a brick house! Look at 'at gun!" With his right hand he twirled it in a manner most dexterous and surprising; then suddenly he became severe. "You white boy, listen me!" he said. "Ef I went an did what I ought to did, I'd march straight out 'iss stable, git a policeman, an' tell him 'rest you an' take you off to jail. 'At's what you need—blowin' man's head off! Listen me: I'm goin' take 'iss gun an' t'low her away where you can't do no harm with her. I'm goin' take her way off in the woods an' t'low her away where can't nobody find her an' go blowin' man's head off with her. 'At's what I'm goin' do." And placing the revolver inside his coat as inconspicuously as possible, he proceeded to the open door and into the alley, where he turned for a final word. "I let you off 'iss one time," he said, "but listen me—you listen, white boy; yo' bet I tell you 'pa. I ain't goin' tell him, an' you ain't goin' tell him. He want know where gun gone, you tell him you los' her."

He disappeared rapidly.

Sam Williams, swallowing continuously, presently walked to the alley door, and remarked in a weak voice, "I'm sick at my stomach." He paused, then, added more decidedly: "I'm goin' home. I guess I've stood about enough around here for one day!" And bestowing a last glance upon his friend, who was now sitting duffily upon the floor in the exact spot where he had stood to fire the dreadful shot, Sam moved slowly away.

The early shades of autumn evening were falling when Penrod emerged from the stable; and a better light might have disclosed to a shrewd eye some indications that here was a boy who had been extremely, if temporarily, ill. He went to the disters and, after a cautious glance round the reassuring horizon, lifted the iron cover. Then he took from the inner pocket of his jacket an object which he dropped listlessly into the water: it was a bit of wood, whittled to the likeness of a pistol, and though his lips moved not, nor any sound issued from his vocal organs, yet were words formed. They were so deep in the person of Penrod they came almost from the slowly convalescing profundities of his stomach. These words concerned firearms, and they were:

"Wish I'd never seen one! Never want to see one again!"

Of course Penrod had no way of knowing that, as regards bingism in general, several of the most distinguished old gentlemen in Europe were at that very moment in exactly the same state of mind.

HUNT BACK ON JOB AS ARIZONA GOVERNOR

PHOENIX, Ariz., Dec. 25.—The supreme court today seated George W. P. Hunt, Democrat, as governor of Arizona. The decision of the court sitting en banc on contest proceedings instituted by Hunt against the election of Thomas Campbell, and appealed from the lower court, was unanimous.

The supreme court's opinion ends a contest which began in November, 1916, when Thomas Campbell, Republican, was declared elected on official returns by the margin of 39 votes.

The controversy over the election developed into one of the most bitter political contests in the history of Arizona. Hunt refused to surrender his office to Campbell until ordered to do so by the supreme court, thus delaying Campbell's actual occupancy of the state capitol and the executive mansion. The Democratic party divided itself into Hunt and anti-Hunt factions. When Campbell moved to the capitol to receive the oath of office, there was fear by some of a violent clash between opposing factions.

After Campbell was officially induced into office the controversy subsided into one in the courts. Hunt brought contest proceedings and lost in the lower court of Arizona, which decided in Campbell's favor, giving him a majority of 67 votes. Hunt appealed from the decision.

The supreme court's decision is regarded as automatically seating Hunt as governor, though it is to be assumed that the formality of assuming the new oath of office must yet be observed.

GENERAL CROZIER IS CAUSE OF U. S. ARMY BEING UNARMED

WASHINGTON, Dec. 25.—Responsibility for ordnance and rifle shortage in the American was laid on General Crozier, chief of ordnance, today by Colonel Isaac Lewis, inventor of the Lewis machine gun, in testimony before the senate military affairs committee.

"General Crozier is responsible more than any other man for the obsolete equipment and the lack of any equipment of the army," said Lewis.

In a dramatic declaration that America is not fighting the battle of the allies, but the battle of America, Lewis declared that "it's a shame and outrage" that American troops abroad have to beg artillery from France, "already near bankruptcy and bled white."

The former West Pointer, who saw his machine gun rejected by the American war department and accepted as one of the best weapons of the allies, told the committee his gun never received a fair trial here