

knocked at the door, and asked Mrs Birch, who was cooking instead of teaching that morning, if she would please go upstairs and speak to Professor Smackemwell.

And no sooner had Mrs Birch bustled out of the kitchen than Mary Mayflower and Wilfred Wilkins crept in; and they all began hunting hard for the cup of broth and the pepper pot.

"Here's his tray all ready; but the cup's empty!" cried Mary. "She hasn't poured the broth out yet."

"It's here, in this big saucepan on the fire. Smells awfully good!" said Ethel. "We'll have to put the pepper in the pan, 'cause if we ladle any broth into the cup, she'll guess!"

"I can't find the pepper-pot; but there's a whole tin of pepper here!" said Wilfred, who had climbed on to the dresser. "Suppose we— Ahishoo! Ahishoo!"

He had taken the lid off the tin and sniffed, and of course it made him sneeze like anything.

"For goodness' sake be quick, or Mrs Birch'll be back!" said Ethel. "Where's the tin? Better put in a good dose, or he'll never taste it in that big pan!"

She seized the tin from Wilfred, who was still "chishlishooing." Next minute the tin was empty, and she was stirring the broth round with a wooden ladle.

"There!" she said. "That'll pay him out for putting me in the corner! Hurry up! I believe that was the bell!"

Didn't they scuffle upstairs again! When Professor Smackemwell came back to the schoolroom, they were all sitting demurely in their places. And they never even smiled when Mrs Birch tapped at the door a minute later, and said: "Your broth, Horatius."

"I trust, my dear," said the Professor, "that you have remembered that I don't like pepper!"

"Of course I've remembered!" snapped Mrs Birch, setting down the tray.

And Professor Smackemwell said: "Boys write out the conditional of 'être,' and girls the subjunctive of 'avoir,' and took up his teacup and drained it at one gulp!"

Oh, my dear chicks! He coughed, he spluttered, he stormed, he fumed. And Mrs Birch rushed in again, and began patting him hard on the back.

And he gasped out: "How dare you?" because, of course, he thought she'd peppered his broth. And, when he went on panting "Pepper, pepper, pepper!" she began to understand, and declared that there hadn't been any.

"Should—I be—going on—like this— If there—hadn't?" stormed the Professor. "I've burnt my throat—dreadfully, I tell you! Send for the doctor!"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs Birch. But the Professor was in such a temper that she simply had to. And, when the doctor arrived, he said that, though there was nothing really wrong, the Professor had better keep quiet for the rest of the day.

Well, the children—who didn't hear this—sat on in the schoolroom, feeling rather frightened, and expecting every minute that Mrs. Birch would come back and say she'd found them out.

But, as time went on and nothing happened, they got rather braver, and began to play "naughts and crosses;" and then "turn the trencher" with Professor Smackemwell's sauce.

At last the first bell rang as usual, for dinner. And they went rather nervously into the dining-room, and found Mrs Birch standing at the end of a long table before a soup-tureen.

"Be quick, children!" she said. "I'm going to have my dinner upstairs with Professor Smackemwell."

She didn't sound cross, though her eyes glauced hard from behind her horn spectacles as she laded out mutton-broth into blue plates. But—I wonder if you've guessed what's coming?—no sooner had Wilfred tasted his first spoonful than he put it down very quickly, and took a drink of water.

"Can I have some bread, please?" he said.

Ethel Eccles had suddenly begun to cough.

"You don't say if you need bread today, with good soup like this!" said Mrs Birch.

Mary Mayflower had turned very red, and put her spoon down.

"There's so much pepper! I've burnt my tongue!" whispered Peter Pelling, from the end of the table.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs Birch. "How can there be pepper, when I've not put any in! I'm afraid you won't get any-

thing else, because, with Professor Smackemwell's not being well, I've had no time for cooking. The broth's just as I poured it out of the saucepan. Don't be fanciful!"

Well, Mary, and Ethel and Wilfred saw at once what had happened.

They'd not only peppered the Professor's broth, but they'd peppered their own at the same time, because the big saucepan had held the soup for their dinner as well!

And of course, they knew perfectly well that Mrs Birch had guessed this. And there they sat, getting redder and redder, and trying to get down spoonfuls of the broth, and coughing and choking, because they'd no bread to help them with it. And finally they put down their spoons, and gave it up altogether!

And then Mrs Birch just said: "Now, emfwp ybnfkg vbgkqj vbgkq emfwypp as you know perfectly well what I'm going to punish you for, we needn't waste time with talking about it!"

And, as you know perfectly well what happened next (think of the third and fourth lines of the "Old Woman" rhyme!), I needn't take up your time in describing it. Besides, it's kinder to the children if I don't!

You can understand that, after no dinner and a long afternoon in bed (they were sent there directly after— Well, what we're not going to talk about!), they felt frightfully hungry for tea. And they were allowed to come down for it, and found Mrs Birch and the Professor in a good temper again, and extra supplies of thin bread-and-butter all round.

But I think they deserved something to remember that examination-day by, don't you?

Tim Thimble's Dream.

Tim Thimble was extremely fat — much heavier than I. And that's because he always sat when chairs were standing by. He did delight to take his ease—a shocking thing to do— For exercise in plenty, please, I recommend to you.

The lazy ways that made him grow I shunned with all my might, and that's exactly why, you know, I'm moderately slight.

But this is all beside the mark, and quite another theme; I meant to say that in the dark Tim Thimble had a dream—

He dreamt that as he tucked the sheet securely round his chin, He heard a roaring in the street—a most appalling din;

It really was a shocking noise. (But here I ought to say: That 'most the most untidy boys 'Tim Thimble led the way:

He never brushed his Sunday coat; he never did his hair,

And as to collars round his throat, I seldom saw them there.)

Now, having made this matter plain, the subject we will drop, And take the story up again without another stop.

Loud, loud, and louder grew the roar, Tim Thimble shrank with fear. For somehow to his bedroom door he thought it drawing near.

His hair did stiff and stiffer grow (but that I cannot blame, For more than once or twice, you know, my own has done the same!)

And then was heard an awful crash: the door wide open flew, When 'neath the clothes Tim made a dash, and covered up his head.

Don't laugh at him: it's hardly nice, and though you think it shame, I boldly own that once or twice I've acted much the same.

When next he peeped into the dark, as bravely as he could, Beside his pillow, stiff and stark, a Congo Lion stood.

"My hair is rough," the Lion cried. "Come, tell me while I wait, How brush and comb should be applied to make a parting straight?"

Tim Thimble, with a heart of wool, exclaiming with feeble glee: "I cannot say; I do not know—I never do my own."

"Then, sir," the Lion roared again, "such lazy habits shun, Or every night I'll come again, to see what you have done."

Tim Thimble trembled, waked from sleep. "I was held an hour from dawn; And when around he dared to peep, the visitor was gone.

But after that he long displayed a neatness and a care: The straightest parting ever made was in Tim Thimble's hair;

And this was all because that night the Lion Conscience came, And taught him to a dream of fright that negligence is shame.

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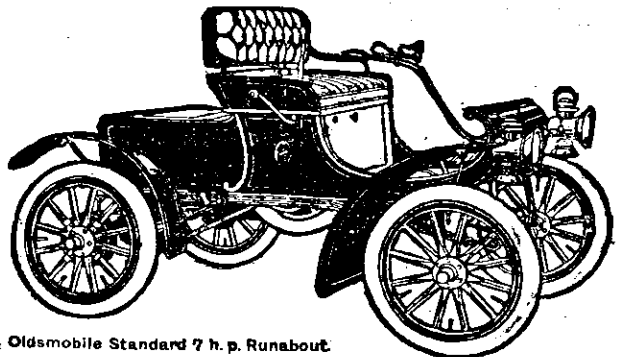
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