

**FARROW
GEORGE
EDWARD**

THE MISSING PRINCE

George Farrow
The Missing Prince

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The Missing Prince:

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G. E. Farrow

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MY DEAR LITTLE FRIENDS, —

In the Preface to my last book I told you that when I closed my eyes I seemed to see hundreds of dear Children's faces turned towards me asking for a story; and now, as so many copies of that book have been sold, I am bound to believe that not hundreds, but thousands, of little friends, to whom I was this time last year a stranger, are expecting another story from my pen.

Some of you may perhaps have seen the very kind things which so many of the papers said about "The Wallypug of Why." Now I am going to tell you a secret, even at the risk of seeming ungrateful to them. It is this. Much as I value their kind opinion, and proud and happy as I am that my book has met with their approval, I value your criticism even more highly than theirs, and I am going to ask you to do me a great favour. I have had so many letters from little friends about "The Wallypug of Why" that it has made me greedy, and, like Oliver, I want more. So will you please write me a letter too, your very own self, telling me just what you think of these two books, and also what kind of story you want after my next one, which is to be a School story, called "Schooldays at St. Vedast's," and which will be published almost as soon as this one is? I did think of writing a story about pet animals, for I am very fond of them; so if you can tell me anything

interesting about your dogs or cats, rabbits, or other favourites, I may perhaps find room for the account in my book. You can always address letters to me in this way, and then they will be sure to reach me wherever I am: —

“Mr. G. E. Farrow,

“C/o Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.,

“Publishers,

“34, Paternoster Row,

“London, E.C.”

Besides being a very great pleasure to me to receive these letters from you, it will help you, I hope, to feel that the Author of this book is in a measure a personal friend.

You will be pleased, I am sure, to see that Mr. Harry Furniss has again been able to give us some of his delightful pictures, and that his clever little daughter Dorothy has helped him.

I see that she has drawn, at the beginning of this Preface, some little folks with letters in their hands. I hope that they are for me, and that there are some from you amongst them.

Your affectionate Friend,

The Author

CHAPTER I. – PIERROT AND THE MOON

BOY was far too excited to go to sleep, so he lay gazing at the crescent Moon which shone through the window opposite his bed and thought of all the wonderful things which had happened on this most eventful of days. To begin quite at the beginning, he had, in his thoughts, to go right back to yesterday, when he had been sent to bed in the middle of the day, so that he might be rested for his long night journey to Scarborough with his Uncle. Then after having been asleep all the afternoon, he had been awakened in the evening just about the time when he usually went to bed, and, treat of treats, had been allowed to sit up to the table to late dinner with his Aunt and Uncle.

Soon after dinner they had started for their long drive to the Station through the brightly lighted streets which Boy had never before seen at night time, and when at last King's Cross Station was reached, they had been hurried into a carriage with rugs and pillows and were soon steaming through the suburbs of London.

Boy had found plenty of amusement in watching the flashing lights out of the window till, as the train got further and further away from the town, the lights became fewer and fewer, and he drew the curtain and settled himself comfortably in a corner with a pillow and a rug.

His Uncle was deeply buried in his paper, and Boy did not like to disturb him, so he picked up *Punch*, which had fallen to the floor, and began to look at the pictures. He must have fallen asleep soon afterwards, for he did not remember anything else till they reached York, where they had to change trains, and where they had hot coffee and sandwiches. Then when the train started again Boy's Uncle had pointed out to him the square towers of York Minster showing clearly against the green and gold sky of early morning; and then Boy had gone to sleep again and did not wake up till they reached Scarborough, where a carriage was waiting to take them to the Hotel. Boy looked about him with great interest as they drove through the half-deserted streets, for it was still very early in the morning. He could see the ruins of an old castle at the end of the street, and as they turned a corner the sea flashing in the morning sunlight burst into view.

Boy thought that he had never before seen anything so beautiful. There was the great bay with the castle at one end and Oliver's Mount at the other, the quay and the little lighthouse, and a lot of ships, while out at sea was a whole fleet of brown sailed fishing-smacks coming in with their spoil of fish. Hundreds of sea-gulls were wheeling round and round uttering their peculiarly shrill cry, and altogether it was a most beautiful sight.

Boy's Uncle had stopped the carriage for a few moments so that they might admire it, and then they had driven to the Hotel at the top of the cliffs, and after having a refreshing wash had gone down to a large room where a number of ladies and gentlemen

were having breakfast Boy had been far too excited to eat much, particularly as his Uncle had promised him a pony ride at eleven. So as soon as breakfast was over he had stood by the window watching the people passing, till oh! joy of joys! there came to the door of the Hotel the loveliest little pony with such a long tail and mane and his Uncle's big chestnut horse Rajah, which had been sent down by train the day before.

What a delightful time it had been, to be sure, as they rode down through the Valley Park to the seashore, and what a splendid canter they had on the hard sand! And then as they rode slowly back again Boy had noticed some beautiful sand castles which the children were building on the shore, collecting pennies in boxes for the hospitals from those who stopped to admire them; lovely castles with flags and trees and toy animals out of Noah's Ark, and quaint little rustic bridges and garden seats in the gardens belonging to them, and Boy had thought how jolly it would be if one could be small enough to walk about in them. Then he had heard some one singing, and his Uncle had taken him to where a large crowd was gathered around some curiously dressed people in white costumes with big black buttons and with big frills around their necks and at their wrists; they wore black skull caps with white conical caps over these. They were called, so Boy found out, the Pierrot Troupe, and one of them was singing about a little Tin Soldier who was in love with a beautiful Doll with eyes that opened and shut with a wire, but who would not have anything to say to him because he was only marked

one-and-nine, while another soldier on the shelf above him was marked *two-and-three*, till presently some one changed the labels and marked him *two-and-three*, and the other one *one-and-nine*. Then the little Doll had altered her mind, and had promised to marry him, and had forsaken the other poor fellow, who was now marked only *one-and-nine*. Boy was very much amused at the song, but felt very sorry for poor *one-and-nine*, and kept talking about it all the way back to the Hotel as they went back to luncheon, which was of course Boy's dinner.

In the afternoon they had gone for a lovely drive in an open carriage all through the beautiful Forge Valley, and then after tea Boy had been taken to the Spa to hear the band play; and now after all these wonderful treats he was lying, as I said before, wide awake in his little strange bed watching the Moon through the half-open window.

What a big Moon it was, to be sure – quite the largest Boy had ever seen, he thought, and surely, yes, surely there is some one sitting in it playing upon a banjo! Why, it's Pierrot! and the Moon is coming nearer and nearer till Boy can hear that he is still singing about the little Tin Soldier. In a great state of excitement Boy sat up in bed.

"I wonder if he is coming here," he thought, as he watched eagerly. Yes! closer and closer came the Moon, till presently Pierrot stepped on to the window-sill and, pushing the window further open, jumped lightly on to the floor and made Boy a polite bow.

"I've brought you an invitation," he said, "to the wedding festivities in connection with the little Tin Soldier's marriage with the Dolly-girl"; and he handed Boy a large envelope with a red seal.

"Oh! *how* kind of you!" said Boy, forgetting even his surprise in the delight of receiving such a novel invitation. He hastily opened the envelope and found a card within bearing the following words: —

"Mr. and Mrs. Waxxe-Doll request the pleasure of Master Boy's company at the wedding festivities celebrating the marriage between their daughter, Miss Dolly-girl, and Captain Two-and-Three, Royal Tin Hussars.

"R.S.V.P.

"Sand Castle,

"The Shore, Scarborough."

"How splendid!" said Boy. "Can you please tell me, sir, what R.S.V.P. means? I've seen it on invitation cards before?"

"I am not quite certain," replied Pierrot; "but in this case I think it must mean Ridiculous Society and Violent Papa. You see, being a toy wedding, they are obliged by toy etiquette to ask all the articles on the same shelf as the bride and bridegroom, and so the company is bound to be rather mixed, and the bride's father is afflicted with the most violent temper you have ever heard of."

"Dear me!" said Boy, "perhaps I had better not go."

"Oh, it will be all right," said Pierrot. "Whenever he feels his

temper getting the better of him he very wisely shuts himself up in a room by himself till it's all over, so you need not be in the least afraid. But, I say, we had better be starting, you know; it's getting rather late."

Boy hurriedly dressed himself, and taking Pierrot's hand he stepped from the window-sill into the Moon, which was conveniently close to the window. It was very much like a boat, Boy thought, as he sat down and made himself comfortable on one of the little cushioned seats which stretched from one side of the Moon to the other. They had only floated a very little way down the street, however, when the Moon began to descend and then stopped, just at the top of the long flight of steps near the Spa, which led to the seashore. Pierrot jumped out, and, after helping Boy to alight, told him that at the bottom of the steps he would find somebody waiting to conduct him to Sand Castle.

"Aren't you coming too?" asked Boy in surprise.

"No," replied Pierrot, "we must be off, the Moon and I, or people will wonder what has become of us. Goodbye!" and getting into the Moon again he was soon floating rapidly away.

Boy was somewhat alarmed at his sudden disappearance, and felt half inclined to run back to the Hotel. "Perhaps I had better go down to the bottom of the steps, though," he thought, "and see who is there;" and he had got half way down when he suddenly stopped in dismay. Why, he was growing shorter! There could be no doubt about it. He could see to his great surprise that he was only about half as tall as he had been when he started running

down the steps.

Whatever should he do? Boy now felt really alarmed. Why, if he went on at that rate there would soon be nothing at all left of him.

“What’s the matter, sonny?” said a tiny voice near him.

Boy looked around, but could see no one.

“What’s the matter, I say?” said the voice again.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Boy, who thought that it was only polite to speak when spoken to, even although he could not see the speaker. “I am growing smaller and smaller, and I don’t know whatever to do.”

“Well, my little man,” said the voice, “you are going to the toy party, aren’t you? How do you expect to get into Sand Castle the ridiculous size that you are at present? You will keep on getting smaller and smaller each step you take till you reach the bottom, when you will be the respectable height of six inches or so.”

“Six inches!” exclaimed Boy. “Oh dear! oh dear! What a tiny mite I shall be, to be sure, and I did so want to be big like Uncle!”

“Do you call six inches small?” said the voice. “Why, I am twenty times as small as that.”

“Are you really? No wonder I can’t see you, then,” remarked Boy. “I should think it isn’t very nice to be so insignificant as that, is it?”

A sudden pain in his arm made him shout “Oh!” and while he was wondering whatever could have caused it, he heard the voice repeating these words: —

“You need not think because I’m small
That I’ve no reputation,
I do not hesitate to say
I’m known throughout the nation.

“By every lady in the land
I’m held in high esteem,
The strongest men require my aid,
However weak I seem.

“And even you must fain admit
That I’m both *sharp* and *bright*,
And probably will want my help
Yourself before to-night.

“So don’t attempt to ‘sit’ on me,
‘Twould not be wise of you.
‘My name?’ An ordinary Pin.
D’ye see the point? Adieu.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Boy; “just fancy a pin talking to one! I wonder whatever will happen next. Well, I certainly *felt* the point if I didn’t see it,” he continued, rubbing his arm and hurrying down the steps, for he didn’t so much mind now he really knew what to expect about his size.

CHAPTER II. – THE PARTY AT SAND CASTLE

GROWING shorter and shorter as he hurried along, Boy noticed that the Moon had gone back to its usual place in the sky, and that Pierrot was nowhere to be seen.

“I suppose he is lying down asleep on the cushions,” he thought, as he let himself down from one step to another; for you see he had by this time become so small that the steps seemed like huge rocks to him.

When he at last reached the bottom one, he was greatly disappointed to find that there was nobody in sight. From behind a piece of rock, however, half buried in the sand, came the sound of laughter. “Ha, ha, ha! Hee, hee, hee! Ho, ho!” shouted somebody, and when Boy hurried up to where the sounds proceeded from a curious sight met his eyes.

A Grig was pirouetting about on the tip of its tail, giggling and laughing in an insane fashion, whilst a solemn-looking Wooden Soldier was standing at “attention” and looking straight in front of him, not taking the slightest notice of the Grig or anything else.

Presently the Grig caught sight of Boy. “Hee, hee, hee!” he snickered, “here comes a boy! What a jolly lark!” and he capered about more madly than before.

The Wooden Soldier, who had a label round his neck with

“One-and-Nine” written on it, turned stiffly around, so that he faced Boy, and said in a deep voice, —

“I wote for you at the bottom of the step for some time, but was obligated to move to a more shelterous situation, as I am suffering from a stiff neck.”

“You *wote* for me!” exclaimed Boy, “whatever do you mean?”

“Wote, past participle of the verb to wait. Wait, wite, wote, you know,” answered the Soldier.

“Hee, hee, hee! Isn’t he a cure?” laughed the Grig, winking at Boy, and twirling about at such a rate that it made Boy quite giddy to look at him.

“He’s been crossed in love, and it’s touched his brain – ha, ha, ha! – he fancies that he has invented a new system of Grammar. What a lark! Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho!” and he rolled about in an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

“Well, of all the extraordinary individuals that I have ever met,” thought Boy, “these two are certainly the most remarkable! I wonder which of them is to show me the way to Sand Castle. I had better ask.”

“Mr. Officer,” he began, for he thought that would be a polite way of addressing the Soldier.

“His name’s One-and-Nine,” interrupted the Grig “What a name! Ha, ha, ha! Hee, hee!”

“The vulgarocity of this individual is unbearable,” exclaimed One-and-Nine angrily. “Let us leave him.”

“Oh! I wish to be directed to Sand Castle,” said Boy. “Can

you please show me the way?”

“That is the purposeness of my being here,” replied One-and-Nine. “Step this way, please,” he said, as he walked stiffly forward.

The Grig did not seem to mind them going in the least, and kept on dancing about and shrieking with laughter.

“Good-bye, old Wooden Head!” he shouted. “You are as good as a pantomime any day, you are! Ha, ha, ha! Hee, hee!” and the sound of his laughter grew fainter and fainter as they walked quickly away from him.

“That Grig will come to a lamentuous end unless he reformationises,” remarked One-and-Nine severely.

“He seems to be in very high spirits about something,” said Boy.

“Yes, that’s the worst of these Grigs,” replied One-and-Nine, “they never seem to considerise the unenjoyability of jollyosity; they seem to think that life is all jubilaceous, whereas it is rather more otherwise than otherwise.”

“Oh dear! oh dear! I do wish this man would talk in a way that I could understand,” thought Boy. “Have we very far to go?” he asked at length, as they walked along in the moonlight.

“About half as far again as half,” answered One-and-Nine absently. “I beg your pardon, I mean we shall be there with considerable soonness. You must excuse me being a little upset; I have recently suffered the same affliction as yourself.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Boy.

“I’ve been reduced,” answered One-and-Nine sorrowfully. “You’ve been reduced too,” he said, “but only in size. I’ve come down in price, which is far more serious. I was once Two-and-Three,” he added regretfully.

“Oh! then you are the *other chap* that Pierrot sang about,” said Boy, “and the Dolly-girl jilted you, didn’t she, and – ”

“That’s not a matter of the slightest consequentially,” interrupted One-and-Nine; “she was a person of frivolaceous character, and though I am bound to admit that at one time I did devotionise her with considerable muchness, I have since found out that she was totally unworthy of my admirosity. Tin Soldier indeed!” he went on contemptuously, evidently referring to his rival, “why, he couldn’t stand fire at all; he would melt! I don’t deny that he looks very well on parade, but he would be no good in action. However, she has chosen to marry him and she must abide by the consequences. If people will marry *tin*, they must be prepared to find that it *melts*?” he added sententiously.

“Oh! there’s Sand Castle, I suppose!” cried Boy, as some lights appeared in the distance.

“Yes,” replied One-and-Nine, “here we are!”

Boy could see when they reached the gates that it was the very Castle which he had so much admired in the morning. “And I am just the right size to go in, just as I wished to do,” he thought gleefully.

A regiment of toy soldiers were drawn up before the gate and saluted as Boy and One-and-Nine entered.

Mr. and Mrs. Waxxe-Doll stood at the entrance to welcome their guests. Mrs. Waxxe-Doll was a very grand-looking personage in most fashionable attire, whilst her husband was not a wax doll at all, but a wooden and cardboard person with very thin, straight legs, and a large body and head which wobbled about when he was touched.

“So pleased to see you,” said Mrs. Waxxe-Doll in a languid voice, shaking hands with Boy, and holding her hand nearly on a level with her head in doing so. “My husband,” she said, introducing Boy, and then walking away.

“How do you do, sir?” said Boy, holding out his hand politely.

“What’s that to do with you?” exclaimed Mr. Waxxe-Doll fiercely. “People have been asking me that silly question all the evening. Do you think I’ve got nothing better to do than stand here and answer foolish conundrums like that? I wonder you don’t say it’s a fine evening and have done with it! All the other folks have been saying that too, one after the other, like a lot of brainless lunatics. ‘How do you do? It’s a fine evening!’ Bah! If you haven’t anything better to talk about than that, you had better have stopped away!” And Mr. Waxxe-Doll glared at Boy till he felt quite alarmed.

“Don’t mind him,” said One-and-Nine, “it’s his way – come along!” and he led the way into the Dancing Hall where the festivities were in full swing. All kinds of toys were represented, and it was indeed, as Pierrot had said it would be, a very mixed gathering.

The guests were principally dolls dressed in the most varied of costumes, from silks, brocades and satins, to black paint; some fastidious-looking young gentlemen with fair curled hair, and dressed in pale blue knitted suits, were leaning against the wall in affected attitudes, and a whole group of Dutch dolls were gathered around a military-looking person in a cocked hat lolling luxuriously on an ottoman at one end of the room. There was a Toy Band at the other end, which looked very imposing, but which Boy found out was only for show, the Musicians only pretending to perform, while the music was really supplied by a musical box hidden away at the back. A number of dolls were dancing a polka when Boy and One-and-Nine entered, so they sat down on a rout-seat near the door and watched them.

A supercilious-looking doll in evening dress sat next to Boy, fanning herself fussily.

“Very mixed lot of people here,” she began, without the slightest introduction. “I should not have come if I had known what to expect. Are you a friend of Mr. Waxxe-Doll’s?” she asked.

“No, I’ve never met him before,” replied Boy.

“Ah! vulgar person, very – plenty of money, though – likes to be thought grand. Of course he isn’t a Waxxe-Doll at all. His wife was a Waxxe and he took her name – it looks very well joined to his with a hyphen, you know. Mrs. Waxxe-Doll is of French descent, and gives herself airs in consequence. They’ve hired this Castle for the season at enormous expense, but bless you, they are

nobodies! See that vulgar-looking old lady in the corner – with a pipe in her mouth – they call her Ancient Aunt Sarah; but she’s nothing of the sort. Everybody knows her; she’s just ‘*Old Aunt Sally, three-shies-a-penny,*’ so it’s no use their trying to disguise the fact. Look at those two,” she went on, as two dolls in very straight narrow dresses danced past, “what guys! But there, what can you expect? They came out of the ark, I believe.”

And Boy could see that they really did look like the figures out of Noah’s Ark.

The music stopped just then, and most of the dolls went out into the grounds to get cool; and Boy, who did not at all care for the spiteful little person who had been letting him into all the Waxxe-Doll’s family secrets, thought that he would follow their example.

One-and-Nine had wandered off by himself, so Boy had no one to talk to.

He found the grounds brilliantly illuminated with little wax vestas stuck in the sand, and the toy trees and rustic bridges looked quite pretty in the light. Three or four Gentlemen dolls were playing a kind of game by the pond, and asked Boy to join them. He found that it was called “Stock Brokers,” and he soon learned how to play it.

Each had a large sheet of blue paper which was called a “Stock,” and which when torn in half became a “Share.” These pieces of paper were thrown into the air, and the game consisted in blowing under these pieces of paper, or “raising the wind,” as

it was called, in order to keep them floating: the one who kept his “Share” or “Stock” from falling longest won the game. Boy quite enjoyed playing it until one of his “Shares” fell to the ground, and then he was “broke,” as they called it, and so he lost the game.

A crowd of dolls hurrying back to the Castle next attracted his attention, and, following them inside, he heard it announced that Sergeant One-and-Nine was about to recite. Boy was very glad to hear this, and managed to push forward to where One-and-Nine was standing.

The Master of Ceremonies was bustling about trying to find every one a seat; and at last, when the room was quite quiet, One-and-Nine began the following poem, which had been composed by himself: —

THE MUS RIDICULOUS AND THE FELIS DOMESTICA

“A Cat amidst the Burdock leaves
Sat all disconsolate,
And sadsomely did wop and wole
And role against her fate.

“‘Ah! hollow, hollow,’ wole the Cat,
‘Is all Societee,
And falshish shamiosity
In all around I see.’

“Oh! why,’ I crew in sympathy,
‘Lamentuate like that?
Pray tell me all your sorrowness’;
And down I flumply sat.

“The Cat did then all sobbishly
Her woesome tale repeat.
‘This world is full of mockishness,
And also of deceit.

“For why? This mom at dawnitude
A mouse I did espy;
‘Twas running whirligigishly
Beneath my very eye.

‘And feeling somewhat breakfastish
I straightway gave a spring,
And landed right upon the back
Of that activeous thing.

“To my surprise it did not squeak,
And neither did it squeal;
And as ‘twas rather littleish,
I ate it at one meal.

“I much regret my hastiness,
For soon, to my dismay,
‘Twas acting most unmouseishly,

In an eccentric way.

“‘Twas what they term a *clockwork* mouse,
And governed by a spring;
Its works behaved revolvingly,
And hurt like anything.

“‘Oh! tell me, is life livable
When things go on like that?
When clockwork mice and feathered shams
Impose upon a Cat?’

“I could not answer her, and so
I softly sneaked away;
I felt that ‘twould be synicish
To wish that Cat ‘Good-day.’”

All the company applauded vigorously at the conclusion of the recitation; and whilst the clapping was still going on a black india-rubber doll rushed in with a very scared face and cried out, “The tide is coming in!” and there was immediately a great commotion throughout the room.

The company rushed helter-skelter to the gate, where they could see that the tide had indeed risen so high as to cut off all communication with the shore. Mr. Waxxe-Doll was stamping about in fury.

“See what comes of all this tomfoolery! Parties, indeed! and hiring Sand Castles for a lot of scatterbrains to make idiots of

themselves in! Wait till I get safely home again on my shelf, and you don't catch me giving any more parties, I can tell you."

The remainder of the dolls were rushing madly about, wringing their hands and crying that they should all be drowned. One-and-Nine seemed to be the only person able to suggest anything.

"Here is a plank," he said, pointing to one which had been left on the sand; "we had better all get on to it, and the tide will carry us back to the shore."

The proposal was hailed with delight by the rest, and they all scrambled on to the plank and waited events. The elaborately dressed dolls in silk and satin held up their dainty skirts so that they should not get wet; whilst the Dutch dolls sat in a row on the edge of the plank with their legs dangling over the side.

Ancient Aunt Sarah threw conventionality to the winds, and lighted up her pipe, at which Mrs. Waxxe-Doll was so shocked that in her agitation she dropped her fan over the side of the plank.

Boy very politely jumped down to fetch it for her, and as he was stepping back a huge wave came rolling up and carried off the plank with all the dolls on it, wetting Boy through to the skin and leaving him standing alone on the wet sand. As the plank with its cargo of screaming dolls floated away, One-and-Nine shouted out, "I will meet you again at Zum," just as they disappeared behind a rock standing out of the sea.

CHAPTER III. – PROFESSOR CRAB

GOOD gracious! whatever am I to do now?" thought Boy, for the tide was rising higher and higher every moment, and there seemed to be no possible way of getting back to the shore again. He had just decided to return to Sand Castle and see if he could not find something to make a raft of when he noticed a very large Crab in a white waistcoat and dark blue coat carrying a goldheaded cane in one claw, and walking rapidly towards him.

As soon as he perceived Boy he exclaimed in a delighted voice,

"Why! Bless me, what a charming little human creature! How do you do, my dear sir?"

Boy, staring at him in great surprise, replied that he was "quite well, thank you," and was just going to ask the Crab if he could suggest a way back to the shore, when a great wave rolled up unexpectedly and carried Boy and the Crab off their feet, destroying about half of Sand Castle, and washing away most of the toy trees which were in the garden.

"Very refreshing, sir, isn't it?" remarked the Crab, smoothing down his coat as the wave receded, leaving them on the wet sand.

Boy, drenched to the skin, was spluttering and gasping for breath, and could not reply for a moment or two, but at last he

managed to say, "I think it is horrid, and I am sure I shall be drowned soon if this sort of thing goes on much longer. Do you know how I can get back to the shore?" he panted.

"You can't get back," said the Crab decidedly.

"Oh dear me! then I shall certainly be drowned!" cried Boy in alarm.

"What nonsense!" remarked the Crab. "That's what all the human creatures say directly they get a little wet. It's all affectation, my dear sir, I assure you. Why, look at me. I'm just as comfortable in the water as out of it, and so would you be if you would only try it. Here comes another wave. Now don't be frightened and don't let yourself be carried away; just stop on the sand and let the water go over you – give me your claw;" and grasping Boy's hand He held him, down while the wave passed over their heads. For a moment Boy could not breathe, but presently having swallowed a great mouthful of salt water, he found to his great surprise that he could breathe just as well under the water as out of it.

"There, what did I tell you?" remarked the Crab pleasantly, when Boy had partially recovered from his fright; for there is no disguising the fact that he had been frightened, although he was a brave little fellow, too. "Come along," continued the Crab, "you had better come and see my school now you have got so far."

"Your school!" exclaimed Boy. "Do you keep a school?"

"Yes," replied the Crab, "I am the Head Master of Drinkon College."

“What a funny name!” said Boy smilingly.

“Not at all,” replied the Crab; “no funnier than Eaton – Eaton on land and Drinkon under the sea, you know.”

Boy thought about this as they proceeded along the hard sand under the water, and then he noticed to his great surprise a number of fishes about his own size, in short jackets and deep collars, and wearing College caps, swimming in their direction.

“These are some of my scholars,” remarked the Crab as they came in sight – the fishes, swimming in a perfectly upright position, raised their caps when they saw the Crab, and one of them said very politely, —

“Good-morning, Professor.”

“Good-morning,” replied the Crab as they swam past. Just then a curious-looking little creature covered all over with little prickly spikes called out rudely, – “Yah! old Professor Crab – who caned the Oyster?” and scuttled away behind some seaweed.

“That,” said the Crab, “is one of the Sea Urchins; they are very rude and ill behaved. I do not allow my scholars to associate with them.”

“Are you really a Professor?” asked Boy, who felt greatly impressed with the Crab’s importance.

“I’m afraid I am,” said the Crab. “All schoolmasters are, you know – whether they admit it or not.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Boy. “I don’t think my schoolmaster is a Professor; at any rate he does not call himself one.”

“Ah, that’s his artfulness,” said the Crab. “A professor,” he explained, “is one who professes to know more than he really does, and all schoolmasters do that more or less, whether they admit it or not – they are obliged to; however, let’s change the subject; it is a painful one.”

Boy was greatly surprised at this admission on the part of the Crab, but he was too much interested in his strange surroundings to think much about it.

They were walking along a roadway with great seaweeds planted at regular intervals on either side, and in the distance Boy could see the outlines of some great buildings.

“Why, there are some houses!” he exclaimed in surprise.

“Of course,” replied Professor Crab. “What did you suppose we lived in?”

“I had no idea that fishes built houses before,” said Boy, “except sticklebacks; I know they build a kind of nest with sticks and things, because I have seen pictures of them in my Natural History book.”

“My dear sir,” remarked the Professor, “those were in the old days, before fishes became civilised: you might as well refer to the time when human creatures dwelt in caves and huts. No, my dear sir, the spread of education has extended to us also, and we have now as fine cities under the sea as any on land.”

Boy was just going to reply when his attention was attracted by a party of Lobsters on bicycles rushing past them, all dressed alike in dark green and yellow. One dear little one riding along

gallantly at the end of the procession amused Boy very much indeed, and he was still watching him when he heard a voice exclaiming, "Cab, sir?" and, turning around, beheld the most curious vehicle you can possibly imagine: two sea-horses were attached to a kind of carriage made out of a large shell mounted on two wheels, and were driven by a small crayfish, wearing a top hat, who was perched up behind.

"Yes, I think we will ride," said Professor Crab, mounting the steps of this strange conveyance, and beckoning Boy to follow. Boy was delighted to do so, and was charmed with the curious little carriage as the coachman cracked his whip and they bowled quickly along. Presently they passed a large building looking like a Station, and Professor Crab told him that it was the Terminus of the Submarine Steam Navigation Company, and told the cabman to stop a moment so that Boy might watch one of the boats which was just starting out of the Station. A very curious affair it turned out to be: shaped like an enormous Cigar, with a screw propeller at one end of it a deck on top with rails around it, on which a number of various kinds of fishes were sitting about on deck-chairs, chatting and reading, while through the large plate-glass windows, of which, there was one on either side of this curiously-shaped boat, Boy could see a number of other fishes making themselves comfortable in the luxuriously furnished saloon. As soon as it floated away out of sight the cabman whipped up his horses again, and off they started once more, and did not stop until they reached some large gates with a board over them, on

which was painted in gold letters:

DRINKON COLLEGE,
Principal: Professor Crab.

The Professor paid the cabman, who touched his hat, and then, followed by Boy, entered a large building just through the gates. A long corridor ran right through the building, and through the glass doors at the end Boy could see a number of the scholars at play.

“Would you like to join them while I give the First Class in Molluscs their singing lesson?” asked the Professor.

Boy said that he should, and passing out into the playground, was soon surrounded by a number of young fishes, all dressed in College suits similar to those Boy had seen before.

“What’s your name?” asked one, as soon as he came up to Boy, and before he could answer another one had asked, “What’s your father? and how much pocket money do you have a week?” while a third demanded, “Where did you go for your holiday last year?”

Boy thought he had better answer one question at a time, so he replied, “Oh, I went to Broadstairs and had such a jolly time, and one day I went out in a boat and caught such a lot of –” (Fortunately he remembered just in time to prevent himself from saying “such a lot of fish” as he had at first intended.)

“Such a lot of what?” asked one of the little fishes curiously.

“Oh – er – er – such a lot of – er – er – things, shells, you know, and er – er – seaweed,” stammered Boy, feeling very confused.

“Rather funny to go out in a boat to catch seaweed, wasn’t it?” remarked one of the fishes suspiciously. “What did you catch really?”

Boy could not think what to say, but at last he thought that he could see a way out of the difficulty, and said, “Oh, I caught a crab.”

The fishes looked horrified.

“Oh! I don’t mean a really truly crab,” Boy hastened to say. “I mean when your oars stick in the water and you can’t draw them out again; that’s called ‘catching a crab,’ you know, and that’s the kind I mean, of course.”

The fishes did not seem quite satisfied though, and stood staring at him suspiciously for some time, till at last one of them said, – “Can you play cricket?”

“Yes, rather,” said Boy proudly. “I’m going to be captain of our eleven next term if Traddles doesn’t come back again.”

“Who’s Traddles?” demanded one of the fishes.

“Oh! a fellow at our school,” said Boy. “He’s eleven and ever so much taller than me; but I can bowl better than him any day.”

“Come on then, let’s have a game,” said one of the fishes, leading the way to the end of the playground where a single wicket was pitched.

“Your innings,” he cried, handing Boy a bat.

Boy thought this was a very curious way of beginning a game, and he was more surprised still when, without the slightest warning, all the rest of the fishes began throwing balls at him as

hard as they could, hitting him pretty sharply in several places, and of course knocking the bails off the stumps at once.

“How’s that, Umpire?” they shouted all together.

The fish who had handed Boy the bat promptly replied “Out,” and the others threw their caps up into the air excitedly and called out that they had won the game.

“That’s not the way to play cricket,” cried Boy, throwing down his bat in disgust.

“Who says it isn’t?” demanded one of the fishes, coming up to him.

“I say so,” maintained Boy stoutly.

“Very well, then I’ll fight you for it,” declared the fish, throwing off his coat.

“I’m sure you won’t,” said Boy, laughing at the very idea.

“Yah! cowardy, cowardy custard,” cried the fishes, dancing around him. “Afraid to fight; dear little mammy’s baby.”

Boy very wisely determined not to heed their taunts and walked back to the College, leaving the quarrelsome little fishes to themselves.

The sound of music from one of the class-rooms told him where he should find the Professor, and looking in at the window he saw the Crab standing beside a blackboard with notes on it waving a *bâton*, while a number of Oysters in rows were singing with their shells wide open.

“Come in,” he cried, when he saw Boy, and Boy went round to the door and entered the room.

“We have nearly finished,” said Professor Crab. “Perhaps you would like to hear the Molluscs sing.”

“Very much indeed,” said Boy, taking a seat on one of the forms.

The Crab counted “One, two, three,” beating time with his *bÃ*
çton, and the Oysters started singing the following song: —

“THE DEAR LITTLE OYSTER.”

“There was once a little Oyster, living underneath the sea,
Who was good as gold and, consequently, happy as could be;
She kept the house as tidy and as clean as a new’ pin,
And helped her Ma to make the beds they tuck the Oysters in.

“We soon discovered she possessed a most uncommon voice,
And Operatic singing then became her ardent choice;
So diligently practised she her lessons and her scales,
That she quickly gained the medal given by the Prince of
Whales.

“Of course she now was far too good to waste her life down
here,
So reluctantly we gave her up to grace another sphere:
She, in a barrel nicely packed, was sent to Mr. Gatti,
And under his most skilful care became an Oyster Patti.”

Boy was very pleased indeed with this song, which the First

Class in Molluscs sang very well, and clapped vigorously.

“I’m glad you like their singing,” said the Professor, looking pleased at Boy’s approval.

“That will do for to-day,” he added, dismissing the class, and the Oysters went out of the room in single file, each one making a little bow as he passed the Professor.

“Now what shall we do with ourselves for the rest of the day?” said the Crab, when they had all gone, for there is a half-holiday, you know. Would you like to go for a trip to Zum?” he asked.

“Oh yes, please,” answered Boy, who remembered that that was where One-and-Nine said that they should meet again.

So Professor Crab put his hat on, and after locking the classroom door set out with Boy for the Station of the Submarine Navigation Company.

CHAPTER IV. – M.D. AND THE DOCTOR'S BILL

THEY found a boat waiting when they reached the Station, and Professor Crab having purchased the tickets they went on board the singular conveyance. They had hardly taken their seats amongst a number of respectably dressed fishes when the bell rang and they were off.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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