

HUGH LOFTING

THE STORY OF

DOCTOR

DOLITTLE

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The Story of Doctor Dolittle

INTRODUCTION TO THE TENTH PRINTING

THERE are some of us now reaching middle age who discover themselves to be lamenting the past in one respect if in none other, that there are no books written now for children comparable with those of thirty years ago. I say written *for* children because the new psychological business of writing *about* them as though they were small pills or hatched in some especially scientific method is extremely popular to-day. Writing for children rather than about them is very difficult as everybody who has tried it knows. It can only be done, I am convinced, by somebody having a great deal of the child in his own outlook and sensibilities. Such was the author of "The Little Duke" and "The Dove in the Eagle's Nest," such the author of "A Flatiron for a Farthing," and "The Story of a Short Life." Such, above all, the author of "Alice in Wonderland." Grownups imagine that they can do the trick by adopting baby language and talking down to their very critical audience. There never was a greater mistake. The imagination of the author must be a child's imagination and yet maturely consistent, so that the White Queen in "Alice," for instance, is seen just as a child would see her, but she continues always herself through all her distressing adventures. The supreme touch of the white rabbit pulling on his white gloves as he hastens is again absolutely the child's vision, but the white rabbit as guide and introducer of Alice's adventures belongs to mature grown insight.

Geniuses are rare and, without being at all an undue praiser of times past, one can say without hesitation that until the appearance of Hugh Lofting, the successor of Miss Yonge, Mrs. Ewing, Mrs. Gatty and Lewis Carroll had not appeared. I remember the delight with which some six months ago I picked up the first "Dolittle" book in the Hampshire bookshop at Smith College in Northampton. One of Mr. Lofting's pictures was quite enough for me. The picture that I lighted upon when I first opened the book was the one of the monkeys making a chain with their arms across the gulf. Then I looked further and discovered Bumpo reading fairy stories to himself. And then looked again and there was a picture of John Dolittle's house.

But pictures are not enough although most authors draw so badly that if one of them happens to have the genius for line that Mr. Lofting shows there must be, one feels, something in his writing as well. There is. You cannot read the first paragraph of the book, which begins in the right way "Once upon a time" without knowing that Mr. Lofting believes in his story quite as much as he expects you to. That is the first essential for a story teller. Then you discover as you read on that he has the right eye for the right detail. What child-inquiring mind could resist this intriguing sentence to be found on the second page of the book:

"Besides the gold-fish in the pond at the bottom of his garden, he had rabbits in the pantry, white mice in his piano, a squirrel in the linen closet and a hedgehog in the cellar."

And then when you read a little further you will discover that the Doctor is not merely a peg on whom to hang exciting and various adventures but that he is himself a man of original and lively character. He is a very kindly, generous man, and anyone who has ever written stories will know that it is much more difficult to make kindly, generous characters interesting than unkindly and mean ones. But Dolittle is interesting. It is not only that he is quaint but that he is wise and knows what he is about. The reader, however young, who meets him gets very soon a sense that if he were in trouble, not necessarily medical, he would go to Dolittle and ask his advice about it. Dolittle seems to extend his hand from the page and grasp that of his reader, and I can see him going down the

centuries a kind of Pied Piper with thousands of children at his heels. But not only is he a darling and alive and credible but his creator has also managed to invest everybody else in the book with the same kind of life.

Now this business of giving life to animals, making them talk and behave like human beings, is an extremely difficult one. Lewis Carroll absolutely conquered the difficulties, but I am not sure that anyone after him until Hugh Lofting has really managed the trick; even in such a masterpiece as “The Wind in the Willows” we are not quite convinced. John Dolittle’s friends are convincing because their creator never forces them to desert their own characteristics. Polynesia, for instance, is natural from first to last. She really does care about the Doctor but she cares as a bird would care, having always some place to which she is going when her business with her friends is over. And when Mr. Lofting invents fantastic animals he gives them a kind of credible possibility which is extraordinarily convincing. It will be impossible for anyone who has read this book not to believe in the existence of the pushmi-pullyu, who would be credible enough even were there no drawing of it, but the picture on page 153 settles the matter of his truth once and for all.

In fact this book is a work of genius and, as always with works of genius, it is difficult to analyze the elements that have gone to make it. There is poetry here and fantasy and humor, a little pathos but, above all, a number of creations in whose existence everybody must believe whether they be children of four or old men of ninety or prosperous bankers of forty-five. I don’t know how Mr. Lofting has done it; I don’t suppose that he knows himself. There it is—the first real children’s classic since “Alice.”

Hugh Walpole.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

PUDDLEBY

ONCE upon a time, many years ago—when our grandfathers were little children—there was a doctor; and his name was Dolittle—John Dolittle, M.D. “M.D.” means that he was a proper doctor and knew a whole lot.

He lived in a little town called, Puddleby-on-the-Marsh. All the folks, young and old, knew him well by sight. And whenever he walked down the street in his high hat everyone would say, “There goes the Doctor!—He’s a clever man.” And the dogs and the children would all run up and follow behind him; and even the crows that lived in the church-tower would caw and nod their heads.

The house he lived in, on the edge of the town, was quite small; but his garden was very large and had a wide lawn and stone seats and weeping-willows hanging over. His sister, Sarah Dolittle, was housekeeper for him; but the Doctor looked after the garden himself.

He was very fond of animals and kept many kinds of pets. Besides the gold-fish in the pond at the bottom of his garden, he had rabbits in the pantry, white mice in his piano, a squirrel in the linen closet and a hedgehog in the cellar. He had a cow with a calf too, and an old lame horse—twenty-five years of age—and chickens, and pigeons, and two lambs, and many other animals. But his favorite pets were Dab-Dab the duck, Jip the dog, Gub-Gub the baby pig, Polynesia the parrot, and the owl Too-Too.

His sister used to grumble about all these animals and said they made the house untidy. And one day when an old lady with rheumatism came to see the Doctor, she sat on the hedgehog who was sleeping on the sofa and never came to see him any more, but drove every Saturday all the way to Oxenthorpe, another town ten miles off, to see a different doctor.

Then his sister, Sarah Dolittle, came to him and said,

“John, how can you expect sick people to come and see you when you keep all these animals in the house? It’s a fine doctor would have his parlor full of hedgehogs and mice! That’s the fourth personage these animals have driven away. Squire Jenkins and the Parson say they wouldn’t come near your house again—no matter how sick they are. We are getting poorer every day. If you go on like this, none of the best people will have you for a doctor.”

“But I like the animals better than the ‘best people’,” said the Doctor.

“You are ridiculous,” said his sister, and walked out of the room.

So, as time went on, the Doctor got more and more animals; and the people who came to see him got less and less. Till at last he had no one left—except the Cat’s-meat-Man, who didn’t mind any kind of animals. But the Cat’s-meat-Man wasn’t very rich and he only got sick once a year—at Christmas-time, when he used to give the Doctor sixpence for a bottle of medicine.

Sixpence a year wasn’t enough to live on—even in those days, long ago; and if the Doctor hadn’t had some money saved up in his money-box, no one knows what would have happened.

And he kept on getting still more pets; and of course it cost a lot to feed them. And the money he had saved up grew littler and littler.

Then he sold his piano, and let the mice live in a bureau-drawer. But the money he got for that too began to go, so he sold the brown suit he wore on Sundays and went on becoming poorer and poorer.

And now, when he walked down the street in his high hat, people would say to one another, “There goes John Dolittle, M.D.! There was a time when he was the best known doctor in the West Country—Look at him now—He hasn’t any money and his stockings are full of holes!”

But the dogs and the cats and the children still ran up and followed him through the town—the same as they had done when he was rich.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

ANIMAL LANGUAGE

IT happened one day that the Doctor was sitting in his kitchen talking with the Cat's-meat-Man who had come to see him with a stomach-ache.

"Why don't you give up being a people's doctor, and be an animal-doctor?" asked the Cat's-meat-Man.

The parrot, Polynesia, was sitting in the window looking out at the rain and singing a sailor-song to herself. She stopped singing and started to listen.

"You see, Doctor," the Cat's-meat-Man went on, "you know all about animals—much more than what these here vets do. That book you wrote—about cats, why, it's wonderful! I can't read or write myself—or maybe *I'd* write some books. But my wife, Theodosia, she's a scholar, she is. And she read your book to me. Well, it's wonderful—that's all can be said—wonderful. You might have been a cat yourself. You know the way they think. And listen: you can make a lot of money doctoring animals. Do you know that? You see, I'd send all the old women who had sick cats or dogs to you. And if they didn't get sick fast enough, I could put something in the meat I sell 'em to make 'em sick, see?"

"Oh, no," said the Doctor quickly. "You mustn't do that. That wouldn't be right."

"Oh, I didn't mean real sick," answered the Cat's-meat-Man. "Just a little something to make them droopy-like was what I had reference to. But as you say, maybe it ain't quite fair on the animals. But they'll get sick anyway, because the old women always give 'em too much to eat. And look, all the farmers round about who had lame horses and weak lambs—they'd come. Be an animal-doctor."

When the Cat's-meat-Man had gone the parrot flew off the window on to the Doctor's table and said,

"That man's got sense. That's what you ought to do. Be an animal-doctor. Give the silly people up—if they haven't brains enough to see you're the best doctor in the world. Take care of animals instead—*they'll* soon find it out. Be an animal-doctor."

"Oh, there are plenty of animal-doctors," said John Dolittle, putting the flower-pots outside on the window-sill to get the rain.

"Yes, there *are* plenty," said Polynesia. "But none of them are any good at all. Now listen, Doctor, and I'll tell you something. Did you know that animals can talk?"

"I knew that parrots can talk," said the Doctor.

"Oh, we parrots can talk in two languages—people's language and bird-language," said Polynesia proudly. "If I say, 'Polly wants a cracker,' you understand me. But hear this: *Ka-ka oi-ee, fee-fee?*"

"Good Gracious!" cried the Doctor. "What does that mean?"

"That means, 'Is the porridge hot yet?'—in bird-language."

"My! You don't say so!" said the Doctor. "You never talked that way to me before."

"What would have been the good?" said Polynesia, dusting some cracker-crumbs off her left wing. "You wouldn't have understood me if I had."

"Tell me some more," said the Doctor, all excited; and he rushed over to the dresser-drawer and came back with the butcher's book and a pencil. "Now don't go too fast—and I'll write it down. This is interesting—very interesting—something quite new. Give me the Birds' A.B.C. first—slowly now."

So that was the way the Doctor came to know that animals had a language of their own and could talk to one another. And all that afternoon, while it was raining, Polynesia sat on the kitchen table giving him bird words to put down in the book.

At tea-time, when the dog, Jip, came in, the parrot said to the Doctor, “See, *he’s* talking to you.”

“Looks to me as though he were scratching his ear,” said the Doctor.

“But animals don’t always speak with their mouths,” said the parrot in a high voice, raising her eyebrows. “They talk with their ears, with their feet, with their tails—with everything. Sometimes they don’t *want* to make a noise. Do you see now the way he’s twitching up one side of his nose?”

“What’s that mean?” asked the Doctor.

“That means, ‘Can’t you see that it has stopped raining?’” Polynesia answered. “He is asking you a question. Dogs nearly always use their noses for asking questions.”

After a while, with the parrot’s help, the Doctor got to learn the language of the animals so well that he could talk to them himself and understand everything they said. Then he gave up being a people’s doctor altogether.

As soon as the Cat’s-meat-Man had told every one that John Dolittle was going to become an animal-doctor, old ladies began to bring him their pet pugs and poodles who had eaten too much cake; and farmers came many miles to show him sick cows and sheep.

One day a plow-horse was brought to him; and the poor thing was terribly glad to find a man who could talk in horse-language.

“You know, Doctor,” said the horse, “that vet over the hill knows nothing at all. He has been treating me six weeks now—for spavins. What I need is *spectacles*. I am going blind in one eye. There’s no reason why horses shouldn’t wear glasses, the same as people. But that stupid man over the hill never even looked at my eyes. He kept on giving me big pills. I tried to tell him; but he couldn’t understand a word of horse-language. What I need is spectacles.”

“Of course—of course,” said the Doctor. “I’ll get you some at once.”

“I would like a pair like yours,” said the horse—“only green. They’ll keep the sun out of my eyes while I’m plowing the Fifty-Acre Field.”

“Certainly,” said the Doctor. “Green ones you shall have.”

“You know, the trouble is, Sir,” said the plow-horse as the Doctor opened the front door to let him out—“the trouble is that *anybody* thinks he can doctor animals—just because the animals don’t complain. As a matter of fact it takes a much cleverer man to be a really good animal-doctor than it does to be a good people’s doctor. My farmer’s boy thinks he knows all about horses. I wish you could see him—his face is so fat he looks as though he had no eyes—and he has got as much brain as a potato-bug. He tried to put a mustard-plaster on me last week.”

“Where did he put it?” asked the Doctor.

“Oh, he didn’t put it anywhere—on me,” said the horse. “He only tried to. I kicked him into the duck-pond.”

“Well, well!” said the Doctor.

“I’m a pretty quiet creature as a rule,” said the horse—“very patient with people—don’t make much fuss. But it was bad enough to have that vet giving me the wrong medicine. And when that red-faced booby started to monkey with me, I just couldn’t bear it any more.”

“Did you hurt the boy much?” asked the Doctor.

“Oh, no,” said the horse. “I kicked him in the right place. The vet’s looking after him now. When will my glasses be ready?”

“I’ll have them for you next week,” said the Doctor. “Come in again Tuesday—Good morning!”

Then John Dolittle got a fine, big pair of green spectacles; and the plow-horse stopped going blind in one eye and could see as well as ever.

And soon it became a common sight to see farm-animals wearing glasses in the country round Puddleby; and a blind horse was a thing unknown.

And so it was with all the other animals that were brought to him. As soon as they found that he could talk their language, they told him where the pain was and how they felt, and of course it was easy for him to cure them.

Now all these animals went back and told their brothers and friends that there was a doctor in the little house with the big garden who really *was* a doctor. And whenever any creatures got sick—not only horses and cows and dogs—but all the little things of the fields, like harvest-mice and water-voles, badgers and bats, they came at once to his house on the edge of the town, so that his big garden was nearly always crowded with animals trying to get in to see him.

There were so many that came that he had to have special doors made for the different kinds. He wrote “HORSES” over the front door, “COWS” over the side door, and “SHEEP” on the kitchen door. Each kind of animal had a separate door—even the mice had a tiny tunnel made for them into the cellar, where they waited patiently in rows for the Doctor to come round to them.

And so, in a few years’ time, every living thing for miles and miles got to know about John Dolittle, M.D. And the birds who flew to other countries in the winter told the animals in foreign lands of the wonderful doctor of Puddleby-on-the-Marsh, who could understand their talk and help them in their troubles. In this way he became famous among the animals—all over the world—better known even than he had been among the folks of the West Country, And he was happy and liked his life very much.

One afternoon when the Doctor was busy writing in a book, Polynesia sat in the window—as she nearly always did—looking out at the leaves blowing about in the garden. Presently she laughed aloud.

“What is it, Polynesia?” asked the Doctor, looking up from his book.

“I was just thinking,” said the parrot; and she went on looking at the leaves.

“What were you thinking?”

“I was thinking about people,” said Polynesia. “People make me sick. They think they’re so wonderful. The world has been going on now for thousands of years, hasn’t it? And the only thing in animal-language that *people* have learned to understand is that when a dog wags his tail he means ‘I’m glad!’—It’s funny, isn’t it? You are the very first man to talk like us. Oh, sometimes people annoy me dreadfully—such airs they put on—talking about ‘the dumb animals.’ *Dumb!*—Huh! Why I knew a macaw once who could say ‘Good morning!’ in seven different ways without once opening his mouth. He could talk every language—and Greek. An old professor with a gray beard bought him. But he didn’t stay. He said the old man didn’t talk Greek right, and he couldn’t stand listening to him teach the language wrong. I often wonder what’s become of him. That bird knew more geography than people will ever know.—*People*, Golly! I suppose if people ever learn to fly—like any common hedge-sparrow—we shall never hear the end of it!”

“You’re a wise old bird,” said the Doctor. “How old are you really? I know that parrots and elephants sometimes live to be very, very old.”

“I can never be quite sure of my age,” said Polynesia. “It’s either a hundred and eighty-three or a hundred and eighty-two. But I know that when I first came here from Africa, King Charles was still hiding in the oak-tree—because I saw him. He looked scared to death.”

THE THIRD CHAPTER

MORE MONEY TROUBLES

AND soon now the Doctor began to make money again; and his sister, Sarah, bought a new dress and was happy.

Some of the animals who came to see him were so sick that they had to stay at the Doctor's house for a week. And when they were getting better they used to sit in chairs on the lawn.

And often even after they got well, they did not want to go away—they liked the Doctor and his house so much. And he never had the heart to refuse them when they asked if they could stay with him. So in this way he went on getting more and more pets.

Once when he was sitting on his garden wall, smoking a pipe in the evening, an Italian organ-grinder came round with a monkey on a string. The Doctor saw at once that the monkey's collar was too tight and that he was dirty and unhappy. So he took the monkey away from the Italian, gave the man a shilling and told him to go. The organ-grinder got awfully angry and said that he wanted to keep the monkey. But the Doctor told him that if he didn't go away he would punch him on the nose. John Dolittle was a strong man, though he wasn't very tall. So the Italian went away saying rude things and the monkey stayed with Doctor Dolittle and had a good home. The other animals in the house called him "Chee-Chee"—which is a common word in monkey-language, meaning "ginger."

And another time, when the circus came to Puddleby, the crocodile who had a bad toothache escaped at night and came into the Doctor's garden. The Doctor talked to him in crocodile-language and took him into the house and made his tooth better. But when the crocodile saw what a nice house it was—with all the different places for the different kinds of animals—he too wanted to live with the Doctor. He asked couldn't he sleep in the fish-pond at the bottom of the garden, if he promised not to eat the fish. When the circus-men came to take him back he got so wild and savage that he frightened them away. But to every one in the house he was always as gentle as a kitten.

But now the old ladies grew afraid to send their lap-dogs to Doctor Dolittle because of the crocodile; and the farmers wouldn't believe that he would not eat the lambs and sick calves they brought to be cured. So the Doctor went to the crocodile and told him he must go back to his circus. But he wept such big tears, and begged so hard to be allowed to stay, that the Doctor hadn't the heart to turn him out.

So then the Doctor's sister came to him and said,

"John, you must send that creature away. Now the farmers and the old ladies are afraid to send their animals to you—just as we were beginning to be well off again. Now we shall be ruined entirely. This is the last straw. I will no longer be housekeeper for you if you don't send away that alligator."

"It isn't an alligator," said the Doctor—"it's a crocodile."

"I don't care what you call it," said his sister. "It's a nasty thing to find under the bed. I won't have it in the house."

"But he has promised me," the Doctor answered, "that he will not bite any one. He doesn't like the circus; and I haven't the money to send him back to Africa where he comes from. He minds his own business and on the whole is very well behaved. Don't be so fussy."

"I tell you I *will not* have him around," said Sarah. "He eats the linoleum. If you don't send him away this minute I'll—I'll go and get married!"

"All right," said the Doctor, "go and get married. It can't be helped." And he took down his hat and went out into the garden.

So Sarah Dolittle packed up her things and went off; and the Doctor was left all alone with his animal family.

And very soon he was poorer than he had ever been before. With all these mouths to fill, and the house to look after, and no one to do the mending, and no money coming in to pay the butcher's bill, things began to look very difficult. But the Doctor didn't worry at all.

"Money is a nuisance," he used to say. "We'd all be much better off if it had never been invented. What does money matter, so long as we are happy?"

But soon the animals themselves began to get worried. And one evening when the Doctor was asleep in his chair before the kitchen-fire they began talking it over among themselves in whispers. And the owl, Too-Too, who was good at arithmetic, figured it out that there was only money enough left to last another week—if they each had one meal a day and no more.

Then the parrot said, "I think we all ought to do the housework ourselves. At least we can do that much. After all, it is for our sakes that the old man finds himself so lonely and so poor."

So it was agreed that the monkey, Chee-Chee, was to do the cooking and mending; the dog was to sweep the floors; the duck was to dust and make the beds; the owl, Too-Too, was to keep the accounts, and the pig was to do the gardening. They made Polynesia, the parrot, housekeeper and laundress, because she was the oldest.

Of course at first they all found their new jobs very hard to do—all except Chee-Chee, who had hands, and could do things like a man. But they soon got used to it; and they used to think it great fun to watch Jip, the dog, sweeping his tail over the floor with a rag tied onto it for a broom. After a little they got to do the work so well that the Doctor said that he had never had his house kept so tidy or so clean before.

In this way things went along all right for a while; but without money they found it very hard.

Then the animals made a vegetable and flower stall outside the garden-gate and sold radishes and roses to the people that passed by along the road.

But still they didn't seem to make enough money to pay all the bills—and still the Doctor wouldn't worry. When the parrot came to him and told him that the fishmonger wouldn't give them any more fish, he said,

"Never mind. So long as the hens lay eggs and the cow gives milk we can have omelettes and junket. And there are plenty of vegetables left in the garden. The Winter is still a long way off. Don't fuss. That was the trouble with Sarah—she would fuss. I wonder how Sarah's getting on—an excellent woman—in some ways—Well, well!"

But the snow came earlier than usual that year; and although the old lame horse hauled in plenty of wood from the forest outside the town, so they could have a big fire in the kitchen, most of the vegetables in the garden were gone, and the rest were covered with snow; and many of the animals were really hungry.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

A MESSAGE FROM AFRICA

THAT Winter was a very cold one. And one night in December, when they were all sitting round the warm fire in the kitchen, and the Doctor was reading aloud to them out of books he had written himself in animal-language, the owl, Too-Too, suddenly said,

“Sh! What’s that noise outside?”

They all listened; and presently they heard the sound of some one running. Then the door flew open and the monkey, Chee-Chee, ran in, badly out of breath.

“Doctor!” he cried, “I’ve just had a message from a cousin of mine in Africa. There is a terrible sickness among the monkeys out there. They are all catching it—and they are dying in hundreds. They have heard of you, and beg you to come to Africa to stop the sickness.”

“Who brought the message?” asked the Doctor, taking off his spectacles and laying down his book.

“A swallow,” said Chee-Chee. “She is outside on the rain-butt.”

“Bring her in by the fire,” said the Doctor. “She must be perished with the cold. The swallows flew South six weeks ago!”

So the swallow was brought in, all huddled and shivering; and although she was a little afraid at first, she soon got warmed up and sat on the edge of the mantelpiece and began to talk.

When she had finished the Doctor said,

“I would gladly go to Africa—especially in this bitter weather. But I’m afraid we haven’t money enough to buy the tickets. Get me the money-box, Chee-Chee.”

So the monkey climbed up and got it off the top shelf of the dresser.

There was nothing in it—not one single penny!

“I felt sure there was twopence left,” said the Doctor.

“There *was*” said the owl. “But you spent it on a rattle for that badger’s baby when he was teething.”

“Did I?” said the Doctor—“dear me, dear me! What a nuisance money is, to be sure! Well, never mind. Perhaps if I go down to the seaside I shall be able to borrow a boat that will take us to Africa. I knew a seaman once who brought his baby to me with measles. Maybe he’ll lend us his boat—the baby got well.”

So early the next morning the Doctor went down to the sea-shore. And when he came back he told the animals it was all right—the sailor was going to lend them the boat.

Then the crocodile and the monkey and the parrot were very glad and began to sing, because they were going back to Africa, their real home. And the Doctor said,

“I shall only be able to take you three—with Jip the dog, Dab-Dab the duck, Gub-Gub the pig and the owl, Too-Too. The rest of the animals, like the dormice and the water-voles and the bats, they will have to go back and live in the fields where they were born till we come home again. But as most of them sleep through the Winter, they won’t mind that—and besides, it wouldn’t be good for them to go to Africa.”

So then the parrot, who had been on long sea-voyages before, began telling the Doctor all the things he would have to take with him on the ship.

“You must have plenty of pilot-bread,” she said—“‘hard tack’ they call it. And you must have beef in cans—and an anchor.”

“I expect the ship will have its own anchor,” said the Doctor.

“Well, make sure,” said Polynesia. “Because it’s very important. You can’t stop if you haven’t got an anchor. And you’ll need a bell.”

“What’s that for?” asked the Doctor.

“To tell the time by,” said the parrot. “You go and ring it every half-hour and then you know what time it is. And bring a whole lot of rope—it always comes in handy on voyages.”

Then they began to wonder where they were going to get the money from to buy all the things they needed.

“Oh, bother it! Money again,” cried the Doctor. “Goodness! I shall be glad to get to Africa where we don’t have to have any! I’ll go and ask the grocer if he will wait for his money till I get back—No, I’ll send the sailor to ask him.”

So the sailor went to see the grocer. And presently he came back with all the things they wanted.

Then the animals packed up; and after they had turned off the water so the pipes wouldn’t freeze, and put up the shutters, they closed the house and gave the key to the old horse who lived in the stable. And when they had seen that there was plenty of hay in the loft to last the horse through the Winter, they carried all their luggage down to the seashore and got on to the boat.

The Cat’s-meat-Man was there to see them off; and he brought a large suet-pudding as a present for the Doctor because, he said he had been told, you couldn’t get suet-puddings in foreign parts.

As soon as they were on the ship, Gub-Gub, the pig, asked where the beds were, for it was four o’clock in the afternoon and he wanted his nap. So Polynesia took him downstairs into the inside of the ship and showed him the beds, set all on top of one another like book-shelves against a wall.

“Why, that isn’t a bed!” cried Gub-Gub. “That’s a shelf!”

“Beds are always like that on ships,” said the parrot. “It isn’t a shelf. Climb up into it and go to sleep. That’s what you call ‘a bunk.’”

“I don’t think I’ll go to bed yet,” said Gub-Gub. “I’m too excited. I want to go upstairs again and see them start.”

“Well, this is your first trip,” said Polynesia. “You will get used to the life after a while.” And she went back up the stairs of the ship, humming this song to herself,

I’ve seen the Black Sea and the Red Sea;
I rounded the Isle of Wight;
I discovered the Yellow River,
And the Orange too—by night.
Now Greenland drops behind again,
And I sail the ocean Blue.
I’m tired of all these colors, Jane,
So I’m coming back to you.

They were just going to start on their journey, when the Doctor said he would have to go back and ask the sailor the way to Africa.

But the swallow said she had been to that country many times and would show them how to get there.

So the Doctor told Chee-Chee to pull up the anchor and the voyage began.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

THE GREAT JOURNEY

NOW for six whole weeks they went sailing on and on, over the rolling sea, following the swallow who flew before the ship to show them the way. At night she carried a tiny lantern, so they should not miss her in the dark; and the people on the other ships that passed said that the light must be a shooting star.

As they sailed further and further into the South, it got warmer and warmer. Polynesia, Chee-Chee and the crocodile enjoyed the hot sun no end. They ran about laughing and looking over the side of the ship to see if they could see Africa yet.

But the pig and the dog and the owl, Too-Too, could do nothing in such weather, but sat at the end of the ship in the shade of a big barrel, with their tongues hanging out, drinking lemonade.

Dab-Dab, the duck, used to keep herself cool by jumping into the sea and swimming behind the ship. And every once in a while, when the top of her head got too hot, she would dive under the ship and come up on the other side. In this way, too, she used to catch herrings on Tuesdays and Fridays—when everybody on the boat ate fish to make the beef last longer.

When they got near to the Equator they saw some flying-fishes coming towards them. And the fishes asked the parrot if this was Doctor Dolittle's ship. When she told them it was, they said they were glad, because the monkeys in Africa were getting worried that he would never come. Polynesia asked them how many miles they had yet to go; and the flying-fishes said it was only fifty-five miles now to the coast of Africa.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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