

*The Story of
Doctor Dolittle*

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ALMA CLASSICS

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TO
ALL CHILDREN

CHILDREN IN YEARS
AND CHILDREN IN HEART

I DEDICATE THIS STORY

*The Story of
Doctor Dolittle*

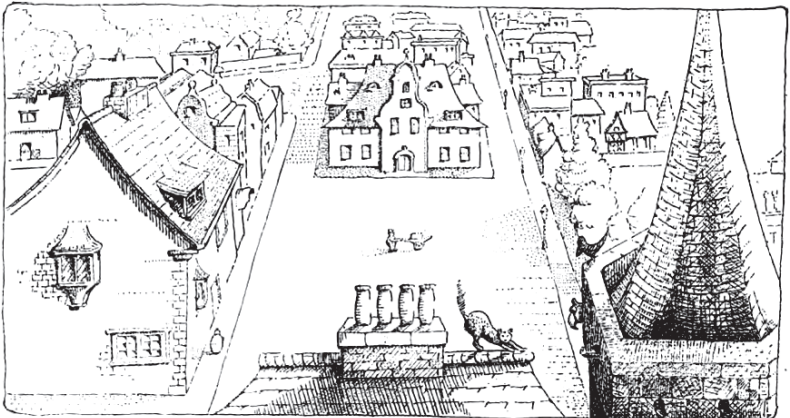
1

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, MD. “MD” 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.

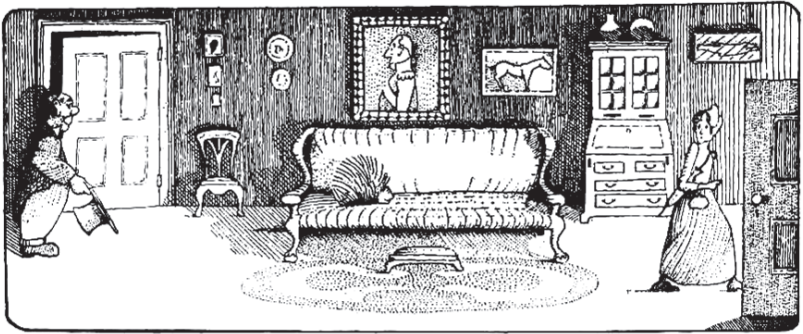
He was very fond of animals and kept many kinds of pets. Besides the goldfish in the pond at the bottom of his garden, he had rabbits in the pantry, white mice in his piano, a squirrel in the linen closet and a hedgehog in the cellar. He had a cow with a calf too, and an old lame horse – twenty-five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

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 patients to come and see you when you keep all these animals in the house? It’s a fine doctor would have his parlour full of hedgehogs and mice! That’s the fourth person these animals have driven away. Squire Jenkins and the Parson say they wouldn’t come near your house again – no matter how ill 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,

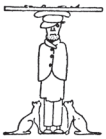
THE STORY OF DOCTOR DOLITTLE

MD! 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.

2

Animal Language



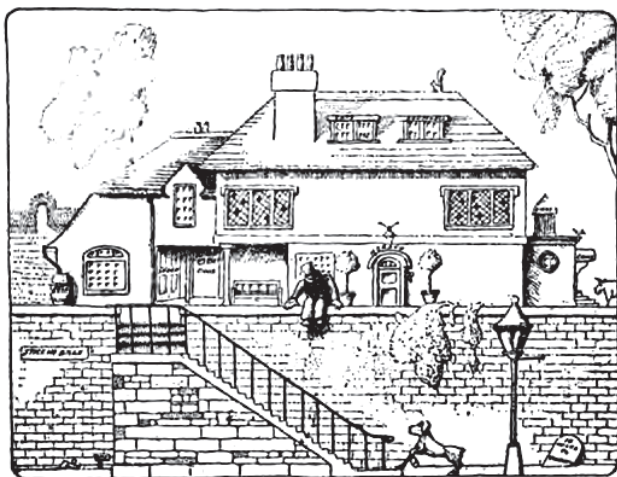
IT HAPPENED ONE DAY that the Doctor was sitting in his kitchen talking with the cat's-meat man, who had come to see him with a stomach ache.

"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 ill fast enough, I could put something in the meat I sell 'em to make 'em bad, see?"

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



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

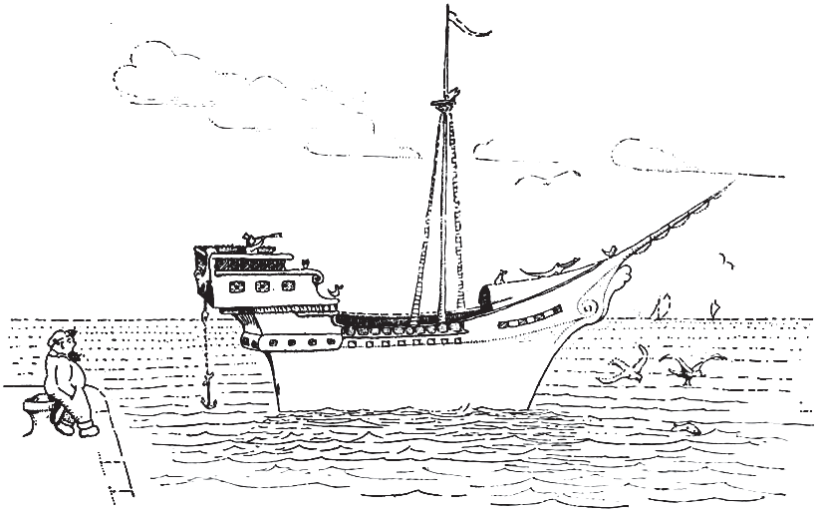
“I was just thinking,” said the parrot, and she went on looking at the leaves.

“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 learnt 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 grey beard bought him. But he didn’t

“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 colours, 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.



5

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 farther and farther 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,