HUGH LOFTING

THE VOYAGES OF DOCTOR DOLITTLE

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Содержание

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To Colin and Elizabeth

PROLOGUE

ALL that I have written so far about Doctor Dolittle I heard long after it happened from those who had known him—indeed a great deal of it took place before I was born. But I now come to set down that part of the great man's life which I myself saw and took part in.

Many years ago the Doctor gave me permission to do this. But we were both of us so busy then voyaging around the world, having adventures and filling note-books full of natural history that I never seemed to get time to sit down and write of our doings.

Now of course, when I am quite an old man, my memory isn't so good any more. But whenever I am in doubt and have to hesitate and think, I always ask Polynesia, the parrot.

That wonderful bird (she is now nearly two hundred and fifty years old) sits on the top of my desk, usually humming sailor songs to herself, while I write this book. And, as every one who ever met her knows, Polynesia's memory is the most marvelous memory in the world. If there is any happening I am not quite sure of, she is always able to put me right, to tell me exactly how it took place, who was there and everything about it. In fact sometimes I almost think I ought to say that this book was written by Polynesia instead of me.

Very well then, I will begin. And first of all I must tell you

something about myself and how I came to meet the Doctor.

PART ONE

THE FIRST CHAPTER
THE COBBLER'S SON

MY name was Tommy Stubbins, son of Jacob Stubbins, the cobbler of Puddleby-on-the-Marsh; and I was nine and a half years old. At that time Puddleby was only quite a small town. A river ran through the middle of it; and over this river there was a very old stone bridge, called Kingsbridge, which led you from the market-place on one side to the churchyard on the other.

Sailing-ships came up this river from the sea and anchored near the bridge. I used to go down and watch the sailors unloading the ships upon the river-wall. The sailors sang strange songs as they pulled upon the ropes; and I learned these songs by heart. And I would sit on the river-wall with my feet dangling over the water and sing with the men, pretending to myself that I too was a sailor.

For I longed always to sail away with those brave ships when they turned their backs on Puddleby Church and went creeping down the river again, across the wide lonely marshes to the sea. I longed to go with them out into the world to seek my fortune in foreign lands—Africa, India, China and Peru! When they got

round the bend in the river and the water was hidden from view, you could still see their huge brown sails towering over the roofs of the town, moving onward slowly—like some gentle giants that walked among the houses without noise. What strange things would they have seen, I wondered, when next they came back to anchor at Kingsbridge! And, dreaming of the lands I had never seen, I'd sit on there, watching till they were out of sight.

Three great friends I had in Puddleby in those days. One was Joe, the mussel-man, who lived in a tiny hut by the edge of the water under the bridge. This old man was simply marvelous at making things. I never saw a man so clever with his hands. He used to mend my toy ships for me which I sailed upon the river; he built windmills out of packing-cases and barrel-staves; and he could make the most wonderful kites from old umbrellas.

Joe would sometimes take me in his mussel-boat, and when the tide was running out we would paddle down the river as far as the edge of the sea to get mussels and lobsters to sell. And out there on the cold lonely marshes we would see wild geese flying, and curlews and redshanks and many other kinds of seabirds that live among the samfire and the long grass of the great salt fen. And as we crept up the river in the evening, when the tide had turned, we would see the lights on Kingsbridge twinkle in the dusk, reminding us of tea-time and warm fires.

Another friend I had was Matthew Mugg, the cat's-meat-man. He was a funny old person with a bad squint. He looked rather awful but he was really quite nice to talk to. He knew everybody

in Puddleby; and he knew all the dogs and all the cats. In those times being a cat's-meat-man was a regular business. And you could see one nearly any day going through the streets with a wooden tray full of pieces of meat stuck on skewers crying, "Meat! M-E-A-T!" People paid him to give this meat to their cats and dogs instead of feeding them on dog-biscuits or the scraps from the table.

I enjoyed going round with old Matthew and seeing the cats and dogs come running to the garden-gates whenever they heard his call. Sometimes he let me give the meat to the animals myself; and I thought this was great fun. He knew a lot about dogs and he would tell me the names of the different kinds as we went through the town. He had several dogs of his own; one, a whippet, was a very fast runner, and Matthew used to win prizes with her at the Saturday coursing races; another, a terrier, was a fine ratter. The cat's-meat-man used to make a business of rat-catching for the millers and farmers as well as his other trade of selling cat's-meat.

My third great friend was Luke the Hermit. But of him I will tell you more later on.

I did not go to school; because my father was not rich enough to send me. But I was extremely fond of animals. So I used to spend my time collecting birds' eggs and butterflies, fishing in the river, rambling through the countryside after blackberries and mushrooms and helping the mussel-man mend his nets.

Yes, it was a very pleasant life I lived in those days long ago

—though of course I did not think so then. I was nine and a half years old; and, like all boys, I wanted to grow up—not knowing how well off I was with no cares and nothing to worry me. Always I longed for the time when I should be allowed to leave my father's house, to take passage in one of those brave ships, to sail down the river through the misty marshes to the sea—out into the world to seek my fortune.

THE SECOND CHAPTER
I HEAR OF THE GREAT NATURALIST

ONE early morning in the Springtime, when I was wandering among the hills at the back of the town, I happened to come upon a hawk with a squirrel in its claws. It was standing on a rock and the squirrel was fighting very hard for its life. The hawk was so frightened when I came upon it suddenly like this, that it dropped the poor creature and flew away. I picked the squirrel up and found that two of its legs were badly hurt. So I carried it in my arms back to the town.

When I came to the bridge I went into the mussel-man's hut and asked him if he could do anything for it. Joe put on his spectacles and examined it carefully. Then he shook his head.

"Yon crittur's got a broken leg," he said—"and another badly cut an' all. I can mend you your boats, Tom, but I haven't the tools nor the learning to make a broken squirrel seaworthy. This is a job for a surgeon—and for a right smart one an' all. There be only one man I know who could save yon crittur's life. And that's John Dolittle."

"Who is John Dolittle?" I asked. "Is he a vet?"

"No," said the mussel-man. "He's no vet. Doctor Dolittle is a nacheralist."

"What's a nacheralist?"

"A nacheralist," said Joe, putting away his glasses and starting to fill his pipe, "is a man who knows all about animals and butterflies and plants and rocks an' all. John Dolittle is a very great nacheralist. I'm surprised you never heard of him—and you daft over animals. He knows a whole lot about shellfish—that I know from my own knowledge. He's a quiet man and don't talk much; but there's folks who do say he's the greatest nacheralist in the world."

"Where does he live?" I asked.

"Over on the Oxenthorpe Road, t'other side the town. Don't know just which house it is, but 'most anyone 'cross there could tell you, I reckon. Go and see him. He's a great man."

So I thanked the mussel-man, took up my squirrel again and started off towards the Oxenthorpe Road.

The first thing I heard as I came into the market-place was some one calling "Meat! M-E-A-T!"

"There's Matthew Mugg," I said to myself. "He'll know where this Doctor lives. Matthew knows everyone."

So I hurried across the market-place and caught him up.

"Matthew," I said, "do you know Doctor Dolittle?"

"Do I know John Dolittle!" said he. "Well, I should think I do! I know him as well as I know my own wife—better, I sometimes think. He's a great man—a very great man."

"Can you show me where he lives?" I asked. "I want to take this squirrel to him. It has a broken leg."

"Certainly," said the cat's-meat-man. "I'll be going right by his house directly. Come along and I'll show you."

So off we went together.

"Oh, I've known John Dolittle for years and years," said Matthew as we made our way out of the market-place. "But I'm pretty sure he ain't home just now. He's away on a voyage. But he's liable to be back any day. I'll show you his house and then you'll know where to find him."

All the way down the Oxenthorpe Road Matthew hardly stopped talking about his great friend, Doctor John Dolittle —"M. D." He talked so much that he forgot all about calling out "Meat!" until we both suddenly noticed that we had a whole procession of dogs following us patiently.

"Where did the Doctor go to on this voyage?" I asked as Matthew handed round the meat to them.

"I couldn't tell you," he answered. "Nobody never knows where he goes, nor when he's going, nor when he's coming back. He lives all alone except for his pets. He's made some great voyages and some wonderful discoveries. Last time he came back he told me he'd found a tribe of Red Indians in the Pacific Ocean —lived on two islands, they did. The husbands lived on one island and the wives lived on the other. Sensible people, some of them savages. They only met once a year, when the husbands came over to visit the wives for a great feast—Christmas-time, most likely. Yes, he's a wonderful man is the Doctor. And as for animals, well, there ain't no one knows as much about 'em as

what he does."

"How did he get to know so much about animals?" I asked.

The cat's-meat-man stopped and leant down to whisper in my ear.

"*He talks their language*," he said in a hoarse, mysterious voice.

"The animals' language?" I cried.

"Why certainly," said Matthew. "All animals have some kind of a language. Some sorts talk more than others; some only speak in sign-language, like deaf-and-dumb. But the Doctor, he understands them all—birds as well as animals. We keep it a secret though, him and me, because folks only laugh at you when you speak of it. Why, he can even write animal-language. He reads aloud to his pets. He's wrote history-books in monkey-talk, poetry in canary language and comic songs for magpies to sing. It's a fact. He's now busy learning the language of the shellfish. But he says it's hard work—and he has caught some terrible colds, holding his head under water so much. He's a great man."

"He certainly must be," I said. "I do wish he were home so I could meet him."

"Well, there's his house, look," said the cat's-meat-man —"that little one at the bend in the road there—the one high up —like it was sitting on the wall above the street."

We were now come beyond the edge of the town. And the house that Matthew pointed out was quite a small one standing by itself. There seemed to be a big garden around it; and this garden

was much higher than the road, so you had to go up a flight of steps in the wall before you reached the front gate at the top. I could see that there were many fine fruit trees in the garden, for their branches hung down over the wall in places. But the wall was so high I could not see anything else.

When we reached the house Matthew went up the steps to the front gate and I followed him. I thought he was going to go into the garden; but the gate was locked. A dog came running down from the house; and he took several pieces of meat which the cat's-meat-man pushed through the bars of the gate, and some paper bags full of corn and bran. I noticed that this dog did not stop to eat the meat, as any ordinary dog would have done, but he took all the things back to the house and disappeared. He had a curious wide collar round his neck which looked as though it were made of brass or something. Then we came away.

"The Doctor isn't back yet," said Matthew, "or the gate wouldn't be locked."

"What were all those things in paper-bags you gave the dog?" I asked.

"Oh, those were provisions," said Matthew—"things for the animals to eat. The Doctor's house is simply full of pets. I give the things to the dog, while the Doctor's away, and the dog gives them to the other animals."

"And what was that curious collar he was wearing round his neck?"

"That's a solid gold dog-collar," said Matthew. "It was given

to him when he was with the Doctor on one of his voyages long ago. He saved a man's life."

"How long has the Doctor had him?" I asked.

"Oh, a long time. Jip's getting pretty old now. That's why the Doctor doesn't take him on his voyages any more. He leaves him behind to take care of the house. Every Monday and Thursday I bring the food to the gate here and give it him through the bars. He never lets any one come inside the garden while the Doctor's away—not even me, though he knows me well. But you'll always be able to tell if the Doctor's back or not—because if he is, the gate will surely be open."

So I went off home to my father's house and put my squirrel to bed in an old wooden box full of straw. And there I nursed him myself and took care of him as best I could till the time should come when the Doctor would return. And every day I went to the little house with the big garden on the edge of the town and tried the gate to see if it were locked. Sometimes the dog, Jip, would come down to the gate to meet me. But though he always wagged his tail and seemed glad to see me, he never let me come inside the garden.

THE THIRD CHAPTER
THE DOCTOR'S HOME

ONE Monday afternoon towards the end of April my father asked me to take some shoes which he had mended to a house on the other side of the town. They were for a Colonel Bellowes who was very particular.

I found the house and rang the bell at the front door. The Colonel opened it, stuck out a very red face and said, "Go round to the tradesmen's entrance—go to the back door." Then he slammed the door shut.

I felt inclined to throw the shoes into the middle of his flower-bed. But I thought my father might be angry, so I didn't. I went round to the back door, and there the Colonel's wife met me and took the shoes from me. She looked a timid little woman and had her hands all over flour as though she were making bread. She seemed to be terribly afraid of her husband whom I could still hear stumping round the house somewhere, grunting indignantly because I had come to the front door. Then she asked me in a whisper if I would have a bun and a glass of milk. And I said, "Yes, please."

After I had eaten the bun and milk, I thanked the Colonel's wife and came away. Then I thought that before I went home I would go and see if the Doctor had come back yet. I had been to his house once already that morning. But I thought I'd just like to

go and take another look. My squirrel wasn't getting any better and I was beginning to be worried about him.

So I turned into the Oxenthorpe Road and started off towards the Doctor's house. On the way I noticed that the sky was clouding over and that it looked as though it might rain.

I reached the gate and found it still locked. I felt very discouraged. I had been coming here every day for a week now. The dog, Jip, came to the gate and wagged his tail as usual, and then sat down and watched me closely to see that I didn't get in.

I began to fear that my squirrel would die before the Doctor came back. I turned away sadly, went down the steps on to the road and turned towards home again.

I wondered if it were supper-time yet. Of course I had no watch of my own, but I noticed a gentleman coming towards me down the road; and when he got nearer I saw it was the Colonel out for a walk. He was all wrapped up in smart overcoats and mufflers and bright-colored gloves. It was not a very cold day but he had so many clothes on he looked like a pillow inside a roll of blankets. I asked him if he would please tell me the time.

He stopped, grunted and glared down at me—his red face growing redder still; and when he spoke it sounded like the cork coming out of a gingerbeer-bottle.

"Do you imagine for one moment," he spluttered, "that I am going to get myself all unbuttoned just to tell a little boy like you *the time*!" And he went stumping down the street, grunting harder than ever.

I stood still a moment looking after him and wondering how old I would have to be, to have him go to the trouble of getting his watch out. And then, all of a sudden, the rain came down in torrents.

I have never seen it rain so hard. It got dark, almost like night. The wind began to blow; the thunder rolled; the lightning flashed, and in a moment the gutters of the road were flowing like a river. There was no place handy to take shelter, so I put my head down against the driving wind and started to run towards home.

I hadn't gone very far when my head bumped into something soft and I sat down suddenly on the pavement. I looked up to see whom I had run into. And there in front of me, sitting on the wet pavement like myself, was a little round man with a very kind face. He wore a shabby high hat and in his hand he had a small black bag.

"I'm very sorry," I said. "I had my head down and I didn't see you coming."

To my great surprise, instead of getting angry at being knocked down, the little man began to laugh.

"You know this reminds me," he said, "of a time once when I was in India. I ran full tilt into a woman in a thunderstorm. But she was carrying a pitcher of molasses on her head and I had treacle in my hair for weeks afterwards—the flies followed me everywhere. I didn't hurt you, did I?"

"No," I said. "I'm all right."

"It was just as much my fault as it was yours, you know,"

said the little man. “I had my head down too—but look here, we mustn’t sit talking like this. You must be soaked. I know I am. How far have you got to go?”

“My home is on the other side of the town,” I said, as we picked ourselves up.

“My Goodness, but that *was* a wet pavement!” said he. “And I declare it’s coming down worse than ever. Come along to my house and get dried. A storm like this can’t last.”

He took hold of my hand and we started running back down the road together. As we ran I began to wonder who this funny little man could be, and where he lived. I was a perfect stranger to him, and yet he was taking me to his own home to get dried. Such a change, after the old red-faced Colonel who had refused even to tell me the time! Presently we stopped.

“Here we are,” he said.

I looked up to see where we were and found myself back at the foot of the steps leading to the little house with the big garden! My new friend was already running up the steps and opening the gate with some keys he took from his pocket.

“Surely,” I thought, “this cannot be the great Doctor Dolittle himself!”

I suppose after hearing so much about him I had expected some one very tall and strong and marvelous. It was hard to believe that this funny little man with the kind smiling face could be really he. Yet here he was, sure enough, running up the steps and opening the very gate which I had been watching for so many

days!

The dog, Jip, came rushing out and started jumping up on him and barking with happiness. The rain was splashing down heavier than ever.

"Are you Doctor Dolittle?" I shouted as we sped up the short garden-path to the house.

"Yes, I'm Doctor Dolittle," said he, opening the front door with the same bunch of keys. "Get in! Don't bother about wiping your feet. Never mind the mud. Take it in with you. Get in out of the rain!"

I popped in, he and Jip following. Then he slammed the door to behind us.

The storm had made it dark enough outside; but inside the house, with the door closed, it was as black as night. Then began the most extraordinary noise that I have ever heard. It sounded like all sorts and kinds of animals and birds calling and squeaking and screeching at the same time. I could hear things trundling down the stairs and hurrying along passages. Somewhere in the dark a duck was quacking, a cock was crowing, a dove was cooing, an owl was hooting, a lamb was bleating and Jip was barking. I felt birds' wings fluttering and fanning near my face. Things kept bumping into my legs and nearly upsetting me. The whole front hall seemed to be filling up with animals. The noise, together with the roaring of the rain, was tremendous; and I was beginning to grow a little bit scared when I felt the Doctor take hold of my arm and shout into my ear.

"Don't be alarmed. Don't be frightened. These are just some of my pets. I've been away three months and they are glad to see me home again. Stand still where you are till I strike a light. My Gracious, what a storm!—Just listen to that thunder!"

So there I stood in the pitch-black dark, while all kinds of animals which I couldn't see chattered and jostled around me. It was a curious and a funny feeling. I had often wondered, when I had looked in from the front gate, what Doctor Dolittle would be like and what the funny little house would have inside it. But I never imagined it would be anything like this. Yet somehow after I had felt the Doctor's hand upon my arm I was not frightened, only confused. It all seemed like some queer dream; and I was beginning to wonder if I was really awake, when I heard the Doctor speaking again:

"My blessed matches are all wet. They won't strike. Have you got any?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't," I called back.

"Never mind," said he. "Perhaps Dab-Dab can raise us a light somewhere."

Then the Doctor made some funny clicking noises with his tongue and I heard some one trundle up the stairs again and start moving about in the rooms above.

Then we waited quite a while without anything happening.

"Will the light be long in coming?" I asked. "Some animal is sitting on my foot and my toes are going to sleep."

"No, only a minute," said the Doctor. "She'll be back in a

minute."

And just then I saw the first glimmerings of a light around the landing above. At once all the animals kept quiet.

"I thought you lived alone," I said to the Doctor.

"So I do," said he. "It is Dab-Dab who is bringing the light."

I looked up the stairs trying to make out who was coming. I could not see around the landing but I heard the most curious footstep on the upper flight. It sounded like some one hopping down from one step to the other, as though he were using only one leg.

As the light came lower, it grew brighter and began to throw strange jumping shadows on the walls.

"Ah—at last!" said the Doctor. "Good old Dab-Dab!"

And then I thought I *really* must be dreaming. For there, craning her neck round the bend of the landing, hopping down the stairs on one leg, came a spotless white duck. And in her right foot she carried a lighted candle!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER
THE WIFF-WAFF

WHEN at last I could look around me I found that the hall was indeed simply full of animals. It seemed to me that almost every kind of creature from the countryside must be there: a pigeon, a white rat, an owl, a badger, a jackdaw—there was even a small pig, just in from the rainy garden, carefully wiping his feet on the mat while the light from the candle glistened on his wet pink back.

The Doctor took the candlestick from the duck and turned to me.

"Look here," he said: "you must get those wet clothes off—by the way, what is your name?"

"Tommy Stubbins," I said.

"Oh, are you the son of Jacob Stubbins, the shoemaker?"

"Yes," I said.

"Excellent bootmaker, your father," said the Doctor. "You see these?" and he held up his right foot to show me the enormous boots he was wearing. "Your father made me those boots four years ago, and I've been wearing them ever since—perfectly wonderful boots—Well now, look here, Stubbins. You've got to change those wet things—and quick. Wait a moment till I get some more candles lit, and then we'll go upstairs and find some dry clothes. You'll have to wear an old suit of mine till we can

get yours dry again by the kitchen-fire."

So presently when more candles had been lighted round different parts of the house, we went upstairs; and when we had come into a bedroom the Doctor opened a big wardrobe and took out two suits of old clothes. These we put on. Then we carried our wet ones down to the kitchen and started a fire in the big chimney. The coat of the Doctor's which I was wearing was so large for me that I kept treading on my own coat-tails while I was helping to fetch the wood up from the cellar. But very soon we had a huge big fire blazing up the chimney and we hung our wet clothes around on chairs.

"Now let's cook some supper," said the Doctor.—"You'll stay and have supper with me, Stubbins, of course?"

Already I was beginning to be very fond of this funny little man who called me "Stubbins," instead of "Tommy" or "little lad" (I did so hate to be called "little lad"!) This man seemed to begin right away treating me as though I were a grown-up friend of his. And when he asked me to stop and have supper with him I felt terribly proud and happy. But I suddenly remembered that I had not told my mother that I would be out late. So very sadly I answered,

"Thank you very much. I would like to stay, but I am afraid that my mother will begin to worry and wonder where I am if I don't get back."

"Oh, but my dear Stubbins," said the Doctor, throwing another log of wood on the fire, "your clothes aren't dry yet. You'll have

to wait for them, won't you? By the time they are ready to put on we will have supper cooked and eaten—Did you see where I put my bag?"

"I think it is still in the hall," I said. "I'll go and see."

I found the bag near the front door. It was made of black leather and looked very, very old. One of its latches was broken and it was tied up round the middle with a piece of string.

"Thank you," said the Doctor when I brought it to him.

"Was that bag all the luggage you had for your voyage?" I asked.

"Yes," said the Doctor, as he undid the piece of string. "I don't believe in a lot of baggage. It's such a nuisance. Life's too short to fuss with it. And it isn't really necessary, you know—Where *did* I put those sausages?"

The Doctor was feeling about inside the bag. First he brought out a loaf of new bread. Next came a glass jar with a curious metal top to it. He held this up to the light very carefully before he set it down upon the table; and I could see that there was some strange little water-creature swimming about inside. At last the Doctor brought out a pound of sausages.

"Now," he said, "all we want is a frying-pan."

We went into the scullery and there we found some pots and pans hanging against the wall. The Doctor took down the frying-pan. It was quite rusty on the inside.

"Dear me, just look at that!" said he. "That's the worst of being away so long. The animals are very good and keep the house

wonderfully clean as far as they can. Dab-Dab is a perfect marvel as a housekeeper. But some things of course they can't manage. Never mind, we'll soon clean it up. You'll find some silver-sand down there, under the sink, Stubbins. Just hand it up to me, will you?"

In a few moments we had the pan all shiny and bright and the sausages were put over the kitchen-fire and a beautiful frying smell went all through the house.

While the Doctor was busy at the cooking I went and took another look at the funny little creature swimming about in the glass jar.

"What is this animal?" I asked.

"Oh that," said the Doctor, turning round—"that's a Wiff-Waff. Its full name is *hippocampus pippitopitus*. But the natives just call it a Wiff-Waff—on account of the way it waves its tail, swimming, I imagine. That's what I went on this last voyage for, to get that. You see I'm very busy just now trying to learn the language of the shellfish. They *have* languages, of that I feel sure. I can talk a little shark language and porpoise dialect myself. But what I particularly want to learn now is shellfish."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, you see, some of the shellfish are the oldest kind of animals in the world that we know of. We find their shells in the rocks—turned to stone—thousands of years old. So I feel quite sure that if I could only get to talk their language, I should be able to learn a whole lot about what the world was like ages and

ages and ages ago. You see?"

"But couldn't some of the other animals tell you as well?"

"I don't think so," said the Doctor, prodding the sausages with a fork. "To be sure, the monkeys I knew in Africa some time ago were very helpful in telling me about bygone days; but they only went back a thousand years or so. No, I am certain that the oldest history in the world is to be had from the shellfish—and from them only. You see most of the other animals that were alive in those very ancient times have now become extinct."

"Have you learned any shellfish language yet?" I asked.

"No. I've only just begun. I wanted this particular kind of a pipe-fish because he is half a shellfish and half an ordinary fish. I went all the way to the Eastern Mediterranean after him. But I'm very much afraid he isn't going to be a great deal of help to me. To tell you the truth, I'm rather disappointed in his appearance. He doesn't *look* very intelligent, does he?"

"No, he doesn't," I agreed.

"Ah," said the Doctor. "The sausages are done to a turn. Come along—hold your plate near and let me give you some."

Then we sat down at the kitchen-table and started a hearty meal.

It was a wonderful kitchen, that. I had many meals there afterwards and I found it a better place to eat in than the grandest dining-room in the world. It was so cozy and home-like and warm. It was so handy for the food too. You took it right off the fire, hot, and put it on the table and ate it. And you could

watch your toast toasting at the fender and see it didn't burn while you drank your soup. And if you had forgotten to put the salt on the table, you didn't have to get up and go into another room to fetch it; you just reached round and took the big wooden box off the dresser behind you. Then the fireplace—the biggest fireplace you ever saw—was like a room in itself. You could get right inside it even when the logs were burning and sit on the wide seats either side and roast chestnuts after the meal was over—or listen to the kettle singing, or tell stories, or look at picture-books by the light of the fire. It was a marvelous kitchen. It was like the Doctor, comfortable, sensible, friendly and solid.

While we were gobbling away, the door suddenly opened and in marched the duck, Dab-Dab, and the dog, Jip, dragging sheets and pillow-cases behind them over the clean tiled floor. The Doctor, seeing how surprised I was, explained:

"They're just going to air the bedding for me in front of the fire. Dab-Dab is a perfect treasure of a housekeeper; she never forgets anything. I had a sister once who used to keep house for me (poor, dear Sarah! I wonder how she's getting on—I haven't seen her in many years). But she wasn't nearly as good as Dab-Dab. Have another sausage?"

The Doctor turned and said a few words to the dog and duck in some strange talk and signs. They seemed to understand him perfectly.

"Can you talk in squirrel language?" I asked.

"Oh yes. That's quite an easy language," said the Doctor. "You

could learn that yourself without a great deal of trouble. But why do you ask?"

"Because I have a sick squirrel at home," I said. "I took it away from a hawk. But two of its legs are badly hurt and I wanted very much to have you see it, if you would. Shall I bring it to-morrow?"

"Well, if its leg is badly broken I think I had better see it to-night. It may be too late to do much; but I'll come home with you and take a look at it."

So presently we felt the clothes by the fire and mine were found to be quite dry. I took them upstairs to the bedroom and changed, and when I came down the Doctor was all ready waiting for me with his little black bag full of medicines and bandages.

"Come along," he said. "The rain has stopped now."

Outside it had grown bright again and the evening sky was all red with the setting sun; and thrushes were singing in the garden as we opened the gate to go down on to the road.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER
POLYNESIA

"I THINK your house is the most interesting house I was ever in," I said as we set off in the direction of the town. "May I come and see you again to-morrow?"

"Certainly," said the Doctor. "Come any day you like. To-morrow I'll show you the garden and my private zoo."

"Oh, have you a zoo?" I asked.

"Yes," said he. "The larger animals are too big for the house, so I keep them in a zoo in the garden. It is not a very big collection but it is interesting in its way."

"It must be splendid," I said, "to be able to talk all the languages of the different animals. Do you think I could ever learn to do it?"

"Oh surely," said the Doctor—"with practise. You have to be very patient, you know. You really ought to have Polynesia to start you. It was she who gave me my first lessons."

"Who is Polynesia?" I asked.

"Polynesia was a West African parrot I had. She isn't with me any more now," said the Doctor sadly.

"Why—is she dead?"

"Oh no," said the Doctor. "She is still living, I hope. But when we reached Africa she seemed so glad to get back to her own country. She wept for joy. And when the time came for me to

come back here I had not the heart to take her away from that sunny land—although, it is true, she did offer to come. I left her in Africa—Ah well! I have missed her terribly. She wept again when we left. But I think I did the right thing. She was one of the best friends I ever had. It was she who first gave me the idea of learning the animal languages and becoming an animal doctor. I often wonder if she remained happy in Africa, and whether I shall ever see her funny, old, solemn face again—Good old Polynesia! —A most extraordinary bird—Well, well!"

Just at that moment we heard the noise of some one running behind us; and turning round we saw Jip the dog rushing down the road after us, as fast as his legs could bring him. He seemed very excited about something, and as soon as he came up to us, he started barking and whining to the Doctor in a peculiar way. Then the Doctor too seemed to get all worked up and began talking and making queer signs to the dog. At length he turned to me, his face shining with happiness.

"Polynesia has come back!" he cried. "Imagine it. Jip says she has just arrived at the house. My! And it's five years since I saw her—Excuse me a minute."

He turned as if to go back home. But the parrot, Polynesia, was already flying towards us. The Doctor clapped his hands like a child getting a new toy; while the swarm of sparrows in the roadway fluttered, gossiping, up on to the fences, highly scandalized to see a gray and scarlet parrot skimming down an English lane.

On she came, straight on to the Doctor's shoulder, where she immediately began talking a steady stream in a language I could not understand. She seemed to have a terrible lot to say. And very soon the Doctor had forgotten all about me and my squirrel and Jip and everything else; till at length the bird clearly asked him something about me.

"Oh excuse me, Stubbins!" said the Doctor. "I was so interested listening to my old friend here. We must get on and see this squirrel of yours—Polynesia, this is Thomas Stubbins."

The parrot, on the Doctor's shoulder, nodded gravely towards me and then, to my great surprise, said quite plainly in English,

"How do you do? I remember the night you were born. It was a terribly cold winter. You were a very ugly baby."

"Stubbins is anxious to learn animal language," said the Doctor. "I was just telling him about you and the lessons you gave me when Jip ran up and told us you had arrived."

"Well," said the parrot, turning to me, "I may have started the Doctor learning but I never could have done even that, if he hadn't first taught me to understand what *I* was saying when I spoke English. You see, many parrots can talk like a person, but very few of them understand what they are saying. They just say it because—well, because they fancy it is smart or, because they know they will get crackers given them."

By this time we had turned and were going towards my home with Jip running in front and Polynesia still perched on the Doctor's shoulder. The bird chattered incessantly, mostly about

Africa; but now she spoke in English, out of politeness to me.

"How is Prince Bumpo getting on?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh, I'm glad you asked me," said Polynesia. "I almost forgot to tell you. What do you think?—*Bumpo is in England!*"

"In England!—You don't say!" cried the Doctor. "What on earth is he doing here?"

"His father, the king, sent him here to a place called—er—Bullford, I think it was—to study lessons."

"Bullford!—Bullford!" muttered the Doctor. "I never heard of the place—Oh, you mean Oxford."

"Yes, that's the place—Oxford," said Polynesia "I knew it had cattle in it somewhere. Oxford—that's the place he's gone to."

"Well, well," murmured the Doctor. "Fancy Bumpo studying at Oxford—Well, well!"

"There were great doings in Jolliginki when he left. He was scared to death to come. He was the first man from that country to go abroad. He thought he was going to be eaten by white cannibals or something. You know what those niggers are—that ignorant! Well!—But his father made him come. He said that all the black kings were sending their sons to Oxford now. It was the fashion, and he would have to go. Bumpo wanted to bring his six wives with him. But the king wouldn't let him do that either. Poor Bumpo went off in tears—and everybody in the palace was crying too. You never heard such a hullabaloo."

"Do you know if he ever went back in search of The Sleeping Beauty?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh yes," said Polynesia—"the day after you left. And a good thing for him he did: the king got to know about his helping you to escape; and he was dreadfully wild about it."

"And The Sleeping Beauty?—did he ever find her?"

"Well, he brought back something which he *said* was The Sleeping Beauty. Myself, I think it was an albino niggeress. She had red hair and the biggest feet you ever saw. But Bumpo was no end pleased with her and finally married her amid great rejoicings. The feastings lasted seven days. She became his chief wife and is now known out there as the Crown-Princess Bum*pah*—you accent the last syllable."

"And tell me, did he remain white?"

"Only for about three months," said the parrot. "After that his face slowly returned to its natural color. It was just as well. He was so conspicuous in his bathing-suit the way he was, with his face white and the rest of him black."

"And how is Chee-Chee getting on?—Chee-Chee," added the Doctor in explanation to me, "was a pet monkey I had years ago. I left him too in Africa when I came away."

"Well," said Polynesia frowning,—"Chee-Chee is not entirely happy. I saw a good deal of him the last few years. He got dreadfully homesick for you and the house and the garden. It's funny, but I was just the same way myself. You remember how crazy I was to get back to the dear old land? And Africa *is* a wonderful country—I don't care what anybody says. Well, I thought I was going to have a perfectly grand time. But somehow

—I don't know—after a few weeks it seemed to get tiresome. I just couldn't seem to settle down. Well, to make a long story short, one night I made up my mind that I'd come back here and find you. So I hunted up old Chee-Chee and told him about it. He said he didn't blame me a bit—felt exactly the same way himself. Africa was so deadly quiet after the life we had led with you. He missed the stories you used to tell us out of your animal books —and the chats we used to have sitting round the kitchen-fire on winter nights. The animals out there were very nice to us and all that. But somehow the dear kind creatures seemed a bit stupid. Chee-Chee said he had noticed it too. But I suppose it wasn't they who had changed; it was we who were different. When I left, poor old Chee-Chee broke down and cried. He said he felt as though his only friend were leaving him—though, as you know, he has simply millions of relatives there. He said it didn't seem fair that I should have wings to fly over here any time I liked, and him with no way to follow me. But mark my words, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he found a way to come—some day. He's a smart lad, is Chee-Chee."

At this point we arrived at my home. My father's shop was closed and the shutters were up; but my mother was standing at the door looking down the street.

"Good evening, Mrs. Stubbins," said the Doctor. "It is my fault your son is so late. I made him stay to supper while his clothes were drying. He was soaked to the skin; and so was I. We ran into one another in the storm and I insisted on his coming into

my house for shelter."

"I was beginning to get worried about him," said my mother. "I am thankful to you, Sir, for looking after him so well and bringing him home."

"Don't mention it—don't mention it," said the Doctor. "We have had a very interesting chat."

"Who might it be that I have the honor of addressing?" asked my mother staring at the gray parrot perched on the Doctor's shoulder.

"Oh, I'm John Dolittle. I dare say your husband will remember me. He made me some very excellent boots about four years ago. They really are splendid," added the Doctor, gazing down at his feet with great satisfaction.

"The Doctor has come to cure my squirrel, Mother," said I. "He knows all about animals."

"Oh, no," said the Doctor, "not all, Stubbins, not all about them by any means."

"It is very kind of you to come so far to look after his pet," said my mother. "Tom is always bringing home strange creatures from the woods and the fields."

"Is he?" said the Doctor. "Perhaps he will grow up to be a naturalist some day. Who knows?"

"Won't you come in?" asked my mother. "The place is a little untidy because I haven't finished the spring cleaning yet. But there's a nice fire burning in the parlor."

"Thank you!" said the Doctor. "What a charming home you

have!”

And after wiping his enormous boots very, very carefully on the mat, the great man passed into the house.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER
THE WOUNDED SQUIRREL

INSIDE we found my father busy practising on the flute beside the fire. This he always did, every evening, after his work was over.

The Doctor immediately began talking to him about flutes and piccolos and bassoons; and presently my father said,

"Perhaps you perform upon the flute yourself, Sir. Won't you play us a tune?"

"Well," said the Doctor, "it is a long time since I touched the instrument. But I would like to try. May I?"

Then the Doctor took the flute from my father and played and played and played. It was wonderful. My mother and father sat as still as statues, staring up at the ceiling as though they were in church; and even I, who didn't bother much about music except on the mouth-organ—even I felt all sad and cold and creepy and wished I had been a better boy.

"Oh I think that was just beautiful!" sighed my mother when at length the Doctor stopped.

"You are a great musician, Sir," said my father, "a very great musician. Won't you please play us something else?"

"Why certainly," said the Doctor—"Oh, but look here, I've forgotten all about the squirrel."

"I'll show him to you," I said. "He is upstairs in my room."

So I led the Doctor to my bedroom at the top of the house and showed him the squirrel in the packing-case filled with straw.

The animal, who had always seemed very much afraid of me —though I had tried hard to make him feel at home, sat up at once when the Doctor came into the room and started to chatter. The Doctor chattered back in the same way and the squirrel when he was lifted up to have his leg examined, appeared to be rather pleased than frightened.

I held a candle while the Doctor tied the leg up in what he called "splints," which he made out of match-sticks with his pen-knife.

"I think you will find that his leg will get better now in a very short time," said the Doctor closing up his bag. "Don't let him run about for at least two weeks yet, but keep him in the open air and cover him up with dry leaves if the nights get cool. He tells me he is rather lonely here, all by himself, and is wondering how his wife and children are getting on. I have assured him you are a man to be trusted; and I will send a squirrel who lives in my garden to find out how his family are and to bring him news of them. He must be kept cheerful at all costs. Squirrels are naturally a very cheerful, active race. It is very hard for them to lie still doing nothing. But you needn't worry about him. He will be all right."

Then we went back again to the parlor and my mother and father kept him playing the flute till after ten o'clock.

Although my parents both liked the Doctor tremendously

from the first moment that they saw him, and were very proud to have him come and play to us (for we were really terribly poor) they did not realize then what a truly great man he was one day to become. Of course now, when almost everybody in the whole world has heard about Doctor Dolittle and his books, if you were to go to that little house in Puddleby where my father had his cobbler's shop you would see, set in the wall over the old-fashioned door, a stone with writing on it which says: "JOHN DOLITTLE, THE FAMOUS NATURALIST, PLAYED THE FLUTE IN THIS HOUSE IN THE YEAR 1839."

I often look back upon that night long, long ago. And if I close my eyes and think hard I can see that parlor just as it was then: a funny little man in coat-tails, with a round kind face, playing away on the flute in front of the fire; my mother on one side of him and my father on the other, holding their breath and listening with their eyes shut; myself, with Jip, squatting on the carpet at his feet, staring into the coals; and Polynesia perched on the mantlepiece beside his shabby high hat, gravely swinging her head from side to side in time to the music. I see it all, just as though it were before me now.

And then I remember how, after we had seen the Doctor out at the front door, we all came back into the parlor and talked about him till it was still later; and even after I did go to bed (I had never stayed up so late in my life before) I dreamed about him and a band of strange clever animals that played flutes and fiddles and drums the whole night through.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER
SHELLFISH TALK

THE next morning, although I had gone to bed so late the night before, I was up frightfully early. The first sparrows were just beginning to chirp sleepily on the slates outside my attic window when I jumped out of bed and scrambled into my clothes.

I could hardly wait to get back to the little house with the big garden—to see the Doctor and his private zoo. For the first time in my life I forgot all about breakfast; and creeping down the stairs on tip-toe, so as not to wake my mother and father, I opened the front door and popped out into the empty, silent street.

When I got to the Doctor's gate I suddenly thought that perhaps it was too early to call on any one: and I began to wonder if the Doctor would be up yet. I looked into the garden. No one seemed to be about. So I opened the gate quietly and went inside.

As I turned to the left to go down a path between some hedges, I heard a voice quite close to me say,

"Good morning. How early you are!"

I turned around, and there, sitting on the top of a privet hedge, was the gray parrot, Polynesia.

"Good morning," I said. "I suppose I am rather early. Is the Doctor still in bed?"

"Oh no," said Polynesia. "He has been up an hour and a half. You'll find him in the house somewhere. The front door is open.

Just push it and go in. He is sure to be in the kitchen cooking breakfast—or working in his study. Walk right in. I am waiting to see the sun rise. But upon my word I believe it's forgotten to rise. It is an awful climate, this. Now if we were in Africa the world would be blazing with sunlight at this hour of the morning. Just see that mist rolling over those cabbages. It is enough to give you rheumatism to look at it. Beastly climate—Beastly! Really I don't know why anything but frogs ever stay in England—Well, don't let me keep you. Run along and see the Doctor."

"Thank you," I said. "I'll go and look for him."

When I opened the front door I could smell bacon frying, so I made my way to the kitchen. There I discovered a large kettle boiling away over the fire and some bacon and eggs in a dish upon the hearth. It seemed to me that the bacon was getting all dried up with the heat. So I pulled the dish a little further away from the fire and went on through the house looking for the Doctor.

I found him at last in the Study. I did not know then that it was called the Study. It was certainly a very interesting room, with telescopes and microscopes and all sorts of other strange things which I did not understand about but wished I did. Hanging on the walls were pictures of animals and fishes and strange plants and collections of birds' eggs and sea-shells in glass cases.

The Doctor was standing at the main table in his dressing-gown. At first I thought he was washing his face. He had a square glass box before him full of water. He was holding one ear under the water while he covered the other with his left hand. As I came

in he stood up.

"Good morning, Stubbins," said he. "Going to be a nice day, don't you think? I've just been listening to the Wiff-Waff. But he is very disappointing—very."

"Why?" I said. "Didn't you find that he has any language at all?"

"Oh yes," said the Doctor, "he has a language. But it is such a poor language—only a few words, like 'yes' and 'no'—'hot' and 'cold.' That's all he can say. It's very disappointing. You see he really belongs to two different families of fishes. I thought he was going to be tremendously helpful—Well, well!"

"I suppose," said I, "that means he hasn't very much sense—if his language is only two or three words?"

"Yes, I suppose it does. Possibly it is the kind of life he leads. You see, they are very rare now, these Wiff-Waffs—very rare and very solitary. They swim around in the deepest parts of the ocean entirely by themselves—always alone. So I presume they really don't need to talk much."

"Perhaps some kind of a bigger shellfish would talk more," I said. "After all, he is very small, isn't he?"

"Yes," said the Doctor, "that's true. Oh I have no doubt that there are shellfish who are good talkers—not the least doubt. But the big shellfish—the biggest of them, are so hard to catch. They are only to be found in the deep parts of the sea; and as they don't swim very much, but just crawl along the floor of the ocean most of the time, they are very seldom taken in nets. I do wish I could

find some way of going down to the bottom of the sea. I could learn a lot if I could only do that. But we are forgetting all about breakfast—Have you had breakfast yet, Stubbins?"

I told the Doctor that I had forgotten all about it and he at once led the way into the kitchen.

"Yes," he said, as he poured the hot water from the kettle into the tea-pot, "if a man could only manage to get right down to the bottom of the sea, and live there a while, he would discover some wonderful things—things that people have never dreamed of."

"But men do go down, don't they?" I asked—"divers and people like that?"

"Oh yes, to be sure," said the Doctor. "Divers go down. I've been down myself in a diving-suit, for that matter. But my!—they only go where the sea is shallow. Divers can't go down where it is really deep. What I would like to do is to go down to the great depths—where it is miles deep—Well, well, I dare say I shall manage it some day. Let me give you another cup of tea."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER
ARE YOU A GOOD NOTICER?

JUST at that moment Polynesia came into the room and said something to the Doctor in bird language. Of course I did not understand what it was. But the Doctor at once put down his knife and fork and left the room.

"You know it is an awful shame," said the parrot as soon as the Doctor had closed the door. "Directly he comes back home, all the animals over the whole countryside get to hear of it and every sick cat and mangy rabbit for miles around comes to see him and ask his advice. Now there's a big fat hare outside at the back door with a squawking baby. Can she see the Doctor, please!—Thinks it's going to have convulsions. Stupid little thing's been eating Deadly Nightshade again, I suppose. The animals are *so* inconsiderate at times—especially the mothers. They come round and call the Doctor away from his meals and wake him out of his bed at all hours of the night. I don't know how he stands it—really I don't. Why, the poor man never gets any peace at all! I've told him time and again to have special hours for the animals to come. But he is so frightfully kind and considerate. He never refuses to see them if there is anything really wrong with them. He says the urgent cases must be seen at once."

"Why don't some of the animals go and see the other doctors?" I asked.

"Oh Good Gracious!" exclaimed the parrot, tossing her head scornfully. "Why, there aren't any other animal-doctors—not real doctors. Oh of course there *are* those vet persons, to be sure. But, bless you, they're no good. You see, they can't understand the animals' language; so how can you expect them to be any use? Imagine yourself, or your father, going to see a doctor who could not understand a word you say—nor even tell you in your own language what you must do to get well! Poof!—those vets! They're that stupid, you've no idea!—Put the Doctor's bacon down by the fire, will you?—to keep hot till he comes back."

"Do you think I would ever be able to learn the language of the animals?" I asked, laying the plate upon the hearth.

"Well, it all depends," said Polynesia. "Are you clever at lessons?"

"I don't know," I answered, feeling rather ashamed. "You see, I've never been to school. My father is too poor to send me."

"Well," said the parrot, "I don't suppose you have really missed much—to judge from what *I* have seen of school-boys. But listen: are you a good noticer?—Do you notice things well? I mean, for instance, supposing you saw two cock-starlings on an apple-tree, and you only took one good look at them—would you be able to tell one from the other if you saw them again the next day?"

"I don't know," I said. "I've never tried."

"Well that," said Polynesia, brushing some crumbs off the corner of the table with her left foot—"that is what you call

powers of observation—noticing the small things about birds and animals: the way they walk and move their heads and flip their wings; the way they sniff the air and twitch their whiskers and wiggle their tails. You have to notice all those little things if you want to learn animal language. For you see, lots of the animals hardly talk at all with their tongues; they use their breath or their tails or their feet instead. That is because many of them, in the olden days when lions and tigers were more plentiful, were afraid to make a noise for fear the savage creatures heard them. Birds, of course, didn't care; for they always had wings to fly away with. But that is the first thing to remember: being a good noticer is terribly important in learning animal language."

"It sounds pretty hard," I said.

"You'll have to be very patient," said Polynesia. "It takes a long time to say even a few words properly. But if you come here often I'll give you a few lessons myself. And once you get started you'll be surprised how fast you get on. It would indeed be a good thing if you could learn. Because then you could do some of the work for the Doctor—I mean the easier work, like bandaging and giving pills. Yes, yes, that's a good idea of mine. 'Twould be a great thing if the poor man could get some help—and some rest. It is a scandal the way he works. I see no reason why you shouldn't be able to help him a great deal—That is, if you are really interested in animals."

"Oh, I'd love that!" I cried. "Do you think the Doctor would let me?"

“Certainly,” said Polynesia—“as soon as you have learned something about doctoring. I’ll speak of it to him myself—Sh! I hear him coming. Quick—bring his bacon back on to the table.”

THE NINTH CHAPTER
THE GARDEN OF DREAMS

WHEN breakfast was over the Doctor took me out to show me the garden. Well, if the house had been interesting, the garden was a hundred times more so. Of all the gardens I have ever seen that was the most delightful, the most fascinating. At first you did not realize how big it was. You never seemed to come to the end of it. When at last you were quite sure that you had seen it all, you would peer over a hedge, or turn a corner, or look up some steps, and there was a whole new part you never expected to find.

It had everything—everything a garden can have, or ever has had. There were wide, wide lawns with carved stone seats, green with moss. Over the lawns hung weeping-willows, and their feathery bough-tips brushed the velvet grass when they swung with the wind. The old flagged paths had high, clipped, yew hedges either side of them, so that they looked like the narrow streets of some old town; and through the hedges, doorways had been made; and over the doorways were shapes like vases and peacocks and half-moons all trimmed out of the living trees. There was a lovely marble fish-pond with golden carp and blue water-lilies in it and big green frogs. A high brick wall alongside the kitchen garden was all covered with pink and yellow peaches ripening in the sun. There was a wonderful great oak, hollow in the trunk, big enough for four men to hide inside. Many summer-

houses there were, too—some of wood and some of stone; and one of them was full of books to read. In a corner, among some rocks and ferns, was an outdoor fire-place, where the Doctor used to fry liver and bacon when he had a notion to take his meals in the open air. There was a couch as well on which he used to sleep, it seems, on warm summer nights when the nightingales were singing at their best; it had wheels on it so it could be moved about under any tree they sang in. But the thing that fascinated me most of all was a tiny little tree-house, high up in the top branches of a great elm, with a long rope ladder leading to it. The Doctor told me he used it for looking at the moon and the stars through a telescope.

It was the kind of a garden where you could wander and explore for days and days—always coming upon something new, always glad to find the old spots over again. That first time that I saw the Doctor's garden I was so charmed by it that I felt I would like to live in it—always and always—and never go outside of it again. For it had everything within its walls to give happiness, to make living pleasant—to keep the heart at peace. It was the Garden of Dreams.

One peculiar thing I noticed immediately I came into it; and that was what a lot of birds there were about. Every tree seemed to have two or three nests in it. And heaps of other wild creatures appeared to be making themselves at home there, too. Stoats and tortoises and dormice seemed to be quite common, and not in the least shy. Toads of different colors and sizes hopped about the

lawn as though it belonged to them. Green lizards (which were very rare in Puddleby) sat up on the stones in the sunlight and blinked at us. Even snakes were to be seen.

"You need not be afraid of them," said the Doctor, noticing that I started somewhat when a large black snake wiggled across the path right in front of us. "These fellows are not poisonous. They do a great deal of good in keeping down many kinds of garden-pests. I play the flute to them sometimes in the evening. They love it. Stand right up on their tails and carry on no end. Funny thing, their taste for music."

"Why do all these animals come and live here?" I asked. "I never saw a garden with so many creatures in it."

"Well, I suppose it's because they get the kind of food they like; and nobody worries or disturbs them. And then, of course, they know me. And if they or their children get sick I presume they find it handy to be living in a doctor's garden—Look! You see that sparrow on the sundial, swearing at the blackbird down below? Well, he has been coming here every summer for years. He comes from London. The country sparrows round about here are always laughing at him. They say he chirps with such a Cockney accent. He is a most amusing bird—very brave but very cheeky. He loves nothing better than an argument, but he always ends it by getting rude. He is a real city bird. In London he lives around St. Paul's Cathedral. 'Cheapside,' we call him."

"Are all these birds from the country round here?" I asked.

"Most of them," said the Doctor. "But a few rare ones visit

me every year who ordinarily never come near England at all. For instance, that handsome little fellow hovering over the snapdragon there, he's a Ruby-throated Humming-bird. Comes from America. Strictly speaking, he has no business in this climate at all. It is too cool. I make him sleep in the kitchen at night. Then every August, about the last week of the month, I have a Purple Bird-of-Paradise come all the way from Brazil to see me. She is a very great swell. Hasn't arrived yet of course. And there are a few others, foreign birds from the tropics mostly, who drop in on me in the course of the summer months. But come, I must show you the zoo."

THE TENTH CHAPTER
THE PRIVATE ZOO

I DID not think there could be anything left in that garden which we had not seen. But the Doctor took me by the arm and started off down a little narrow path and after many windings and twistings and turnings we found ourselves before a small door in a high stone wall. The Doctor pushed it open.

Inside was still another garden. I had expected to find cages with animals inside them. But there were none to be seen. Instead there were little stone houses here and there all over the garden; and each house had a window and a door. As we walked in, many of these doors opened and animals came running out to us evidently expecting food.

"Haven't the doors any locks on them?" I asked the Doctor.

"Oh yes," he said, "every door has a lock. But in my zoo the doors open from the inside, not from the out. The locks are only there so the animals can go and shut themselves *in* any time they want to get away from the annoyance of other animals or from people who might come here. Every animal in this zoo stays here because he likes it, not because he is made to."

"They all look very happy and clean," I said. "Would you mind telling me the names of some of them?"

"Certainly. Well now: that funny-looking thing with plates on his back, nosing under the brick over there, is a South

American armadillo. The little chap talking to him is a Canadian woodchuck. They both live in those holes you see at the foot of the wall. The two little beasts doing antics in the pond are a pair of Russian minks—and that reminds me: I must go and get them some herrings from the town before noon—it is early-closing today. That animal just stepping out of his house is an antelope, one of the smaller South African kinds. Now let us move to the other side of those bushes there and I will show you some more."

"Are those deer over there?" I asked.

"*Deer!*" said the Doctor. "Where do you mean?"

"Over there," I said, pointing—"nibbling the grass border of the bed. There are two of them."

"Oh, that," said the Doctor with a smile. "That isn't two animals: that's one animal with two heads—the only two-headed animal in the world. It's called the 'pushmi-pullyu.' I brought him from Africa. He's very tame—acts as a kind of night-watchman for my zoo. He only sleeps with one head at a time, you see—very handy—the other head stays awake all night."

"Have you any lions or tigers?" I asked as we moved on.

"No," said the Doctor. "It wouldn't be possible to keep them here—and I wouldn't keep them even if I could. If I had my way, Stubbins, there wouldn't be a single lion or tiger in captivity anywhere in the world. They never take to it. They're never happy. They never settle down. They are always thinking of the big countries they have left behind. You can see it in their eyes, dreaming—dreaming always of the great open spaces where

they were born; dreaming of the deep, dark jungles where their mothers first taught them how to scent and track the deer. And what are they given in exchange for all this?" asked the Doctor, stopping in his walk and growing all red and angry—"What are they given in exchange for the glory of an African sunrise, for the twilight breeze whispering through the palms, for the green shade of the matted, tangled vines, for the cool, big-starred nights of the desert, for the patter of the waterfall after a hard day's hunt? What, I ask you, are they given in exchange for *these*? Why, a bare cage with iron bars; an ugly piece of dead meat thrust in to them once a day; and a crowd of fools to come and stare at them with open mouths!—No, Stubbins. Lions and tigers, the Big Hunters, should never, never be seen in zoos."

The Doctor seemed to have grown terribly serious—almost sad. But suddenly his manner changed again and he took me by the arm with his same old cheerful smile.

"But we haven't seen the butterfly-houses yet—nor the aquariums. Come along. I am very proud of my butterfly-houses."

Off we went again and came presently into a hedged enclosure. Here I saw several big huts made of fine wire netting, like cages. Inside the netting all sorts of beautiful flowers were growing in the sun, with butterflies skimming over them. The Doctor pointed to the end of one of the huts where little boxes with holes in them stood in a row.

"Those are the hatching-boxes," said he. "There I put the

different kinds of caterpillars. And as soon as they turn into butterflies and moths they come out into these flower-gardens to feed."

"Do butterflies have a language?" I asked.

"Oh I fancy they have," said the Doctor—"and the beetles too. But so far I haven't succeeded in learning much about insect languages. I have been too busy lately trying to master the shellfish-talk. I mean to take it up though."

At that moment Polynesia joined us and said, "Doctor, there are two guinea-pigs at the back door. They say they have run away from the boy who kept them because they didn't get the right stuff to eat. They want to know if you will take them in."

"All right," said the Doctor. "Show them the way to the zoo. Give them the house on the left, near the gate—the one the black fox had. Tell them what the rules are and give them a square meal —Now, Stubbins, we will go on to the aquariums. And first of all I must show you my big, glass, sea-water tank where I keep the shellfish."

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER
MY SCHOOLMASTER, POLYNESIA

WELL, there were not many days after that, you may be sure, when I did not come to see my new friend. Indeed I was at his house practically all day and every day. So that one evening my mother asked me jokingly why I did not take my bed over there and live at the Doctor's house altogether.

After a while I think I got to be quite useful to the Doctor, feeding his pets for him; helping to make new houses and fences for the zoo; assisting with the sick animals that came; doing all manner of odd jobs about the place. So that although I enjoyed it all very much (it was indeed like living in a new world) I really think the Doctor would have missed me if I had not come so often.

And all this time Polynesia came with me wherever I went, teaching me bird language and showing me how to understand the talking signs of the animals. At first I thought I would never be able to learn at all—it seemed so difficult. But the old parrot was wonderfully patient with me—though I could see that occasionally she had hard work to keep her temper.

Soon I began to pick up the strange chatter of the birds and to understand the funny talking antics of the dogs. I used to practise listening to the mice behind the wainscot after I went to bed, and watching the cats on the roofs and pigeons in the market-square

of Puddleby.

And the days passed very quickly—as they always do when life is pleasant; and the days turned into weeks, and weeks into months; and soon the roses in the Doctor's garden were losing their petals and yellow leaves lay upon the wide green lawn. For the summer was nearly gone.

One day Polynesia and I were talking in the library. This was a fine long room with a grand mantlepiece and the walls were covered from the ceiling to the floor with shelves full of books: books of stories, books on gardening, books about medicine, books of travel; these I loved—and especially the Doctor's great atlas with all its maps of the different countries of the world.

This afternoon Polynesia was showing me the books about animals which John Dolittle had written himself.

"My!" I said, "what a lot of books the Doctor has—all the way around the room! Goodness! I wish I could read! It must be tremendously interesting. Can you read, Polynesia?"

"Only a little," said she. "Be careful how you turn those pages—don't tear them. No, I really don't get time enough for reading—much. That letter there is a *k* and this is a *b*."

"What does this word under the picture mean?" I asked.

"Let me see," she said, and started spelling it out. "B-A-B-O-O-N—that's *Monkey*. Reading isn't nearly as hard as it looks, once you know the letters."

"Polynesia," I said, "I want to ask you something very important."

"What is it, my boy?" said she, smoothing down the feathers of her right wing. Polynesia often spoke to me in a very patronizing way. But I did not mind it from her. After all, she was nearly two hundred years old; and I was only ten.

"Listen," I said, "my mother doesn't think it is right that I come here for so many meals. And I was going to ask you: supposing I did a whole lot more work for the Doctor—why couldn't I come and live here altogether? You see, instead of being paid like a regular gardener or workman, I would get my bed and meals in exchange for the work I did. What do you think?"

"You mean you want to be a proper assistant to the Doctor, is that it?"

"Yes. I suppose that's what you call it," I answered. "You know you said yourself that you thought I could be very useful to him."

"Well"—she thought a moment—"I really don't see why not. But is this what you want to be when you grow up, a naturalist?"

"Yes," I said, "I have made up my mind. I would sooner be a naturalist than anything else in the world."

"Humph!—Let's go and speak to the Doctor about it," said Polynesia. "He's in the next room—in the study. Open the door very gently—he may be working and not want to be disturbed."

I opened the door quietly and peeped in. The first thing I saw was an enormous black retriever dog sitting in the middle of the hearth-rug with his ears cocked up, listening to the Doctor who was reading aloud to him from a letter.

"What *is* the Doctor doing?" I asked Polynesia in a whisper.

"Oh, the dog has had a letter from his mistress and he has brought it to the Doctor to read for him. That's all. He belongs to a funny little girl called Minnie Dooley, who lives on the other side of the town. She has pigtails down her back. She and her brother have gone away to the seaside for the Summer; and the old retriever is heart-broken while the children are gone. So they write letters to him—in English of course. And as the old dog doesn't understand them, he brings them here, and the Doctor turns them into dog language for him. I think Minnie must have written that she is coming back—to judge from the dog's excitement. Just look at him carrying on!"

Indeed the retriever seemed to be suddenly overcome with joy. As the Doctor finished the letter the old dog started barking at the top of his voice, wagging his tail wildly and jumping about the study. He took the letter in his mouth and ran out of the room snorting hard and mumbling to himself.

"He's going down to meet the coach," whispered Polynesia. "That dog's devotion to those children is more than I can understand. You should see Minnie! She's the most conceited little minx that ever walked. She squints too."

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER
MY GREAT IDEA

PRESENTLY the Doctor looked up and saw us at the door.

"Oh—come in, Stubbins," said he, "did you wish to speak to me? Come in and take a chair."

"Doctor," I said, "I want to be a naturalist—like you—when I grow up."

"Oh you do, do you?" murmured the Doctor. "Humph!—Well!—Dear me!—You don't say!—Well, well! Have you er—have you spoken to your mother and father about it?"

"No, not yet," I said. "I want you to speak to them for me. You would do it better. I want to be your helper—your assistant, if you'll have me. Last night my mother was saying that she didn't consider it right for me to come here so often for meals. And I've been thinking about it a good deal since. Couldn't we make some arrangement—couldn't I work for my meals and sleep here?"

"But my dear Stubbins," said the Doctor, laughing, "you are quite welcome to come here for three meals a day all the year round. I'm only too glad to have you. Besides, you do do a lot of work, as it is. I've often felt that I ought to pay you for what you do—But what arrangement was it that you thought of?"

"Well, I thought," said I, "that perhaps you would come and see my mother and father and tell them that if they let me live here with you and work hard, that you will teach me to read and

write. You see my mother is awfully anxious to have me learn reading and writing. And besides, I couldn't be a proper naturalist without, could I?"

"Oh, I don't know so much about that," said the Doctor. "It is nice, I admit, to be able to read and write. But naturalists are not all alike, you know. For example: this young fellow Charles Darwin that people are talking about so much now—he's a Cambridge graduate—reads and writes very well. And then Cuvier—he used to be a tutor. But listen, the greatest naturalist of them all doesn't even know how to write his own name nor to read the *A B C*."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"He is a mysterious person," said the Doctor—"a very mysterious person. His name is Long Arrow, the son of Golden Arrow. He is a Red Indian."

"Have you ever seen him?" I asked.

"No," said the Doctor, "I've never seen him. No white man has ever met him. I fancy Mr. Darwin doesn't even know that he exists. He lives almost entirely with the animals and with the different tribes of Indians—usually somewhere among the mountains of Peru. Never stays long in one place. Goes from tribe to tribe, like a sort of Indian tramp."

"How do you know so much about him?" I asked—"if you've never even seen him?"

"The Purple Bird-of-Paradise," said the Doctor—"she told me all about him. She says he is a perfectly marvelous naturalist.

I got her to take a message to him for me last time she was here. I am expecting her back any day now. I can hardly wait to see what answer she has brought from him. It is already almost the last week of August. I do hope nothing has happened to her on the way."

"But why do the animals and birds come to you when they are sick?" I said—"Why don't they go to him, if he is so very wonderful?"

"It seems that my methods are more up to date," said the Doctor. "But from what the Purple Bird-of-Paradise tells me, Long Arrow's knowledge of natural history must be positively tremendous. His specialty is botany—plants and all that sort of thing. But he knows a lot about birds and animals too. He's very good on bees and beetles—But now tell me, Stubbins, are you quite sure that you really want to be a naturalist?"

"Yes," said I, "my mind is made up."

"Well you know, it isn't a very good profession for making money. Not at all, it isn't. Most of the good naturalists don't make any money whatever. All they do is *spend* money, buying butterfly-nets and cases for birds' eggs and things. It is only now, after I have been a naturalist for many years, that I am beginning to make a little money from the books I write."

"I don't care about money," I said. "I want to be a naturalist. Won't you please come and have dinner with my mother and father next Thursday—I told them I was going to ask you—and then you can talk to them about it. You see, there's another thing:

if I'm living with you, and sort of belong to your house and business, I shall be able to come with you next time you go on a voyage."

"Oh, I see," said he, smiling. "So you want to come on a voyage with me, do you?—Ah hah!"

"I want to go on all your voyages with you. It would be much easier for you if you had someone to carry the butterfly-nets and note-books. Wouldn't it now?"

For a long time the Doctor sat thinking, drumming on the desk with his fingers, while I waited, terribly impatiently, to see what he was going to say.

At last he shrugged his shoulders and stood up.

"Well, Stubbins," said he, "I'll come and talk it over with you and your parents next Thursday. And—well, we'll see. We'll see. Give your mother and father my compliments and thank them for their invitation, will you?"

Then I tore home like the wind to tell my mother that the Doctor had promised to come.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER
A TRAVELER ARRIVES

THE next day I was sitting on the wall of the Doctor's garden after tea, talking to Dab-Dab. I had now learned so much from Polynesia that I could talk to most birds and some animals without a great deal of difficulty. I found Dab-Dab a very nice, old, motherly bird—though not nearly so clever and interesting as Polynesia. She had been housekeeper for the Doctor many years now.

Well, as I was saying, the old duck and I were sitting on the flat top of the garden-wall that evening, looking down into the Oxenthorpe Road below. We were watching some sheep being driven to market in Puddleby; and Dab-Dab had just been telling me about the Doctor's adventures in Africa. For she had gone on a voyage with him to that country long ago.

Suddenly I heard a curious distant noise down the road, towards the town. It sounded like a lot of people cheering. I stood up on the wall to see if I could make out what was coming. Presently there appeared round a bend a great crowd of school-children following a very ragged, curious-looking woman.

"What in the world can it be?" cried Dab-Dab.

The children were all laughing and shouting. And certainly the woman they were following was most extraordinary. She had very long arms and the most stooping shoulders I have ever seen.

She wore a straw hat on the side of her head with poppies on it; and her skirt was so long for her it dragged on the ground like a ball-gown's train. I could not see anything of her face because of the wide hat pulled over her eyes. But as she got nearer to us and the laughing of the children grew louder, I noticed that her hands were very dark in color, and hairy, like a witch's.

Then all of a sudden Dab-Dab at my side startled me by crying out in a loud voice,

"Why, it's Chee-Chee!—Chee-Chee come back at last! How dare those children tease him! I'll give the little imps something to laugh at!"

And she flew right off the wall down into the road and made straight for the children, squawking away in a most terrifying fashion and pecking at their feet and legs. The children made off down the street back to the town as hard as they could run.

The strange-looking figure in the straw hat stood gazing after them a moment and then came wearily up to the gate. It didn't bother to undo the latch but just climbed right over the gate as though it were something in the way. And then I noticed that it took hold of the bars with its feet, so that it really had four hands to climb with. But it was only when I at last got a glimpse of the face under the hat that I could be really sure it was a monkey.

Chee-Chee—for it was he—frowned at me suspiciously from the top of the gate, as though he thought I was going to laugh at him like the other boys and girls. Then he dropped into the garden on the inside and immediately started taking off his

clothes. He tore the straw hat in two and threw it down into the road. Then he took off his bodice and skirt, jumped on them savagely and began kicking them round the front garden.

Presently I heard a screech from the house, and out flew Polynesia, followed by the Doctor and Jip.

"Chee-Chee!—Chee-Chee!" shouted the parrot. "You've come at last! I always told the Doctor you'd find a way. How ever did you do it?"

They all gathered round him shaking him by his four hands, laughing and asking him a million questions at once. Then they all started back for the house.

"Run up to my bedroom, Stubbins," said the Doctor, turning to me. "You'll find a bag of peanuts in the small left-hand drawer of the bureau. I have always kept them there in case he might come back unexpectedly some day. And wait a minute—see if Dab-Dab has any bananas in the pantry. Chee-Chee hasn't had a banana, he tells me, in two months."

When I came down again to the kitchen I found everybody listening attentively to the monkey who was telling the story of his journey from Africa.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER
CHEE-CHEE'S VOYAGE

It seems that after Polynesia had left, Chee-Chee had grown more homesick than ever for the Doctor and the little house in Puddleby. At last he had made up his mind that by hook or crook he would follow her. And one day, going down to the seashore, he saw a lot of people, black and white, getting on to a ship that was coming to England. He tried to get on too. But they turned him back and drove him away. And presently he noticed a whole big family of funny people passing on to the ship. And one of the children in this family reminded Chee-Chee of a cousin of his with whom he had once been in love. So he said to himself, "That girl looks just as much like a monkey as I look like a girl. If I could only get some clothes to wear I might easily slip on to the ship amongst these families, and people would take me for a girl. Good idea!"

So he went off to a town that was quite close, and hopping in through an open window he found a skirt and bodice lying on a chair. They belonged to a fashionable black lady who was taking a bath. Chee-Chee put them on. Next he went back to the seashore, mingled with the crowd there and at last sneaked safely on to the big ship. Then he thought he had better hide, for fear people might look at him too closely. And he stayed hidden all the time the ship was sailing to England—only coming out at

night, when everybody was asleep, to find food.

When he reached England and tried to get off the ship, the sailors saw at last that he was only a monkey dressed up in girl's clothes; and they wanted to keep him for a pet. But he managed to give them the slip; and once he was on shore, he dived into the crowd and got away. But he was still a long distance from Puddleby and had to come right across the whole breadth of England.

He had a terrible time of it. Whenever he passed through a town all the children ran after him in a crowd, laughing; and often silly people caught hold of him and tried to stop him, so that he had to run up lamp-posts and climb to chimney-pots to escape from them. At night he used to sleep in ditches or barns or anywhere he could hide; and he lived on the berries he picked from the hedges and the cob-nuts that grew in the copses. At length, after many adventures and narrow squeaks, he saw the tower of Puddleby Church and he knew that at last he was near his old home.

When Chee-Chee had finished his story he ate six bananas without stopping and drank a whole bowlful of milk.

"My!" he said, "why wasn't I born with wings, like Polynesia, so I could fly here? You've no idea how I grew to hate that hat and skirt. I've never been so uncomfortable in my life. All the way from Bristol here, if the wretched hat wasn't falling off my head or catching in the trees, those beastly skirts were tripping me up and getting wound round everything. What on earth do women

wear those things for? Goodness, I was glad to see old Puddleby this morning when I climbed over the hill by Bellaby's farm!"

"Your bed on top of the plate-rack in the scullery is all ready for you," said the Doctor. "We never had it disturbed in case you might come back."

"Yes," said Dab-Dab, "and you can have the old smoking-jacket of the Doctor's which you used to use as a blanket, in case it is cold in the night."

"Thanks," said Chee-Chee. "It's good to be back in the old house again. Everything's just the same as when I left—except the clean roller-towel on the back of the door there—that's new—Well, I think I'll go to bed now. I need sleep."

Then we all went out of the kitchen into the scullery and watched Chee-Chee climb the plate-rack like a sailor going up a mast. On the top, he curled himself up, pulled the old smoking-jacket over him, and in a minute he was snoring peacefully.

"Good old Chee-Chee!" whispered the Doctor. "I'm glad he's back."

"Yes—good old Chee-Chee!" echoed Dab-Dab and Polynesia.

Then we all tip-toed out of the scullery and closed the door very gently behind us.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER
I BECOME A DOCTOR'S ASSISTANT

WHEN Thursday evening came there was great excitement at our house. My mother had asked me what were the Doctor's favorite dishes, and I had told her: spare ribs, sliced beet-root, fried bread, shrimps and treacle-tart. To-night she had them all on the table waiting for him; and she was now fussing round the house to see if everything was tidy and in readiness for his coming.

At last we heard a knock upon the door, and of course it was I who got there first to let him in.

The Doctor had brought his own flute with him this time. And after supper was over (which he enjoyed very much) the table was cleared away and the washing-up left in the kitchen-sink till the next day. Then the Doctor and my father started playing duets.

They got so interested in this that I began to be afraid that they would never come to talking over my business. But at last the Doctor said,

"Your son tells me that he is anxious to become a naturalist."

And then began a long talk which lasted far into the night. At first both my mother and father were rather against the idea—as they had been from the beginning. They said it was only a boyish whim, and that I would get tired of it very soon. But after the matter had been talked over from every side, the Doctor turned

to my father and said,

"Well now, supposing, Mr. Stubbins, that your son came to me for two years—that is, until he is twelve years old. During those two years he will have time to see if he is going to grow tired of it or not. Also during that time, I will promise to teach him reading and writing and perhaps a little arithmetic as well. What do you say to that?"

"I don't know," said my father, shaking his head. "You are very kind and it is a handsome offer you make, Doctor. But I feel that Tommy ought to be learning some trade by which he can earn his living later on."

Then my mother spoke up. Although she was nearly in tears at the prospect of my leaving her house while I was still so young, she pointed out to my father that this was a grand chance for me to get learning.

"Now Jacob," she said, "you know that many lads in the town have been to the Grammar School till they were fourteen or fifteen years old. Tommy can easily spare these two years for his education; and if he learns no more than to read and write, the time will not be lost. Though goodness knows," she added, getting out her handkerchief to cry, "the house will seem terribly empty when he's gone."

"I will take care that he comes to see you, Mrs. Stubbins," said the Doctor—"every day, if you like. After all, he will not be very far away."

Well, at length my father gave in; and it was agreed that I

was to live with the Doctor and work for him for two years in exchange for learning to read and write and for my board and lodging.

"Of course," added the Doctor, "while I have money I will keep Tommy in clothes as well. But money is a very irregular thing with me; sometimes I have some, and then sometimes I haven't."

"You are very good, Doctor," said my mother, drying her tears. "It seems to me that Tommy is a very fortunate boy."

And then, thoughtless, selfish little imp that I was, I leaned over and whispered in the Doctor's ear,

"Please don't forget to say something about the voyages."

"Oh, by the way," said John Dolittle, "of course occasionally my work requires me to travel. You will have no objection, I take it, to your son's coming with me?"

My poor mother looked up sharply, more unhappy and anxious than ever at this new turn; while I stood behind the Doctor's chair, my heart thumping with excitement, waiting for my father's answer.

"No," he said slowly after a while. "If we agree to the other arrangement I don't see that we've the right to make any objection to that."

Well, there surely was never a happier boy in the world than I was at that moment. My head was in the clouds. I trod on air. I could scarcely keep from dancing round the parlor. At last the dream of my life was to come true! At last I was to be given

a chance to seek my fortune, to have adventures! For I knew perfectly well that it was now almost time for the Doctor to start upon another voyage. Polynesia had told me that he hardly ever stayed at home for more than six months at a stretch. Therefore he would be surely going again within a fortnight. And I—I, Tommy Stubbins, would go with him! Just to think of it!—to cross the Sea, to walk on foreign shores, to roam the World!

PART TWO

THE FIRST CHAPTER
THE CREW OF "THE CURLEW"

FROM that time on of course my position in the town was very different. I was no longer a poor cobbler's son. I carried my nose in the air as I went down the High Street with Jip in his gold collar at my side; and snobbish little boys who had despised me before because I was not rich enough to go to school now pointed me out to their friends and whispered, "You see him? He's a doctor's assistant—and only ten years old!"

But their eyes would have opened still wider with wonder if they had but known that I and the dog that was with me could talk to one another.

Two days after the Doctor had been to our house to dinner he told me very sadly that he was afraid that he would have to give up trying to learn the language of the shellfish—at all events for the present.

"I'm very discouraged, Stubbins, very. I've tried the mussels and the clams, the oysters and the whelks, cockles and scallops; seven different kinds of crabs and all the lobster family. I think I'll leave it for the present and go at it again later on."

"What will you turn to now?" I asked.

"Well, I rather thought of going on a voyage, Stubbins. It's quite a time now since I've been away. And there is a great deal of work waiting for me abroad."

"When shall we start?" I asked.

"Well, first I shall have to wait till the Purple Bird-of-Paradise gets here. I must see if she has any message for me from Long Arrow. She's late. She should have been here ten days ago. I hope to goodness she's all right."

"Well, hadn't we better be seeing about getting a boat?" I said. "She is sure to be here in a day or so; and there will be lots of things to do to get ready in the mean time, won't there?"

"Yes, indeed," said the Doctor. "Suppose we go down and see your friend Joe, the mussel-man. He will know about boats."

"I'd like to come too," said Jip.

"All right, come along," said the Doctor, and off we went.

Joe said yes, he had a boat—one he had just bought—but it needed three people to sail her. We told him we would like to see it anyway.

So the mussel-man took us off a little way down the river and showed us the neatest, prettiest, little vessel that ever was built. She was called *The Curlew*. Joe said he would sell her to us cheap. But the trouble was that the boat needed three people, while we were only two.

"Of course I shall be taking Chee-Chee," said the Doctor. "But although he is very quick and clever, he is not as strong as

a man. We really ought to have another person to sail a boat as big as that."

"I know of a good sailor, Doctor," said Joe—"a first-class seaman who would be glad of the job."

"No, thank you, Joe," said Doctor Dolittle. "I don't want any seamen. I couldn't afford to hire them. And then they hamper me so, seamen do, when I'm at sea. They're always wanting to do things the proper way; and I like to do them *my* way—Now let me see: who could we take with us?"

"There's Matthew Mugg, the cat's-meat-man," I said.

"No, he wouldn't do. Matthew's a very nice fellow, but he talks too much—mostly about his rheumatism. You have to be frightfully particular whom you take with you on long voyages."

"How about Luke the Hermit?" I asked.

"That's a good idea—splendid—if he'll come. Let's go and ask him right away."

THE SECOND CHAPTER
LUKE THE HERMIT

THE Hermit was an old friend of ours, as I have already told you. He was a very peculiar person. Far out on the marshes he lived in a little bit of a shack—all alone except for his brindle bulldog. No one knew where he came from—not even his name. Just "Luke the Hermit" folks called him. He never came into the town; never seemed to want to see or talk to people. His dog, Bob, drove them away if they came near his hut. When you asked anyone in Puddleby who he was or why he lived out in that lonely place by himself, the only answer you got was, "Oh, Luke the Hermit? Well, there's some mystery about him. Nobody knows what it is. But there's a mystery. Don't go near him. He'll set the dog on you."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.