



The Story of Doctor Dolittle (Classics You Should Know) (Volume 10)

Hugh Lofting

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If You Could Talk To The Animals in Your Life, What Would They Tell You?

The Story of Doctor Dolittle, Being the History of His Peculiar Life at Home and Astonishing Adventures in Foreign Parts (1920), written and illustrated by Hugh Lofting, is the first of his Doctor Dolittle books, a series of children's novels about a man who learns to talk to animals and becomes their champion around the world.

Doctor John Dolittle is a doctor who shuns human patients in favour of animals, with whom he can speak in their own languages. He later becomes a naturalist, using his abilities to speak with animals to better understand nature and the history of the world.

The character Doctor Dolittle first appeared in the author's illustrated letters to children, written from the trenches during World War I when actual news, he later said, was either too horrible or too dull. The stories are set in early Victorian England, where Doctor John Dolittle lives in the fictional English village of Puddleby-on-the-Marsh in the West Country.

Dolittle has a few close human friends, including Tommy Stubbins and Matthew Mugg, the Cats'-Meat Man. The animal team includes Polynesia (a parrot), Gub-Gub (a pig), Jip (a dog), Dab-Dab (a duck), Chee-Chee (a monkey), Too-Too (an owl), the Pushmi-pullyu, and a White Mouse later named simply "Whitey".

The original edition of the book included language and plot elements that are considered racist by present-day standards, though probably not intended as malicious by the writer. Some consider that his Black African characters are clearly intended by the writer to be sympathetic, that our modern views tend to assign more meaning where perhaps none was intended.

About the Author: Hugh John Lofting (14 January 1886 – 26 September 1947) was a British author, trained as a civil engineer, who created the character of Doctor Dolittle, one of the classics of children's literature.

He traveled widely as a civil engineer, before enlisting in the Irish Guards regiment of the British Army to serve in the First World War. Not wishing to write to his children about the brutality of the war, he wrote imaginative letters which later became the foundation of the successful Doctor Dolittle novels for children. Seriously wounded in the war, in 1919 Lofting moved with his family to Killingworth, Connecticut, in the US. He was married three times and had three children, one of whom, his son Christopher, is the executor of his literary estate.

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