

**DOCTOR LUKE OF
THE
LABRADOR. [1904]**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649563777

Doctor Luke of the Labrador. [1904] by Norman Duncan

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NORMAN DUNCAN

**DOCTOR LUKE OF
THE
LABRADOR. [1904]**

DOCTOR LUKE
of THE LABRADOR

To the Reader

HOWEVER bleak the Labrador—however naked and desolate that shore—flowers bloom upon it. However bitter the despoiling sea—however cold and rude and merciless—the gentler virtues flourish in the hearts of the folk. . . . And the glory of the coast—and the glory of the whole world—is mother-love: which began in the beginning and has continued unchanged to this present time—the conspicuous beauty of the fabric of life: the great constant of the problem.

N. D.

*College Campus,
Washington, Pennsylvania,
October 15, 1904.*

Contents

| | | |
|--------|--|-----|
| I. | Our Harbour | 13 |
| II. | The World from the Watchman | 17 |
| III. | In the Haven of Her Arms | 29 |
| IV. | The Shadow | 35 |
| V. | Mary | 48 |
| VI. | The Man on the Mail Boat | 57 |
| VII. | The Woman from Wolf Cove | 70 |
| VIII. | The Blind and the Blind | 79 |
| IX. | A Wreck on the Thirty Devils | 89 |
| X. | The Flight | 102 |
| XI. | The Women at the Gate | 110 |
| XII. | Doctor and I | 115 |
| XIII. | A Smiling Face | 125 |
| XIV. | In the Watches of the Night | 133 |
| XV. | The Wolf | 138 |
| XVI. | A Malady of the Heart | 150 |
| XVII. | Hard Practice | 167 |
| XVIII. | Skipper Tommy Gets a Letter | 182 |
| XIX. | The Fate of the Mail-Boat Doctor | 191 |
| XX. | Christmas Eve at Topmast Tickle | 202 |

| | | |
|---------|--|-----|
| XXI. | Down North | 219 |
| XXII. | The Way from Heart's Delight | 222 |
| XXIII. | The Course of True Love | 239 |
| XXIV. | The Beginning of the End | 258 |
| XXV. | A Capital Crime | 265 |
| XXVI. | Decoyed | 287 |
| XXVII. | The Day of the Dog | 305 |
| XXVIII. | In Harbour | 320 |

DOCTOR LUKE of THE LABRADOR

I

OUR HARBOUR

A CLUSTER of islands, lying off the cape, made the shelter of our harbour. They were but great rocks, gray, ragged, wet with fog and surf, rising bleak and barren out of a sea that forever fretted a thousand miles of rocky coast as barren and as sombre and as desolate as they; but they broke wave and wind unflinching and with vast unconcern—they were of old time, mighty, steadfast, remote from the rage of weather and the changing mood of the sea, surely providing safe shelter for us folk of the coast—and we loved them, as true men, everywhere, love home.

“’Tis the cleverest harbour on the Labrador!” said we.

When the wind was in the northeast—when it broke, swift and vicious, from the sullen waste of water beyond, whipping up the grey sea, driving in

the vagrant ice, spreading clammy mist over the reefs and rocky headlands of the long coast—our harbour lay unruffled in the lee of God's Warning. Skull Island and a shoulder of God's Warning broke the winds from the north : the froth of the breakers, to be sure, came creeping through the north tickle, when the sea was high ; but no great wave from the open ever disturbed the quiet water within. We were fended from the southerly gales by the massive, beetling front of the Isle of Good Promise, which, grandly unmoved by their fuming rage, turned them up into the black sky, where they went screaming northward, high over the heads of the white houses huddled in the calm below ; and the seas they brought—gigantic, breaking seas—went to waste on Raven Rock and the Reef of the Thirty Black Devils, ere, their strength spent, they growled over the jagged rocks at the base of the great cliffs of Good Promise and came softly swelling through the broad south tickle to the basin. The west wind came out of the wilderness, fragrant of the far-off forest, lying unknown and dread in the inland, from which the mountains, bold and blue and forbidding, lifted high their heads ; and the mist was then driven back into the gloomy seas of the east, and the sun was out, shining warm and yellow, and the sea, lying in the lee of the land, was all aripple and aflash.

When the spring gales blew—the sea being yet white with drift-ice—the schooners of the Newfoundland fleet, bound north to the fishing, often came scurrying into our harbour for shelter. And when the skippers, still dripping the spray of the gale from beard and sou'wester, came ashore for a yarn and an hospitable glass with my father, the trader, many a tale of wind and wreck and far-away harbours I heard, while we sat by the roaring stove in my father's little shop: such as those which began, "Well, 'twas the wonderfulest gale o' wind you ever seed—snowin' an' blowin', with the sea in mountains, an' it as black as a wolf's throat—an' we was somewheres off Cape Mugford. She were drivin' with a nor'east gale, with the shore somewheres handy t' le'ward. But, look! nar a one of us knowed where she were to, 'less 'twas in the thick o' the Black Heart Reefs. . . ." Stout, hearty fellows they were who told yarns like these—thick and broad about the chest and lanky below, long-armed, hammer-fisted, with frowsy beards, bushy brows, and clear blue eyes, which were fearless and quick to look.

"'Tis a fine harbour you got here, Skipper David Roth," they would say to my father, when it came time to go aboard, "an' here, zur," raising the last glass, "is t' the rocks that make it!"