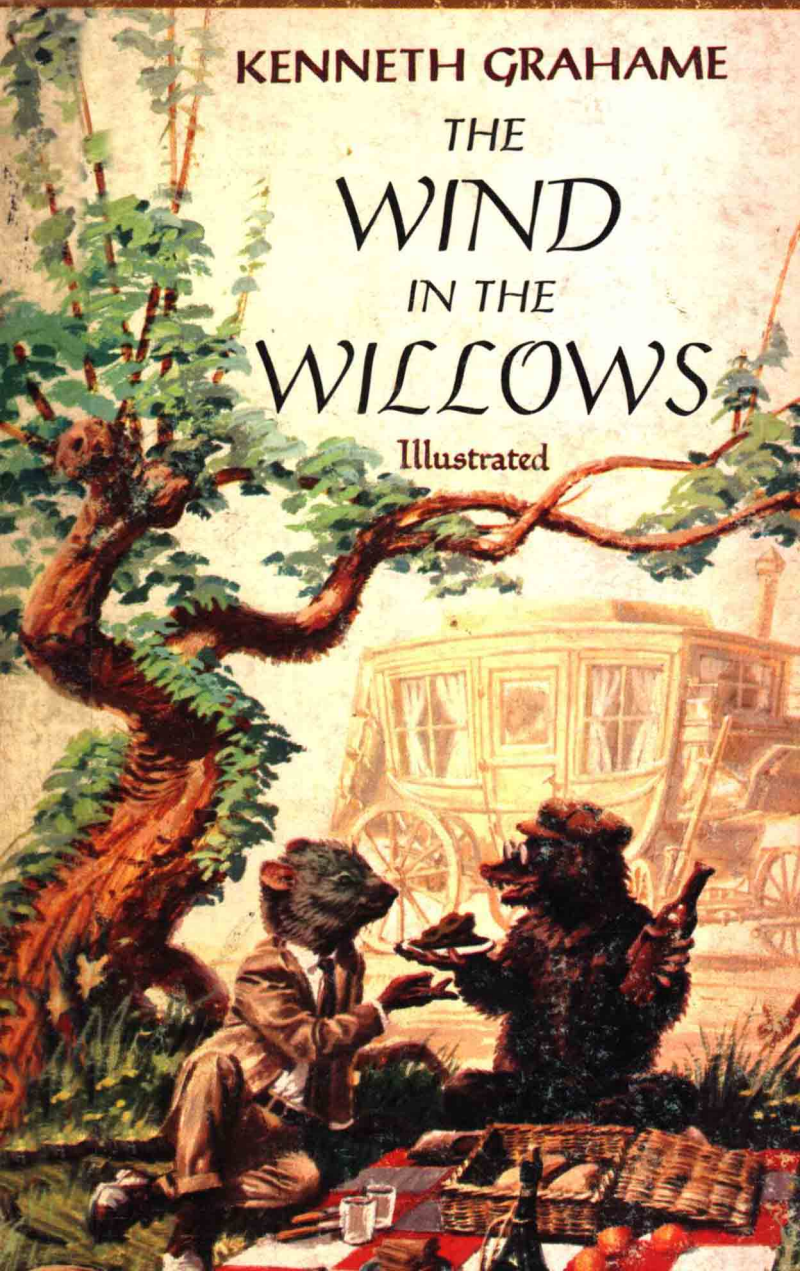


KENNETH GRAHAME

THE
WIND
IN THE
WILLOWS

Illustrated



THE
WIND
IN THE
WILLOWS



KENNETH GRAHAME

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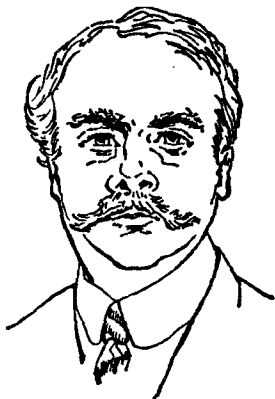
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INTRODUCTION

From Æsop to Walt Disney, the world has had a special affection for stories in which animals talk and act like human beings. Children, in particular, delight in literature of the animal world, and certainly the charm is carried into adulthood. It is not difficult, then, to imagine why Kenneth Grahame's six-year-old son was entranced by his father's bedtime stories concerning the adventures of a toad, a mole, a rat, and a badger. These four creatures peopled the fairy-tale world of the riverbank and the wild wood which an affectionate father created for the dreams of an imaginative son. When "Mouse," as young Grahame was called, refused to go on a summer holiday because he would miss his father's nightly stories, the older Grahame consented to continue the tales in a series of letters. These letters, written in the summer of 1907, were the basis of *The Wind in the Willows*. Since 1908, readers have felt the charming winds of Kenneth Grahame's world, and the Toad, the Rat, the Mole, and the Badger have become as

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famous in children's literature as was Joel Chandler Harris' "Brer Rabbit" in the last century and as are Walt Disney's creations today. It is interesting that George Orwell also chose an animal fantasy through which to express his views of contemporary politics. *Animal Farm*, like *The Wind in the Willows*, became a classic in its own time.

Kenneth Grahame was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1859. His parents died when he was a young child and he went to live with relatives in Berkshire, England. Lacking funds for a college education, he decided on a vocation in banking; then, as throughout his lifetime, writing and a love of nature were his primary avocations. At the age of twenty he became a clerk for the Bank of England and nineteen years later he was appointed Secretary of the institution. Like Wallace Stevens, the famous modern poet and Hartford (Connecticut) insurance executive, Grahame left his writing until the evening and week-end hours. Even then, the literary craft was second to his nature studies. This seemingly sedate and secure life was not without its share of tragedy. He retired from banking in 1908 following a gunshot wound inflicted by a crazed man in the bank. Also, he never fully recovered from the grief of losing his only son, Alastair ("Mouse"), who died in an accident at the age of twenty. Grahame died on July 6, 1932.

Besides this popular book, the author published a collection of sketches, *Pagan Papers* (1893), which made his literary endeavors known to the public, and two books about childhood, *The Golden Age* (1895), and a sequel, *Dream Days* (1898). These latter two books were favorites of Theodore Roosevelt, who first balked at reading the 1908 animal fantasy but later wrote the author that he had read the book cover to cover three times. The American President was one of the first to realize the

merits of the story. Another was the *New York Times* reviewer who commented that the book was "destined to be one of those dog-eared volumes which one laughs over and loves." In 1929, A. A. Milne, author of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, wrote a dramatic version of Grahame's story which he called *Toad of Toad Hall*. Fourteen years after Grahame's death, his widow, Elspeth Grahame, published the original letters which her husband had written to their son during the summer of 1907. The brief book is fittingly called *First Whisper of "The Wind in the Willows"* (1944).

Plot and theme are not important in the realm of fantasy. As the characters come to life, the reader quickly loses awareness of the plot line in *The Wind in the Willows*. If there are any deeper or more significant themes than civility, common sense, and friendship in the story, then they are carefully muted. This is just as well, since we learn from the Badger that the human species has less perpetuity than the animal one,

"... very long ago, on the spot where the Wild Wood waves now, before ever it had planted itself and grown up to what it now is, there was a city—a city of people, you know. Here, where we are standing, they lived, and walked, and talked, and slept, and carried on their business. Here they stabled their horses and feasted, from here they rode out to fight or drove out to trade. They were a powerful people, and rich, and great builders. They built to last, for they thought their city would last for ever."

"But what has become of them all?" asked the Mole.

"Who can tell?" said the Badger. "People come—they stay for a while, they flourish, they build—and they go. It is their way. But we remain. There were

badgers here, I've been told, long before that same city ever came to be. And now there are badgers here again. We are an enduring lot, and we may move out for a time, but we wait, and are patient, and back we come. And so it will ever be."

The narrator also contrasts animal and human instincts:

We others, who have long lost the more subtle of the physical sense, have not even proper terms to express an animal's inter-communications with his surroundings, living or otherwise, and have only the word "smell," for instance, to include the whole range of delicate thrills which murmur in the nose of the animal night and day, summoning, warning, inciting, repelling. It was one of these mysterious faery calls from out of the void that suddenly reached Mole in the darkness, making him tingle through and through with its familiar appeal, even while yet he could not clearly remember what it was. He stopped dead in his tracks, his nose searching hither and thither in its efforts to recapture the fine filament, the telegraphic current, that had so strongly moved him. A moment, and he had caught it again; and with it this time came recollection in fullest flood.

Grahame's knowledge of nature is revealed in countless references to animal law and lore; for example, this one on the phenomenon of hibernation:

No animal, according to the rules of animal-etiquette, is ever expected to do anything strenuous or heroic, or even moderately active during the off-season of winter. All are sleepy—some actually asleep. All are weather-bound, more or less; and all

are resting from arduous days and nights, during which every muscle in them has been severely tested, and every energy kept at full stretch.

The humor and "conflict" of the story occurs when human social values are imposed on the animal world; for instance, when the Badger admonishes the Toad for his wild ways: "Independence is all very well, but we animals never allow our friends to make fools of themselves beyond a certain limit; and that limit you've reached." This social consciousness, as the reader will see, not only involves the moral character of the Toad but extends to the protection of his property even after he deceives his three friends.

The success and popularity of the story rests with the four main characters. After reading or listening to the narrative, these four personified creatures become part of our experience—we never forget them, and years later, when we read or reread, tell or discuss the tale with our own children, the poignancy of the portrayal is again evident. The paternal Badger, the prodigal Toad, with his mania for motorcars, the inquisitive Mole, the knowledgeable Rat, and their adventures from Mole End to Toad Hall, are unforgettable. Grahame has probably drawn the most lovable Rat in all the literature of fantasy. Who cannot be sympathetic and amused by this depiction of a water rat as the idle yachtsman:

. . . there is nothing—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats . . . In or out of 'em, it doesn't matter, that's the charm of it. Whether you get away, or whether you don't, whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when

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you've done it there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not.

Whether familiarity with the work derives from a momentary perusal gleaned from a busy hour or from multiple readings over a number of years, the reader will come to realize why *The Wind in the Willows* has been called a model of English prose style.

—FRANCIS R. GEMME
*Chairman, Department of English
Milford Academy*

Storrs, Connecticut
December, 1965

**THE
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Chapter 1

THE RIVER BANK

The Mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home. First with brooms, then with dusters; then on ladders and steps and chairs, with a brush and a pail of whitewash; till he had dust in his throat and eyes, and splashes of whitewash all over his black fur, and an aching back and weary arms. Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing. It was small wonder, then, that he suddenly flung down his brush on the floor, said 'Bother!' and 'O blow!' and also 'Hang spring-cleaning!' and bolted out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat. Something up above was calling him imperiously, and he made for the steep little tunnel which answered in his case to the gravelled carriage-drive owned by animals whose residences are nearer to the sun and air. So he scraped and scratched and scabbled and scrooged, and then he scrooged again and scabbled and scratched and scraped, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself, 'Up we go! Up we go!' till at last, pop! his snout came out into the sunlight, and he found himself rolling in the warm grass of a great meadow.

'This is fine!' he said to himself. 'This is better than whitewashing!' The sunshine struck hot on his fur, soft breezes caressed his heated brow, and after the seclusion of the cellarage he had lived in so long the carol of happy birds fell on his dulled hearing almost like a shout. Jumping off all his four legs at once, in the joy of living and the delight of spring without its cleaning, he

pursued his way across the meadow till he reached the hedge on the further side.

'Hold up!' said an elderly rabbit at the gap. 'Sixpence for the privilege of passing by the private road!' He was bowled over in an instant by the impatient and contemptuous Mole, who trotted along the side of the hedge chaffing the other rabbits as they peeped hurriedly from their holes to see what the row was about. 'Onion-sauce! Onion-sauce!' he remarked jeeringly, and was gone before they could think of a thoroughly satisfactory reply. Then they all started grumbling at each other. 'How stupid you are! Why didn't you tell him——' 'Well, why didn't you say——' 'You might have reminded him——' and so on, in the usual way; but, of course, it was then much too late, as is always the case.

It all seemed too good to be true. Hither and thither through the meadows he rambled busily, along the hedgerows, across the copses, finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting—everything happy, and progressive, and occupied. And instead of having an uneasy conscience pricking him and whispering 'Whitewash!' he somehow could only feel how jolly it was to be the only idle dog among all these busy citizens. After all, the best part of a holiday is perhaps not so much to be resting yourself, as to see all the other fellows busy working.

He thought his happiness was complete when, as he meandered aimlessly along, suddenly he stood by the edge of a full-fed river. Never in his life had he seen a river before—this sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them with a laugh, to fling itself on fresh playmates that shook themselves free, and were caught and held again. All was a-shake and a-shiver—glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble. The Mole was bewitched, entranced, fascinated. By the side of the river he trotted as one trots, when very small, by the side of a man who holds one spellbound by exciting stories; and when tired at last, he sat on the bank, while the river still chattered on to him, a bab-

bling procession of the best stories in the world, sent from the heart of the earth to be told at last to the insatiable sea.

As he sat on the grass and looked across the river, a dark hole in the bank opposite, just above the water's edge, caught his eye, and dreamily he fell to considering what a nice snug dwelling-place it would make for an animal with few wants and fond of a bijou riverside residence, above flood level and remote from noise and dust. As he gazed, something bright and small seemed to twinkle down in the heart of it, vanished, then twinkled once more like a tiny star. But it could hardly be a star in such an unlikely situation; and it was too glittering and small for a glow-worm. Then, as he looked, it winked at him, and so declared itself to be an eye; and a small face began gradually to grow up round it, like a frame round a picture.

A brown little face, with whiskers.

A grave round face, with the same twinkle in its eye that had first attracted his notice.

Small neat ears and thick silky hair.

It was the Water Rat!

Then the two animals stood and regarded each other cautiously.

'Hullo, Mole!' said the Water Rat.

'Hullo, Rat!' said the Mole.

'Would you like to come over?' inquired the Rat presently.

'Oh, it's all very well to *talk*,' said the Mole rather pettishly, he being new to a river and riverside life and its ways.

The Rat said nothing, but stooped and unfastened a rope and hauled on it; then lightly stepped into a little boat which the Mole had not observed. It was painted blue outside and white within, and was just the size for two animals; and the Mole's whole heart went out to it at once, even though he did not yet fully understand its uses.

The Rat sculled smartly across and made fast. Then he held up his fore-paw as the Mole stepped gingerly down.

'Lean on that!' he said. 'Now then, step lively!' and the Mole to his surprise and rapture found himself actually seated in the stern of a real boat.

'This has been a wonderful day!' said he, as the Rat shoved off and took to the sculls again. 'Do you know, I've never been in a boat before in all my life.'

'What?' cried the Rat, open-mouthed: 'Never been in a—you never—well, I—what have you been doing, then?'

'Is it so nice as all that?' asked the Mole shyly, though he was quite prepared to believe it as he leant back in his seat and surveyed the cushions, the oars, the rowlocks, and all the fascinating fittings, and felt the boat sway lightly under him.

'Nice? It's the *only* thing,' said the Water Rat solemnly, as he leant forward for his stroke. 'Believe me, my young friend, there is *nothing*—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Simply messing,' he went on dreamily: 'messing—about—in—boats; messing—'

'Look ahead, Rat!' cried the Mole suddenly.

It was too late. The boat struck the bank full tilt. The dreamer, the joyous oarsman, lay on his back at the bottom of the boat, his heels in the air.

'—about in boats—or *with* boats,' the Rat went on composedly, picking himself up with a pleasant laugh. 'In or out of 'em, it doesn't matter. Nothing seems really to matter, that's the charm of it. Whether you get away, or whether you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you've done it there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not. Look here! If you've really nothing else on hand this morning, supposing we drop down the river together, and have a long day of it?'

The Mole waggled his toes from sheer happiness, spread his chest with a sigh of full contentment, and