



The Wind in the Willows (Illustrated)

Kenneth Grahame

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The Wind in the Willows is a classic of children's literature by Kenneth Grahame, first published in 1908. Alternately slow moving and fast paced, it focuses on four anthropomorphised animal characters in a pastoral version of England. The novel is notable for its mixture of mysticism, adventure, morality, and camaraderie and celebrated for its evocation of the nature of the Thames valley.

In 1908 Grahame retired from his position as secretary of the Bank of England. He moved back to Cookham, Berkshire, where he had been brought up and spent his time by the River Thames doing much as the animal characters in his book do—namely, as one of the phrases from the book says, "simply messing about in boats"—and wrote down the bed-time stories he had been telling his son Alistair.

In 1909, Theodore Roosevelt, then US president, wrote to Grahame to tell him that he had "read it and reread it, and have come to accept the characters as old friends". The novel was in its thirty-first printing when playwright A. A. Milne adapted a part of it for the stage as Toad of Toad Hall in 1929. In 2003, The Wind in the Willows was listed at number 16 on the BBC's survey The Big Read

Mole has a sudden case of spring fever, gives up on his house-cleaning, and wanders in the fields and meadows. He finds himself by a river (he has been such a stay-at-home that he has never seen it before) and meets the Water Rat, who invites Mole into his boat, something else he has never seen before. "Believe me, my young friend," Rat says dreamily, "there is nothing —absolutely nothing —half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."

A world of friendships, the joy of carefree wandering, of picnicking, and playing has opened for Mole. Half way through the book, the Mole, the Water Rat and the Badger go to Toad Hall to try to help their friend Mr. Toad who has a bad habit of reckless driving. Toad has quite a few adventures. His irresponsible living and extravagance lead to the loss of his home to the barbaric stouts and weasels. The four friends go to battle to regain Toad Hall. The book ends with a banquet where all the friends rejoice at Toad's return.

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