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Kenneth Grahame and the Vision of Childhood

COLIN MOSS

How important is it to protect the sense of wonder and imagination in young children? And when should we expect to impose discipline on children, or expect them to take moral responsibility for their own actions? The works of Kenneth Grahame can provide surprising insights into these questions. His *The Wind in the Willows* is an important work of literature. Less well known are his other works, which present a remarkable account of a child's eye view of the world. He had not only a love of animals, but considerable concern at the encroachment on childhood that he saw in his times, a concern which is even more pressing for us today. His works give us insights into the qualities of childhood which are still vitally important.

My own interest in Kenneth Grahame was first aroused by a curious event following the reading of a passage from his most famous work, which awakened a distant memory of my own. Having read *The Wind in the Willows* as a child, and like so many others been entranced by the world of its little animals, years later I reread it, for no conscious reason other than pleasure. But I shortly afterwards became aware of a very definite gap in my memory of it—not just a general vagueness, but at some undefined point a complete absence of memory. Moreover, this absence was itself without reference or context; as to what it pertained, I had no idea. I knew that I had read the book, and that I had forgotten something, but knew nothing more about it. Without attaching any great importance to this, at some later age I reread the book again, and much to my surprise, the process repeated itself.

That curious empty space in the memory remained with me for a number of years, well into adult life, when I eventually returned to the book, intrigued to find the passage in question (if it was a specific passage), and resolve the little mystery. I discovered it to be the chapter entitled 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn'. For those who do not know the book, this chapter relates how Ratty and Mole have been out all night anxiously searching for a lost baby otter, and in the early dawn come to an island in the middle of the river. They land on the island,

and hear a magical music, a soft piping, and feel an atmosphere of great gentleness and mystery, that fills them with wonder. There they see the great god Pan, although they can hardly look at him, for he is of such an aspect as to fill them completely with awe. Rat, when asked if he is frightened, says, 'Of him? Oh never, never! And yet—and yet, o Mole, I am afraid!' The lost otter sits at Pan's feet. Mole and Rat are overwhelmed; the sun rises—and the vision is gone. Afterwards they are blessed with forgetfulness, 'lest the awful remembrance should remain and grow, and overshadow mirth and pleasure', and so no memory of this wonderful experience remains to them in their everyday lives, and it fades away in the sound of the wind in the reeds.¹ The passage is one that deserves without reservation the description 'magical', in the most innocent sense of that word.

But what was of particular importance to myself was that after re-reading that passage, I knew that I too had been given 'the gift of forgetfulness' when young. I too had had such a magical experience, of which I could remember almost nothing; but had been reminded of its existence by the episode in the book. I even knew where it had happened—beside a stream in the country about a mile from my parents' house; but about the experience itself I could remember little more than that it was the most wonderful thing I had ever experienced. I have since revisited the spot, and found it little changed; a small winding stream hidden away in its own little valley, with fresh flowing water in its pools and bends, and reeds and plants growing beside it as it winds through curves deep in the soft soil. The memory probably dates from before my school-days, although I cannot be certain; my mother often took me to that stream when I was young, but the visit in question was certainly made alone, in those freer days when children could be allowed out to play all day in the fields without adult supervision. Of course I have since tried to recall what I experienced that day, but I can only remember that the whole of my surroundings, the stream and the plants growing beside it, were filled with more life and radiance than I can begin to describe. Whether there was more to it than that I cannot say, nor whether there were any similarities to the experiences of Mole and Rat in Grahame's story.

Another memory may however give some clues—of another occasion, standing by our front gate in an ordinary suburb, but sur-

1. *The Wind in the Reeds* was Grahame's original title for the book.

rounded by a kind of life that, although as real as the world I could touch, had no physical existence. If you were to imagine clouds of butterflies or other delicate and benign creatures flying around me, but not as material beings, as spirits—that is the faintest impression of what I experienced, as I so dimly remember it. And I remember quite clearly thinking that I was going to lose that awareness, because I was shortly going to school for the first time, and I was filled with an enormous and inescapable sadness at the inevitability of losing this world that I experienced as well as the everyday material reality. So this other memory may give just a hint of the nature of my experience by the stream. But in terms of *The Wind in the Willows*, what was most striking to me as an adult, and remained so, was that I knew I had recalled the fact of that experience when re-reading the book. So I knew that the type of experience Grahame was describing, and the draught of forgetfulness that is given to his little animals, was not just a literary invention; and so I came to ask the question—was it real for Grahame too? To what extent does his description reveal an actual memory, or an inspired retelling of a half-forgotten event?

In seeking clues to that riddle, and bearing in mind that Pan is central to the vision Grahame describes, one might start from his early essay 'The Rural Pan'. However, the relationship to Pan described there is very much one of an adult, although not incompatible with the later story. Grahame contrasts the city's noisy pleasure-seeking trippers on the Thames with those who prefer to seek out the quiet backwaters and peaceful glades, where the rural Pan is 'piping the low, sweet strain that reaches only the ears of a chosen few', 'abounding in friendly greetings for his foster brothers the dab-chick and water-rat', and who, 'only half a god after all', 'loveth the more unpretentious humankind, especially'.² The essay concludes with the concern that there will still be places where it is possible to find him in future, with the increasing pressures of the 'iron horse'. Grahame's association of Pan with rural peace and the natural world was very much his own, quite distinct from the other conceptions of well-known authors who were his contemporaries, although the only other useful reference to Pan in Grahame's writing is found in his 'personal book', which

2. 'The Rural Pan', printed in the *National Observer*, April 1891. Reprinted in Peter Haining, *Paths to the River Bank: The Origins of The Wind in the Willows from the Writings of Kenneth Grahame* (London: Souvenir Press, 1983), p. 33.

had inscribed on its front page these words from Matthew Arnold:³

In the huge world, that roars hard by
Be others happy if they can!
But in my helpless cradle I
Was breathed on by the rural Pan!

That quote was obviously meaningful to Grahame, but it does not get us very far. More promising lines of enquiry are his memories of childhood, and the particularly strong relationship to the natural world that he undoubtedly had. That this relationship may have had something of an other-worldly nature to it, far more so than is the case for the majority of humanity, is suggested by an experience of one of his close friends:

I had hardly ever, before then, met Kenneth Grahame amongst a crowd . . . and I remember, as he came towards me through the press, realizing how distinct he was from the people around him. There was something not abnormal, but super-normal in his presence—he was the slightest bit over life-size (any painter will know what that means)—there was a splendour about him that was both of the body and the spirit. He was a being of a different race, or perhaps a throwback to what our race may have been before it became stunted and devitalized. It was the impression of a moment, but I never forgot it. His good looks I had hitherto taken as a matter of course—it seemed natural that the writer of such books should look like that—but, as I then saw him, towering above his fellows, his beauty took on a new significance, showing him as the lost Arcadian, the wanderer from the Country of the Young, one who had looked into the eyes of Pan and listened to the Piper at the Gates of Dawn.⁴

Another friend, in his obituary letter to *The Times*, implied something of the same when he said: 'With silences that half-revealed

3. Quoted in Patrick R. Chalmers, *Kenneth Grahame: Life, Letters, and Unpublished Work* (London: Methuen 1933), p. 36. The lines come from Arnold's poem 'Lines written in Kensington Gardens'.

4. Graham Robertson, quoted in Chalmers, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

things beyond reach of words, he seemed at once a child and a king.⁵ In fact Grahame had a remarkably clear memory of childhood, and 'the blissful days when you trod the one authentic paradise',⁶ which he experienced, as all of us do, 'ere the gate shut behind me'.⁷ He knew what the shutting of that gate meant, which he puts into the words of one of his characters—'I an old man dream dreams, you, a young one, see Visions.'⁸ But Kenneth Grahame was one who had not forgotten that Paradise of youth, and who could remember his own experience before the gate closed. *The Wind in the Willows* was his last literary work, but before it was written he was already famous as the author of a number of short stories about childhood, published in the books *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*. These stories are written entirely from the point of view of a child, not the imagined child, but quite clearly one drawn from Grahame's own memories. Brought up by relatives, without the close and loving contact with his own parents to gradually bring him into the adult world, he seems to have maintained a dual awareness, of childhood and maturity, throughout his life. As he says in the prologue to *The Golden Age*, 'Looking back to those days of old . . . I can see now that to children with a proper equipment of parents these things would have worn a very different aspect.' These preserved memories and attitudes from childhood are what make his work unique.

Grahame returned, at the age of forty-seven, as a married man and a father, to live in Cookham Dene near the banks of the Thames, where he had lived between the ages of four to seven with his siblings and their maternal grandmother after the premature death of their mother. He said, 'I feel I should never be surprised to meet myself as I was when a little chap of five, suddenly coming round a corner . . . The queer thing is, I can remember everything I felt then, the part of my brain I used from four till seven can never have altered. Coming back here wakens every recollection. After that time I don't remember anything particularly.'⁹ Grahame remembered a relationship with the world

5. Letter from Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch to the editor of *The Times*, quoted *ibid.*, p. 317.

6. 'White Poppy', in *Pagan Papers* (London: Elkin Matthews and John Lane, 1893).

7. 'The Olympians', prologue to *The Golden Age* (London: John Lane, 1895).

8. 'A Harvesting', *The Golden Age*.

9. Constance Smedley records him as saying this in 1907, a year after returning to Cookham Dene with his wife and child: *Crusaders* (London: Duckworth, 1929), p. 150. Quoted in Peter Green, *Kenneth Grahame: A Biography* (London: John Murray, 1959), p. 17.

that is differentiated from adulthood in a number of ways, but particularly by the exercise of imagination. For grown-ups, as John Clare wrote, 'reason like a winter's day', had 'nipt childhood visions all away'.¹⁰ The relatives who looked after the Grahame children, to whom he collectively refers in the prologue to *The Golden Age* as 'The Olympians', had altogether lost the faculty of imagination. They had 'absolute licence to indulge in the pleasures of life', but in fact 'could get no good of it'—'To anything but appearances they were blind. For them the orchard (a place elf-haunted, wonderful!) simply produced so many apples and cherries . . . They never set foot within fir-wood or hazel-copse, nor dreamt of the marvels hid therein. The mysterious sources—sources as of old Nile—that fed the duck-pond had no magic for them. They were unaware of Indians, nor recked they anything of bisons or of pirates (with pistols!), though the whole place swarmed with such portents. They cared not about exploring for robbers' caves, nor digging for hidden treasure.'¹¹ The children, on the other hand, played at lions, at the Knights of the Round Table, at Red Indians, in a world where princesses and dragons were not exceptional. They sat with the adults at the meal table: 'We illuminati, eating silently, our heads full of plans and conspiracies, could have told them what real life was. We had just left it outside, and were all on fire to get back to it.'¹²

Although Grahame's memory of childhood was quite remarkable, I do not think that his experience at that age was unique; probably many of us could remember some incidents from our own childhood which recall that type of imagination. For example, I can remember one morning after November the Fifth, replacing the cold fireworks in the ground, and watching the spectacle all over again in my imagination—and the second display was incomparably superior to the first. Or there was the time with a primary schoolfriend when we played with toy soldiers in his garden, and the thrill and excitement of the battle—and how the next time I visited him I tried hard to recapture the magic, but on that leaden day the toy soldiers and the muddy garden refused to come to life, and remained nought but their obsti-

10. John Clare, *The Shepherds Calendar* (London: John Taylor, 1827), 'January'; on p. 19 of the edition by Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield (Oxford University Press, 1964).

11. Prologue, *The Golden Age*. 12. *Ibid.*

nate and dull material selves. Imaginative experience in childhood is not rare, it is only the memories of it that are scarce—what makes Grahame's work so valuable is how vividly he recalled that type of imagination. He had 'a belief, now seriously under attack in the increasingly commercialized world, that decency and the beauty of the mind's imaginings had been designed as the ruling principles of mankind',¹³ and he felt that the only guardians of that imagination were the young—'children are the only really living people left to us'.¹⁴ His early stories vividly recapture the importance of the imagination in childhood.

The Wind in the Willows is somewhat different; it is not written, as his earlier work, from the point of view of the child, but is a story about animals. To generations who have grown up with the book, and Beatrix Potter's stories, this may not seem exceptional, but it was a surprise to publishers, critics, and adult readers at the time. But although an animal story, the book is also concerned with childhood, and Grahame did see a special relationship between the two, which is worth exploring. A good place to start is with the words Grahame wrote for the publisher's catalogue, where we will find an interesting question: 'It is a book of Youth, and so perhaps chiefly *for* youth, and those who still keep the spirit of youth alive in them: of life, sunshine, running water, woodlands, dusty roads, winter firesides; free of problems, clear of the clash of sex; of life as it might fairly be supposed to be regarded by some of the wise small things, "that glide on grasses and rubble of woody wreck".'¹⁵ Here is something of a riddle—that he saw the book quite clearly as a book *of* youth, and at the same time, of life as seen through the eyes of 'the wise small things'. Whereas in his earlier works he had described childhood as a child, now he describes it through the eyes of small animals. This could of course be dismissed as no more than a convenient fiction, a way of telling stories, and it is undoubtedly so at one level. But the obvious question is—why should

13. Alison Prince, *Kenneth Grahame* (London: Allison & Busby, 1994), p. 182.

14. The passage from which this phrase is taken is quoted at greater length on p. oo below.

15. Quoted in Haining, *op. cit.*, p.19. Grahame's accompanying comment was 'I will jot down on the flyleaf of this some material for a descriptive paragraph for the announcement list, although probably any one else would do it better.' The quotation is from 'Melampus' by George Meredith, which retells the ancient Greek story of the healer who was given the gift of understanding the language of animals.

youth be described through the eyes of animals? Looking at Grahame's life and his own relationship to animals will help to answer that question.

Grahame and his siblings, although looked after by relatives when young, were in some respects orphans—they lived without the normal transition towards adult attitudes that comes about through a close and emotionally warm relationship with parents. Grahame's early life was somewhat detached from adults, and the corollary to that detachment is quite clear when he says in *The Golden Age* that the adult world of the Olympians 'was further removed from us . . . than the kindly beasts who shared our natural existence in the sun'.¹⁶ Grahame was exceptional in that his close relationship with animals carried on throughout his life, so that in adult life he could describe the nature of it in ways beyond the child's power of expression. In later life he said to Clayton Hamilton that 'Every animal, by instinct, lives according to his nature. Thereby he lives wisely, and betters the tradition of mankind. No animal is ever tempted to deny his nature. No animal knows how to tell a lie. Every animal is honest. Every animal is true—and is, therefore, according to his nature, both beautiful and good. I like most of my friends amongst the animals.'¹⁷ Afterwards he introduced Hamilton 'individually to each of the domestic animals in that district'. This helps to confirm the comments of Constance Smedley, who was not exaggerating when she said of him that 'To Kenneth Grahame each creature had its own life as important to it as his own.'¹⁸ And this affinity for animals was not simply a one-sided affair—as is clear from Graham Robertson, a close friend, who quite simply said that 'the animals loved him'.¹⁹ Neither did Grahame hesitate to express his view on what he saw as their moral superiority over human beings—his introduction to Aesop carefully undermines the attribution of human failings to animals, making it clear that to do so is only an excuse to satirize the human beings, and quite at variance with any real study of the animals themselves.²⁰

Grahame's experience of both childhood and animals was not only unusual, but for him a connected reality—he felt that children, as he

16. Prologue to *The Golden Age*. 17. Prince, op. cit., p. 255.

18. Ibid., p. 351. Prince notes that this was edited out in Chalmers's biography.

19. Graham Robertson, tribute sent to Elspeth Grahame in a letter of 11 April 1933. Quoted by Haining, p. 15, and Prince, p. 181.

20. Introduction to *A Hundred Fables of Aesop from the English Version of Sir R. L'Estrange* (London and New York: John Lane, 1899).

had experienced himself, could have a closer understanding of the animal world than was normally possible for the adult. He was quite explicit about this, as for instance in a letter he wrote to the father of a youthful admirer—‘She mustn’t grow any older, or she will get away from Mole and Rat.’²¹ Can this connection tell us something about the nature of childhood? I believe it can, and part of it will become clear if we consider the time of childhood that Grahame is referring to. His description of *The Wind in the Willows* clearly indicates a time before puberty. It was not an idle comment; in written form, that would have been wholly out of character for Grahame, and in any case the comment was repeated in a reply to a letter from Theodore Roosevelt, when he said that story is characterized by what it leaves out—‘no problems, no sex, no second meaning’.²² Grahame linked the loss of a child’s close relationship to the animal world with the coming of age; before that stage of development, he saw the character of childhood both in the exercise of imagination and wonder, and in a quality of innocence that children share with animals. Innocence is not the word Grahame used, but it is an appropriate word to summarize his views. This quality is characterized most fully in *The Wind in the Willows*, in the characters of Rat, Mole, Badger, and Otter, who retain the quality of innocence throughout the story. Toad is slightly more complex, and we cannot help feeling that Toad is a wonderful and sympathetic characterization of the less perfect aspects that can come to life in childhood. The story of Toad in particular was developed from the bed-time stories that Grahame told to his son, and an element of the personal relationship between father and son is almost certainly described here. Constance Smedley, who played a key role in persuading Grahame to write down the Toad stories, said, ‘Mouse’s²³ own tendency to exult in his exploits was gently satirized in Mr Toad, a favourite character who gave the juvenile audience occasion for some slightly self-conscious laughter.’²⁴ But what is most interesting about Toad is that, unlike the other main characters, he has made contact with the world of human beings, and their grown-up world of machines. If we take the analogy with childhood, he has started to grow up, which brings with it the loss of innocence, and the loss of the

21. *The Times*, 19 July 1932, quoted in Green, op. cit., p. 146.

22. Chalmers, op. cit., p. 138.

23. ‘Mouse’ was the Grahame’s nickname for their son. 24. Prince, op. cit., p. 226.

close connection with the whole natural world, that Rat and Mole never lose. The age of independence has started to dawn for Toad—which is why his friends see the only hope as being to forcibly keep him in a state of innocence—lecturing him that ‘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.’²⁵ Toad does return to his old life with the other animals in the story, but it is doubtful that he will stay there, as evidenced by Grahame’s short and reluctant response to a question as to what happened to Toad later—‘Of course Toad never really reformed, he was by nature incapable of it. But the subject is a painful one to pursue.’²⁶ That would have been a story of later life, a different story to the one Grahame wanted to tell. What would have made that story so different is that Toad has started to develop the first elements of self-consciousness, which is an essentially human quality; only through this can he interact with the rather mixed specimens of humanity who appear briefly in the story. Toad in fact was moving away from the innocence of animal-hood and into the first beginnings of human independence, in a similar fashion to the child approaching adolescence.

To explore this more deeply, we must look at aspects that Grahame did not make explicit. He clearly felt that animals were morally superior to human beings, but he did not, as far as we know, clearly address the question as to whether animals have the ability to make moral *choices*, to bear moral responsibility for their actions. And the answer to that question follows on from unbiased observation—‘no animal is ever tempted to deny his nature’—for the simple reason that they are not tempted, because they have not been given the choice. By analogy with the biblical story of the temptation of humankind, animals have not been ‘tempted’, and have not ‘fallen’. They are morally superior, but by nature, and not through their own decision. That is why they cannot tell lies. It does not take too much observation of animals to see that they experience emotions such as lust, pain, pleasure, and loneliness. But they cannot choose what they do or what they feel—their emotions, and the thoughts that they have, are evidently a response in accordance with their own nature. They cannot choose between good and evil, they do not have moral responsibility.

25. *The Wind in the Willows* (London: Methuen, 1908), Chapter 6, ‘Mr. Toad’, p. 134.

26. Letter to Elspeth Grahame, 5 February 1933. Quoted in Green, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

This aspect of moral responsibility is one which has clear links with childhood. In general, and even in law, we do not expect children to be able to make moral choices in the same way as adults, and with good reason—they are not ready for it. Before the coming of age, children learn by imitation, by example, and by instruction and authority; the importance of this in early years is clearly recognized in the system of Waldorf education created by the great polymath and educationalist Rudolf Steiner, and is one of the fundamental principles of his approach. Without good examples to imitate, and without adequate authority, children are left with only their instincts, and those are not enough to fill a moral vacuum; we have all heard of examples where corrupting influences have worked in that vacuum with terrible results. Children need to be taught morality, it is not innate.

If we see the young given an environment appropriate to their state of innocence, then we can see that puberty marks a fundamental change not just to the physical human being, but to the moral aspect also. Before puberty, children have to be *taught* to be good; after puberty, they have to *choose* to be good. Without any action on their part other than the simple process of living and growing, they are given responsibility for their own lives at puberty. The different relationship to the body brings about (or goes hand in hand with) a different relationship of the soul—which comes into its own individual responsibilities. Not that it is entirely ready for them, or for adulthood—education does not (or should not) finish at puberty for this reason, and only after the individual receives that responsibility can the real moral education of the adult be given. But puberty marks the stage in human life where individual moral responsibility starts—possibly the most important step on the road to individuation, the particular mark of the human being. We can only fully understand that process if we understand the step from innocence, and the experience of childhood. Kenneth Grahame's special memory of childhood—'I certainly did once inhabit Arcady'²⁷—helps us to see when and how innocence ends, and our consequent responsibility as adults for the moral education of youth, before children are of an age to assume that responsibility for themselves.

We have already introduced Grahame's understanding of the imagination of childhood, and consequently a picture of how we

27. Prologue, *The Golden Age*.

should as parents protect it. The importance of this was also highlighted by Rudolf Steiner—‘Although it is highly necessary, in view of the nature of our modern civilization, that a man or woman should be fully awake in later life, the child must be allowed to remain as long as possible in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of pictorial imagination in which his or her early years are passed. For if we allow his or her organism to grow strong in this non-intellectual way, he or she will rightly develop in later life the intellectuality needed today.’²⁸ That this has major implications for the education and care of the very young should be obvious, and it is quite clear to me that the current tendency to expose even very young children to television and computer games could well remove from them all possibility of those childhood imaginative experiences, and thereby introduce them to the adult world and its intellectuality far earlier than is healthy, with possibly catastrophic consequences for their imaginative life and health in later years. They will have been removed from the years of imagination, and prematurely plunged into the world of the Olympians, where ‘to anything but appearances they are blind’. Kenneth Grahame describes the child’s capability for self-defence thus: ‘It should always be remembered that whenever a child is set down in a situation that is distasteful, out of harmony, jarring—and he is very easily jarred—that very moment he begins, without conscious effort, to throw out and build up an environment really suitable to his soul, and to transport himself thereto.’²⁹ It must of course be questioned how far this capability will serve in averting the onslaught that children face today. That Kenneth Grahame felt this danger most strongly himself, we can see from a reply he gave to Clayton Hamilton when asked why he had written mainly about children and animals: ‘The most priceless possession of the human race is the wonder of the world. Yet, latterly, the utmost endeavours of mankind have been directed towards the dissipation of that wonder . . . Science analyses everything to its component parts, and neglects to put them back together again . . . Nobody, any longer, may hope to entertain an angel unawares, or to meet Sir Lancelot in shining armour on a moonlit road. You have quoted Wordsworth—“it is not now as it hath been of yore”. But the poet *began* by reminding us that “there *was* a time” . . . it

28. *A Modern Art of Education* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1972), p. 119; from a lecture given 10 August 1923.

29. ‘Secret Kingdoms’, *New Review*, March 1896, reproduced in Haining, op. cit., p. 142.

is that time which I have attempted to recapture and commemorate in *Dream Days* and *The Golden Age* . . . Children are not merely people: they are the only really living people that have been left to us. Any child will agree with your American poet, Walt Whitman, when he says, "To me every day and night is an unspeakable perfect miracle." In my tales about children, I have tried to show that their simple acceptance of the mood of wonderment, their readiness to welcome a perfect miracle at any hour of the day or night, is a thing more precious than any of the laboured acquisitions of adult mankind.³⁰ That Grahame also saw the value of this imaginative facility for later life is clear from a lecture he gave to the Keats–Shelley Literary Association, discussing how a dreamy (and therefore healthy) child in class experiences his dreams—"if the real had anything half so fine to offer him, the real would doubtless get its chance with him; but, as we all know, it hasn't . . . is it not indeed the essence of both [the wayward dream and the high purposeful ideal] that we are carried away by them into an intenser, finer, clearer atmosphere than this earth can possibly offer? . . . It is no disparagement of the dreams themselves that only a very few of the dreamers have the power, or rather the gift, to harness their dreams with mastery or bend them to their imperious will. . . . I hope to persuade you that . . . in each and all of us the real and ideal places, so to speak, are co-existing and functioning constantly side by side . . . for in these dreams we are always better than ourselves, and the world is always better than it is, and surely it is by seeing things as better than they are that one arrives at making them better. This indeed is what "vision" means, and one knows that "without vision the people perish" . . . perish from the anaemia of no ideals."³¹

It is probably clear by now that I found no conclusive answer to my question—as to whether Grahame also experienced a childhood vision. But I did find something more valuable—he gave us in his literary output not only some beautiful books, but a characterization of the nature of childhood that is of great profundity. The understanding of the importance of wonder and imagination, and a right moral upbringing for the young, have huge implications for our whole approach to education, and our own personal understanding of the child. It is no exaggeration to say that the way these aspects of upbringing are dealt with by parents and teachers could have a far-reaching effect on the whole health and happiness of future generations.

30. Chalmers, *op. cit.*, p. 211. 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 258–73.