

OXFORD
SCHOOL EDUCATION

Revised
Edition

5

Oxford Reading Circle

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Contents

1. The River Bank—Kenneth Grahame	9
2. The Months—Sara Coleridge	20
3. The Boy who Served his Tribe—Frances Usher	24
4. The Toad's Warts	33
5. Nurse's Song—William Blake	41
6. The Boy with an Answer	45
7. The Poet and the Jester	55
8. The Sea—James Reeves	65
9. The Cruel Crane	69
10. A Debt Made Profit—Martin Bennett	80
11. The Speed Track—Peter	94
12. The Winged Monkeys—Frank L. Baum	98
13. Haggard's Crossing	109
14. Ye Fairy Ship—Walter Crane	119
15. Three Men in a Boat—Jerome K. Jerome	123
16. Leisure—W. H. Davies	133
17. The Boy who Broke the Bank—Ruskin Bond	137
18. How I Learned to Ride—Leo Tolstoy	147
19. The Lake Isle of Innisfree—William Butler Yeats	156
20. Fly Back to Me—A. N. Forde	162
21. Sea Fever—John Masefield	171
22. The Dance Class	175

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



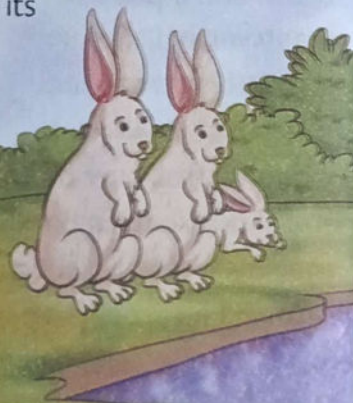
spring-cleaning the thorough cleaning of a house, usually carried out at the end of winter

penetrating strong enough to enter or spread through something

little house. 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, and he made for the steep little tunnel. 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. 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



bolted
privilege

moved suddenly and quickly
an advantage, right or benefit that is not available to all; a licence

by the private road!' He was bowled over in an instant by the impatient 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, finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting—everything happy.

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. All was 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, and when tired at last, he sat on the bank.

chaffing
jeeringly
meandered

teasing
laughing at somebody in a rude manner, mockingly
wandered along a winding path

'Nice? It's the ONLY thing,' said the Water Rat, as he leant forward for his stroke. 'Believe me, my young friend, there is NOTHING—absolute 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, 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 leaned back blissfully into the soft cushions. 'WHAT a day I'm having!' he said. 'Let us start at once!'

14

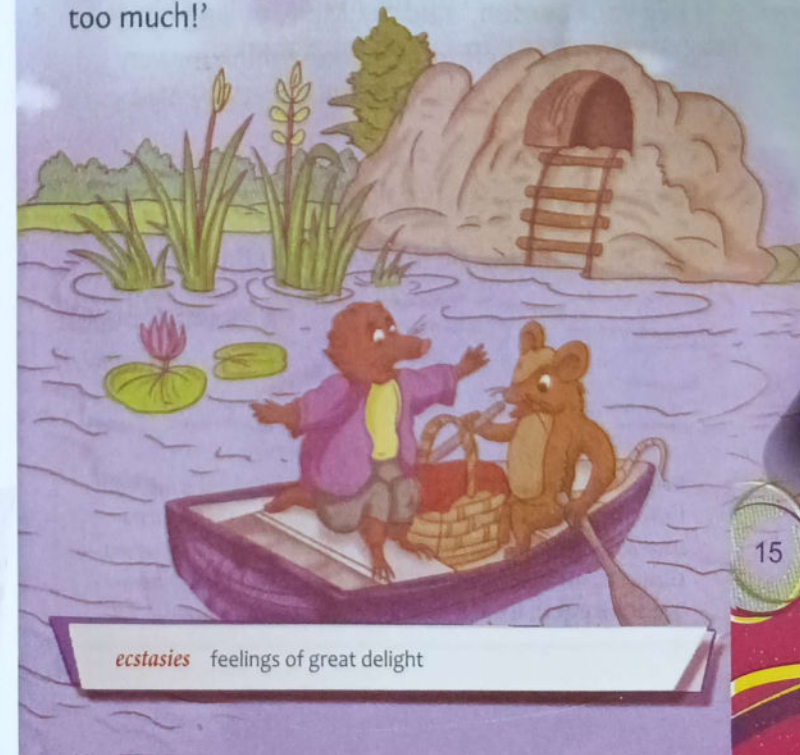
'Hold hard a minute, then!' said the Rat. He climbed up into his hole, and after a short interval reappeared staggering under a fat, wicker luncheon-basket.

'Shove that under your feet,' he observed to the Mole, as he passed it down into the boat. Then he took the sculls again.

'What's inside it?' asked the Mole, wriggling with curiosity.

'There's cold chicken inside it,' replied the Rat briefly; 'cold turkey cold cheese pickled gherkins salad french rolls cress sandwiches potted meat ginger ale lemonade soda water —'

'O stop, stop,' cried the Mole in ecstasies: 'This is too much!'



15

ecstasies feelings of great delight

"Do you really think so?" enquired the Rat seriously. "It's only what I always take on these little excursions!"

The Mole never heard a word he was saying. Absorbed in the sparkle, the ripple, the scents and the sounds and the sunlight, he trailed a paw in the water and dreamed long waking dreams. The Water Rat, like the good little fellow he was, sculled steadily on.

"I like your clothes, old chap," he remarked after some half an hour or so had passed. "I'm going to get a black velvet suit myself some day, as soon as I can afford it."

"I beg your pardon," said the Mole, pulling himself together with an effort. "You must think me very rude; but all this is so new to me. So—this—is—a—River!"

"THE River," corrected the Rat.

"And you really live by the river? What a jolly life!"

KENNETH GRAHAME
(Abridged)

Kenneth Grahame (1859–1932) was born in Scotland, but moved to live in England, by the banks of the River Thames. He joined the Bank of England after his education, and worked there till he retired. Grahame's most famous book is *Wind in the Willows* (1908), from which this extract is taken. Read the whole book, if you can!

Exercises

A. Questions

1. Which words and phrases in the first paragraph tell us that the Mole wanted to be out in the fresh Spring air?
2. How did the rabbits react when the Mole passed by the private road?
3. Which words and phrases tell us that the Mole was enjoying the Spring?
4. What seemed even more attractive than the Spring to the Mole, and what was so good about it?
5. Did the Water Rat emerge quickly or slowly from his hole? How do we know?
6. What clues are there to tell us how the Water Rat felt about his boat and the river?
7. What kind of picnic were they going to have?

B. Reference to context

Read these lines from the story, then answer the questions.

1. *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.*
 - a. Who is sitting on the grass and what was the 'dark hole' that he saw?
 - b. What does he see in the hole at first?
 - c. What does he see later?