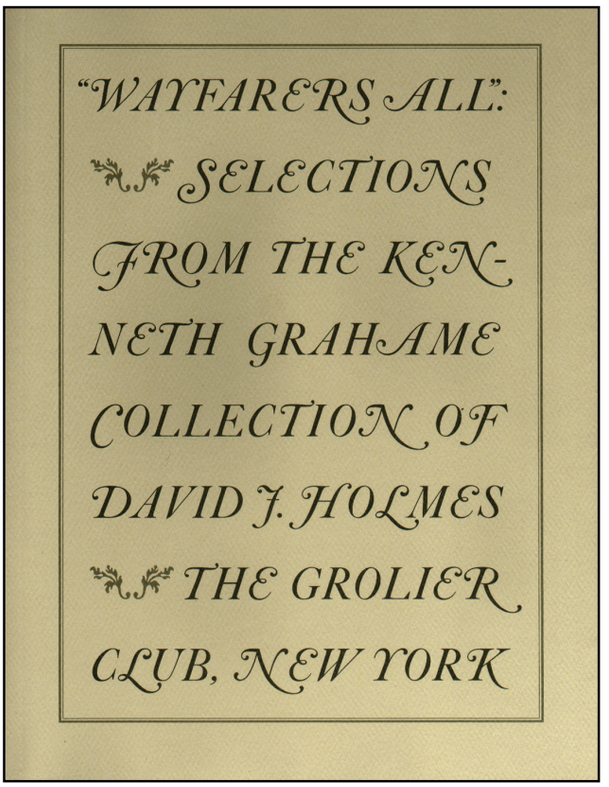
Kenneth Grahame Collection



HOLMES, David J. *"Wayfarers All": Selections from the Kenneth Grahame Collection of David J. Holmes.* New York: The Grolier Club, 2008. Small 4to. Softbound. 46pp. Illustrations. $15.

THE GROLIER CLUB HAS AGAIN shown its consistency in publishing handsome, reasonably-priced publications worthwhile to book and autograph collectors alike. This time it's an exhibition catalog that collectors and wannabe-collectors of literary autographs will wish to explore.

"Wayfarers All": Selections from the Kenneth Grahame Collection of David J. Holmes introduces an author whose most famous book, the 1908 *Wind in the Willows*, has far eclipsed his few others and even his own name. Grahame was born in Scotland in 1859 and died in England in 1932, and today how work is quite neglected among literate Americans.

David Holmes—soft-spoken, articulate, with a wealth of knowledge—is the only dealer in this country I can think of gutsy enough to specialize in fine literary autographs, primarily 18th through 20th century English and American. Luckily his own collecting passion fell on Grahame, and who better to understand this reticent and introspective writer. In a perceptive "Collector's Statement," Holmes notes:

"I do not remember the exact moment when I decided to collect Kenneth Grahame. Perhaps I was collecting him before I knew it. As an admirer of his prose, I had purchased Grahame's letters for my shop's inventory, and they sparked my interest. They hinted at a mentality that seemed to be, curiously, both restrained and poetic, of the world and yet not of the world...."

"Wayfarers All" presents descriptions of 63 items from Holmes' collection, exhibited at the Grolier Club's beautiful building on East 60th Street between March 19 and May 23. Of these 63 pieces, 24 are illustrated–mostly autographs and original artwork, plus a few books. While most of the exhibit represents primo Grahame material, Holmes fleshes this portrait out nicely by including some illustrators, authors, publishers and others closely associated with Grahame.

The chapter on Grahame's first book, for instance, the 1893 *Pagan Papers*, features a fine Grahame postcard regarding the proof sheets for this book, the British limited edition of the book, a printed announcement for it and a letter from Grahame's publisher William Ernest Henley. The chapter on his second book, *The Golden Age* (1895), contains two copies of the first English edition (one with a 1926 TLS from Grahame discussing it, the other with a presentation inscription from Grahame), an ALS from Grahame to the U.S. publisher discussing this book, the first English edition with Maxfield Parrish illustrations inscribed by the publisher to the poet A.C. Swinburne, the first edition with Ernest H. Shepard (of *Winnie the Pooh* fame) illustrations limited and signed by Grahame and Shepard, and a lovely Parrish ALS discussing the original *Golden Age* artwork.

And so it goes. Subsequent chapters, each featuring a modest number of choice and relevant items, cover every Grahame book (including A.A. Milne's *Toad of Toad Hall*, a dramatization of *The Wind in the Willows*, and a chapter on books which Grahame edited or contributed to). Of course *The Wind in the Willows*, Grahame's blockbuster, gets star treatment, triple in length and number of illustrations as the other chapters. There's a letter from Constance Smedley, English feminist and writer, who prodded Grahame into writing his masterpiece, and a signed postcard photograph of Theodore Roosevelt, who urged Charles Scribner into taking Grahame's manuscript seriously; a first U.S. edition, "One of a very small known number of inscribed copies"; a first English edition, inscribed by Grahame to his older sister; an ALS from the English publisher A.M.S. Methuen congratulating Grahame on the book; a lengthy ALS from Grahame thanking a reviewer of the book, and on and on. If you're a *Wind in the Willows* fan, or simply appreciate nice literary material, it will take your breath away.

Not to sound like every infomercial, but—*that's not all!* Then comes a truly killer assortment of original artwork by Shepard, Paul Bransom, Arthur Rackham.

Illustrations throughout are clear and sharp, though rarely printed at 100 percent actual size due to the book's trim size. As a collection of Grahame exemplars for authentication and research purposes, this exhibition catalog cannot be beat and serious collectors should want it for that reason alone. David Holmes and the Grolier Club provide a real service to the autograph collecting community in sharing their appreciation and expertise of this rather neglected author.

For many years now I've had a lovely modern slipcased edition of *The Wind in the Willows* gracing my library. It's in pristine condition—the cover's never been cracked. Like so many, it was on my books-to-be-read-when-time-permits-(but rarely does)-list, those classic titles every educated person is expected to have read. Thanks to David Holmes first-rate collection and his ability to impart enthusiasm for Grahame, I'll be pulling that volume off the shelf tonight.

IMAGE COURTESY THE AUTHOR

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