

THE HEADSWOMAN

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The headswoman by Kenneth Grahame

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KENNETH GRAHAME

**THE
HEADSWOMAN**

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By the Same Author

THE GOLDEN AGE
PAGAN PAPERS

88742
The Headswoman

BY

KENNETH GRAHAME



JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD

NEW YORK AND LONDON

1898

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I

IT was a bland, sunny morning of a mediæval May, — an old-style May of the most typical quality; and the Council of the little town of St. Radegonde were assembled, as was their wont at that hour, in the picturesque upper chamber of the Hôtel de Ville, for the dispatch of the usual municipal business. Though the date was early sixteenth century, the members of this particular town-council possessed considerable resemblance to those of similar assemblies in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and even the nineteenth centuries, in a general absence of any characteristic at all — unless a pervading hopeless insignificance

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can be considered as such. All the character in the room, indeed, seemed to be concentrated in the girl who stood before the table, erect, yet at her ease, facing the members in general and Mr. Mayor in particular; a delicate-handed, handsome girl of some eighteen summers, whose tall, supple figure was well set off by the quiet, though tasteful mourning in which she was clad.

"Well, gentlemen," the Mayor was saying, "this little business appears to be — er — quite in order, and it only remains for me to — er — review the facts. You are aware that the town has lately had the misfortune to lose its executioner, — a gentleman who, I may say, performed the duties of his office with neatness and dispatch, and gave the fullest satisfaction to all with whom he — er — came in contact. But the Council has already, in a vote of condolence, expressed its sense of the — er — striking qualities of the deceased. You are doubt-

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less also aware that the office is hereditary, being secured to a particular family in this town, so long as any one of its members is ready and willing to take it up. The deed lies before me, and appears to be — er — quite in order. It is true that on this occasion the Council might have been called upon to consider and examine the title of the claimant, the late lamented official having only left a daughter, — she who now stands before you; but I am happy to say that Jeanne — the young lady in question — with what I am bound to call great good-feeling on her part, has saved us all trouble in that respect, by formally applying for the family post, with all its — er — duties, privileges, and emoluments; and her application appears to be — er — quite in order. There is therefore, under the circumstances, nothing left for us to do but to declare the said applicant duly elected. I would wish, however, before I — er — sit down, to make