Three Men in a Boat: To Say Nothing of the Dog Study Guide

Three Men in a Boat: To Say Nothing of the Dog by Jerome K. Jerome

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

"Three Men in a Boat: To Say Nothing of the Dog" is Jerome K. Jerome's amusing account of a two-week boat trip up the Thames River from London to Oxford and back. The trip is taken by his friends George and Harris and himself, along with his rat terrier, Montmorency.

After a few false starts in the preparations, the three men leave on their journey in a rented rowboat. As they pass each town and village along the way, J. provides brief, humorous histories of the area and the various monarchs and other notable figures associated with it. His imagination is slanted toward the chivalrous days of knights and damsels, and he often imagines these kinds of scenes as they pass along the river, while sometimes letting his idyllic daydreams distract him from important things, such as watching where he is steering the boat.

The three men are good friends, and enjoy each others' company despite their occasional flare-ups. Jerome's descriptions acknowledge that they all take themselves too seriously at times and his humor is self-effacing when their pride or cockiness leads them into ridiculous situations. The young men are financially comfortable, but are not to proud to sleep two or three to a bed in a hastily-rented spare room in a pinch. They imagine themselves to be handy and proficient outdoorsmen, but are confounded by tasks such as setting up a tent or cooking over a camp stove. Jerome depicts these situations with a gentle humor.

Much like the river journey it depicts, the book meanders from place to place, from topic to topic, and Jerome salts the book with hilarious anecdotes about his friends that he is reminded of by various events on the trip. Montmorency is treated as one of the characters, and his predilection for catching rats and starting fights is depicted with the same tone of admiration J. offers his human friends.

The men make their way to Oxford, sometimes camping in their canvas-covered boat, sometimes staying at inns, and enjoy two days at Oxford before heading back downstream to London. As they leave Oxford, it begins to rain, and despite their original insistence to stick out the whole journey, they guiltily leave their boat behind and take the train for the final leg. The book ends with the three men (and the dog) enjoying a fine meal in a London nightclub, toasting themselves and their friendship.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The book opens with three young English men sitting idle, smoking and talking about their health. Their names are George, William Samuel Harris, and J., the author and narrator. Montmorency, a terrier, is also present. On the subject of health, J. admits he is something of a hypochondriac. Every ailment he hears about or reads about in an advertisement for patent medicine seems to fit his symptoms perfectly. He has gone to his doctor, he explains, who prescribes a hearty diet and exercise, and tells him not to "stuff up your head with things you don't understand" (p. 5). J. jokes that the prime symptom of his current malady is "a general disinclination to work of any kind" (p. 5).

After a meal and some more general complaining about their health, the three decide they need a change for a week or so. They reject the idea of a sea trip, as J. explains, because a week is to short a time to get over the initial seasickness. Just as one gets accustomed to being on a ship, the trip is over. He notes however, that while everyone gets seasick, once they are back on land, they seem to "forget" all about it, leaving it out of the accounts of their journey.

It is finally decided the three will take a boating trip up the Thames River from London. This seems a fine idea to everyone except the dog, but a vote is taken, J. says, and the dog is outnumbered.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Jerome sets the tone for the rest of the book in his self-effacing assessment of his own inclination to be lazy. All the main characters are introduced. George is a clerk in a bank and it is implied that the other two men are similarly employed, single young men with time on their hands. Harris is introduced as someone fond of drink, a character trait that will be the cause of a humorous episode later in the book.

Jerome includes the humorous case of travelers who return from sea trips and pretend they had a wonderful time when they actually spent most of the time seasick. This is unlike Jerome's account of the three men's journey, which will include the good and bad parts, even when they sometimes reflect poorly on the teller.

Chapters 2-3

Chapters 2-3 Summary

The three friends decide they will leave the following Saturday from Kingston, with Harris and J. meeting George there after he finishes his day at the bank where he works.

The next question they ask themselves is whether to camp out or sleep at inns. George and J. are in favor of camping, and the narrator describes an idyllic scene of sleeping in the open air as the sun sets, along a river bank under a shimmering moon. Harris interrupts his vision by asking what happens when it rains. J. admits this is a practical consideration, and his tone changes as he describes trying to put up a wet canvas tent while the pouring rain soaks all the food and clothing. They compromise and decide they will sleep outside when it is nice, and at inns when it is not. Congratulating themselves on such a sensible solution, they conclude their discussion by stepping out for a drink.

Chapter 3 opens the following night, when the three friends have gathered again to make plans for what to take with them on their trip. Harris attempts to take charge, reminding the author of his Uncle Podger, who would announce he was going to undertake some simple project, like hanging a picture, but in the process would enlist the help of everyone else in the family to bring him things and assist. By the end of it, the simple project would be terribly involved and not even completed right.

The three compile a list of things to take, but discard it. The river would not float a boat "sufficiently large to take the things we had set down as indispensible," J. writes. Instead, they decide not to list what they think they want, but only list things they cannot do without. This sets J. off on a allegorical aside how life would be much easier if we all discarded the extra trappings we do not need and learned to live more simply. Just as his allegory reaches its peak, the author stalls and apologizes to the reader.

They decide on a small set of clothes they should each take, planning to wash them in the river. George assures them this can be done easily, but they are learn later, J. says, that George is an "impostor."

Chapters 2-3 Analysis

The characters of the three young men are developed further in the next two introductory chapters. Each imagines himself an expert on what should be packed and how to pack it, and each imagines himself the boss. The narrator does not spare himself from being skewered. Much of the humor in the book comes from the author displaying the same traits he pokes at others for having. This is done in a knowing tone that indicates the narrator,and by extension the author, does not take himself too seriously.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The next subject the young men consider is food. Base don their previous experience they decide not to take an oil stove, as the oil tends to get on everything, and makes a sooty, smelly mess. Similarly, they decide their food stocks should not contain any cheese, as cheese tends to "make to much of itself" (p.31) flavoring everything else in the hamper. J. tells an amusing story of a time he volunteered to carry some large cheeses for a friend on a train journey. Entering a crowded train carriage, he notices that all the other passengers find excuses to leave him alone and he ends up in an empty carriage in an otherwise crowded train.

The men gather the items they intend to take, push aside the furniture, and pile everything in the center of the room. J. volunteers to pack and is dismayed when George and Harris seem to take him at his word and sit back to let him do the work. What he intended, he explains, is that he will oversee the packing, giving advice to the other two as they do the work.

Nevertheless, J. dives in and packs all the clothes and supplies. As he is strapping the last strap, Harris points out he has forgotten to pack the boots. He puts the boots in, but is then troubled that he may have forgotten to pack his toothbrush. He finds it, and then realizes he has packed his tobacco pouch, but wants it. Frustrated, he tells the others he is finished, and packing the hampers with food is up to them.

J. enjoys watching them make fools of themselves trying to pack the food. At one point, George sits on the butter, and it sticks to his backside. The two men spend several minutes looking for it. After several hours of this, everything is packed. It is now nearly one a.m. and the men go to bed, agreeing they will wake the next morning at 6:30 to get a good start on the day.

Chapter 4 Analysis

A glimpse of how the three men relate to one another is given in Chapter 4, as they are on the third day of preparation for their trip. They are quarrelsome, but in a good-natured way. Jerome includes a good deal of slapstick humor throughout the book, and the episode with the three men trying to pack their food hamper provides an excellent example. Jerome also relies on more subtle observational humor. The experience of packing the perfect suitcase only to find something important has been left out is one familiar to readers even after 100 years, as is finding you have packed something you need right away.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The next day begins with the housekeeper waking the men at 9:00 in the morning, each blaming the others for not waking them all up sooner.

At breakfast, they check the weather forecast. J. remarks that weather forecasts are useless things, as they forecast "precisely what happened yesterday or the day before, and precisely the opposite of what is going to happen to-day" (p. 43).

After breakfast, Harris and J. move the luggage outside to wait for a cab. This is the first time it has all been in one place, and J. is surprised at the bulk of it all. As they wait for the cab, a group of boys gathers around starts teasing the men. The group gets larger and the teasing continues that the men must be embarking on a long journey into Africa, or across the Atlantic.

The cab finally arrives and takes them to Waterloo Station, where, after some difficulty in finding the right platform, they take the train to Kingston. Their boat is waiting there. They load it and set out on the river.

Chapter 5 Analysis

After preparations that take the first third of the entire book, the trip finally begins. J. shows a keen awareness of how ridiculous he and his companions appear to others in their colorful boating jackets and piles of luggage, and has fun at their own expense by describing the neighborhood's reaction to their departure. The satirical description of the Waterloo Railway Station as a place of utter confusion staffed by incompetents would have been more familiar to readers of Jerome's day. At the heart of the joke is that the men had to bribe a conductor to convince him to take them where they wanted to go on the train. The train was a mail train, not a passenger train,and normally traveled in the opposite direction. This is impossible, of course, which is the source of the humor.

Chapters 6-7

Chapters 6-7 Summary

In Chapter 6, J. writes about the town of Kingston, the former royal seat of the Saxon kings. The houses there reflect the wealth and importance the town once had, with latticed windows and large fireplaces.

J. tells a story of a Kingston shop that is in a former house. The house has a large, beautiful carved oak staircase, and is paneled floor to ceiling with carved oak. The owner does not care for carved oak, however, and has covered the walls with wallpaper.

This starts J. musing on how odd it seems that people always seem to end up with what they do not want. He relates the case of a boy he knew in school named Stivvings. Stivvings loved to study, but was always getting sick and missing school. At the same time, boys like J. who want nothing more than to miss a day of school continue on in good health.

The men row past Hampton Court, where there is a hedge maze. Harris once tried to negotiate this maze, he tells J., getting hopelessly lost. As he tried to find his way out, he came across several others who were also lost and joined his party to look for the way out. After several hours, they called for the keeper to help them, but the keeper got lost himself. Harris and J. agree they would try to get George to go into the maze some time.

Chapter 7 opens as the men are going through Moulsey Lock, one of the busiest on the river. The lock is full of boaters dressed in their Sunday boating dress, putting J. on the subject of boating attire.

Men tend to wear bright colored blazers and straw hats, with women in pretty, if impractical, dresses. He tells a story of an outing with some young women dressed in so-called "boating costumes." They were so afraid of getting their dresses wet or soiled, they were practically afraid to move.

As they approach Hampton Church, Harris wants to get out and look at a tomb inscription. J. refuses, ridiculing what he feels is the pointless tourist practice of looking at old tombstone inscriptions.

This angers Harris, but J. reminds him they must keep moving to met up with George. This deflects Harris' anger to George for a bit, until he announces he intends to stop the boat and find a pub to have a drink. J. points out that there are no pubs nearby, but there is lemonade in the hamper. Harris then goes off about having nothing decent to drink and goes fishing for the bottle of whiskey they have packed at the bottom of the hamper. He forgets he is holding the steering lines, however, and as he bends over to dig through the hamper, he runs the boat into the bank and falls into the hamper head first. J. has to help him out, which makes him even more mad.

Chapters 6-7 Analysis

The journey has started, but J. and Harris do not get far in the next few chapters. Jerome includes a long aside about the apparent fate of many to be given what they do not want and not to get what they do. Nothing can be taken for granted as being desirable in itself, he suggests, as there will be someone who does not care for it, like the shopkeeper who covers the elaborate carved oak of his house with wallpaper. J. takes an amusing imaginary journey to the future where someone has discovered a worthless knick-knack from J's time and reveres it as a priceless artifact.

The men move through the first of several locks on the river. These are devices that raise or lower boats from one level to another, and are a kind of social gathering place for pleasure boaters as several boats move through at once. There is a certain style of clothing preferred by the young set, which includes brightly colored striped blazers for the men and elaborate dresses for the women. J. displays his bewilderment at the fair sex as he describes an outing with a couple of women so carefully dressed they can hardly move.

Harris' fondness for drinking and quick temper are shown at the end of the chapter as he works himself up over not having anything strong to drink.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Harris and J. stop at Kempton Park to lunch. As they sit beneath a willow, a man asks them if they are aware they are trespassing. They casually say they are not aware, but are willing to take his word for it. They do not move, however, and the man does not leave. Harris offers him some bread and jam, but he declines gruffly and says it is his duty to get them to leave. Harris, a large young man, asks, again casually, how he intends to go about it. The man sizes Harris up and then says he'll go and tell his master and see what he wants to do.

The man does not return, and J. explains that he is likely just one of many such people along the river who try to extort a shilling from boaters by telling them they are trespassing. This sends J. into an angry aside about people who post no trespassing signs and try to keep others from enjoying the riverside. Harris agrees, but even more strongly, saying he would like to kill any man who puts up a no trespassing sign, kill his family, burn down his house and sing "comic songs" on the ruins.

This puts J. on the subject of Harris and how he sometimes insists on singing comic songs at parties. He imagines himself a good singer, but cannot remember all the words or music, usually forgetting the part that includes the humor. In the meantime, everyone at the party will be enduring Harris' insistence that the piano player has got it wrong, and his assurances that the song really is funny if they'll just bear with him.

J. is reminded of a dinner party he attended where the guests all thought of themselves as enjoying a highly cultured evening. Two young men at the party play a joke on the others by telling them that one of the guests, from Germany, will play a comic song. They present the man, who proceeds to play and sing a very sad song in German. None of the guests understand German, but they do not want to let on, so they begin to laugh at various parts of the song. This confounds the singer, who is not in on the joke.

The men row to Walton, and J. provides a brief history of the town. They row past Halliford and Shepperton, with J. trying to keep Harris from stopping to read tomb inscriptions. As they approach Weybridge, they see a man in a bright orange blazer and realize it is George. He is standing on shore with an odd shaped package, which he informs them is a banjo. He does not play, but he has an instruction book, he says.

Chapter 8 Analysis

J. first broaches the subject of "riparian rights" in Chapter 8, that is the question of who enjoys the rights to access the river and river bank. He has no patience for anyone who places "no trespassing" signs on the bank or tries to keep boats from following backwater streams. Harris, still upset over not having any drink, reinforces his opinion strongly.

The anecdote of the double joke played by two boys on a German singer and his conceited audience is one of the funniest episodes in the book, and is a good example of Jerome's brand of humor that recognizes that what is funny is largely a matter of one's point of view. J is among those on whom the joke is played, but he does not strongly condemn the young men who tricked him. Instead, he recognizes that it was his own imagined refinement that created the opportunity for the joke and laughs along with it, although with pretended indignant feelings.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Harris and J. decide that George should start off by doing some work, and they give him the tow line to pull them as he walks alongside the river.

J. remarks on the uncanny ability of towlines to become tangled on their own, no matter how carefully one winds them or handles them. This usually sets fellow boaters into a feud, each blaming the other for tangling the rope. J. tells the story of once finding two men standing on the towpath holding a line between them and looking astonished. They had stepped out to untangle the line and their boat had floated off without them.

J. also writes about the common occurrence of the man towing walking along while talking to another and losing track of what the person steering the boat is doing. Meanwhile, the man in the boat has dropped his hat in the water, or something has broken, and he is yelling at the men towing, who are engrossed in conversation and do not pay attention. George tells a story of being on the river once and seeing a young couple walking on the towpath, talking, and pulling a towline that is not attached to anything. George considers yelling at them to tell them, but then hits on the idea of attaching the rope to his own boat. The couple tows them for some time before they realize what has happened.

J. tells about lazy boaters who hire a barge horse to pull their boats. They move so quickly that it is impossible to get out of their way, he says, and there are frequent accidents.

J. also writes about being towed by girls, which is always "exciting." It takes three to tow the boat, he says, two to pull and one to turn around and giggle. They are constantly stopping and coming back to the boat to get things and ask how they are doing, making it impossible to steer.

They approach Penton Hook and consider stopping there to camp, but decide to press on for a few more miles. This is a mistake, J. says, as the last few miles of the day always seem twice as far.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 is made up mostly of amusing asides about J's observances as a frequent pleasure boater. Along many portions of the river runs a path, called a towpath, where a person can walk while pulling a boat along upstream while someone in the boat steers. Given the nature of any rope to tangle and the constant passing of river traffic, this is a situation that provides ample material for funny stories.

J introduces a theme in Chapter 9 that seems to apply to the book itself. He tells of a trip in which he has lost track of how far he is from home, and not knowing exactly how far he has to go he imagines he is still a great distance away. Then just as it is getting dark, he finds he is actually almost home, to his great pleasure and surprise.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The men move ahead, intending to camp at a place called Magna Charta Island, but after some time they grow weary and decide to find any suitable place. They reach an attractive spot called "Picnic Point." They think they will have supper, but George suggests they set up the hoops and canvas over the boat first, so they will have their beds prepared before they start to eat.

This seems like a good idea to all, and they expect the job will take only a few minutes. " That was an under-estimate," J. says. The hoops do not fit the slots properly, and George and Harris become hopelessly wrapped up in the canvas. But they finally get it set right and go about making supper.

The first thing to do, J. explains, is put the tea kettle on and then ignore it while you do other things. Even better, he writes, is to make open remarks about how you don't really even want any tea. If you are really desiring tea and watch the kettle, he says, it will never boil. You have to fool it.

The men prepare a large supper and eat their fill. J. notes the effects of a full stomach on their outlook. Whereas before supper they fought with each other, afterward they are full of courtesy and kindness.

J. has trouble getting comfortable in the boat, and late at night crawls out to get some fresh air. He is stunned by the beauty of the stars and the darkness of the night. The chapter concludes with a romantic passage in ode to night.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 begins with an episode of slapstick comedy as the three men try to erect the canvas canopy over their boat for the first time, again finding that the plans they made in the comfort of their London apartment do not run so smoothly in practice. The chapter takes a turn, however, as J climbs out of the boat at night, unable to sleep, and is struck by the beauty of the night sky. Here Jerome includes a long passage written in a rather flowery style, referring to knights of chivalry and the darkness of night. It is a departure of style that is somewhat confusing at first, as the narrator's other descents into similar language are done with a certain amount of sarcasm. The passage provides a sense of gravity to the character of J that is maybe belied by his otherwise playful personality.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

J. wakes early the next morning and finds George is also awake. Neither of them can get back to sleep, J. remarks, because there is no reason for them to get up. If there had been some reason for them to be up, it would have been very easy to sleep for several more hours.

This sends J. into a story about a time when George's watch stopped at 8:15 one night and he did not notice. He woke up the next morning and seeing his watch believed it was 8:15 in the morning and rushed to get ready to go to work. He is dismayed to find the landlady has not prepared breakfast, and rushes out to the bus station. He eventually notices there is nobody else around and hears a clock strike three. Confused, he asks a policeman for the time, who assumes he is drunk and tells him to go home.

George does go home, but because he has no reason to be up he cannot sleep. He decides to go for a walk, but is shadowed by policemen. He returns home and never does get back to sleep.

The men get up and decide they will all have a bath in the river. None of them is willing to be the first to try the water, however. J. decides he will just splash some of the water over him, but accidentally falls in. The others, who do not see him fall, think he has jumped in on purpose, and he seizes the opportunity to tell them they are "duffers" for not trying it themselves.

As J. is dressing, he accidentally flings his shirt into the river. He is upset at himself, and grows even more furious when George starts laughing at him. He soon discovers, however, that it was not his shirt, but George's that went in the river. Suddenly George does not think it so funny.

They are near Magna Charta Island, and J. includes a descriptive passage imagining what the river was like that day as King John and his barons gathered for him to sign the historic document, the Magna Charta.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Jerome describes the familiar occurrence when one cannot get back to sleep even when one has the time to sleep in. The opposite situation has already occurred earlier in the book, when the three men intend to get up early to have a good start on their trip and sleep three hours late. Jerome continues along this line of observational humor when he describes the story of George mistaking the time and getting up for work several hours early.

The episode with the wet shirt is another example of Jerome's reversal of the joke based on one's point of view. When it is happening to someone else, it is funny, but not when it is happening to oneself.

Jerome concludes with a more serious passage imagining the historic day when King John ceded some of the power of the monarch to the barons by signing the Magna Charta near where the men have stopped. These historic asides are frequent throughout the book, and are usually tinged with humor, or serve as daydreams for J as he lets his mind drift along with the river.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

After their breakfast, the young men explore the area. They go over to the island where King John is supposed to have signed the Magna Charta, and explore the ruins of a priory where King Henry VIII supposedly courted Anne Boleyn.

This subject reminds J. of being in a house where two young people are courting. No matter where one goes in the house, the couple seems to be there, and when one interrupts them, all parties are embarrassed. He imagines such a scene with Henry and Anne.

The men take to the river and soon are passing Datchet. This reminds George and J. of a previous boat trip they took when they stopped at Datchet late one night and wanted to sleep. They walked into the town and came to an inn, but thought they might go on and see if there was something they liked better. They came to another inn, but thought again there might be something even nicer down the road. They do not find anything after a while and ask a man, who directs them back to the first two inns, telling them these are the only two in town. They return, but find that both inns are completely full. They try asking at the grocer's for a room, and are directed all over town to private homes, none of which have room for them. As they are about to give up and sleep on the street, a small boy come along and tells them his mother would put them up. They follow the boy to his house, and though the beds are small, the food is good and they are well pleased.

They stop for lunch and find they have packed no mustard to go with their cold beef. This puts them in a bad mood, but when George produces a can of pineapple, they begin to feel better. Until they realize they have forgotten a can opener. They try to beat the can open by various methods, but it will not open. George eventually throws it into the river in anger.

Back on the river, the wind turns and is at their back and they decide to raise the sail. J. is steering, and they are all enjoying the brisk breeze as they move along the river at a good speed. There is nobody else on the river, J. remarks, except three old men fishing from a punt. J. goes on about the exhilarating sensation of sailing along the river, like some romantic figures from literature. He is awakened from his daydream by the realization that they have just run into the sole other boat on the river. The old men curse the younger three in very specific terms. George takes over the steering.

They stop at Marlow and stay at an inn.

Chapter 12 Analysis

J's daydreaming gets the better of him in Chapter 12 as he lets his mind wander while he is steering the boat while under sail. There is only one other boat on the river, and they run into it. The three older, gruff men sitting still in the fishing boat contrast sharply with the three young men in bright colors moving swiftly along the river.

Life on the river seem to have elevated the smallest things into major events, as when the men discover they have forgotten to bring any mustard for their meat. A fairly minor thing any other time, J imagines that there is nothing he could ask for more than a little mustard for his meat. Their spirits plummet because of the missing mustard, and then shoot back up just as quickly as they discover a can of delicious pineapple. Having forgotten the can opener, it is useless to them and some more slapstick ensues as they try to beat the can open, ending up in a rage.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

J. give a brief history of Marlow, which he considers one of the most attractive river towns on their trip. They wake up early, and go to the river to bathe before breakfast. On their way back, Montmorency, their rat terrier, attacks a cat. J. muses on the mischievous nature of the rat terrier breed, telling a story of a time he witnessed an innocent-looking rat terrier belonging to a young woman start an enormous dog fight.

Montmorency charges after the cat, but instead of running, the cat simply waits for the dog to get close, then sits down and stares at it. J. imagines a conversation between the self-assured cat and the puzzled and slightly frightened dog, who stops in his tracks and begins to back away slowly.

After breakfast, the men resupply their food stores. Rather than have the shops deliver their purchase to the dock later, they insist that the delivery boy follow them immediately. The result is a parade of delivery boys, dogs and other interested townspeople, all walking down to the river.

Back on the river, J. takes up the subject of steam-powered boats. These boats move faster than the small rowboats, and J. complains that their pilots act is if they own the river, and the noise from their engines and whistle disturbs his peaceful enjoyment of the river.

When the men see a steam launch approaching from behind, they prepare by sitting with their backs to it and drifting their boat out into the middle of the river. As the launch approaches, they pretend to be deep in discussion, not able to hear the whistles and yells from the other boat. When they can no longer ignore them, they pretend to get confused and not know how to steer the boat out of the way.

The men stop for lunch in a grassy field. Harris sits and begins to carve a meat pie in his lap. The others turn away shortly and when they look back, Harris has suddenly disappeared. He reappears mysteriously, apparently from out of the earth. He had been sitting on the edge of a gully hidden by tall grass, and had fallen in. Convinced the others have arranged this on purpose, he is furious.

Chapter 13 Analysis

In Chapter 13, Jerome sets up a joke that will not be finished until a later chapter when he describes the way he and his companions purposefully annoy boaters in steam launches.

The episode with the procession of townspeople and delivery boys following the men back to their boat with their restocked hampers and equipment mirrors the earlier scene

when the men are in London waiting for a cab to take them and their luggage to the train station. In that case, however, people gathered around to tease and mock them. In this case, the young men are the masters leading the parade.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

After lunch, they boat to Sonning, a picturesque village with quaint houses and gardens. They choose an island to camp on for the night, and set about making dinner. At George's suggestion, they make an "Irish stew" out of potatoes and peas and some of the leftovers. They begin to throw many different things in the pot and Montmorency gets into the spirit by killing and offering a water rat. They pretend to consider adding the rat to the stew, but decide against it.

The stew is delicious, J. writes, and they make tea to have afterward. On the journey, Montmorency has shown some animosity toward the teakettle, standing by and growling at it as it begins to hiss and spit. On this occasion, he goes so far as to attack it, grabbing it by the spout as it begins to boil. He learns his lesson and runs off howling.

George and J. want to go walk around Henley, a nearby town, after supper, but Harris stays behind, taking them to the shore and returning to the island in the boat. They plan to return to the shore and yell for him to come get them when they are through.

They go into Henley and happen to meet some people they know. The time passes quickly and it is nearly 11:00 when they start back on the long walk to the river. It is getting cold and there is a light rain and they begin to think fondly of being dry and warm back inside the boat. When they get to the shore, they cannot remember which of the islands they had moored at. They yell at each of them, but there is no answer from Harris. They know the inns at Henley are full, and have just given up hope in yelling, when they see a light and hear Montmorency barking.

Harris approaches and is in bad spirits. He has been attacked by swans. At first there were two, he tells them, and he ran them off, but then they returned with several more. His story changes with each telling and the next morning he seems to have forgotten about the swans entirely.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The men seem to have become less picky about their taste in food as they have spent more time on the river, and a stew made of a wide variety of leftovers becomes the most delicious thing the narrator has ever tasted.

The narrator has already made several references to Harris' proclivity for drink, and while it is not expressly mentioned, it is clear that the story of the swan attack is fueled by Harris' drunken imagination. Left behind alone as J and George explore the local town, Harris gets drunk and imagines a hoard of swans have attacked him, forcing him to move the boat.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The men wake up and have a plain breakfast. They decide they will start out rowing the boat rather than tow it, and begin to quarrel about which two should pull the oars and which should sit and steer. In a boat, J. remarks, each person imagines he has done more work than anyone else.

J. gives a synopsis of the three men's various experience with boats. He himself became attracted to them at a young age, sometimes getting in trouble when he would steal material to make rafts. George had begin boating as a teenager, as many other young men had. Harris had more experience rowing on the sea, which J. finds too difficult.

J. also relates some humorous stories about boating. He is on a punt with another young man, who is propelling the boat by punting it with a long pole, which is stuck down into the river bottom while the punter walks along the deck, moving the boat forward. His friend miscalculates, however, and walks off the end of the punt, leaving him stuck at the top of the pole, which is stuck in the mud in the middle of the river. J., left without a pole, drifts downstream and is saved by another boat not far before a weir.

J. finishes the chapter with another disastrous boating episode where he and some friends rent a sailboat on a windy day, none of them knowing how to sail. They end up far from the dock where they rented the boat and had to be pulled back.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Chapter 15 consists largely of anecdotes about boating and the relative experiences of J and his companions. They are well along on their journey now, and each imagining that he has done most of the work to get them there.

The anecdote that closes the chapter is another funny story based on the narrator's tendency to let his bravado carry him into situations he cannot get out of. Imagining that sailing a boat is something he will be able to do naturally and ignoring the advice of a more experienced sailor, he nearly wrecks a rented sailboat and ends up having to pay a fair bit of money.

Chapters 16-17

Chapters 16-17 Summary

The men come to Reading, an unattractive place, and J. provides a brief history. They meet some friends of theirs by chance in a steam launch, and ask for a tow. J. enjoys being towed, moving along at a brisk pace, but complains - with tongue in cheek - that the only problem with it is that so many smaller boats are always getting in the way. Ten miles past Reading, they cast off from the steam launch and J. claims his turn at rowing is over, since they are now past Reading. The others do not agree with his assessment and he takes the oars.

After a short time, they see something black floating in the water and approach it to see what it is. They are startled to find it is the body of a woman. Some men on the shore, who have already seen the body, take charge and the men row on. They later learn the woman had committed suicide, and J. imagines the details of her story.

The men intend to continue on to Wallingford, but are attracted by the charms of Streatly, where they stop.

Chapter 17 begins as the men have been in Streatly for two days, where they have had their clothes washed. George had assured them they could easily wash their clothes in the river, and they had tried it, but J. writes their clothes came out of the river dirtier than they went in.

Streatly and the nearby town of Goring are popular with fishermen, J. writes, and moves on to the subject of fishing. He had once enjoyed the sport and was told by more experienced fishermen that had all the skills but one. He did not have a sufficient imagination to tell lies.

J. tells about a friend of his who develops a formula for exaggerating his daily catch, which is to count each fish as ten and begin with a count of ten. So if he caught no fish, he would say he caught ten, one fish became twenty, and so on.

J. finishes the chapter with a story of the young men sitting at a pub and admiring a large trout mounted above the fireplace. One by one, different patrons of the pub stop by and tell the men the story of how they themselves caught the great fish. They laugh and tell the pub owner about all the men who claimed to have caught the fish. He laughs himself, and then tells them how he was the one who caught it, and gives them the story.

The innkeeper leaves, and George climbs up on a chair to get a closer look at the fish. He slips and knocks it off the wall. It falls to the ground and shatters. It is made of plaster.

Chapters 16-17 Analysis

In Chapter 16, Jerome delivers the punch line of the joke he sets up in Chapter 13. The men are now being towed by a steam launch, which they enjoy except for the fact that so many smaller boats seem to get in their way. Again, the point of view has changed the circumstances.

The discovery of a woman's body provides an uncharacteristic departure from the lighthearted tone of the story, and Jerome again delves into more serious prose in imagining the events that lead up to the woman's tragic suicide.

The fish story at the end of the chapter is itself a fish story of the kind that might be told around a pub fireplace, but without a real fish.

Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary

From Streatly, the men row to Culham and camp in the boat for the night. Part of the trip includes a long stretch with no locks, which is preferred by sport rowers, J, says, but not by pleasure boaters, who enjoy going through the locks. He tells the story of going through a lock one busy day a Hampton Court. A photographer has set up at the lock to take pictures of all the boats in the lock with the people dressed in their boating costumes. J. and George pose vainly as the photographer sets up. They don't notice that the nose of their boat has become caught under part of the lock, and the rising water threatens to flip the boat. They push away just in time, and just as the photographer snaps the photo they are caught falling over, feet in the air.

From Culham, the men hope to reach Oxford the next day. J. describes the small towns along the way to Oxford, and the difficult last mile of river approaching Oxford, with tricky currents that make it hard to steer. They are constantly getting in the way of other boats, and they in theirs, and there is much cursing, J. says, noting that being in a boat seems to make everything much more irritating than it would be on land.

Chapter 19, the final chapter, finds the men enjoying two days in Oxford before their downstream journey home. As they leave Oxford, it begins to rain. They put the canvas cover over the boat at lunch and spend the wet evening inside it. They are cold and damp, but resolve to see their journey through to the end.

The next day is just as wet as they set out, hoping to reach Pangbourne by the evening. When the weather does not improve, they guiltily decide they will catch a train back to London from Pangbourne, hoping to be back in time to go out to dinner. Leaving their boat with a caretaker, they sneak away on the train, still in their dirty boating clothes.

They arrive in London and go straight out to eat. As the rain and wind howl outside, they sit back after a large meal and agree how thankful they are to be out of that boat.

Chapters 18-19 Analysis

Oxford is the destination of the upstream portion of the journey, and while the men stay there for two days, nothing is mentioned about it until they prepare to leave on the downstream journey back to London. It begins to rain, but the shelter of the canvas canopy, which J describes as being so homelike in Chapter 14, now seems dreary and uncomfortable.

Jerome packs the entire journey home into the last few pages of the book. Earlier, the narrator has mentioned about how the last few miles of a day's journey always seem as if they are twice as long. It is as if Jerome intends to shortcut these drawn out last few miles of his story and get home quickly. With a few paragraphs, the three men are

whisked from their damp boat into a warm, friendly London nightclub where they enjoy an indulgent meal.

Characters

J

J is the narrator of the book. He is a young, single middle-class man living in London, much like the author himself at the time of the publication of the book, and the initial J is possibly meant to suggest that he stands in for Jerome.

J is fond of history and literature and spends much of his time daydreaming about the days when knights roamed the countryside of England. This daydreaming sometimes gets him into trouble when he does not pay suitable attention to what he is doing.

J, like his two friends on the boat trip, is a little vain and conceited, but he realizes it and pokes gentle fun at himself, his friends, and the habits of others like them through his anecdotes, where he and his friends are often the butt of ego-skewering jokes.

J has always been fond of boats, but prefers the old fashioned rowboat or sailboat to the noisy steam boats that have started to invade his peace and quiet on the river. He has very definite views that the river should remain open to everyone and has harsh words for anyone who would put up no trespassing signs or try to restrict the use of the river.

George

The second of the "three men" in the story. George is a bank clerk who works on Saturdays and so joins the boating trip up the river. It is George's idea to take the river trip, and his friends are surprised that he should come up with such a sensible idea. He is teased by his friends for having large feet and sleeping a lot. His tendency to sleep in adds irony to the story of when his watch stops one night and he wakes up in the middle of the night thinking he is going to be late for work. He bathes, dresses and eats and rushes to the bus stop before he notices nobody else is on the street and that it is dark out. He cannot get back to sleep the rest of the night.

George buys a banjo for the trip, imagining that he will learn to play it from a book. His friends are skeptical. They do allow him to try and J describes the situations with sarcastic politeness.

George not only is the one who suggests the trip in the first place, he is the first to suggest the three men cut the trip short by taking a train home for the last section.

Harris

William Samuel Harris, the third of the "three men" in the title of the book. Harris is a young single man with a fondness for drink. J jokes that no matter where they go, Harris

always seems to know of a good pub nearby and is constantly encouraging his friends to accompany him. Harris manages to get fairly drunk one night while George and J have gone of to a nearby town and imagines he is being attacked by swans.

Harris sometimes loses his temper, at which point his friends let him rave until he settles down. His temper flares up several times during the trip. Harris imagines that he is an entertaining singer of comic songs, but usually forgets what song he is singing, forgets the words, and loses his temper with the piano player.

Montmorency

J's rat terrier. Montmorency likes nothing more than to catch rats, chase cats, and start fights with other dogs.

Mrs. Poppets

The housekeeper for the three young men in London.

Uncle Podger

J's uncle who turns the smallest task into a major endeavor requiring the help of everyone in the household.

Two Well-dressed Sisters

Two ladies that accompany J and others on a boat outing dressed in boating costumes that are designed for appearance and not practicality. They are afraid to get any water or dirt on them

Bow

A friend of J who is along on the boat trip with the two well-dressed sisters. Bow pretends to ignore their finery and encourages them to help him wash up the dishes on the muddy river bank.

The Groundskeeper

A man who tries to run the three men off some private property along the riverbank. They acknowledge him, but casually let him know they have no intention of moving. He leaves to tell his master, but does not return.

Herr Slossen Boschen

The German professor who sings a tragic German song at a dinner party to an audience that has been told he is singing a comic song but do not understand the words. He becomes quite angry when they laugh through his song.

Two Young Fellows

The young students who have returned from Germany who play a joke on J and some others at a dinner party. They tell the assembled guests that a German guest, Herr Slossen Boschen, will sing a comic song in German. The singer actually sings a tragic song, but it is in German and the guests, not wanting to let on they do not understand the words, laugh all the way through it.

Stivvings, Jr.

A schoolmate of J's who loved to go to school, but was always to ill to attend. Offered as a figure on envy by the other boys who would rather not go to school.

The Dead Woman

A poor woman the three men find floating dead in the river. They later learn she had become so destitute that she committed suicide.

Objects/Places

London

The largest city in England and the home of the three men who embark on the boat trip.

Thames River

One of the major rivers in England, the Thames flows down through Oxford to London. It is on the Thames that the men take their boat trip.

Kingston

The starting point of the journey.

Hampton

A town near the beginning of the trip where boating is popular and the residents wear the most flashy boating costumes.

Kempton Park

Where Harris and J stop for lunch the first day, under some willows.

Waterloo Station

The large railroad station where Harris and J catch the train to Kingston.

Sunbury Lock

One of the locks Harris and J pass through on the first afternoon of rowing.

Walton

A quaint riverside town on the way to Weybridge.

Weybridge

A busy section of the river where Harris and J meet up with George, making him tow the boat.

Runnymede

A town opposite Magna Charta Island.

Magna Charta Island

An island reputed to be the site of the signing of the Magna Charta by King John. The three men explore the island, and visit the rock on which the document was supposedly signed.

Datchet

The town where, on an earlier trip, George and J tried desperately to find a place to sleep when every bed was full.

Marlow

J's favorite town along the trip, and where the three men resupply their boat, leading a parade of delivery boys and townspeople to the riverside.

Sonning

A picturesque little town with brick houses and roses in bloom.

Henley

A town near Sonning where the men stop. George and J go into Henley and spend time with some friends they happen to meet while Harris stays behind with the boat, battling off imaginary swans.

Reading

An unattractive river town where the river is dirty and the scenery unremarkable, according to J.

Goring

A town near where the men find the body of a woman floating in the river.

Streatly

A town near Goring, where the men stay for two days, and where they hear the stories of the magnificent trout.

Oxford

The upstream destination of the trip, and the home of Oxford University. J does not describe the group's stay in Oxford much except to say that Montmorency found many dogs to start fights with.

Pangbourne

The town where the three men decide to ditch the boat in favor of taking the train back to London.

Alhambra

A theater where the men enjoy a show before dining on a sumptuous meal, still dressed in their dirty boating attire, after taking the train from Pangbourne.

The Boat

A wide rowboat that can be rowed by one or two men, be towed from the bank by a line, or towed from another boat. It has a rudder at the back controlled by lines, and a mast and sail that can be erected when there is a good wind. The boat is also fitted with slots on the sides into which metal hoops can be inserted and a canvas cover stretched over to create a shelter for sleeping.

Lock

A series of gates in a river that allows for the easy lifting or lowering of boats from one level to another. Several boats can fit into a lock at once. They are operated by a lock keeper.

Themes

The Relativity of Humor

In many of the humorous passages in "Three Men in a Boat," Jerome points out that one's point of view determines what one thinks is funny. This may seem obvious in itself, but he goes a step further and recognizes that acknowledging this human trait leads to a new level of humor.

The story of George's wet shirt in Chapter 11 demonstrates this basic observation in a simple form. George thinks that J has dropped his shirt in the river, getting it wet. He laughs, and J is angry. Then J realizes it is not his own shirt but George's that has fallen in the river. The tables have turned and now George is angry and J is amused. "I tried to make him see the fun of the thing, but he could not. George is very dense at seeing a joke sometimes," J says (p. 115).

However, J is not laughing just because George's shirt is wet, he's laughing at the larger situation, laughing at himself for having been so angry before, and laughing at the fact that things can change so quickly.

A similar story is the one of the two young students who tell a small group of people that a certain song being sung in German is a comic song when it is actually a tragic song. J is among the group on whom this joke is played, and he describes the high-minded attitude of himself and the other gathered guests, who think of themselves as cultured and refined, and, not wanting to betray their ignorance of German, laugh at the sad song. This sounds precisely like the kind of joke J and his friends might play on someone else, in which case they would certainly find it funny. It is J himself who is the victim of the joke, however, and rather than be angry he simply accepts that an excellent joke has been played and turns it into an illuminating and hilarious story.

The Story as a River Trip

The structure of Jerome's book closely mirrors the nature of the river on which the three men take their boat trip. Like a river, the story often meanders. J needs only the smallest toehold on a subject to go off into an aside or long episode that is only partly related to the main subject of the boat trip. In some chapters, the main story hardly advances at all. Instead they are made up almost entirely of side stories and anecdotes, like backwaters of the river where the current slackens. Chapter 9, for example, is mainly stories about other trips and other people's experiences towing boats. Chapter 15 provides mostly backstory for the main characters and their own experiences with boats.

The river stops moving entirely when it goes through a lock, and similarly J stops and looks around him frequently on the trip. He provides historical asides and vivid descriptions of the surrounding villages and towns. He sometimes lets these daydreams

distract him from his surroundings, as when he accidentally steers the boat into another one, or when he sits daydreaming while his friends prepare the boat to leave one morning.

Like the river, the story moves along at an easy pace, but has some more serious sections as well. There are weirs and sometimes tricky currents, and Jerome includes these in his narrative. The passage on the darkness of night at the end of Chapter 10, the recreation of the signing of the Magna Charta in Chapter 11, and the discovery of the woman's body in Chapter 16 temporarily interrupt the lazy flow of the story.

Jerome takes his readers along on the boat trip by treating them to a meandering trip along the river of his prose.

Humor in Everyday Things

A large part of Jerome's humor comes from observances he makes about commonplace things that are familiar to his reader. This is not the contrived humor where an unlikely situation arises and causes upheaval for a set of characters. Jerome derives comedy from making observations about everyday situations that are familiar to his reader. Who hasn't packed a suitcase and then worried that he has forgotten his toothbrush? Or gone camping without the can opener? Or lay awake on a weekend morning, unable to get back to sleep even though there is no reason to be awake? Or awakened early and guessed the time wrong?

Jerome finds the humor in these regular situations, and the connection that they form with his reader makes the book that much more enjoyable. Even 100 years after it was published, modern readers will recognize the young man's bewilderment at the seemingly odd behavior of young women, and the supernatural ability of long ropes to tangle themselves without human intervention. Jerome's humor rises above the very specific time and place of the action of the story because it is based on common human experience.

He is also wiling to use himself, or rather his stand-in, J, as the object of light ridicule in the telling of these observational anecdotes. By laughing at himself, Jerome invites his readers to laugh at themselves as they face the sometimes ridiculous nature of being human.

Style

Point of View

Three Men in a Boat is told from the point of view a young man called "J." J is a comfortable young man living in London working as a clerk. He is familiar with boating as a pastime activity, and assumes a similar acquaintance in his reader. The book is fictional, but the evident similarity between J. and the author, Jerome, suggests that the episodes within are based on his own real friends, his life and experiences.

J's point of view is of a middle class young British man who usually enjoys dining out in restaurants and having his cleaning done for him. Much of the humor in the book derives from J. and his friends of similar backgrounds coping with their excursion into the less comfortable lifestyle of living out of a boat for two weeks. He enjoys history and provides short, often humorous sketches of the historical backgrounds of the surrounding countryside. J. enjoys the freedom of being on the river and despises anyone who would try to block access to he river by way of fences or "No Trespassing" signs.

J and his friends are single men, and women are discussed with a mix of admiration and bewilderment. The point of view is distinctly male, and celebrates the often teasing and sometimes rough camaraderie of young, single men.

Setting

The main setting of the book is in a boat on the Thames River between London and Oxford, which the three young men navigate on their two week pleasure trip. Along the river are several towns and villages of various sizes, which are described as the characters stop or pass by along the way.

The river is a popular location for pleasure boating among the middle class, and there are several other groups of young men and women out in various types of boats. The boat the young men rent for their trip is a rowboat, which can be rowed by one or two men while another steers. The boat also has a sail, which can be hoisted when the wind is right. Metal hoops can be raised over the boat, on which a canvas is stretched to make a covered tent for sleeping. These cramped quarters provide the setting for several humorous passages in the book.

In between the towns and villages are fields and forests where the men sometimes stop to prepare meals and rest. Where other rivers and streams meet the Thames, there are backwaters they sometimes explore.

Their journey begins and ends in London, the largest city in England, where the men all live at the same boarding house. They gather in their rooms at the beginning of the

book to make their preparations for the trip. The book ends with the three back in London, enjoying a fine meal out in their grubby river clothes.

Language and Meaning

Three Men in a Boat is written in British English, with British idioms used throughout. Published first in 1899, the language is largely more direct and conversational than the flowery language usually associated with Victorian era prose, but does sometimes include more "serious" passages.

The tone of the language is relaxed and congenial. Jerome often uses straightforward comic understatement to humorous effect, as when he writes "I remember a holiday of mine being completely ruined one late autumn by our paying attention to the weather report of the local newspaper" (p. 43). He also uses the opposite technique, injecting humorous pomposity in a satirical fashion. When a man asks the three men if they are aware they are trespassing, they answer, "We said we hadn't given the matter sufficient consideration as yet to enable us to arrive at a definite conclusion on that point, but that, if he assured us on his word as a gentleman that we were trespassing, we would, without further hesitation, believe it."

The story is told in an anecdotal style, with several asides and related anecdotes, which add to the overall relaxed style of the work. The language is meant to entertain and provide a pleasurable trip, like the boat trip being enjoyed by the main characters.

Structure

The book is written in basic chronological order, beginning with the three men's preparations for their trip by boat from London to Oxford and back, followed by the trip itself, and their return to London. The book is separated into 19 chapters.

The action is depicted in a roughly day-to-day diary style, with longer passages describing the local history and attractions of some of the places the three men visit. Approximately the first third of the book concerns the elaborate preparations made by the three young men about the particulars of their trip. Most of the remaining portion of the book covers the trip up to Oxford. The entire trip back is condensed into the last chapter.

The narration meanders from topic to topic as the narrator, spurred by events along the way, recalls and relates humorous stories about himself and his friends that occurred outside the action of the book. Some entire chapters are given over to these asides to the reader.

Each chapter is introduced with a synopsis in short phrases that add to the humor through comic understatement, such as "Advantages of cheese as a traveling companion," and "Contrariness of tea-kettles, how to overcome."

Quotes

"There were four of us - George, and William Samuel Harris, and myself, and Montmorency. We were sitting in my room, smoking, and talking about how abd we were - bad from a medical point of view I mean, of course." Chapter 1, p. 1

"We therefore decided that we would sleep out on fine nights; and hotel it, and inn it, and pub it, like respectable folks, when it was wet, or when we felt inclined for a change." Chapter 2, p. 18

"That's Harris all over - so ready to take the burden of everything himself, and put it on the backs of other people." Chapter 3, p. 20

"I can't sit still and see another man slaving and working. I want to get up and superintend, and walk round with my hands in my pockets, and tell him what to do. It is my energetic nature. I can't help it." Chapter 4, p. 36

"I don't know why it should be, I am sure, but the sight of another man asleep in bed when I am up, maddens me." Chapter 5, p. 42

"It seems to be the rule of this world. Each person has what he doesn't want, and other people have what he does want." Chapter 6, p. 54

"Nothing is more fetching, to my thinking, than a tasteful boating costume. But a 'boating costume,' it would be as well if all ladies would understand, ought to be a costume that can be worn in a boat, and not merely under a glass-case." Chapter 7, p. 65

"The site of those notice-boards rouses every evil instinct in my nature. I feel I want to tear each one down, and hammer it over the head of the man who put it up, until I have killed him, and then I would bury him, and put the board up over the grave as a tombstone." Chapter 8, p. 75

"There is something very strange and unaccountable about a tow-line. You roll it up with as much patience and care as you would take to fold up a new pair of trousers, and five minutes afterwards, when you pick it up, it is one ghastly, soul-revolting tangle." Chapter 9, p. 87

"One feels so forgiving and generous after a substantial and well-digested meal - so noble-minded, so kindly hearted." Chapter 10, p. 102

"As there was no earthly necessity for our getting up under another two hours at the very least, and our getting up at that time was an utter absurdity, it was only in keeping with the natural cussedness of things in general that we should both feel that lying down for five minutes more would be death to us." Chapter 11, p. 110

"I don't think I ever in my life, before or since, felt I wanted mustard as badly as I felt I wanted it then. I don't care for mustard as a rule, and it is very seldom that I take it at all, but I would have given worlds for it then." Chapter 12, p. 129

"The only subject on which Montmorency and I have any serious difference of opinion is cats. I like cats; Montmorency does not." Chapter 13, p 138

"Harris said he had had quite a fight with these two swans; but courage and skill had prevailed in the end, and he had defeated them. Half an hour afterwards they returned with eighteen other swans! it must have been a fearful battle, so far as we could understand Harris's account of it." Chapter 14, p. 161

"It always does seem to me that am doing more work than I should do. It is not that I object to the work, mind you; I like work; it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours." Chapter 15, p. 164

"We came in sight of Reading about eleven. The river is dirty and dismal here. One does not linger in the neighbourhood of Reading." Chapter 16, p. 179

"I knew a young man once, he was a most conscientious fellow and, when he took to fly-fishing, he determined never to exaggerate his hauls by more than twenty-five per cent. "Chapter 17, p. 188

"For I myself am fond of locks. they pleasantly break the monotony of the pull." Chapter 18, p. 193

"On one point we were all agreed, and that was that, come what might, we would go through with this job to the bitter end. " Chapter 19, p. 208

Topics for Discussion

Discuss Jerome's inclusion of stories and anecdotes into his narrative. What purpose do they serve?

Why does Jerome insert short, serious passages, such as the tale of the woman who commits suicide? How do they affect the story?

Is Jerome's humor still funny to a modern audience? Why or why not?

How does Jerome use humor to make more serious statements?

Discuss J's opinion that access to the river and the riverbank should be open to all people. Do you agree or disagree?

How are women portrayed in "Three Men in a Boat?"

Why does Jerome spend so little time describing the journey home?