

"No?" he said. "What's disturbing you, Monk?"

"O, the devil, I think," said the young man peevishly. "Come along, do, out of this."

Together they walked down to the river in almost absolute silence. Mr. Cantle had agreed to join his friend for an agreeable week-end on the water. It looked promising. He thought a little and came to a characteristically uncompromising decision.

"Is it anything to do with Miss Varley?"

"Yes, it is."

"She—they have a houseboat here, haven't they?"

"Yes."

"Close by?"

"More or less. Just above Datcher."

"Then, I think, perhaps I'd better—"

"Then I think, perhaps you'd not. You don't know anything about it. It's not what you suppose."

"O!"

A punt, in luxurious keeping with the tastes of its owner, awaited them at the steps. It was equipped with a number of little lockers for wine and food a wealth of the downiest cushions, and an adjustable tilt with brass hoops for "roughing it" at nights on the water. For the Honourable Ivo was at the moment an aquatic gipsy, wandering at large and at whim, and scorning the effeminate pillow.

They loitered through Romney lock, talking commonplaces, and below relinquished their poles and drifted until the reeds held them up. It was a fair, sweet, afternoon, full of life and merriment, and in view of the crowding craft, the remotest from ghostliness.

"Would you like to see her?" said Mr. Monk suddenly and unexpectedly.

Cantle was never to be taken off his guard.

"If it will please you, it will please me," he said.

They resumed the poles and made forward. To their left a little sludgy creek went up amongst the osiers, and, anchored at its mouth, rocked the vulgarest little apology for a houseboat. It seemed

just one cuddv, mounted on a craft like a bomb-ketch, which is filled from stem to stern; and what with its implied restrictiveness, and dingy appearance, and stump of a chimney, one could not have imagined a less inviting prison in which to make out a holiday. Yet there was a lord to this squalid baby galliot and to all appearance a very contented one, as he sat smoking a pipe with his legs dangling over the side. Monk nodded to him, and the man nodded back with a grin.

Who's that?" asked Mr. Cantle, when out of earshot.

"O, a crank! You should recognize the breed better than I do."

Mr. Cantle, thoughtfully nursing his jaw, with a frow on his face, had left off punting.

"Don't you know him?" he said, suddenly.

"We exchange civilities," answered the other, "the freemasonry of the river, you understand. There's the Varleys' boat."

Forging under the Victoria Bridge, they had come in view of a long line of houseboats moored under the left bank against a withy bed, and opposite the Home Park. At one of these high, the Mermaid, very large and handsome, they came to, and fastening on, stepped aboard. A sound of murmuring ceased with their arrival, and Cantle had hardly become aware of two figures seated in the saloon, before he was being introduced to one of them.

Miss Varley was certainly "interesting"—tall and "English" but with an exhausted look, and her eyes superhumanly large.

She greeted the stranger sweetly, and her fiancé with a rather full, pathetic look.

"Mamma's resting a little," she said, in a bodiless voice, "and Nanna's been reading to me. Papa comes down by the seven o'clock train."

"And what's Nanna been reading?" asked the young man.

The old nurse held up the volume. It was the Holy Book. Monk ground his teeth.

"Hush, Master Ivo!" whispered the woman, "you only distress her."

"I'd rather see her reading a yellow-back on a July day on the river."