

How I Came to Be an Oarsman

By JAMES A. TEN EYCK

I HAVE often been asked why I did not write for publication some of the episodes and experiences stored in my memory covering a lifetime of rowing history. The writer's field is a new one to me, and one which I tread with many misgivings. What I write will not necessarily be chronological or consecutive. Evenings after the day's work is done I have often sat down with a group of young fellows and gone over with them some of my rowing experiences, and it is in much the same mood and covering much the same ground that I now propose to proceed.

Many times every season I am asked how I came to be an oarsman. Well, heredity and environment had me down for the count before I even started to fight. I suppose there is not a living family so devoted to the rowing game as mine. As far back as I know we have been a rowing family. Benson Lossing, in his "Field Book of the Revolution," mentions my grandfather as the "octo-

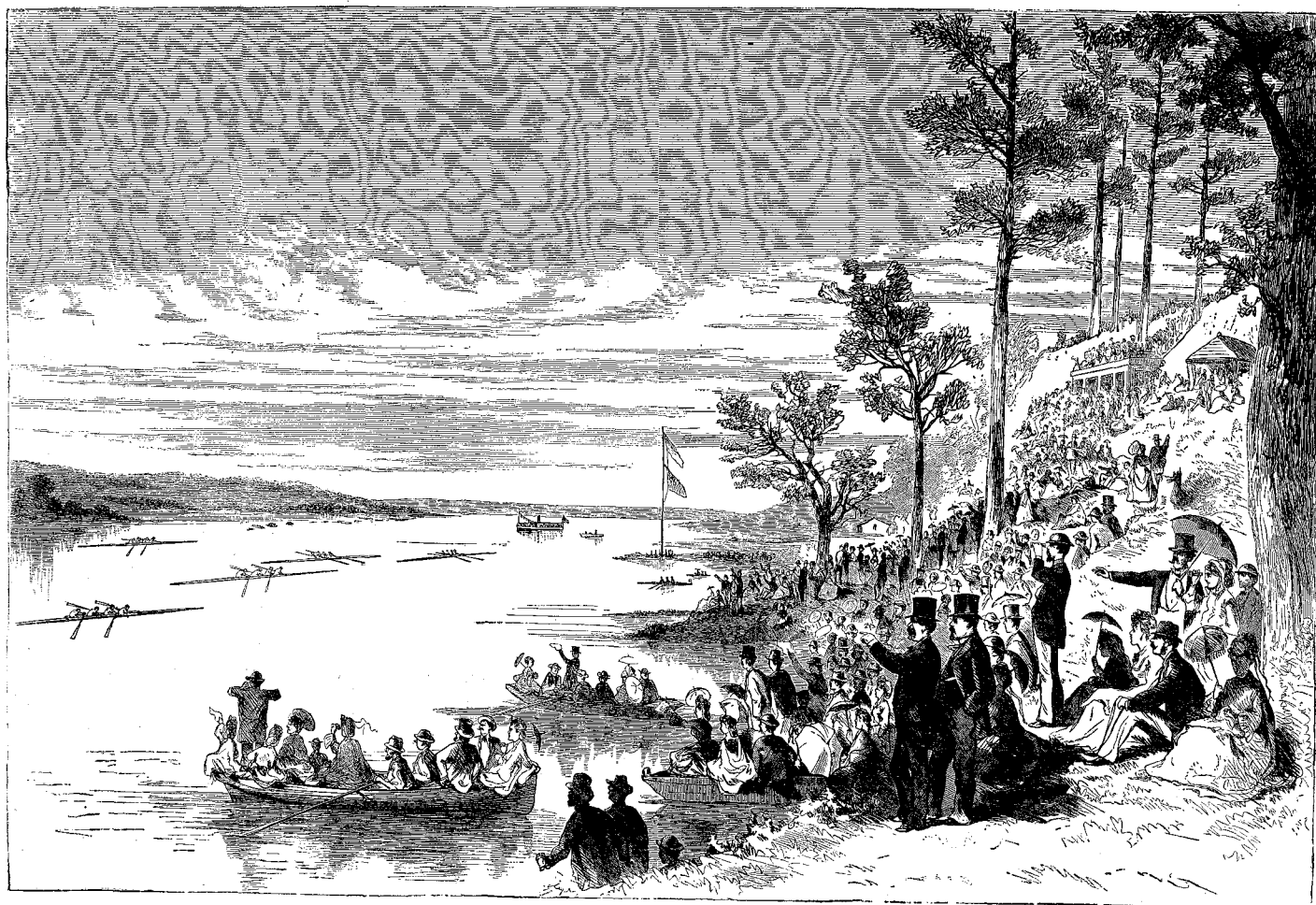
THIS is the first of a series of articles by the veteran coach of the crews of Syracuse University. Mr. Ten Eyck's reminiscences of the rowing game constitute, we believe, one of the most interesting chapters that have been written in the book of American sport. We count ourselves fortunate in being able to present them to our readers.

genarian" who rowed him across the Hudson at Old King's Ferry. We've been boatmen always. Sprung from rowing men and born on the bank of the Hudson, it was as natural for me to row as it is for a fish to swim. In fact, I have always designated that part of the Hudson between West Point and Hook Mountain as my cradle. My mother's

lullaby and the river's songs were almost equally dear and soothing to my childish ear.

I can scarcely remember when I first became acquainted with the river. I early came to know it in all its moods, and those moods were often sinister and fraught with tragedy. Indeed, when I was yet a child in my mother's arms the report that she and I had been drowned was for three days undisputed. We had attempted to cross from Verplanck's Point to Tomkins Cove with a ferryman who, either through whisky or ignorance, was foolhardy enough to row across the hawser of a tow. We were of course capsized. The crew of the tow pulled us aboard one of the barges, and, since their schedule allowed of no landings, they took us on to New York. There were no telephones and few telegraph stations in those days. It was not until we made our way back by train that my father's fears were allayed.

But even in the face of such episodes



The famous Ward brothers, of Cornwall, New York, winning the International four-oared boat-race on Saratoga Lake in 1871.
From a sketch by Thomas Nast in Harper's Weekly of September 30, 1871

as this, the first lesson my father taught me was not to be afraid. No daredevil, mock-heroic courage his, but a shrewd man's knowledge of man's limitations when in conflict with nature's power. My father was a stern teacher and a thorough one. By precept and example he taught that one learned to do by doing. So I learned to row by rowing. As a barefoot boy I acted as ferryman. One day a passenger said, "Sonny, how far do you row in a day?"

"I don't know, sir."

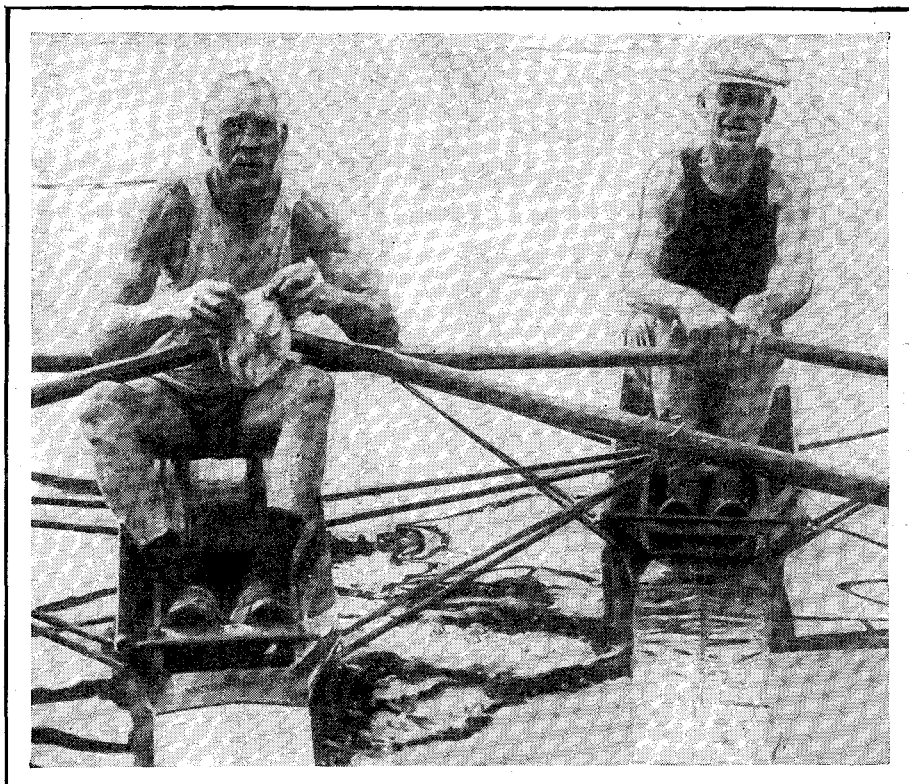
"Well, how far have you rowed to-day?"

When I figured up my mileage, I found I had rowed twenty-five miles. It was still the middle of the afternoon, and the chances were I should add six or eight miles before the day was done.

My mother died when I was ten years old. She and I were pals. After she was gone I got the *Wanderlust*; I got tired of going to school, and set out to see the world. My father at that time was foreman of a gang of fishermen at Stony Point. Since I knew several of the ferrymen along shore, it was easy to be set across the river, and I walked the five miles from Cauldwell's Landing to Stony Point, arriving just as the fishermen were coming ashore. My father seemed glad to see me, made no reference to sending me back to school, and I was allowed to help handle the nets. The next season I joined the gang and was given wages. From April till June we hauled shad nets and tugged at the oars of heavily laden fish boats. At the beginning of the season the weather was often so fierce that ice, forming thick on blade and loom, made the oar weigh a ton to a boy whose arms already ached with cold and fatigue.

Boat races were numerous in those good old river days—races between rival fishermen of the same gang and between rival gangs. One of my father's proudest boasts was (though it was no boast with him, just a plain statement of fact) that he never had lost a race. So it followed naturally that I became interested in racing. I heard it talked, I saw it done, and eventually I did it myself.

A boy chum and myself decided that it was time for us to break into the game. We were about thirteen years old, and both of us so slender we could have gone through a gas-pipe. I do not know now where we got the \$2.50, but we challenged a couple of fishermen to a race over a two-and-a-half-mile course for that amount. We rowed in heavy fishboats with straight ash oars. The fishermen were older and more experienced,



(C) Keystone

"Those who remain aren't tottering around with two crutches and a cane. Last summer two of them appeared in an exhibition race at the National Regatta at Philadelphia—Fred Plaisted and Jim Reilly"—Plaisted, who won this race, at the left

and they "jockeyed" us and won the race. Our friends decided that we kids were the better oarsmen and made up our loss. This experience dampened my ardor for a while, but the racing instinct could not long lie dormant. In my next venture I decided to go it alone, and in my first single-scutt race I was more fortunate. This is the way it happened.

There was to be a race between two celebrated oarsmen at Sing Sing, as Ossining was then called. The old side-wheeler *Aurora*, running between Peekskill (my home town) and Sing Sing, carried two unrecorded passengers that day who had decided to play hookey from school to see the boat race. Among all the fans along shore there were no more enthusiastic spectators than the two small stowaways who emerged from the *Aurora's* hold when she docked at Sing Sing. That race made rowing history, when John McKiel, of Cold Spring, beat Gil Ward, of the famous Ward brothers of Cornwall, New York. After the main event two local boys were matched. At this time it was not the custom to follow the races in boats, as there were no gasoline launches and but few steam launches, so spectators had to content themselves with waiting on the docks for the finish. During the progress of this race a local boy was performing some grand-stand rowing for the entertainment of the waiting fans. A friend of his in stentorian tones an-

nounced that the boy out there in the boat could beat any boy in town. I had been watching this boy's maneuvers, and my fighting blood was up. I happened to be standing by the side of John McKiel, and I just quietly touched him on the elbow. He looked round, recognized me, caught and interpreted the glitter in my eye, and shouted back to the challenger:

"I know a boy who can beat your kid, and I'll wager a five-spot on him."

"Does the boy belong in this town?"

"He doesn't belong here, but he is here," and McKiel shoved me a little forward. When the challenger saw me, a stripling about as wide as a necktie and weighing less than a hundred pounds, he laughed and called back:

"You're on!"

The race was rowed, and I won. I won also nine dollars, for some of the spectators had added to the stake. Here was I, a truant from school, with a victory and nine dollars to my credit and no way of accounting for either! As McKiel and my father were intimate friends, I am sure the latter must have known of the race, but he never mentioned it to me, and you may be sure I never did to him. Perhaps dad had a sneaking kind of pride in my performance, though his disciplinary method would never have allowed him to own it.

The famous Josh Ward, one of Amer-

ica's early single-scuttlers, refereed the race, and soon after he invited me to come to Cornwall and train under him for a couple of weeks and then compete in a race to be rowed under his management. You may well imagine the boy's pride who was thus singled out and honored by a man who was only little less of a hero than the great men whose names cling to sacred spots along the Hudson.

So that is how I broke into the ranks of professional oarsmen, in the days when some dozen of them did the rowing for the country. The mention of Josh Ward brings to my mind, not only the famous Ward brothers, of Cornwall, but many other men whose names were household words in those days. I was

one of them. I knew them all either personally or by reputation. There are few of these men still living, but that is not to be wondered at, for their years must have exceeded the Biblical standard of threescore and ten. Those who do remain aren't tottering around with two crutches and a cane. Last summer two of them appeared in an exhibition race at the National Regatta at Philadelphia and later in the summer rowed a match race at Saratoga. Fred Plaisted and Jim Reilly are the oarsmen referred to. While they didn't break any time records, I doubt if you can muster two or three men from any other sport, professionals or amateurs, who can come back after having been for fifty years

more or less actively interested in a sport and give a performance that people will pay money to go and see.

We can still do a little long-distance work too. There has been a good deal in the papers from time to time about an athlete being all through at forty. When I was nearer fifty than forty, a New York oarsman, Anthese by name, issued a challenge to any oarsman in the United States to row a match race from New York to Albany for a thousand dollars. I accepted the challenge and won, with no worse effect for the hundred-and-fifty-mile race than a handful of blisters. My actual rowing time was twenty-four hours and twenty-four minutes.

The Mirage

The First of a Series of American Vistas

By HERMANN HAGEDORN

DESERT, desert, desert, hour on hour; serried ridges, bare and hot; cactus and brown sand, greasewood and brown sand; and, standing guard over the waste places like ghastly sentinels without limbs or features, lofty and grotesque, the spined suwara that were ancient when Cortez's men sought here the seven lost cities of Cibola.

Desert; a row of misshapen houses; a brief stop; desert. The train speeds on.

And suddenly, without warning, water! A silver strip, a lake, a sea, as placid as the face of the deep before it knew the first breath of Jehovah!

The train rushes toward it; it runs beside it. No mountain pool was ever so limpid, no tropical ocean ever so majestically calm. No oar, no prow disturbs its surface; no human form breaks the soft lines of the shore. The lavender peaks and ridges at the farther side are sharp and clear as the craggy hills that rise out of the Ægean in an old engraving that I remember.

I stare out of the car window, hushed with wonder, enthralled at a beauty so real and so immaterial, a phantasm of air and light set in a frame of crags and desert stretches. "Such stuff as dreams are made of!"

A soft voice recalls me from my musings. The woman in the seat opposite me is also staring at the strange, unearthly vision; she does not turn her head as she speaks.

"Is it an arm of the Gulf? My geography is weak. Or is it the Salton Sea?"

"The Gulf is three hundred or more miles to the east; the Salton Sea is a thousand miles to the west. It is a mirage."

"It cannot be," she murmurs. "It

cannot be. It is so real; it is so beautiful. Don't you see the water lapping on the shore?"

"It is a trick of light."

"It can't be that, it can't be that!" Her voice is intense, almost indignant. "That line of darker water—a breeze is ruffling the surface. And there where the lake touches those hills!"

"The hills are real, madam."

"What can we trust if we cannot trust our eyes?" The words are not meant for me, and I have no words to give in answer to them.

The train speeds on. The desert draws in upon the magical sea. Slowly the serene expanse narrows.

"It is a lake," she says, firmly. "We are coming to the end."

"Look back."

She leans forward. Eastward, too, the lake is coming to an end. The desert is pressing the sea against the distant hills. It is no longer a sea; it is a broad river. It is no longer a river. It is a long pool, such as one might see in low-lying meadows after a night of rain. The pool narrows and is gone. Once more desert, desert, desert; serried ridges; cactus.

I hear her sigh, and catch the sigh before it is half spent. She has gray, thoughtful eyes; her hair has a touch of silver in it; she is past middle age. She leans her head against the back of the seat; the lids cover the eyes. There is a look of desolation on her face as though she were remembering other mirages.

THOSE who wonder at the reluctance of our Government to recognize the "reformed" Government of Russia are invited to read with particular attention two articles by

Richard Eaton

They will be published in early issues of *The Outlook*.

One article deals with the strange educational theories of the new Russia—a land where children are free to disobey everything but the State; the other with the hospitality of the Russian Government to those who are suspected of being counter-revolutionized. It is a thrilling story that Mr. Eaton tells of his meeting with the tragic beauty of Simianova and his dreary hours in a Bolshevik prison.