

# His Day Off in the Country

By FREDERICK UPHAM ADAMS



**H**ASTINGS decided to take a day off. A financial calm overspread the world, and his bank could do without its president for twenty-four hours. What was the use of having the most beautiful country place on the Hudson, and not enjoy its charms once in awhile? Therefore, he sat in an ornate pergola on the upper edge of terraces which sloped a hundred feet down to the river. There lay the fleet of the Bon Ami Yacht Club, and amid it his steam launch pulled at her moorings.

Mrs. Hastings joined him, book in hand. "You should do this, John, at least twice a week," she advised, drinking in the beauty of the frowning cliffs across a mile of sparkling water.

"Perhaps I shall," he said, leaning forward and looking intently at a large sloop anchored near the shore. "What is Burnham's boat doing in there?" he asked, pointing to the trim yacht. "Her berth is out there beyond mine. When the tide changes she is likely to foul the Sadie. I wonder who left her there?"

"There are men working on her," observed Mrs. Hastings, after a glance at the Teddy, Burnham's fleet sloop.

"That's right," admitted the banker, adjusting his glasses. Slight happenings are of much importance when one takes a day off, with nothing to do but watch a river. "I never saw a man like Burnham to monkey with a yacht. I'll bet that boat costs him more to run than my automobile. There are three men tinkering around her now."

He pondered silently on this weakness of Burnham's, and then discovered that something else was happening. On the deck of the yacht were two of the crew and her skipper. In front of the club house was a large rowboat manned by six men in blue uniforms, and standing in the bow was a man who wore a silk hat and a black frock coat. Hastings wondered why a man should embark on a rowing cruise in so strange a garb. The uniformed men pulled occasionally at their oars, so as to keep the boat fairly stationary against the tide.

"Who are those fellows?" asked Hastings, distracting his wife's attention from her book.

"Probably cadets from the military school," she said, and took no further notice of them.

"They are too big for cadets," declared Hastings, and while he was considering this problem his attention was drawn to a happening much more startling.

Another rowboat containing eight men bore down the river and made directly for Burnham's yacht. He noted that these men were roughly dressed, and that they were villainous looking characters. They steered directly to the starboard side of the yacht, threw out a grappling hook, and made fast. In the meantime the skipper and his two sailors had disappeared in the cabin. The eight men scrambled on board the Teddy.

This centering of activity about this particular yacht was so peculiar that Hastings longed to point it out to his wife; but that good woman was absorbed in her book, and he desisted—but only for a moment.

As the boarding party piled on the deck of the Teddy, her skipper and his two men emerged from the cabin and rushed toward them. What followed brought the banker to his feet, and so thrilled him with horror that for the moment he was speechless. The eight rough looking men fell on the three defenders of the

yacht, beat them brutally with clubs, and bore them to the deck.

"Great Scott! Look at them! Look at them!" he cried, as the brave skipper went down from an awful blow delivered by a low browed ruffian.

"What is it, John?" carelessly asked his wife, without looking up from a specially interesting page. "Let them work on the old boat; what do you care?"

"Work? They're fighting!" he exclaimed, dancing and waving his arms in his excitement. "Look at 'em! They're killing 'em!"

Mrs. Hastings looked up in time to watch the victorious desperados bind and gag the three valiant men who lay stretched out on the deck, seemingly lifeless.

It was then that Hastings realized what was happening. For a month a gang of river pirates had been plundering yachts on both sides of the river, but until now the fleet of the Bon Ami had escaped their depredations. They had done their work in the night, and to prevent it his club had kept a watch; but this was happening before their eyes in broad daylight. It was so daring in its infamy that he rubbed his eyes to make sure it was not a dream.

"Are they really fighting, John?" asked the dazed woman.

"Of course they're fighting!" he exclaimed. "Where's the club janitor and the servants? Why don't those idiots in uniform do something? Look at them sit there like stone bottles! What on earth are they thinking of, to let men be killed before their eyes without doing a thing? What can I do?"

"You stay right here!" insisted his wife, catching him by the arm. "You know what happened the last time you mixed up in a row which did not concern you."

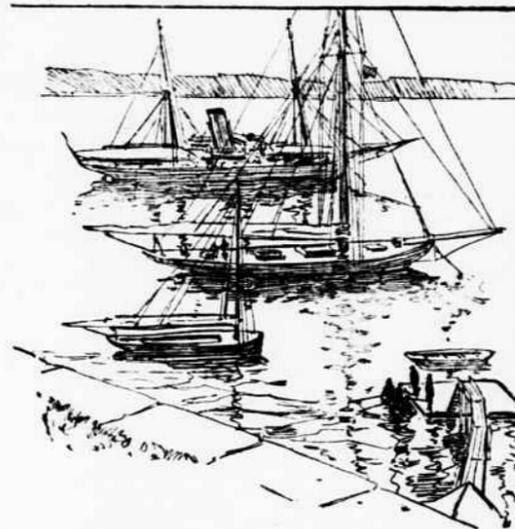
Five of the river pirates plunged into the cabin, and a moment later they were dragging from it a small safe. It seemed heavy and cumbersome, and the men tugged and pulled at it, while one large villain, evidently their leader, shouted at them with oaths and ordered them to lower it to the rowboat.

Something then happened which made the blood of the two spectators run cold. The skipper had succeeded in loosening the cords which bound him, and as he struggled to his feet the leader of the thieves caught sight of him. Grasping a stout club from the hands of one of the gang, he dealt the unfortunate man such a blow that he sank to the deck, a quivering, inert mass. It was sickening to see a brave man murdered in the discharge of his duty, and Hastings's legs trembled as he stood with clenched hands, a helpless witness of this tragedy. His wife covered her eyes and shuddered.

It was at this moment that a new factor was introduced. The six uniformed men, who had been singularly inactive, now came to the rescue. With long and swinging strokes they rowed swiftly toward the yacht, the man with the silk hat and the frock coat standing in the bow.

"Hurry up, there!" yelled Hastings, dancing and flinging his arms. "Row harder, men! Give it to 'em! Soak 'em! Kill 'em!"

The thieves were so busy with the captured safe that they did not seem to hear Hastings, neither did they notice the approach of the craft filled with officers. The man who stood in the bow of the oncoming rowboat whipped off his frock coat and silk hat, and was the first one to climb on the deck of the Teddy. The river pirates were massed near the stern of the boat, and not until the officers and



their shirt sleeved and bare headed leader were almost upon them did they realize their danger. As the civilian leader of the police officers rushed forward he picked up a three-foot section of rubber hose, an article used for a fender, and wielded it as a weapon in the desperate fight which ensued.

Like most bankers, Hastings is a conservative man; but what followed tingled every drop of fighting blood in his veins. The white shirt sleeves were like the plume of Henry of Navarre. There was not a moment they were not in the thickest of the fight. With the courage of a bulldog he hurled himself at the massive figure of the leader of the river pirates. The next instant the deck was covered with a writhing mass of swearing and infuriated men. They heard the thud of the piece of rubber hose as it fell on the heads and shoulders of the outlaws. Once the brave civilian was knocked down, and he and the leader wrestled on the deck; but the former shook his opponent off, sprang to his feet, and fought on like a fiend incarnate.

There came the report of a pistol shot, and a puff of blue smoke floated over the heads of the fighters. At this signal other shots rang out, the two parties drawing slightly apart and firing at close range. Three men fell. A fourth staggered a moment near the rail, a revolver dropped from his clasp, and with a convulsive shudder he swayed and fell overboard. He came to the surface near the bow, floated for a moment, and then disappeared. There was no question concerning his fate, and Hastings noted with horror that he wore the uniform of a defender of the law.

"My God! This is awful!" gasped Hastings, clutching his wife by the arm and dragging her away. "Get back here out of range! Did you hear that bullet whizz over our heads? I'm going to town for more police!"

He rushed for the garage, and luckily found the chauffeur on hand, and a minute later a sixty horse power machine was roaring toward the village half a mile away.

Mrs. Hastings hovered near the edge of the bank, but out of sight and range. The pistol shots still rang out, and mingled with them were the yells and moans of the contestants. The good wife was keenly sensible of the risk run; but she had a woman's curiosity, and must and did see what was

happening. She crouched behind the shelter of the pagoda, and from that coign of comparative safety looked down on a scene which had a remarkable climax.

The fighters were massed near the stern of the yacht, and the struggle centered round the safe. The deck was strewn with dead and wounded. Three of the participants were frantically swimming for shore, and the man in the shirt sleeves was still in the thickest of the fray. His collar was gone, and his red scarf hung like a streak of blood against the white of his shirt bosom. The section of hose swished through the air, but his blows were weaker.

Of a sudden the safe was pushed to the stern of the yacht, poised there for an instant, and then fell with a splash into the water; but instead of sinking, as all properly constituted safes are wont to do, this one floated and drifted slowly down with the tide. This astounding miracle had a magical effect on the warring factions. The man in the shirt sleeves took one look at the bobbing safe, lowered his weapon, and then shouted words unintelligible to Mrs. Hastings.

The fighting ceased instantly. The men who a moment before were seeking



The Leader of the Thieves Dealt the Skipper a Murderous Blow.