

PART I

THE FOREST





# THE BLAZED TRAIL

## CHAPTER ONE

WHEN history has granted him the justice of perspective, we shall know the American Pioneer as one of the most picturesque of her many figures. Resourceful, self-reliant, bold; adapting himself with fluidity to diverse circumstances and conditions; meeting with equal cheerfulness of confidence and completeness of capability both unknown dangers and the perils by which he has been educated; seizing the useful in the lives of the beasts and men nearest him, and assimilating it with marvellous rapidity; he presents to the world a picture of complete adequacy which it would be difficult to match in any other walk of life. He is a strong man, with a strong man's virtues and a strong man's vices. In him the passions are elemental, the dramas epic, for he lives in the age when men are close to nature, and draw from her their forces. He satisfies his needs direct from the earth. Stripped of all the towns can give him, he merely resorts to a facile substitution. It becomes an affair of rawhide for



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leather, buckskin for cloth, venison for canned tomatoes. We feel that his steps are planted on solid earth, for civilizations may crumble without disturbing his magnificent self-poise. In him we perceive dimly his environment. He has something about him which other men do not possess—a frank clearness of the eye, a swing of the shoulder, a carriage of the hips, a tilt of the hat, an air of muscular well-being—which marks him as belonging to the advance guard, whether he wears buckskin, mackinaw, sombrero, or broadcloth. The woods are there, the plains, the rivers. Snow is there, and the line of the prairie. Mountain peaks and still pine forests have impressed themselves subtly; so that when we turn to admire his unconsciously graceful swing, we seem to hear the ax biting the pine, or the prospector's pick tapping the rock. And in his eye is the capability of quiet humor, which is just the quality that the surmounting of many difficulties will give a man.

Like the nature he has fought until he understands, his disposition is at once kindly and terrible. Outside the subtleties of his calling, he sees only red. Relieved of the strenuousness of his occupation, he turns all the force of the wonderful energies that have carried him far where other men would have halted, to channels in which a gentle current makes flood enough. It is the mountain torrent and the canal. Instead of pleasure he seeks

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orgies. He runs to wild excesses of drinking, fighting, and carousing—which would frighten most men to sobriety—with a happy, reckless spirit that carries him beyond the limits of even his extraordinary forces.

This is not the moment to judge him. And yet one cannot help admiring the magnificently picturesque spectacle of such energies running riot. The power is still in evidence, though beyond its proper application.



## CHAPTER TWO

IN the network of streams draining the eastern portion of Michigan and known as the Saginaw waters, the great firm of Morrison & Daly had for many years carried on extensive logging operations in the wilderness. The number of their camps was legion, of their employees a multitude. Each spring they had gathered in their capacious booms from thirty to fifty million feet of pine logs.

Now at last, in the early eighties, they reached the end of their holdings. Another winter would finish the cut. Two summers would see the great mills at Beeson Lake dismantled or sold, while Mr. Daly, the "woods partner" of the combination, would flit away to the scenes of new and perhaps more extensive operations. At this juncture Mr. Daly called to him John Radway, a man whom he knew to possess extensive experience, a little capital, and a desire for more of both.

"Radway," said he, when the two found themselves alone in the mill office, "we expect to cut this year some fifty millions, which will finish our pine holdings in the Saginaw waters. Most of this timber lies over in the Crooked Lake district, and

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that we expect to put in ourselves. We own, however, five million on the Cass Branch which we would like to log on contract. Would you care to take the job?"

"How much a thousand do you give?" asked Radway.

"Four dollars," replied the lumberman.

"I'll look at it," replied the jobber.

So Radway got the "descriptions" and a little map divided into townships, sections, and quarter sections; and went out to look at it. He searched until he found a "blaze" on a tree, the marking on which indicated it as the corner of a section. From this corner the boundary lines were blazed at right angles in either direction. Radway followed the blazed lines. Thus he was able accurately to locate isolated "forties" (forty acres), "eighties," quarter sections, and sections in a primeval wilderness. The feat, however, required considerable woodcraft, an exact sense of direction, and a pocket compass.

These resources were still further drawn upon for the next task. Radway tramped the woods, hills, and valleys to determine the most practical route over which to build a logging road from the standing timber to the shores of Cass Branch. He found it to be an affair of some puzzlement. The pines stood on a country rolling with hills, deep with pot-holes. It became necessary to dodge in and out,



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here and there, between the knolls, around or through the swamps, still keeping, however, the same general direction, and preserving always the requisite level or down grade. Radway had no vantage point from which to survey the country. A city man would promptly have lost himself in the tangle; but the woodsman emerged at last on the banks of the stream, leaving behind him a meandering trail of clipped trees that wound, twisted, doubled, and turned, but kept ever to a country without steep hills. From the main road he purposed arteries to tap the most distant parts.

"I'll take it," said he to Daly.

Now Radway happened to be in his way a peculiar character. He was acutely sensitive to the human side of those with whom he had dealings. In fact, he was more inclined to take their point of view than to hold his own. For that reason, the subtler disputes were likely to go against him. His desire to avoid coming into direct collision of opinion with the other man, veiled whatever of justice might reside in his own contention. Consequently it was difficult for him to combat sophistry or a plausible appearance of right. Daly was perfectly aware of Radway's peculiarities, and so proceeded to drive a sharp bargain with him.

Customarily a jobber is paid a certain proportion of the agreed price as each stage of the work is completed—so much when the timber is cut; so much

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when it is skidded, or piled; so much when it is stacked at the river, or banked; so much when the "drive" down the waters of the river is finished. Daly objected to this method of procedure.

"You see, Radway," he explained, "it is our last season in the country. When this lot is in, we want to pull up stakes, so we can't take any chances on not getting that timber in. If you don't finish your job, it keeps us here another season. There can be no doubt, therefore, that you finish your job. In other words, we can't take any chances. If you start the thing, you've got to carry it 'way through."

"I think I can, Mr. Daly," the jobber assured him.

"For that reason," went on Daly, "we object to paying you as the work progresses. We've got to have a guarantee that you don't quit on us, and that those logs will be driven down the branch as far as the river in time to catch our drive. Therefore I'm going to make you a good price per thousand, but payable only when the logs are delivered to our rivermen."

Radway, with his usual mental attitude of one anxious to justify the other man, ended by seeing only his employer's argument. He did not perceive that the latter's proposition introduced into the transaction a gambling element. It became possible for Morrison & Daly to get a certain amount of work, short of absolute completion, done for nothing.



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"How much does the timber estimate?" he inquired finally.

"About five millions."

"I'd need a camp of forty or fifty men then. I don't see how I can run such a camp without borrowing."

"You have some money, haven't you?"

"Yes; a little. But I have a family, too."

"That's all right. Now look here." Daly drew toward him a sheet of paper and began to set down figures showing how the financing could be done. Finally it was agreed. Radway was permitted to draw on the Company's warehouse for what provisions he would need. Daly let him feel it as a concession.

All this was in August. Radway, who was a good practical woodsman, set about the job immediately. He gathered a crew, established his camp, and began at once to cut roads through the country he had already blazed on his former trip.

Those of us who have ever paused to watch a group of farmers working out their road taxes, must have gathered a formidable impression of road-clearing. And the few of us who, besides, have experienced the adventure of a drive over the same highway after the tax has been pronounced liquidated, must have indulged in varied reflections as to the inadequacy of the result.

Radway's task was not merely to level out and

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ballast the six feet of a road-bed already constructed, but to cut a way for five miles through the unbroken wilderness. The way had moreover to be not less than twenty-five feet wide, needed to be absolutely level and free from any kind of obstructions, and required in the swamps liberal ballasting with poles, called corduroys. To one who will take the trouble to recall the variety of woods, thickets, and jungles that go to make up a wooded country—especially in the creek bottoms where a logging road finds often its levellest way—and the piles of wind-falls, vines, bushes, and scrubs that choke the thickets with a discouraging and inextricable tangle, the clearing of five miles to street width will look like an almost hopeless undertaking. Not only must the growth be removed, but the roots must be cut out, and the inequalities of the ground levelled or filled up. Reflect further that Radway had but a brief time at his disposal—but a few months at most—and you will then be in a position to gauge the first difficulties of those the American pioneer expects to encounter as a matter of course. The cutting of the road was a mere incident in the battle with the wilderness.

The jobber, of course, pushed his roads as rapidly as possible, but was greatly handicapped by lack of men. Winter set in early and surprised him with several of the smaller branches yet to finish. The main line, however, was done.



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At intervals squares were cut out alongside. In them two long timbers, or skids, were laid andiron-wise for the reception of the piles of logs which would be dragged from the fallen trees. They were called skidways. Then finally the season's cut began.

The men who were to fell the trees, Radway distributed along one boundary of a "forty." They were instructed to move forward across the forty in a straight line, felling every pine tree over eight inches in diameter. While the "saw-gangs," three in number, prepared to fell the first trees, other men, called "swampers," were busy cutting and clearing of roots narrow little trails down through the forest from the pine to the skidway at the edge of the logging road. The trails were perhaps three feet wide, and marvels of smoothness, although no attempt was made to level mere inequalities of the ground. They were called *travoy roads* (French *travois*). Down them the logs would be dragged and hauled, either by means of heavy steel tongs or a short sledge on which one end of the timber would be chained.

Meantime the sawyers were busy. Each pair of men selected a tree, the first they encountered over the blazed line of their "forty." After determining in which direction it was to fall, they set to work to chop a deep gash in that side of the trunk.

Tom Broadhead and Henry Paul picked out a

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tremendous pine which they determined to throw across a little open space in proximity to the *travoy* road. One stood to right, the other to left, and alternately their axes bit deep. It was a beautiful sight this, of experts wielding their tools. The craft of the woodsman means incidentally such a free swing of the shoulders and hips, such a directness of stroke as the blade of one sinks accurately in the gash made by the other, that one never tires of watching the grace of it. Tom glanced up as a sailor looks aloft.

"She'll do, Hank," he said.

The two then with a dozen half clips of the ax, removed the inequalities of the bark from the saw's path. The long, flexible ribbon of steel began to sing, bending so adaptably to the hands and motions of the men manipulating, that it did not seem possible so mobile an instrument could cut the rough pine. In a moment the song changed timbre. Without a word the men straightened their backs. Tom flirted along the blade a thin stream of kerosene oil from a bottle in his hip pocket, and the sawyers again bent to their work, swaying back and forth rhythmically, their muscles rippling under the texture of their woolens like those of a panther under its skin. The outer edge of the saw-blade disappeared.

"Better wedge her, Tom," advised Hank.

They paused while, with a heavy sledge, Tom



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drove a triangle of steel into the crack made by the sawing. This prevented the weight of the tree from pinching the saw, which is a ruin at once to the instrument and the temper of the filer. Then the rhythmical *z-z-z!* *z-z-z!* again took up its song.

When the trunk was nearly severed, Tom drove another and thicker wedge.

"*Timber!*" hallooed Hank in a long-drawn melodious call that melted through the woods into the distance. The swampers ceased work and withdrew to safety.

But the tree stood obstinately upright. So the saw leaped back and forth a few strokes more.

"*Crack!*" called the tree.

Hank coolly unhooked his saw handle, and Tom drew the blade through and out the other side.

The tree shivered, then leaned ever so slightly from the perpendicular, then fell, at first gently, afterwards with a crescendo rush, tearing through the branches of other trees, bending the small timber, breaking the smallest, and at last hitting with a tremendous crash and bang which filled the air with a fog of small twigs, needles, and the powder of snow, that settled but slowly. There is nothing more impressive than this rush of a pine top, excepting it be a charge of cavalry or the fall of Niagara. Old woodsmen sometimes shout aloud with the mere excitement into which it lifts them.

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Then the swampers, who had by now finished the travoy road, trimmed the prostrate trunk clear of all protuberances. It required fairly skillful ax work. The branches had to be shaved close and clear, and at the same time the trunk must not be gashed. And often a man was forced to wield his instrument from a constrained position.

The chopped branches and limbs had now to be dragged clear and piled. While this was being finished, Tom and Hank marked off and sawed the log lengths, paying due attention to the necessity of avoiding knots, forks, and rotten places. Thus some of the logs were eighteen, some sixteen, or fourteen, and some only twelve feet in length.

Next appeared the teamsters with their little wooden sledges, their steel chains, and their tongs. They had been helping the skidders to place the parallel and level beams, or skids, on which the logs were to be piled by the side of the road. The tree which Tom and Hank had just felled, lay up a gentle slope from the new travoy road, so little Fabian Laveque, the teamster, clamped the bite of his tongs to the end of the largest, or butt, log.

"*Allez, Molly!*" he cried.

The horse, huge, elephantine, her head down, nose close to her chest, intelligently spying her steps, moved. The log half rolled over, slid three feet, and menaced a stump.

"*Gee!*" cried Laveque.



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Molly stepped twice directly sideways, planted her fore foot on a root she had seen, and pulled sharply. The end of the log slid around the stump.

"Allez!" commanded Laveque.

And Molly started gingerly down the hill. She pulled the timber, heavy as an iron safe, here and there through the brush, missing no steps, making no false moves, backing, and finally getting out of the way of an unexpected roll with the ease and intelligence of Laveque himself. In five minutes the burden lay by the travoy road. In two minutes more one end of it had been rolled on the little flat wooden sledge and, the other end dragging, it was winding majestically down through the ancient forest. The little Frenchman stood high on the forward end. Molly stepped ahead carefully, with the strange intelligence of the logger's horse. Through the tall, straight, decorative trunks of trees the little convoy moved with the massive pomp of a dead warrior's cortège. And little Fabian Laveque, singing, a midget in the vastness, typified the indomitable spirit of these conquerors of a wilderness.

When Molly and Fabian had travoyed the log to the skidway, they drew it with a bump across the two parallel skids, and left it there to be rolled to the top of the pile.

Then Mike McGovern and Bob Stratton and Jim Gladys took charge of it. Mike and Bob were run-

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ning the cant-hooks, while Jim stood on top of the great pile of logs already decked. A slender, pliable steel chain, like a gray snake, ran over the top of the pile and disappeared through a pulley to an invisible horse—Jenny, the mate of Molly. Jim threw the end of this chain down. Bob passed it over and under the log and returned it to Jim, who reached down after it with the hook of his implement. Thus the stick of timber rested in a long loop, one end of which led to the invisible horse, and the other Jim made fast to the top of the pile. He did so by jamming into another log the steel swamp-hook with which the chain was armed. When all was made fast, the horse started.

"She's a bumper!" said Bob. "Look out, Mike!"

The log slid to the foot of the two parallel poles laid slanting up the face of the pile. Then it trembled on the ascent. But one end stuck for an instant, and at once the log took on a dangerous slant. Quick as light Bob and Mike sprang forward, gripped the hooks of the cant-hooks, like great thumbs and forefingers, and, while one held with all his power, the other gave a sharp twist upward. The log straightened. It was a master feat of power, and the knack of applying strength justly.

At the top of the little incline, the timber hovered for a second.

"One more!" sang out Jim to the driver. He



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poised, stepped lightly up and over, and avoided by the safe hair's breadth being crushed when the log rolled. But it did not lie quite straight and even. So Mike cut a short thick block, and all three stirred the heavy timber sufficiently to admit of the billet's insertion.

Then the chain was thrown down for another.

Jenny, harnessed only to a straight short bar with a hook in it, leaned to her collar and dug in her hoofs at the word of command. The driver, close to her tail, held fast the slender steel chain by an ingenious hitch about the ever-useful swamp-hook. When Jim shouted "whoa!" from the top of the skidway, the driver did not trouble to stop the horse—he merely let go the hook. So the power was shut off suddenly, as is meet and proper in such ticklish business. He turned and walked back, and Jenny, like a dog, without the necessity of command, followed him in slow patience.

Now came Dyer, the scaler, rapidly down the logging road, a small slender man with a little, turned-up mustache. The men disliked him because of his affectation of a city smartness, and because he never ate with them, even when there was plenty of room. Radway had confidence in him because he lived in the same shanty with him. This one fact a good deal explains Radway's character. The scaler's duty at present was to measure the diameter of the logs in each skidway, and so compute the number of

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board feet. At the office he tended van, kept the books, and looked after supplies.

He approached the skidway swiftly, laid his flexible rule across the face of each log, made a mark on his pine tablets in the column to which the log belonged, thrust the tablet in the pocket of his coat, seized a blue crayon, in a long holder, with which he made an 8 as indication that the log had been scaled, and finally tapped several times strongly with a sledge hammer. On the face of the hammer in relief was an M inside of a delta. This was the Company's brand, and so the log was branded as belonging to them. He swarmed all over the skidway, rapid and absorbed, in strange contrast of activity to the slower power of the actual skidding. In a moment he moved on to the next scene of operations without having said a word to any of the men.

"A fine t'ing!" said Mike, spitting.

So day after day the work went on. Radway spent his time tramping through the woods, figuring on new work, showing the men how to do things better or differently, discussing minute expedients with the blacksmith, the carpenter, the cook.

He was not without his troubles. First he had not enough men; the snow lacked, and then came too abundantly; horses fell sick of colic or caulked themselves; supplies ran low unexpectedly; trees turned out "punk"; a certain bit of ground proved



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soft for travoying, and so on. At election-time, of course, a number of the men went out.

And one evening, two days after election-time, another and important character entered the North woods and our story.

## CHAPTER THREE

ON the evening in question, some thirty or forty miles southeast of Radway's camp, a train was crawling over a badly laid track which led toward the Saginaw Valley. The whole affair was very crude. To the edge of the right-of-way pushed the dense swamp, like a black curtain shutting the virgin country from the view of civilization. Even by daylight the sight could have penetrated but a few feet. The right-of-way itself was rough with upturned stumps, blackened by fire, and gouged by many and varied furrows. Across the snow were tracks of animals.

The train consisted of a string of freight cars, one coach divided half and half between baggage and smoker, and a day car occupied by two silent, awkward women and a child. In the smoker lounged a dozen men. They were of various sizes and descriptions, but they all wore heavy blanket mackinaw coats, rubber shoes, and thick German socks tied at the knee. This constituted, as it were, a sort of uniform. The air was so thick with smoke that the men had difficulty in distinguishing objects across the length of the car.