

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IN every direction the woods. Not an opening of any kind offered the mind a breathing place under the free sky. Sometimes the pine groves—vast, solemn, grand, with the patrician aloofness of the truly great; sometimes the hardwood—bright, mysterious, full of life; sometimes the swamps—dark, dank, speaking with the voices of the shyer creatures; sometimes the spruce and balsam thickets—aromatic, enticing. But never the clear, open sky.

And always the woods creatures, in startling abundance and tameness. The solitary man with the pack-straps across his forehead and shoulders had never seen so many of them. They withdrew silently before him as he advanced. They accompanied him on either side, watching him with intelligent, bright eyes. They followed him stealthily for a little distance, as though escorting him out of their own particular territory. Dozens of times a day the traveller glimpsed the flaunting white flags of deer. Often the creatures would take but a few hasty jumps, and then would wheel, the beautiful embodiments of the picture deer, to snort and paw the leaves. Hundreds of birds, of which he did not

THE BLAZED TRAIL

know the name, stooped to his inspection, whirred away at his approach, or went about their business with hardy indifference under his very eyes. Blase porcupines trundled superbly from his path. Once a mother-partridge simulated a broken wing, fluttering painfully. Early one morning the traveller ran plump on a fat lolling bear, taking his ease from the new sun, and his meal from a panic-stricken army of ants. As beseemed two innocent wayfarers they honored each other with a salute of surprise, and went their way. And all about and through, weaving, watching, moving like spirits, were the forest multitudes which the young man never saw, but which he divined, and of whose movements he sometimes caught for a single instant the faintest patter or rustle. It constituted the mystery of the forest, that great fascinating, lovable mystery which, once it steals into the heart of a man, has always a hearing and a longing when it makes its voice heard.

The young man's equipment was simple in the extreme. Attached to a heavy leather belt of cartridges hung a two-pound axe and a sheath knife. In his pocket reposed a compass, an air-tight tin of matches, and a map drawn on oiled paper of a district divided into sections. Some few of the sections were colored, which indicated that they belonged to private parties. All the rest was State or Government land. He carried in his hand a repeating rifle. The pack, if opened, would have been found to con-

THE LANDLOOKER

tain a woolen and a rubber blanket, fishing tackle, twenty pounds or so of flour, a package of tea, sugar, a slab of bacon carefully wrapped in oiled cloth, salt, a suit of underwear, and several extra pairs of thick stockings. To the outside of the pack had been strapped a frying pan, a tin pail, and a cup.

For more than a week Thorpe had journeyed through the forest without meeting a human being, or seeing any indications of man, excepting always the old blaze of the government survey. Many years before, officials had run careless lines through the country along the section-boundaries. At this time the blazes were so weather-beaten that Thorpe often found difficulty in deciphering the indications marked on them. These latter stated always the section, the township, and the range east or west by number. All Thorpe had to do was to find the same figures on his map. He knew just where he was. By means of his compass he could lay his course to any point that suited his convenience.

The map he had procured at the United States Land Office in Detroit. He had set out with the scanty equipment just described for the purpose of "looking" a suitable bunch of pine in the northern peninsula, which, at that time, was practically untouched. Access to its interior could be obtained only on foot or by river. The South Shore Railroad was already engaged in pushing a way through the virgin forest, but it had as yet penetrated only as far

THE BLAZED TRAIL

as Seney; and after all, had been projected more with the idea of establishing a direct route to Duluth and the copper districts than to aid the lumber industry. Marquette, Menominee, and a few smaller places along the coast were lumbering near at home; but they shipped entirely by water. Although the rest of the peninsula also was finely wooded, a general impression obtained among the craft that it would prove too inaccessible for successful operation.

Furthermore, at that period, a great deal of talk was believed as to the inexhaustibility of Michigan pine. Men in a position to know what they were talking about stated dogmatically that the forests of the southern peninsula would be adequate for a great many years to come. Furthermore, the magnificent timber of the Saginaw, Muskegon, and Grand River valleys in the southern peninsula occupied entire attention. No one cared to bother about property at so great a distance from home. As a consequence, few as yet knew even the extent of the resources so far north.

Thorpe, however, with the far-sightedness of the born pioneer, had perceived that the exploitation of the upper country was an affair of a few years only. The forests of southern Michigan were vast, but not limitless; and they had all passed into private ownership. The north, on the other hand, would not prove as inaccessible as it now seemed, for the carry-

THE LANDLOOKER

ing trade would some day realize that the entire waterway of the Great Lakes offered an unrivalled outlet. With that elementary discovery would begin a rush to the new country. Tiring of a profitless employment farther south he resolved to anticipate it, and by acquiring his holdings before general attention should be turned that way, to obtain of the best.

He was without money, and practically without friends; while Government and State lands cost respectively two dollars and a half and a dollar and a quarter an acre, cash down. But he relied on the good sense of capitalists to perceive, from the statistics which his explorations would furnish, the wonderful advantage of logging a new country with the chain of Great Lakes as shipping outlet at its very door. In return for his information, he would expect a half interest in the enterprise. This is the usual method of procedure adopted by landlookers everywhere.

We have said that the country was quite new to logging, but the statement is not strictly accurate. Thorpe was by no means the first to see the money in northern pine. Outside the big mill districts already named, cuttings of considerable size were already under way, the logs from which were usually sold to the mills of Marquette or Menominee. Here and there along the best streams, men had already begun operations.

THE BLAZED TRAIL

But they worked on a small scale and with an eye to the immediate present only; bending their efforts to as large a cut as possible each season rather than to the acquisition of holdings for future operations. This they accomplished naively by purchasing one forty and cutting a dozen. Thorpe's map showed often near the forks of an important stream a section whose coloring indicated private possession. Legally the owners had the right only to the pine included in the marked sections; but if any one had taken the trouble to visit the district, he would have found operations going on for miles up and down stream. The colored squares would prove to be nothing but so many excuses for being on the ground. The bulk of the pine of any season's cut he would discover had been stolen from unbought State or Government land.

This in the old days was a common enough trick. One man, at present a wealthy and respected citizen, cut for six years, and owned just one forty-acres! Another logged nearly fifty million feet from an eighty! In the State to-day live prominent business men, looked upon as models in every way, good fellows, good citizens, with sons and daughters proud of their social position, who, nevertheless, made the bulk of their fortunes by stealing Government pine.

"What you want to-day, old man?" inquired a wholesale lumber dealer of an individual whose name now stands for domestic and civic virtue.

THE LANDLOOKER

"I'll have five or six million saw logs to sell you in the spring, and I want to know what you'll give for them."

"Go on!" expostulated the dealer with a laugh, "ain't you got that forty all cut yet?"

"She holds out pretty well," replied the other with a grin.

An official, called the Inspector, is supposed to report such stealings, after which another official is to prosecute. Aside from the fact that the danger of discovery is practically zero in so wild and distant a country, it is fairly well established that the old-time logger found these two individuals susceptible to the gentle art of "sugaring." The officials, as well as the lumberman, became rich. If worst came to worst, and investigation seemed imminent, the operator could still purchase the land at legal rates, and so escape trouble. But the intention to appropriate was there, and, to confess the truth, the whitewashing by purchase needed but rarely to be employed. I have time and again heard landlookers assert that the old Land Offices were rarely "on the square," but as to that I cannot, of course, venture an opinion.

Thorpe was perfectly conversant with this state of affairs. He knew, also, that in all probability many of the colored districts on his map represented firms engaged in steals of greater or less magnitude. He was further aware that most of the concerns stole

THE BLAZED TRAIL

the timber because it was cheaper to steal than to buy; but that they would buy readily enough if forced to do so in order to prevent its acquisition by another. This other might be himself. In his exploration, therefore, he decided to employ the utmost circumspection. As much as possible he purposed to avoid other men; but if meetings became inevitable, he hoped to mask his real intentions. He would pose as a hunter and fisherman.

During the course of his week in the woods, he discovered that he would be forced eventually to resort to this expedient. He encountered quantities of fine timber in the country through which he travelled, and some day it would be logged, but at present the difficulties were too great. The streams were shallow, or they did not empty into a good shipping port. Investors would naturally look first for holdings along the more practicable routes.

A cursory glance sufficed to show that on such waters the little red squares had already blocked a foothold for other owners. Thorpe surmised that he would undoubtedly discover fine unbought timber along their banks, but that the men already engaged in stealing it would hardly be likely to allow him peaceful acquisition.

For a week, then, he journeyed through magnificent timber without finding what he sought, working always more and more to the north, until finally he stood on the shores of Superior. Up to now the

THE LANDLOOKER

streams had not suited him. He resolved to follow the shore west to the mouth of a fairly large river called the Ossawinamakee.* It showed, in common with most streams of its size, land already taken, but Thorpe hoped to find good timber nearer the mouth. After several days' hard walking with this object in view, he found himself directly north of a bend in the river; so, without troubling to hunt for its outlet into Superior, he turned through the woods due south, with the intention of striking in on the stream. This he succeeded in accomplishing some twenty miles inland, where also he discovered a well-defined and recently used trail leading up the river. Thorpe camped one night at the bend, and then set out to follow the trail.

It led him for upward of ten miles nearly due south, sometimes approaching, sometimes leaving the river, but keeping always in its direction. The country in general was rolling. Low parallel ridges of gentle declivity glided constantly across his way, their valleys sloping to the river. Thorpe had never seen a grander forest of pine than that which clothed them.

For almost three miles, after the young man had passed through a preliminary jungle of birch, cedar, spruce, and hemlock, it ran without a break, clear, clean, of cloud-sweeping altitude, without underbrush. Most of it was good bull-sap, which is

* Accent the last syllable.

THE BLAZED TRAIL

known by the fineness of the bark, though often in the hollows it shaded gradually into the rough-skinned cork pine. In those days few people paid any attention to the Norway, and hemlock was not even thought of. With every foot of the way Thorpe became more and more impressed.

At first the grandeur, the remoteness, the solemnity of the virgin forest fell on his spirit with a kind of awe. The tall, straight trunks lifted directly upward to the vaulted screen through which the sky seemed as remote as the ceiling of a Roman church. Ravens wheeled and croaked in the blue, but infinitely far away. Some lesser noises wove into the stillness without breaking the web of its splendor, for the pine silence laid soft, hushing fingers on the lips of those who might waken the sleeping sunlight.

Then the spirit of the pioneer stirred within his soul. The wilderness sent forth its old-time challenge to the hardy. In him awoke that instinct which, without itself perceiving the end on which it is bent, clears the way for the civilization that has been ripening in old-world hot-houses during a thousand years. Men must eat; and so the soil must be made productive. We regret, each after his manner, the passing of the Indian, the buffalo, the great pine forests, for they are of the picturesque; but we live gladly on the product of the farms that have taken their places. Southern Michigan was once a



Thorpe camped one night at the bend, and then set out to follow the trail

THE LANDLOOKER

pine forest: now the twisted stump-fences about the most fertile farms of the north alone break the expanse of prairie and of trim "wood-lots."

Thorpe knew little of this, and cared less. These feathered trees, standing close-ranked and yet each isolate in the dignity and gravity of a sphinx of stone, set to dancing his blood of the frontiersman. He spread out his map to make sure that so valuable a clump of timber remained still unclaimed. A few sections lying near the headwaters were all he found marked as sold. He resumed his tramp light-heartedly.

At the ten-mile point he came upon a dam. It was a crude dam—built of logs—whose face consisted of strong buttresses slanted up-stream, and whose sheer was made of unbarked timbers laid smoothly side by side at the required angle. At present its gate was open. Thorpe could see that it was an unusually large gate, with a powerful apparatus for the raising and the lowering of it.

The purpose of the dam in this new country did not puzzle him in the least, but its presence bewildered him. Such constructions are often thrown across logging streams at proper intervals in order that the operator may be independent of the spring freshets. When he wishes to "drive" his logs to the mouth of the stream, he first accumulates a head of water behind his dams, and then, by lifting the gates, creates an artificial freshet sufficient to float

THE BLAZED TRAIL

his timber to the pool formed by the next dam below. The device is common enough; but it is expensive. People do not build dams except in the certainty of some years of logging, and quite extensive logging at that. If the stream happens to be navigable, the promoter must first get an Improvement Charter from a board of control appointed by the State. So Thorpe knew that he had to deal, not with a hand-to-mouth-timber-thief, but with a great company preparing to log the country on a big scale.

He continued his journey. At noon he came to another and similar structure. The pine forest had yielded to knolls of hardwood separated by swamp-holes of blackthorn. Here he left his pack and pushed ahead in light marching order. About eight miles above the first dam, and eighteen from the bend of the river, he ran into a "slashing" of the year before. The decapitated stumps were already beginning to turn brown with weather, the tangle of tops and limbs was partially concealed by poplar growths and wild raspberry vines. Parenthetically, it may be remarked that the promptitude with which these growths succeed the cutting of the pine is an inexplicable marvel. Clear forty acres at random in the very centre of a pine forest, without a tract of poplar within an hundred miles; the next season will bring up the fresh shoots. Some claim that blue-jays bring the seeds in their crops. Others incline

THE LANDLOOKER

to the theory that the creative elements lie dormant in the soil, needing only the sun to start them to life. Final speculation is impossible, but the fact stands.

To Thorpe this particular clearing became at once of the greatest interest. He scrambled over and through the ugly *débris* which for a year or two after logging operations cumpers the ground. By a rather prolonged search he found what he sought—the "section corners" of the tract, on which the government surveyor had long ago marked the "descriptions." A glance at the map confirmed his suspicions. The slashing lay some two miles north of the sections designated as belonging to private parties. It was Government land.

Thorpe sat down, lit a pipe, and did a little thinking.

As an axiom it may be premised that the shorter the distance logs have to be transported, the less it costs to get them in. Now Thorpe had that very morning passed through beautiful timber lying much nearer the mouth of the river than either this, or the sections farther south. Why had these men deliberately ascended the stream? Why had they stolen timber eighteen miles from the bend, when they could equally well have stolen just as good fourteen miles nearer the terminus of their drive?

Thorpe ruminated for some time without hitting upon a solution. Then suddenly he remembered the

THE BLAZED TRAIL

two dams, and his idea that the men in charge of the river must be wealthy and must intend operating on a large scale. He thought he glimpsed it. After another pipe, he felt sure.

The Unknowns were indeed going in on a large scale. They intended eventually to log the whole of the Ossawinamakee basin. For this reason they had made their first purchase, planted their first foothold, near the headwaters. Furthermore, located as they were far from a present or an immediately future civilization, they had felt safe in leaving for the moment their holdings represented by the three sections already described. Some day they would buy all the standing Government pine in the basin; but in the meantime they would steal all they could at a sufficient distance from the lake to minimize the danger of discovery. They had not dared to appropriate the three-mile tract Thorpe had passed through, because in that locality the theft would probably be remarked, so they intended eventually to buy it. Until that should become necessary, however, every stick cut meant so much less to purchase.

"They're going to cut, and keep on cutting, working down river as fast as they can," argued Thorpe. "If anything happens so they *have* to, they'll buy in the pine that is left; but if things go well with them, they'll take what they can for nothing. They're getting this stuff out up-river first, because they can steal safer while the country is still unsettled; and

THE LANDLOOKER

even when it does fill up, there will not be much likelihood of an investigation so far in-country—at least until after they have folded their tents."

It seems to us who are accustomed to the accurate policing of our twentieth century, almost incredible that such wholesale robberies should have gone on with so little danger of detection. Certainly detection was a matter of sufficient simplicity. Some one happens along, like Thorpe, carrying a Government map in his pocket. He runs across a parcel of unclaimed land already cut over. It would seem easy to lodge a complaint, institute a prosecution against the men known to have put in the timber. *But it is almost never done.*

Thorpe knew that men occupied in so precarious a business would be keenly on the watch. At the first hint of rivalry, they would buy in the timber they had selected. But the situation had set his fighting blood to racing. The very fact that these men were thieves on so big a scale made him the more obstinately determined to thwart them. They undoubtedly wanted the tract down river. Well, so did he!

He purposed to look it over carefully, to ascertain its exact boundaries and what sections it would be necessary to buy in order to include it, and perhaps even to estimate it in a rough way. In the accomplishment of this he would have to spend the summer, and perhaps part of the fall, in that district.

THE BLAZED TRAIL

He could hardly expect to escape notice. By the indications on the river, he judged that a crew of men had shortly before taken out a drive of logs. After the timber had been rafted and towed to Marquette, they would return. He might be able to hide in the forest, but sooner or later, he was sure, one of the company's landlookers or hunters would stumble on his camp. Then his very concealment would tell them what he was after. The risk was too great. For above all things Thorpe needed time. He had, as has been said, to ascertain what he could offer. Then he had to offer it. He would be forced to interest capital, and that is a matter of persuasion and leisure.

Finally his shrewd, intuitive good-sense flashed the solution on him. He returned rapidly to his pack, assumed the straps, and arrived at the first dam about dark of the long summer day.

There he looked carefully about him. Some fifty feet from the water's edge a birch knoll supported, besides the birches, a single big hemlock. With his belt axe, Thorpe cleared away the little white trees. He stuck the sharpened end of one of them in the bark of the shaggy hemlock, fastened the other end in a crotch eight or ten feet distant, slanted the rest of the saplings along one side of this ridge pole, and turned in, after a hasty supper, leaving the completion of his permanent camp to the morrow.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

IN the morning he thatched smooth the roof of the shelter, using for the purpose the thick branches of hemlocks; placed two green spruce logs side by side as cooking range; slung his pot on a rod across two forked sticks; cut and split a quantity of wood; spread his blankets; and called himself established. His beard was already well grown, and his clothes had become worn by the brush and faded by the sun and rain. In the course of the morning he lay in wait very patiently near a spot overflowed by the river, where, the day before, he had noticed lily-pads growing. After a time a doe and a spotted fawn came and stood ankle-deep in the water, and ate of the lily-pads. Thorpe lurked motionless behind his screen of leaves; and as he had taken the precaution so to station himself that his hiding-place lay down-wind, the beautiful animals were unaware of his presence.

By and by a prong-buck joined them. He was a two-year-old, young, tender, with the velvet just off his antlers. Thorpe aimed at his shoulder, six inches above the belly-line, and pressed the trigger. As though by enchantment the three woods creatures