

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

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disappeared. But the hunter had noticed that, whereas the doe and fawn flourished bravely the broad white flags of their tails, the buck had seemed but a streak of brown. By this he knew he had hit.

Sure enough, after two hundred yards of following the prints of sharp hoofs and occasional gobbets of blood on the leaves, he came upon his prey dead. It became necessary to transport the animal to camp. Thorpe stuck his hunting knife deep into the front of the deer's chest, where the neck joins, which allowed most of the blood to drain away. Then he fastened wild grape vines about the antlers, and, with a little exertion drew the body after him as though it had been a toboggan.

It slid more easily than one would imagine, along the grain; but not as easily as by some other methods with which Thorpe was unfamiliar.

At camp he skinned the deer, cut most of the meat into thin strips which he salted and placed in the sun to dry, and hung the remainder in a cool arbor of boughs. The hide he suspended over a pole.

All these things he did hastily, as though he might be in a hurry; as indeed he was.

At noon he cooked himself a venison steak and some tea. Then with his hatchet he cut several small pine poles, which he fashioned roughly in a number of shapes and put aside for the future. The brains of the deer, saved for the purpose, he boiled with

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water in his tin pail, wishing it were larger. With the liquor thus obtained he intended later to remove the hair and grain from the deer hide. Toward evening he caught a dozen trout in the pool below the dam. These he ate for supper.

Next day he spread the buck's hide out on the ground and drenched it liberally with the product of deer-brains. Later the hide was soaked in the river, after which, by means of a rough two-handled spatula, Thorpe was enabled after much labor to scrape away entirely the hair and grain. He cut from the edge of the hide a number of long strips of raw-hide, but anointed the body of the skin liberally with the brain liquor.

"Glad I don't have to do that every day!" he commented, wiping his brow with the back of his wrist.

As the skin dried he worked and kneaded it to softness. The result was a fair quality of white buckskin, the first Thorpe had ever made. If wetted, it would harden dry and stiff. Thorough smoking in the fumes of punk maple would obviate this, but that detail Thorpe left until later.

"I don't know whether it's all necessary," he said to himself doubtfully, "but if you're going to assume a disguise, let it be a good one."

In the meantime, he had bound together with his rawhide thongs several of the oddly shaped pine timbers to form a species of dead-fall trap. It was

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slow work, for Thorpe's knowledge of such things was theoretical. He had learned his theory well, however, and in the end arrived.

All this time he had made no effort to look over the pine, nor did he intend to begin until he could be sure of doing so in safety. His object now was to give his knoll the appearances of a trapper's camp.

Toward the end of the week he received his first visit. Evening was drawing on, and Thorpe was busily engaged in cooking a panful of trout, resting the frying pan across the two green spruce logs between which glowed the coals. Suddenly he became aware of a presence at his side. How it had reached the spot he could not imagine, for he had heard no approach. He looked up quickly.

"How do," greeted the newcomer gravely.

The man was an Indian, silent, solemn, with the straight, unwinking gaze of his race.

"How do," replied Thorpe.

The Indian without further ceremony threw his pack to the ground, and, squatting on his heels, watched the white man's preparations. When the meal was cooked, he coolly produced a knife, selected a clean bit of hemlock bark, and helped himself. Then he lit a pipe, and gazed keenly about him. The buckskin interested him.

"No good," said he, feeling of its texture.

Thorpe laughed. "Not very," he confessed.

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"Good," continued the Indian, touching lightly his own moccasins.

"What you do?" he inquired after a long silence, punctuated by the puffs of tobacco.

"Hunt; trap; fish," replied Thorpe with equal sententiousness.

"Good," concluded the Indian, after a ruminative pause.

That night he slept on the ground. Next day he made a better shelter than Thorpe's in less than half the time; and was off hunting before the sun was an hour high. He was armed with an old-fashioned smooth-bore muzzle-loader; and Thorpe was astonished, after he had become better acquainted with his new companion's methods, to find that he hunted deer with fine bird shot. The Indian never expected to kill or even mortally wound his game; but he would follow for miles the blood drops caused by his little wounds, until the animals in sheer exhaustion allowed him to approach close enough for a dispatching blow. At two o'clock he returned with a small buck, tied scientifically together for toting, with the waste parts cut away, but every ounce of utility retained.

"I show," said the Indian:—and he did. Thorpe learned the Indian tan; of what use are the hollow shank bones; how the spinal cord is the toughest, softest, and most pliable sewing-thread known.

The Indian appeared to intend making the birch-

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knoll his permanent headquarters. Thorpe was at first a little suspicious of his new companion, but the man appeared scrupulously honest, was never intrusive, and even seemed genuinely desirous of teaching the white little tricks of the woods brought to their perfection by the Indian alone. He ended by liking him. The two rarely spoke. They merely sat near each other, and smoked. One evening the Indian suddenly remarked:

"You look 'um tree."

"What's that?" cried Thorpe, startled.

"You no hunter, no trapper. You look 'um tree, for make 'um lumber."

The white had not begun as yet his explorations. He did not dare until the return of the logging crew or the passing of some one in authority at the up-river camp, for he wished first to establish in their minds the innocence of his intentions.

"What makes you think that, Charley?" he asked.

"You good man in woods," replied Injin Charley sententiously, "I tell by way you look at him pine."

Thorpe ruminated.

"Charley," said he, "why are you staying here with me?"

"Big frien'," replied the Indian promptly.

"Why are you my friend? What have I ever done for you?"

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"You gottum chief's eye," replied his companion with simplicity.

Thorpe looked at the Indian again. There seemed to be only one course.

"Yes, I'm a lumberman," he confessed, "and I'm looking for pine. But, Charley, the men up the river must not know what I'm after."

"They gettum pine," interjected the Indian like a flash.

"Exactly," replied Thorpe, surprised afresh at the other's perspicacity.

"Good!" ejaculated Injin Charley, and fell silent.

With this, the longest conversation the two had attempted in their peculiar acquaintance, Thorpe was forced to be content. He was, however, ill at ease over the incident. It added an element of uncertainty to an already precarious position.

Three days later he was intensely thankful the conversation had taken place.

After the noon meal he lay on his blanket under the hemlock shelter, smoking and lazily watching Injin Charley busy at the side of the trail. The Indian had terminated a long two days' search by toting from the forest a number of strips of the outer bark of white birch, in its green state pliable as cotton, thick as leather, and light as air. These he had cut into arbitrary patterns known only to himself, and was now sewing as a long

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shapeless sort of bag or sac to a slender beech-wood oval. Later it was to become a birch-bark canoe, and the beech-wood oval would be the gun-wale.

So idly intent was Thorpe on this piece of construction that he did not notice the approach of two men from the down-stream side. They were short, alert men, plodding along with the knee-bent persistency of the woods-walker, dressed in broad hats, flannel shirts, coarse trousers tucked in high laced "cruisers"; and carrying each a bulging meal sack looped by a cord across the shoulders and chest. Both were armed with long slender scaler's rules. The first intimation Thorpe received of the presence of these two men was the sound of their voices addressing Injin Charley.

"Hullo Charley," said one of them, "what you doing here? Ain't seen you since th' Sturgeon district."

"Mak' 'um canoe," replied Charley rather obviously.

"So I see. But what you expect to get in this God-forsaken country?"

"Beaver, muskrat, mink, otter."

"Trapping, eh?" The man gazed keenly at Thorpe's recumbent figure. "Who's the other fellow?"

Thorpe held his breath; then exhaled it in a long sigh of relief.

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"Him white man," Injin Charley was replying, "him hunt too. He mak' 'um buckskin."

The landlooker arose lazily and sauntered toward the group. It was part of his plan to be well recognized so that in the future he might arouse no suspicions.

"Howdy," he drawled, "got any smokin'?"

"How are you," replied one of the scalers, eyeing him sharply, and tendering his pouch. Thorpe filled his pipe deliberately, and returned it with a heavy-lidded glance of thanks. To all appearances he was one of the lazy, shiftless white hunters of the backwoods. Seized with an inspiration, he said, "What sort of chances is they at your camp for a little flour? Me and Charley's about out. I'll bring you meat; or I'll make you boys moccasins. I got some good buckskin."

It was the usual proposition.

"Pretty good, I guess. Come up and see," advised the scaler. "The crew's right behind us."

"I'll send up Charley," drawled Thorpe, "I'm busy now makin' traps," he waved his pipe, calling attention to the pine and rawhide dead-falls.

They chatted a few moments, practically and with an eye to the strict utility of things about them, as became woodsmen. Then two wagons creaked lurching by, followed by fifteen or twenty men. The last of these, evidently the foreman, was joined by the two scalers.

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"What's that outfit?" he inquired with the sharpness of suspicion.

"Old Injin Charley—you remember, the old boy that tanned that buck for you down on Cedar Creek."

"Yes, but the other fellow."

"Oh, a hunter," replied the scaler carelessly.

"Sure?"

The man laughed. "Couldn't be nothin' else," he asserted with confidence. "Regular old backwoods mossback."

At the same time Injin Charley was setting about the splitting of a cedar log.

"You see," he remarked, "I big frien'."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IN the days that followed, Thorpe cruised about the great woods. It was slow business, but fascinating. He knew that when he should embark on his attempt to enlist considerable capital in an "unsight unseen" investment, he would have to be well supplied with statistics. True, he was not much of a timber estimator, nor did he know the methods usually employed, but his experience, observation, and reading had developed a latent sixth sense by which he could appreciate quality, difficulties of logging, and such kindred practical matters.

First of all he walked over the country at large, to find where the best timber lay. This was a matter of tramping; though often on an elevation he succeeded in climbing a tall tree whence he caught bird's-eye views of the country at large. He always carried his gun with him, and was prepared at a moment's notice to seem engaged in hunting—either for game or for spots in which later to set his traps. The expedient was, however, unnecessary.

Next he ascertained the geographical location of the different clumps and forests, entering the sections, the quarter-sections, even the separate forties

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in his note-book; taking in only the "descriptions" containing the best pine.

Finally he wrote accurate notes concerning the topography of each and every pine district—the lay of the land; the hills, ravines, swamps, and valleys; the distance from the river; the character of the soil. In short, he accumulated all the information he could by which the cost of logging might be estimated.

The work went much quicker than he had anticipated, mainly because he could give his entire attention to it. Injin Charley attended to the commissary, with a delight in the process that removed it from the category of work. When it rained, an infrequent occurrence, the two hung Thorpe's rubber blankets before the opening of the driest shelter, and waited philosophically for the weather to clear. Injin Charley had finished the first canoe, and was now leisurely at work on another. Thorpe had filled his note-book with the class of statistics just described. He decided now to attempt an estimate of the timber.

For this he had really too little experience. He knew it, but determined to do his best. The weak point of his whole scheme lay in that it was going to be impossible for him to allow the prospective purchaser a chance of examining the pine. That difficulty Thorpe hoped to overcome by inspiring personal confidence in himself. If he failed to do so,

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he might return with a landlooker whom the investor trusted, and the two could re-enact the comedy of this summer. Thorpe hoped, however, to avoid the necessity. It would be too dangerous. He set about a rough estimate of the timber.

Injin Charley intended evidently to work up a trade in buckskin during the coming winter. Although the skins were in poor condition at this time of the year, he tanned three more, and smoked them. In the day-time he looked the country over as carefully as did Thorpe. But he ignored the pines, and paid attention only to the hardwood and the beds of little creeks. Injin Charley was in reality a trapper, and he intended to get many fine skins in this promising district. He worked on his tanning and his canoe-making late in the afternoon.

One evening just at sunset Thorpe was helping the Indian shape his craft. The loose sac of birch-bark sewed to the long beech oval was slung between two tripods. Injin Charley had fashioned a number of thin, flexible cedar strips of certain arbitrary lengths and widths. Beginning with the smallest of these, Thorpe and his companion were catching one end under the beech oval, bending the strip bow-shape inside the sac, and catching again the other side of the oval. Thus the spring of the bent cedar, pressing against the inside of the birch-bark sac, distended it tightly. The cut of the sac and the length

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of the cedar strips gave to the canoe its graceful shape.

The two men bent there at their task, the dull glow of evening falling upon them. Behind them the knoll stood out in picturesque relief against the darker pine—the little shelters, the fire-places of green spruce, the blankets, the guns, a deer's carcass suspended by the feet from a cross pole, the drying buckskin on either side. The river rushed by with a never-ending roar and turmoil. Through its shouting one perceived, as through a mist, the still lofty peace of evening.

A young fellow, hardly more than a boy, exclaimed with keen delight of the picturesque as his canoe shot around the bend into sight of it.

The canoe was large and powerful, but well filled. An Indian knelt in the stern; amidships was well laden with duffle of all descriptions; then the young fellow sat in the bow. He was a bright-faced, eager-eyed, curly-haired young fellow, all enthusiasm and fire. His figure was trim and clean, but rather slender; and his movements were quick but nervous. When he stepped carefully out on the flat rock to which his guide brought the canoe with a swirl of the paddle, one initiated would have seen that his clothes, while strong and serviceable, had been bought from a sporting catalogue. There was a trimness, a neatness, about them.

"This is a good place," he said to the guide,

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"we'll camp here." Then he turned up the steep bank without looking back.

"Hullo!" he called in a cheerful, unembarrassed fashion to Thorpe and Charley. "How are you? Care if I camp here? What you making? By Jove! I never saw a canoe made before. I'm going to watch you. Keep right at it."

He sat on one of the outcropping boulders and took off his hat.

"Say! you've got a great place here! You here all summer? Hullo! you've got a deer hanging up. Are there many of 'em around here? I'd like to kill a deer first rate. I never have. It's sort of out of season now, isn't it?"

"We only kill the bucks," replied Thorpe.

"I like fishing, too," went on the boy; "are there any here? In the pool? John," he called to his guide, "bring me my fishing tackle."

In a few moments he was whipping the pool with long, graceful drops of the fly. He proved to be adept. Thorpe and Injin Charley stopped work to watch him. At first the Indian's stolid countenance seemed a trifle doubtful. After a time it cleared.

"Good!" he grunted.

"You do that well," Thorpe remarked. "Is it difficult?"

"It takes practice," replied the boy. "See that riffle?" He whipped the fly lightly within six

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inches of a little suction hole; a fish at once rose and struck.

The others had been little fellows and easily handled. At the end of fifteen minutes the newcomer landed a fine two-pounder.

"That must be fun," commented Thorpe. "I never happened to get in with fly-fishing. I'd like to try it sometime."

"Try it now!" urged the boy, enchanted that he could teach a woodsman anything.

"No," Thorpe declined, "not to-night, to-morrow perhaps."

The other Indian had by now finished the erection of a tent, and had begun to cook supper over a little sheet-iron camp stove. Thorpe and Charley could smell ham.

"You've got quite a pantry," remarked Thorpe.

"Won't you eat with me?" proffered the boy hospitably.

But Thorpe declined. He could, however, see canned goods, hard tack, and condensed milk.

In the course of the evening the boy approached the older man's camp, and, with a charming diffidence, asked permission to sit a while at their fire.

He was full of delight over everything that savored of the woods, or woodcraft. The most trivial and everyday affairs of the life interested him. His eager questions, so frankly proffered, aroused even the taciturn Charley to eloquence. The

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construction of the shelter, the cut of a deer's hide, the simple process of "jerking" venison—all these awakened his enthusiasm.

"It must be good to live in the woods," he said with a sigh, "to do all things for yourself. It's so free!"

The men's moccasins interested him. He asked a dozen questions about them—how they were cut, whether they did not hurt the feet, how long they would wear. He seemed surprised to learn that they are excellent in cold weather.

"I thought *any* leather would wet through in the snow!" he cried. "I wish I could get a pair somewhere!" he exclaimed. "You don't know where I could buy any, do you?" he asked of Thorpe.

"I don't know," answered he, "perhaps Charley here will make you a pair."

"*Will* you, Charley?" cried the boy.

"I mak' him," replied the Indian stolidly.

The many-voiced night of the woods descended close about the little camp fire, and its soft breezes wafted stray sparks here and there like errant stars. The newcomer, with shining eyes, breathed deep in satisfaction. He was keenly alive to the romance, the grandeur, the mystery, the beauty of the littlest things, seeming to derive a deep and solid contentment from the mere contemplation of the woods and its ways and creatures.

"I just *do* love this!" he cried again and again.

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"Oh, it's great, after all that fuss down there!" and he cried it so fervently that the other men present smiled; but so genuinely that the smile had in it nothing but kindness.

"I came out for a month," said he suddenly, "and I guess I'll stay the rest of it right here. You'll let me go with you sometimes hunting, won't you?" he appealed to them with the sudden open-heartedness of a child. "I'd like first rate to kill a deer."

"Sure," said Thorpe, "glad to have you."

"My name is Wallace Carpenter," said the boy with a sudden unmistakable air of good-breeding.

"Well," laughed Thorpe, "two old woods loafers like us haven't got much use for names. Charley here is called Geezigut, and mine's nearly as bad; but I guess plain Charley and Harry will do."

"All right, Harry," replied Wallace.

After the young fellow had crawled into the sleeping bag which his guide had spread for him over a fragrant layer of hemlock and balsam, Thorpe and his companion smoked one more pipe. The whip-poor-wills called back and forth across the river. Down in the thicket, fine, clear, beautiful, like the silver thread of a dream, came the notes of the white-throat—the nightingale of the North. Injin Charley knocked the last ashes from his pipe.

"Him nice boy!" said he.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE young fellow stayed three weeks, and was a constant joy to Thorpe. His enthusiasms were so whole-souled; his delight so perpetual; his interest so fresh! The most trivial expedients of woods lore seemed to him wonderful. A dozen times a day he exclaimed in admiration or surprise over some bit of woodcraft practiced by Thorpe or one of the Indians.

"Do you mean to say you have lived here six weeks and only brought in what you could carry on your backs!" he cried.

"Sure," Thorpe replied.

"Harry, you're wonderful! I've got a whole canoe load, and imagined I was travelling light and roughing it. You beat Robinson Crusoe! He had a whole ship to draw from."

"My man Friday helps me out," answered Thorpe, laughingly indicating Injin Charley.

Nearly a week passed before Wallace managed to kill a deer. The animals were plenty enough; but the young man's volatile and eager attention stole his patience. And what few running shots offered, he missed, mainly because of buck fever. Finally, by a lucky chance, he broke a four-year-old's neck,