

THE BLAZED TRAIL

"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,

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dropping him in his tracks. The hunter was delighted. He insisted on doing everything for himself—cruel hard work it was too—including the toting and skinning. Even the tanning he had a share in. At first he wanted the hide cured, "with the hair on." Injin Charley explained that the fur would drop out. It was the wrong season of the year for pelts.

"Then we'll have buckskin and I'll get a buckskin shirt out of it," suggested Wallace.

Injin Charley agreed. One day Wallace returned from fishing in the pool to find that the Indian had cut out the garment, and was already sewing it together.

"Oh!" he cried, a little disappointed, "I wanted to see it done!"

Injin Charley merely grunted. To make a buckskin shirt requires the hides of three deer. Charley had supplied the other two, and wished to keep the young man from finding it out.

Wallace assumed the woods life as a man would assume an unaccustomed garment. It sat him well, and he learned fast, but he was always conscious of it. He liked to wear moccasins, and a deer knife; he liked to cook his own supper, or pluck the fragrant hemlock browse for his pillow. Always he seemed to be trying to realize and to savor fully the charm, the picturesqueness, the romance of all that he was doing and seeing. To Thorpe these things were a

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part of everyday life; matters of expedient or necessity. He enjoyed them, but subconsciously, as one enjoys an environment. Wallace trailed the cloak of his glories in frank admiration of their splendor.

This double point of view brought the men very close together. Thorpe liked the boy because he was open-hearted, free from affectation, assumptive of no superiority—in short, because he was direct and sincere, although in a manner totally different from Thorpe's own directness and sincerity. Wallace, on his part, adored in Thorpe the free, open-air life, the adventurous quality, the quiet hidden power, the resourcefulness and self-sufficiency of the pioneer. He was too young as yet to go behind the picturesque or romantic; so he never thought to inquire of himself what Thorpe did there in the wilderness, or indeed if he did anything at all. He accepted Thorpe for what he thought him to be, rather than for what he might think him to be. Thus he reposed unbounded confidence in him.

After a while, observing the absolute ingenuousness of the boy, Thorpe used to take him from time to time on some of his daily trips to the pines. Necessarily he explained partially his position and the need of secrecy. Wallace was immensely excited and important at learning a secret of such moment, and deeply flattered at being entrusted with it.

Some may think that here, considering the magni-

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tude of the interests involved, Thorpe committed an indiscretion. It may be; but if so, it was practically an inevitable indiscretion. Strong, reticent characters like Thorpe's prove the need from time to time of violating their own natures, of running counter to their ordinary habits of mind and deed. It is a necessary relaxation of the strenuous, a debauch of the soul. Its analogy in the lower plane is to be found in the dissipations of men of genius; or still lower in the orgies of fighters out of training. Sooner or later Thorpe was sure to emerge for a brief space from that iron-bound silence of the spirit, of which he himself was the least aware. It was not so much a hunger for affection, as the desire of a strong man temporarily to get away from his strength. Wallace Carpenter became in his case the exception to prove the rule.

Little by little the eager questionings of the youth extracted a full statement of the situation. He learned of the timber-thieves up the river, of their present operations; and their probable plans; of the valuable pine lying still unclaimed; of Thorpe's stealthy raid into the enemy's country. It looked big to him—epic! These were tremendous forces in motion, here was intrigue, here was direct practical application of the powers he had been playing with.

"Why, it's great! It's better than any book I ever read!"

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He wanted to know what he could do to help.

"Nothing except keep quiet," replied Thorpe, already uneasy, not lest the boy should prove unreliable, but lest his very eagerness to seem unconcerned should arouse suspicion. "You mustn't try to act any different. If the men from up-river come by, be just as cordial to them as you can, and don't act mysterious and important."

"All right," agreed Wallace, bubbling with excitement. "And then what do you do—after you get the timber estimated?"

"I'll go South and try, quietly, to raise some money. That will be difficult, because, you see, people don't know me; and I am not in a position to let them look over the timber. Of course it will be merely a question of my judgment. They can go themselves to the Land Office and pay their money. There won't be any chance of my making way with that. The investors will become possessed of certain 'descriptions' lying in this country, all right enough. The rub is, will they have enough confidence in me and my judgment to believe the timber to be what I represent it?"

"I see," commented Wallace, suddenly grave.

That evening Injin Charley went on with his canoe building. He melted together in a pot, resin and pitch. The proportion he determined by experiment, for the mixture had to be neither hard enough to crack nor soft enough to melt in the sun.

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Then he daubed the mess over all the seams. Wallace superintended the operation for a time in silence.

"Harry," he said suddenly with a crisp decision new to his voice, "will you take a little walk with me down by the dam. I want to talk with you."

They strolled to the edge of the bank and stood for a moment looking at the swirling waters.

"I want you to tell me all about logging," began Wallace. "Start from the beginning. Suppose, for instance, you had bought this pine here we were talking about—what would be your first move?"

They sat side by side on a log, and Thorpe explained. He told of the building of the camps, the making of the roads; the cutting, swamping, travoying, skidding; the banking and driving. Unconsciously a little of the battle clang crept into his narrative. It became a struggle, a gasping tug and heave for supremacy between the man and the wilderness. The excitement of war was in it. When he had finished, Wallace drew a deep breath.

"When I am home," said he simply, "I live in a big house on the Lake Shore Drive. It is heated by steam and lighted by electricity. I touch a button or turn a screw, and at once I am lighted and warmed. At certain hours meals are served me. I don't know how they are cooked, or where the materials come from. Since leaving college I have spent a little time down town every day; and then I've

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played golf or tennis or ridden a horse in the park. The only real thing left is the sailing. The wind blows just as hard and the waves mount just as high to-day as they did when Drake sailed. All the rest is tame. We do little imitations of the real thing with blue ribbons tied to them, and think we are camping or roughing it. This life of yours is glorious, is vital, it means something in the march of the world;—and I doubt whether ours does. You are subduing the wilderness, extending the frontier. After you will come the backwoods farmer to pull up the stumps; and after him the big farmer and the cities."

The young fellow spoke with unexpected swiftness and earnestness. Thorpe looked at him in surprise.

"I know what you are thinking," said the boy, flushing. "You are surprised that I can be in earnest about anything. I'm out of school up here. Let me shout and play with the rest of the children."

Thorpe watched him with sympathetic eyes, but with lips that obstinately refused to say one word. A woman would have felt rebuffed. The boy's admiration, however, rested on the foundation of the more manly qualities he had already seen in his friend. Perhaps this very aloofness, this very silent, steady-eyed power appealed to him.

"I left college at nineteen because my father died," said he. "I am now just twenty-one. A

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large estate descended to me, and I have had to care for its investments all alone. I have one sister—that is all.”

“So have I,” cried Thorpe, and stopped.

“The estates have not suffered,” went on the boy simply. “I have done well with them. But,” he cried fiercely, “I *hate* it! It is petty and mean and worrying and nagging! That’s why I was so glad to get out in the woods.”

He paused.

“Have some tobacco,” said Thorpe.

Wallace accepted with a nod.

“Now, Harry, I have a proposal to make to you. It is this; you need thirty thousand dollars to buy your land. Let me supply it, and come in as half partner.”

An expression of doubt crossed the landlooker’s face.

“Oh *please!*” cried the boy, “I do want to get in something real! It will be the making of me!”

“Now see here,” interposed Thorpe suddenly, “you don’t even know my name.”

“I know *you*,” replied the boy.

“My name is Harry Thorpe,” pursued the other.

“My father was Henry Thorpe, an embezzler.”

“Harry,” replied Wallace soberly, “I am sorry I made you say that. I do not care for your name—except perhaps to put it in the articles of partnership—and I have no concern with your ancestry. I

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tell you it is a favor to let me in on this deal. I don’t know anything about lumbering, but I’ve got eyes. I can see that big timber standing up thick and tall, and I know people make profits in the business. It isn’t a question of the raw material surely, and you have experience.”

“Not so much as you think,” interposed Thorpe.

“There remains,” went on Wallace without attention to Thorpe’s remark, “only the question of——”

“My honesty,” interjected Thorpe grimly.

“No!” cried the boy hotly, “of your letting me in on a good thing!”

Thorpe considered a few moments in silence.

“Wallace,” he said gravely at last, “I honestly do think that whoever goes into this deal with me will make money. Of course there’s always chances against it. But I am going to do my best. I’ve seen other men fail at it, and the reason they’ve failed is because they did not demand success of others and of themselves. That’s it; success! When a general commanding troops receives a report on something he’s ordered done, he does not trouble himself with excuses;—he merely asks whether or not the thing was accomplished. Difficulties don’t count. It is a soldier’s duty to perform the impossible. Well, that’s the way it ought to be with us. A man has no right to come to me and say, ‘I failed because such and such things happened.’ Either he should

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succeed in spite of it all; or he should step up and take his medicine without whining. Well, I'm going to succeed!"

The man's accustomed aloofness had gone. His eye flashed, his brow frowned, the muscles of his cheeks contracted under his beard. In the bronze light of evening he looked like a fire-breathing statue to that great ruthless god he had himself invoked—Success.

Wallace gazed at him with fascinated admiration.

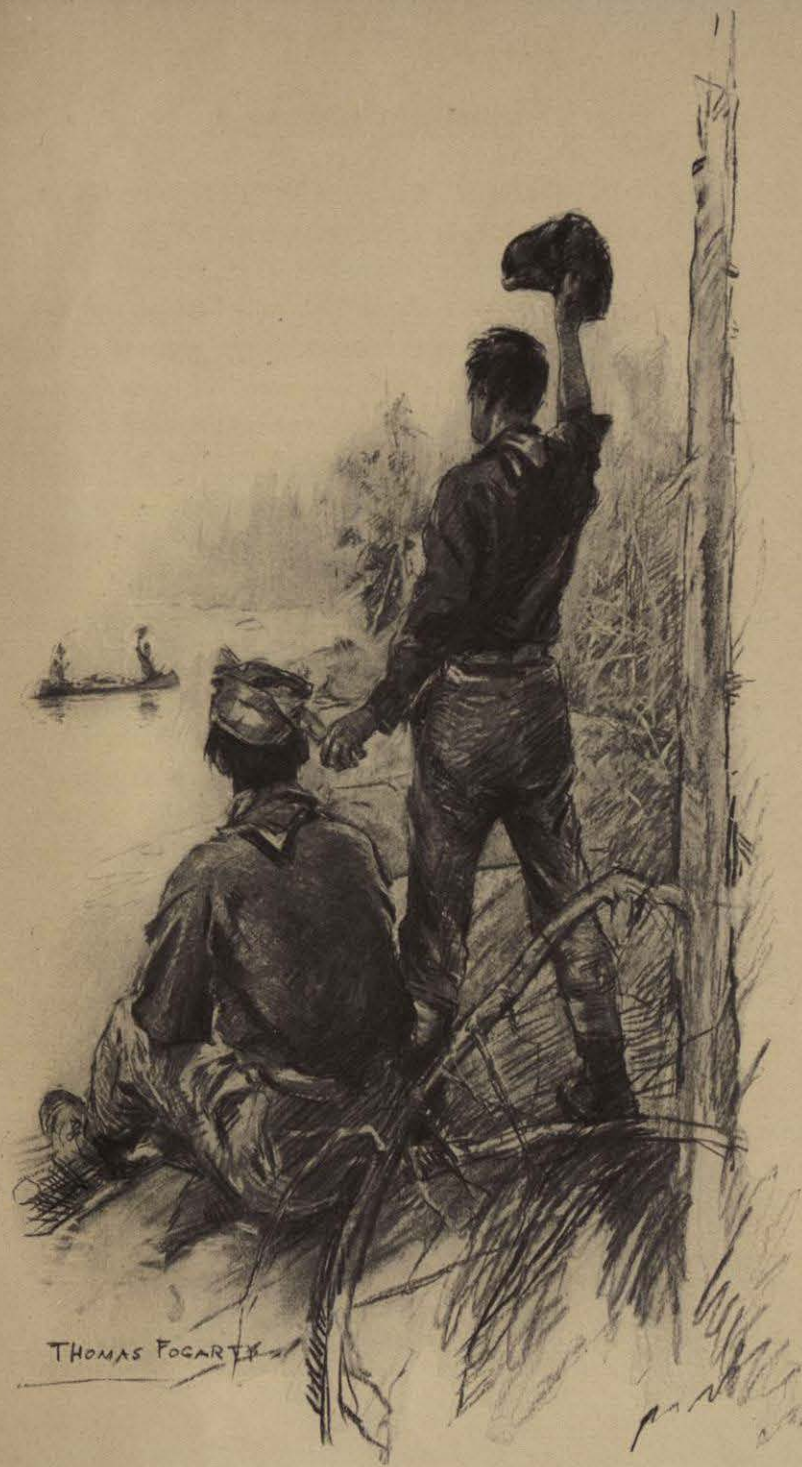
"Then you will?" he asked tremulously.

"Wallace," he replied again, "they'll say you have been the victim of an adventurer, but the result will prove them wrong. If I weren't perfectly sure of this, I wouldn't think of it, for I like you, and I know you want to go into this more out of friendship for me and because your imagination is touched, than from any business sense. But I'll accept, gladly. And I'll do my best!"

"Hooray!" cried the boy, throwing his cap up in the air. "We'll do 'em up in the first round!"

At last when Wallace Carpenter reluctantly quitted his friends on the Ossawinamakee, he insisted on leaving with them a variety of the things he had brought.

"I'm through with them," said he. "Next time I come up here we'll have a camp of our own, won't we, Harry? And I do feel that I am awfully in you fellows' debt. You've given me the best time



THOMAS FOGARTY

The little canoe shot away down the current

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I have ever had in my life, and you've refused payment for the moccasins and things you've made for me. I'd feel much better if you'd accept them—just as keepsakes.”

“All right, Wallace,” replied Thorpe, “and much obliged.”

“Don't forget to come straight to me when you get through estimating, now, will you? Come to the house and stay. Our compact holds now, honest Injin; doesn't it?” asked the boy anxiously.

“Honest Injin,” laughed Thorpe. “Good-by.”

The little canoe shot away down the current. The last Injin Charley and Thorpe saw of the boy was as he turned the curve. His hat was off and waving in his hand, his curls were blowing in the breeze, his eyes sparkled with bright good-will, and his lips parted in a cheery halloo of farewell.

“Him nice boy,” repeated Injin Charley, turning to his canoe.