

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

AT the banks of the river, Thorpe rapidly issued his directions. The affair had been all pre-arranged. During the week previous he and his foremen had reviewed the situation, examining the state of the ice, the heads of water in the three dams. Immediately above the first rollways was Dam Three with its two wide sluices through which a veritable flood could be loosened at will; then four miles farther lay the rollways of Sadler & Smith, the up-river firm; and above them tumbled over a forty-five foot ledge the beautiful Siscoe Falls; these first rollways of Thorpe's—spread in the broad marsh flat below the dam—contained about eight millions; the rest of the season's cut was scattered for thirty miles along the bed of the river.

Already the ice cementing the logs together had begun to weaken. The ice had wrenched and tugged savagely at the locked timbers until they had, with a mighty effort, snapped asunder the bonds of their hibernation. Now a narrow lane of black rushing water pierced the rollways, to boil and eddy in the consequent jam three miles below.

To the foremen Thorpe assigned their tasks, call-

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ing them to him one by one, as a general calls his aids.

"Moloney," said he to the big Irishman, "take your crew and break that jam. Then scatter your men down to within a mile of the pond at Dam Two, and see that the river runs clear. You can tent for a day or so at West Bend or some other point about half-way down; and after that you had better camp at the dam. Just as soon as you get logs enough in the pond, start to sluicing them through the dam. You won't need more than four men there, if you keep a good head. You can keep your gates open five or six hours. And Moloney!"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to be careful not to sluice too long. There is a bar just below the dam, and if you try to sluice with the water too low, you'll centre and jam there, as sure as shooting."

Bryan Moloney turned on his heel and began to pick his way down-stream over the solidly banked logs. Without waiting the command, a dozen men followed him. The little group bobbed away irregularly into the distance, springing lightly from one timber to the other, holding their quaintly fashioned peaveys in the manner of a rope-dancer's balancing pole. At the lowermost limit of the rollways each man pried a log into the water, and, standing gracefully erect on this unstable craft,

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floated out down the current to the scene of his dangerous labor.

"Kerlie," went on Thorpe, "your crew can break rollways with the rest until we get the river fairly filled, and then you can move on down-stream as fast as you are needed. Scotty, you will have the rear. Tim and I will boss the river."

At once the signal was given to Ellis, the dam watcher. Ellis and his assistants thereupon began to pry with long iron bars at the ratchets of the heavy gates. The chore-boy bent attentively over the ratchet-pin, lifting it delicately to permit another inch of raise, dropping it accurately to enable the men at the bars to seize a fresh purchase. The river's roar deepened. Through the wide sluiceways a torrent foamed and tumbled. Immediately it spread through the brush on either side to the limits of the freshet banks, and then gathered for its leap against the uneasy rollways. Along the edge of the dark channel the face of the logs seemed to crumble away. Farther in toward the banks where the weight of timber still outbalanced the weight of the flood, the tiers grumbled and stirred, restless with the stream's calling. Far down the river, where Bryan Moloney and his crew were picking at the jam, the water in eager streamlets sought the interstices between the logs, gurgling excitedly like a mountain brook.

The jam creaked and groaned in response to the

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pressure. From its face a hundred jets of water spurted into the lower stream. Logs up-ended here and there, rising from the bristling surface slowly, like so many arms from lower depths. Above, the water eddied back foaming; logs shot down from the rollways, paused at the slackwater, and finally hit with a hollow and resounding *boom!* against the tail of the jam. A moment later they too up-ended, so becoming an integral part of the *chevaux de frise*.

The crew were working desperately. Down in the heap somewhere, two logs were crossed in such a manner as to lock the whole. They sought those logs.

Thirty feet above the bed of the river six men clamped their peaveys into the soft pine; jerking, pulling, lifting, sliding the great logs from their places. Thirty feet below, under the threatening face, six other men coolly picked out and set adrift, one by one, the timbers not inextricably imbedded. From time to time the mass creaked, settled, perhaps even moved a foot or two; but always the practised rivermen, after a glance, bent more eagerly to their work.

Outlined against the sky, big Bryan Moloney stood directing the work. He had gone at the job on the bias of indirection, picking out a passage at either side that the centre might the more easily "pull." He knew by the tenseness of the log he stood on that, behind the jam, power had gathered

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sufficient to push the whole tangle down-stream. Now he was offering it the chance.

Suddenly the six men below the jam scattered. Four of them, holding their peaveys across their bodies, jumped lightly from one floating log to another in the zigzag to shore. When they stepped on a small log they re-leaped immediately, leaving a swirl of foam where the little timber had sunk under them; when they encountered one larger, they hesitated for a barely perceptible instant. Thus their progression was of fascinating and graceful irregularity. The other two ran the length of their footing, and, overleaping an open of water, landed heavily and firmly on the very ends of two small floating logs. In this manner the force of the jump rushed the little timbers end-on through the water. The two men, maintaining marvellously their balance, were thus ferried to within leaping distance of the other shore.

In the meantime a barely perceptible motion was communicating itself from one particle to another through the centre of the jam. A cool and observant spectator might have imagined that the broad timber carpet was changing a little its pattern, just as the earth near the windows of an arrested railroad train seems for a moment to retrogress. The crew redoubled its exertions, clamping its peaveys here and there, apparently at random, but in reality with the most definite of purposes. A

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sharp *crack* exploded immediately underneath. There could no longer exist any doubt as to the motion, although it was as yet sluggish, glacial. Then in silence a log shifted—in silence and slowly—but with irresistible force. Jimmy Powers quietly stepped over it, just as it menaced his leg. Other logs in all directions up-ended. The jam crew were forced continually to alter their positions, riding the changing timbers bent-kneed, as a circus rider treads his four galloping horses.

Then all at once down by the face something crashed. The entire stream became alive. It hissed and roared, it shrieked, groaned and grumbled. At first slowly, then more rapidly, the very forefront of the centre melted inward and forward and downward until it caught the fierce rush of the freshet and shot out from under the jam. Far up-stream, bristling and formidable, the tons of logs, grinding savagely together, swept forward.

The six men and Bryan Moloney—who, it will be remembered, were on top—worked until the last moment. When the logs began to cave under them so rapidly that even the expert rivermen found difficulty in “staying on top,” the foreman set the example of hunting safety.

“She ‘pulls,’ boys,” he yelled.

Then in a manner wonderful to behold, through the smother of foam and spray, through the crash and yell of timbers protesting the flood’s hurrying,

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through the leap of destruction, the drivers zig-zagged calmly and surely to the shore.

All but Jimmy Powers. He poised tense and eager on the crumbling face of the jam. Almost immediately he saw what he wanted, and without pause sprang boldly and confidently ten feet straight downward, to alight with accuracy on a single log floating free in the current. And then in the very glory and chaos of the jam itself he was swept down-stream.

After a moment the constant acceleration in speed checked, then commenced perceptibly to slacken. At once the rest of the crew began to ride down-stream. Each struck the caulks of his river boots strongly into a log, and on such unstable vehicles floated miles with the current. From time to time, as Bryan Moloney indicated, one of them went ashore. There, usually at a bend of the stream where the likelihood of jamming was great, they took their stands. When necessary, they ran out over the face of the river to separate a congestion likely to cause trouble. The rest of the time they smoked their pipes.

At noon they ate from little canvas bags which had been filled that morning by the cookee. At sunset they rode other logs down the river to where their camp had been made for them. There they ate hugely, hung their ice-wet garments over a tall framework constructed around a monster fire, and turned in on hemlock branches.

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All night long the logs slipped down the moonlit current, silently, swiftly, yet without haste. The porcupines invaded the sleeping camp. From the whole length of the river rang the hollow *boom, boom, boom*, of timbers striking one against the other.

The drive was on.

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IN the meantime the main body of the crew under Thorpe and his foremen were briskly tumbling the logs into the current. Sometimes under the urging of the peaveys, but a single stick would slide down; or again a double tier would cascade with the roar of a little Niagara. The men had continually to keep on the tension of an alert, for at any moment they were called upon to exercise their best judgment and quickness to keep from being carried downward with the rush of the logs. Not infrequently a frowning sheer wall of forty feet would hesitate on the brink of plunge. Then Shearer himself proved his right to the title of riverman.

Shearer wore caulks nearly an inch in length. He had been known to ride ten miles, without shifting his feet, on a log so small that he could carry it without difficulty. For cool nerve he was unexcelled.

"I don't need you boys here any longer," he said quietly.

When the men had all withdrawn, he walked confidently under the front of the rollway, glancing with practised eye at the perpendicular wall of logs

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over him. Then, as a man pries jack-straws, he clamped his peavey and tugged sharply. At once the rollway flattened and toppled. A mighty splash, a hurl of flying foam and crushing timbers, and the spot on which the riverman had stood was buried beneath twenty feet of solid green wood. To Thorpe it seemed that Shearer must have been overwhelmed, but the riverman always mysteriously appeared at one side or the other, nonchalant, urging the men to work before the logs should have ceased to move. Tradition claimed that only once in a long woods life had Shearer been forced to "take water" before a breaking rollway: and then he saved his peavey. History stated that he had never lost a man on the river, simply and solely because he invariably took the dangerous tasks upon himself.

As soon as the logs had caught the current, a dozen men urged them on. With their short peaveys, the drivers were enabled to prevent the timbers from swirling in the eddies—one of the first causes of a jam. At last, near the foot of the flats, they abandoned them to the stream, confident that Moloney and his crew would see to their passage down the river.

In three days the rollways were broken. Now it became necessary to start the rear.

For this purpose Billy Camp, the cook, had loaded his cook-stove, a quantity of provisions, and a supply of bedding, aboard a scow. The scow was built of

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tremendous hewn timbers, four or five inches thick, to withstand the shock of the logs. At either end were long sweeps to direct its course. The craft was perhaps forty feet long, but rather narrow, in order that it might pass easily through the chute of a dam. It was called the "wanigan."

Billy Camp, his cookee, and his crew of two were now doomed to tribulation. The huge, unwieldy craft from that moment was to become possessed of the devil. Down the white water of rapids it would bump, smashing obstinately against boulders, impervious to the frantic urging of the long sweeps; against the roots and branches of the stream side it would scrape with the perverseness of a vicious horse; in the broad reaches it would sulk, refusing to proceed; and when expediency demanded its pause, it would drag Billy Camp and his entire crew at the rope's end, while they tried vainly to snub it against successively uprooted trees and stumps. When at last the wanigan was moored fast for the night—usually a mile or so below the spot planned—Billy Camp pushed back his battered old brown derby hat, the badge of his office, with a sigh of relief. To be sure he and his men had still to cut wood, construct cooking and camp fires, pitch tents, snip browse, and prepare supper for seventy men; but the hard work of the day was over. Billy Camp did not mind rain or cold—he would cheerfully cook away with the water dripping from his battered

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derby to his chubby and cold-purpled nose—but he did mind the wanigan. And the worst of it was, he got no sympathy nor aid from the crew. From either bank he and his anxious struggling assistants were greeted with ironic cheers and facetious remarks. The tribulations of the wanigan were as the salt of life to the spectators.

Billy Camp tried to keep back of the rear in clear water, but when the wanigan so disposed, he found himself jammed close in the logs. There he had a chance in his turn to become spectator, and so to repay in kind some of the irony and facetiousness.

Along either bank, among the bushes, on sandbars, and in trees, hundreds and hundreds of logs had been stranded when the main drive passed. These logs the rear crew were engaged in restoring to the current.

And as a man had to be able to ride any kind of a log in any water; to propel that log by jumping on it, by rolling it squirrel fashion with the feet, by punting it as one would a canoe; to be skillful in pushing, prying, and poling other logs from the quarter deck of the same cranky craft; as he must be prepared at any and all times to jump waist deep into the river, to work in ice-water hours at a stretch; as he was called upon to break the most dangerous jams on the river, representing, as they did, the accumulation which the jam crew had left behind them, it was naturally considered the height of glory

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to belong to the rear crew. Here were the best of the Fighting Forty—men with a reputation as “white-water birlers”—men afraid of nothing.

Every morning the crews were divided into two sections under Kerlie and Jack Hyland. Each crew had charge of one side of the river, with the task of cleaning it thoroughly of all stranded and entangled logs. Scotty Parsons exercised a general supervisory eye over both crews. Shearer and Thorpe travelled back and forth the length of the drive, riding the logs down-stream, but taking to a partly submerged pole trail when ascending the current. On the surface of the river in the clear water floated two long graceful boats called bateaux. These were in charge of expert boatmen—men able to propel their craft swiftly forward, backward and sideways, through all kinds of water. They carried in racks a great supply of pike-poles, peaveys, axes, rope and dynamite, for use in various emergencies. Intense rivalry existed as to which crew “sacked” the farthest down-stream in the course of the day. There was no need to urge the men. Some stood upon the logs, pushing mightily with the long pike-poles. Others, waist deep in the water, clamped the jaws of their peaveys into the stubborn timbers, and, shoulder bent, slid them slowly but surely into the swifter waters. Still others, lining up on either side of one of the great brown tree trunks, carried it bodily to its appointed place. From one end of the rear to

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the other shouts, calls, warnings, and jokes flew back and forth. Once or twice a vast roar of Homeric laughter went up as some unfortunate slipped and soused into the water. When the current slackened, and the logs hesitated in their run, the entire crew hastened, bobbing from log to log, down-river to see about it. Then they broke the jam, standing surely on the edge of the great darkness, while the ice water sucked in and out of their shoes.

Behind the rear Big Junko poled his bateau backward and forward exploding dynamite. Many of the bottom tiers of logs in the rollways had been frozen down, and Big Junko had to loosen them from the bed of the stream. He was a big man, this, as his nickname indicated, built of many awkwardnesses. His cheekbones were high, his nose flat, his lips thick and slobbery. He sported a wide, ferocious straggling mustache and long eyebrows, under which gleamed little fierce eyes. His forehead sloped back like a beast's, but was always hidden by a disreputable felt hat. Big Junko did not know much, and had the passions of a wild animal, but he was a reckless riverman and devoted to Thorpe. Just now he exploded dynamite.

The sticks of powder were piled amidships. Big Junko crouched over them, inserting the fuses and caps, closing the openings with soap, finally lighting them, and dropping them into the water alongside, where they immediately sank. Then a few strokes

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of a short paddle took him barely out of danger. He huddled down in his craft, waiting. One, two, three seconds passed. Then a hollow boom shook the stream. A cloud of water sprang up, strangely beautiful. After a moment the great brown logs rose suddenly to the surface from below, one after the other, like leviathans of the deep. And Junko watched, dimly fascinated, in his rudimentary animal's brain, by the sight of the power he had evoked to his aid.

When night came the men rode down-stream to where the wanigan had made camp. There they slept, often in blankets wetted by the wanigan's eccentricities, to leap to their feet at the first cry in early morning. Some days it rained, in which case they were wet all the time. Almost invariably there was a jam to break, though strangely enough almost every one of the old-timers believed implicitly that "in the full of the moon logs will run free at night."

Thorpe and Tim Shearer nearly always slept in a dog tent at the rear; though occasionally they passed the night at Dam Two, where Bryan Moloney and his crew were already engaged in sluicing the logs through the chute.

The affair was simple enough. Long booms arranged in the form of an open V guided the drive to the sluice gate, through which a smooth apron of water rushed to turmoil in an eddying pool below.

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Two men tramped steadily backward and forward on the booms, urging the logs forward by means of long pike poles to where the suction could seize them. Below the dam, the push of the sluice water forced them several miles down-stream, where the rest of Bryan Moloney's crew took them in charge.

Thus through the wide gate nearly three-quarters of a million feet an hour could be run—a quantity more than sufficient to keep pace with the exertions of the rear. The matter was, of course, more or less delayed by the necessity of breaking out such roll-ways as they encountered from time to time on the banks. At length, however, the last of the logs drifted into the wide dam pool. The rear had arrived at Dam Two, and Thorpe congratulated himself that one stage of his journey had been completed. Billy Camp began to worry about shooting the wanigan through the sluiceway.