

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

THE rear had been tenting at the dam for two days, and was about ready to break camp, when Jimmy Powers swung across the trail to tell them of the big jam.

Ten miles along the river bed the stream dropped over a little half-falls into a narrow, rocky gorge. It was always an anxious spot for the river drivers. In fact, the plunging of the logs head-on over the fall had so gouged out the soft rock below that an eddy of great power had formed in the basin. Shearer and Thorpe had often discussed the advisability of constructing an artificial apron of logs to receive the impact. Here, in spite of all efforts, the jam had formed—first a little centre of a few logs in the middle of the stream, dividing the current, and shunting the logs to right and left; then “wings” growing out from either bank, built up from logs shunted too violently; finally a complete stoppage of the channel, and the consequent rapid piling up as the pressure of the drive increased. Now the bed was completely filled, far above the level of the falls, by a tangle that defied the jam crew’s best efforts.

The rear at once took the trail down the river.

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

Thorpe and Shearer and Scotty Parsons looked over the ground.

“She may ‘pull,’ if she gets a good start,” decided Tim.

Without delay the entire crew was set to work. Nearly a hundred men can pick a great many logs in the course of a day. Several times the jam started, but always “plugged” before the motion had become irresistible. This was mainly because the rocky walls narrowed at a slight bend to the west, so that the drive was throttled, as it were. It was hoped that perhaps the middle of the jam might burst through here, leaving the wings stranded. The hope was groundless.

“We’ll have to shoot,” Shearer reluctantly decided.

The men were withdrawn. Scotty Parsons cut a sapling twelve feet long, and trimmed it. Big Junko thawed his dynamite at a little fire, opening the ends of the packages in order that the steam generated might escape. Otherwise the pressure inside the oiled paper of the package was capable of exploding the whole affair. When the powder was warm, Scotty bound twenty of the cartridges around the end of the sapling, adjusted a fuse in one of them, and soaped the opening to exclude water. Then Big Junko thrust the long javelin down into the depths of the jam, leaving a thin stream of smoke behind him as he turned away. With sinis-

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

ter, evil eye he watched the smoke for an instant, then zigzagged awkwardly over the jam, the long, ridiculous tails of his brown cutaway coat flopping behind him as he leaped. A scant moment later the hoarse dynamite shouted.

Great chunks of timber shot to an inconceivable height; entire logs lifted bodily into the air with the motion of a fish jumping; a fountain of water gleamed against the sun and showered down in fine rain. The jam shrugged and settled. That was all; the "shot" had failed.

The men ran forward, examining curiously the great hole in the log formation.

"We'll have to flood her," said Thorpe.

So all the gates of the dam were raised, and the torrent tried its hand. It had no effect. Evidently the affair was not one of violence, but of patience. The crew went doggedly to work.

Day after day the *clank, clank, clink* of the peaveys sounded with the regularity of machinery. The only practicable method was to pick away the flank logs, leaving a long tongue pointing downstream from the centre to start when it would. This happened time and again, but always failed to take with it the main jam. It was cruel hard work; a man who has lifted his utmost strength into a peavey knows that. Any but the Fighting Forty would have grumbled.

Collins, the bookkeeper, came up to view the

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

tangle. Later a photographer from Marquette took some views, which, being exhibited, attracted a great deal of attention, so that by the end of the week a number of curiosity seekers were driving over every day to see the Big Jam. A certain Chicago journalist in search of balsam health of lungs even sent to his paper a little item. This, unexpectedly, brought Wallace Carpenter to the spot. Although reassured as to the gravity of the situation, he remained to see.

The place was an amphitheatre for such as chose to be spectators. They could stand or sit on the summit of the gorge cliffs, overlooking the river, the fall, and the jam. As the cliff was barely sixty feet high, the view lacked nothing in clearness.

At last Shearer became angry.

"We've been monkeying long enough," said he. "Next time we'll leave a centre that *will* go out. We'll shut the dams down tight and dry-pick out two wings that'll start her."

The dams were first run at full speed, and then shut down. Hardly a drop of water flowed in the bed of the stream. The crews set laboriously to work to pull and roll the logs out in such flat fashion that a head of water should send them out.

This was even harder work than the other, for they had not the floating power of water to help them in the lifting. As usual, part of the men worked below, part above.

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

Jimmy Powers, curly-haired, laughing-faced, was irrepressible. He badgered the others until they threw bark at him and menaced him with their peaveys. Always he had at his tongue's end the proper quip for the occasion, so that in the long run the work was lightened by him. When the men stopped to think at all, they thought of Jimmy Powers with very kindly hearts, for it was known that he had had more trouble than most, and that the coin was not made too small for him to divide with a needy comrade. To those who had seen his mask of whole-souled good-nature fade into serious sympathy, Jimmy Powers's poor little jokes were very funny indeed.

"Did 'je see th' Swede at the circus las' summer?" he would howl to Red Jacket on the top tier.

"No," Red Jacket would answer, "was he there?"

"Yes," Jimmy Powers would reply; then, after a pause—"in a cage!"

It was a poor enough jest, yet if you had been there, you would have found that somehow the log had in the meantime leaped of its own accord from that difficult position.

Thorpe approved thoroughly of Jimmy Powers; he thought him a good influence. He told Wallace so, standing among the spectators on the cliff-top.

"He is all right," said Thorpe. "I wish I had more like him. The others are good boys, too."

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

Five men were at the moment tugging futilely at a reluctant timber. They were attempting to roll one end of it over the side of another projecting log, but were continually foiled, because the other end was jammed fast. Each bent his knees, inserting his shoulder under the projecting peavey stock, to straighten in a mighty effort.

"Hire a boy!" "Get some powder of Junko!" "Have Jimmy *talk* it out!" "Try that little one over by the corner," called the men on top of the jam.

Everybody laughed, of course. It was a fine spring day, clear-eyed and crisp, with a hint of new foliage in the thick buds of the trees. The air was so pellucid that one distinguished without difficulty the straight entrance to the gorge a mile away, and even the West Bend, fully five miles distant.

Jimmy Powers took off his cap and wiped his forehead.

"You boys," he remarked politely, "think you are boring with a mighty big auger."

"My God!" screamed one of the spectators on top of the cliff.

At the same instant Wallace Carpenter seized his friend's arm and pointed.

Down the bed of the stream from the upper bend rushed a solid wall of water several feet high. It flung itself forward with the headlong impetus of a cascade. Even in the short interval between the

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

visitor's exclamation and Carpenter's rapid gesture, it had loomed into sight, twisted a dozen trees from the river bank, and foamed into the entrance of the gorge. An instant later it collided with the tail of the jam.

Even in the railroad rush of those few moments several things happened. Thorpe leaped for a rope. The crew working on top of the jam ducked instinctively to right and left and began to scramble toward safety. The men below, at first bewildered and not comprehending, finally understood, and ran toward the face of the jam with the intention of clambering up it. There could be no escape in the narrow cañon below, the walls of which rose sheer.

Then the flood hit square. It was the impact of irresistible power. A great sheet of water rose like surf from the tail of the jam; a mighty cataract poured down over its surface, lifting the free logs; from either wing timbers crunched, split, rose suddenly into wracked prominence, twisted beyond the semblance of themselves. Here and there single logs were even projected bodily upward, as an apple seed is shot from between the thumb and forefinger. Then the jam moved.

Scotty Parsons, Jack Hyland, Red Jacket, and the forty or fifty topmen had reached the shore. By the wriggling activity which is a riverman's alone, they succeeded in pulling themselves beyond the

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

snap of death's jaws. It was a narrow thing for most of them, and a miracle for some.

Jimmy Powers, Archie Harris, Long Pine Jim, Big Nolan, and Mike Moloney, the brother of Bryan, were in worse case. They were, as has been said, engaged in "flattening" part of the jam about eight or ten rods below the face of it. When they finally understood that the affair was one of escape, they ran toward the jam, hoping to climb out. Then the crash came. They heard the roar of the waters, the wrecking of the timbers, they saw the logs bulge outward in anticipation of the break. Immediately they turned and fled, they knew not where.

All but Jimmy Powers. He stopped short in his tracks, and threw his battered old felt hat defiantly full into the face of the destruction hanging over him. Then, his bright hair blowing in the wind of death, he turned to the spectators standing helpless and paralyzed, forty feet above him.

It was an instant's impression—the arrested motion seen in the flash of lightning—and yet to the onlookers it had somehow the quality of time. For perceptible duration it seemed to them they stared at the contrast between the raging hell above and the yet peaceable river bed below. They were destined to remember that picture the rest of their natural lives, in such detail that each one of them could almost have reproduced it photographically by simply closing his eyes. Yet afterward, when they

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

attempted to recall definitely the impression, they knew it could have lasted but a fraction of a second, for the reason that, clear and distinct in each man's mind, the images of the fleeing men retained definite attitudes. It was the instantaneous photography of events.

"So long, boys," they heard Jimmy Powers's voice. Then the rope Thorpe had thrown fell across a caldron of tortured waters and of tossing logs.

## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

**D**URING perhaps ten seconds the survivors watched the end of Thorpe's rope trailing in the flood. Then the young man with a deep sigh began to pull it toward him.

At once a hundred surmises, questions, ejaculations broke out.

"What happened?" cried Wallace Carpenter.

"What was that man's name?" asked the Chicago journalist with the eager instinct of his profession.

"This is terrible, terrible, terrible!" a white-haired physician from Marquette kept repeating over and over.

A half dozen ran toward the point of the cliff to peer down-stream, as though they could hope to distinguish anything in that waste of flood water.

"The dam's gone out," replied Thorpe. "I don't understand it. Everything was in good shape, as far as I could see. It didn't act like an ordinary break. The water came too fast. Why, it was as dry as a bone until just as that wave came along. An ordinary break would have eaten through little by little before it burst, and Davis should have been

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

able to stop it. This came all at once, as if the dam had disappeared. I don't see."

His mind of the professional had already begun to query causes.

"How about the men?" asked Wallace. "Isn't there something I can do?"

"You can head a hunt down the river," answered Thorpe. "I think it is useless until the water goes down. Poor Jimmy! He was one of the best men I had. I wouldn't have had this happen——"

The horror of the scene was at last beginning to filter through numbness into Wallace Carpenter's impressionable imagination.

"No, no!" he cried vehemently. "There is something criminal about it to me! I'd rather lose every log in the river!"

Thorpe looked at him curiously. "It is one of the chances of war," said he, unable to refrain from the utterance of his creed. "We all know it."

"I'd better divide the crew and take in both banks of the river," suggested Wallace in his constitutional necessity of doing something.

"See if you can't get volunteers from this crowd," suggested Thorpe. "I can let you have two men to show you trails. If you can make it that way, it will help me out. I need as many of the crew as possible to use this flood water."

"O Harry!" cried Carpenter, shocked. "You

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

can't be going to work again to-day after that horrible sight, before we have made the slightest effort to recover the bodies!"

"If the bodies can be recovered, they shall be," replied Thorpe quietly. "But the drive will not wait. We have no dams to depend on now, you must remember, and we shall have to get out on freshet water."

"Your men won't work. I'd refuse just as they will!" cried Carpenter, his sensibilities still suffering.

Thorpe smiled proudly. "You do not know them. They are mine. I hold them in the hollow of my hand!"

"By Jove!" cried the journalist in sudden enthusiasm. "By Jove! that is magnificent!"

The men of the river crew had crouched on their narrow footholds while the jam went out. Each had clung to his peavey, as is the habit of rivermen. Down the current past their feet swept the *débris* of flood. Soon logs began to swirl by—at first few, then many—from the remaining rollways which the river had automatically broken. In a little time the eddy caught up some of these logs, and immediately the inception of another jam threatened. The rivermen, without hesitation, as calmly as though catastrophe had not thrown the weight of its moral terror against their stoicism, sprang, peavey in hand, to the insistent work.

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

"By Jove!" said the journalist again. "That is magnificent! They are working over the spot where their comrades died!"

Thorpe's face lit with gratification. He turned to the young man.

"You see," he said in proud simplicity.

With the added danger of freshet water, the work went on.

At this moment Tim Shearer approached from inland, his clothes dripping wet, but his face retaining its habitual expression of iron calmness. "Anybody caught?" was his first question as he drew near.

"Five men under the face," replied Thorpe briefly.

Shearer cast a glance at the river. He needed to be told no more.

"I was afraid of it," said he. "The rollways must be all broken out. It's saved us that much, but the freshet water won't last long. It's going to be a close squeak to get 'em out now. Don't exactly figure on what struck the dam. Thought first I'd go right up that way, but then I came down to see about the boys."

Carpenter could not understand this apparent callousness on the part of men in whom he had always thought to recognize a fund of rough but genuine feeling. To him the sacredness of death was incompatible with the insistence of work. To these

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

others the two, of grim necessity, went hand in hand.

"Where were you?" asked Thorpe of Shearer.

"On the pole trail. I got in a little, as you see."

In reality the foreman had had a close call for his life. A toughly-rooted basswood alone had saved him.

"We'd better go up and take a look," he suggested. "Th' boys has things going here all right."

The two men turned toward the brush.

"Hi, Tim," called a voice behind him.

Red Jacket appeared clambering up the cliff.

"Jack told me to give this to you," he panted, holding out a chunk of strangely twisted wood.

"Where'd he get this?" inquired Thorpe, quickly. "It's a piece of the dam," he explained to Wallace, who had drawn near.

"Picked it out of the current," replied the man.

The foreman and his boss bent eagerly over the morsel. Then they stared with solemnity into each other's eyes.

"Dynamite, by God!" exclaimed Shearer.

## CHAPTER FIFTY

FOR a moment the three men stared at each other without speaking.

"What does it mean?" almost whispered Carpenter.

"Mean? Foul play!" snarled Thorpe. "Come on, Tim."

The two struck into the brush, threading the paths with the ease of woodsmen. It was necessary to keep to the high inland ridges for the simple reason that the pole trail had by now become impassable. Wallace Carpenter, attempting to follow them, ran, stumbled, and fell through brush that continually whipped his face and garments, continually tripped his feet. All he could obtain was a vanishing glimpse of his companions' backs. Thorpe and his foreman talked briefly.

"It's Morrison and Daly," surmised Shearer. "I left them 'count of a trick like that. They wanted me to take charge of Perkinson's drive and hang her a purpose. I been suspecting something—they've been layin' too low."

Thorpe answered nothing. Through the site of the old dam they found a torrent pouring from the

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

narrowed pond, at the end of which the dilapidated wings flapping in the current attested the former structure. Davis stood staring at the current.

Thorpe strode forward and shook him violently by the shoulder.

"How did this happen?" he demanded hoarsely. "Speak!"

The man turned to him in a daze. "I don't know," he answered.

"You ought to know. How was that 'shot' exploded? How did they get in here without you seeing them? Answer me!"

"I don't know," repeated the man. "I jest went over in th' bresh to kill a few pa'tridges, and when I come back I found her this way. I wasn't goin' to close down for three hours yet, and I thought they was no use a hangin' around here."

"Were you hired to watch this dam, or weren't you?" demanded the tense voice of Thorpe. "Answer me, you fool."

"Yes, I was," returned the man, a shade of aggression creeping into his voice.

"Well, you've done it well. You've cost me my dam, and you've killed five men. If the crew finds out about you, you'll go over the falls, sure. You get out of here! Pike! Don't you ever let me see your face again!"

The man blanched as he thus learned of his comrades' deaths. Thorpe thrust his face at him,



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

lashed by circumstances beyond his habitual self-control.

"It's men like you who make the trouble," he stormed. "Damn fools who say they didn't mean to. It isn't enough not to mean to. They should *mean not to!* I don't ask you to think. I just want you to do what I tell you, and you can't even do that."

He threw his shoulder into a heavy blow that reached the dam-watcher's face, and followed it immediately by another. Then Shearer caught his arm, motioning the dazed and bloody victim of the attack to get out of sight. Thorpe shook his foreman off with one impatient motion, and strode away up the river, his head erect, his eyes flashing, his nostrils distended.

"I reckon you'd better mosey," Shearer dryly advised the dam watcher; and followed.

Late in the afternoon the two men reached Dam Three, or rather the spot on which Dam Three had stood. The same spectacle repeated itself here, except that Ellis, the dam watcher, was nowhere to be seen.

"The dirty whelps," cried Thorpe, "they did a good job!"

He thrashed about here and there, and so came across Ellis blindfolded and tied. When released, the dam watcher was unable to give any account of his assailants.

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

"They came up behind me while I was cooking," he said. "One of 'em grabbed me and the other one kivered my eyes. Then I hears the 'shot' and knows there's trouble."

Thorpe listened in silence. Shearer asked a few questions. After the low-voiced conversation Thorpe arose abruptly.

"Where you going?" asked Shearer.

But the young man did not reply. He swung, with the same long, nervous stride, into the down-river trail.

Until late that night the three men—for Ellis insisted on accompanying them—hurried through the forest. Thorpe walked tirelessly, upheld by his violent but repressed excitement. When his hat fell from his head, he either did not notice the fact, or did not care to trouble himself for its recovery, so he glanced through the trees bareheaded, his broad white brow gleaming in the moonlight. Shearer noted the fire in his eyes, and from the coolness of his greater age, counselled moderation.

"I wouldn't stir the boys up," he panted, for the pace was very swift. "They'll kill some one over there, it'll be murder on both sides."

He received no answer. About midnight they came to the camp.

Two great fires leaped among the trees, and the men, past the idea of sleep, grouped between them, talking. The lesson of twisted timbers was not lost

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

to their experience, and the evening had brought its accumulation of slow anger against the perpetrators of the outrage. These men were not given to oratorical mouthings, but their low-voiced exchanges between the puffings of a pipe led to a steadier purpose than that of hysteria. Even as the woodsmen joined their group, they had reached the intensity of execution. Across their purpose Thorpe threw violently his personality.

"You must not go," he commanded.

Through their anger they looked at him askance.

"I forbid it," Thorpe cried.

They shrugged their indifference and arose. This was an affair of caste brotherhood; and the blood of their mates cried out to them.

"The work," Thorpe shouted hoarsely. "The work! We must get those logs out! We haven't time!"

But the Fighting Forty had not Thorpe's ideal. Success meant a day's work well done; while vengeance stood for a righting of the realities which had been unrighteously overturned. Thorpe's dry-eyed, burning, almost mad insistence on the importance of the day's task had not its ordinary force. They looked upon him from a standpoint apart, calmly, dispassionately, as one looks on a petulant child. The grim call of tragedy had lifted them above little mundane things.

Then swiftly between the white, strained face of

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

the madman trying to convince his heart that his mind had been right, and the fanatically exalted rivermen, interposed the sanity of Radway. The old jobber faced the men calmly, almost humorously, and somehow the very bigness of the man commanded attention. When he spoke, his coarse, good-natured, every-day voice fell through the tense situation, clarifying it, restoring it to the normal.

"You fellows make me sick," said he. "You haven't got the sense God gave a rooster. Don't you see you're playing right in those fellows' hands? What do you suppose they dynamited them dams for? To kill our boys? Don't you believe it for a minute. They never dreamed we was dry-pickin' that jam. They sent some low-lived whelp down there to hang our drive, and by smoke it looks like they was going to succeed, thanks to you mutton-heads."

"'Spose you go over and take 'em apart; what then? You have a scrap; probably you lick 'em." The men growled ominously, but did not stir. "You whale daylight out of a lot of men who probably don't know any more about this here shooting of our dams than a hog does about a ruffled shirt. Meanwhile your drive hangs. Well? Well? Do you suppose the men who were back of that shooting, do you suppose Morrison and Daly give a tinker's dam how many men of theirs you lick? What they want is to hang our drive. If they

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

hang our drive, it's cheap at the price of a few black eyes."

The speaker paused and grinned good-humoredly at the men's attentive faces. Then suddenly his own became grave, and he swung into his argument all the impressiveness of his great bulk.

"Do you want to know how to get even?" he asked, shading each word. "Do you want to know how to make those fellows sing so small you can't hear them? Well, I'll tell you. *Take out this drive!* Do it in spite of them! Show them they're no good when they buck up against Thorpe's One! Our boys died doing their duty—the way a riverman ought to. *Now hump yourselves!* Don't let 'em die in vain!"

The crew stirred uneasily, looking at each other for approval of the conversion each had experienced. Radway, seizing the psychological moment, turned easily toward the blaze.

"Better turn in, boys, and get some sleep," he said. "We've got a hard day to-morrow." He stooped to light his pipe at the fire. When he had again straightened his back after rather a prolonged interval, the group had already disintegrated. A few minutes later the cookee scattered the brands of the fire from before a sleeping camp.

Thorpe had listened non-committally to the colloquy. He had maintained the suspended attitude of a man who is willing to allow the trial of other

## THE FOLLOWING OF THE TRAIL

methods, but who does not therefore relinquish his own. At the favorable termination of the discussion he turned away without comment. He expected to gain this result. Had he been in a more judicial state of mind he might have perceived at last the reason, in the complicated scheme of Providence, for his long connection with John Radway.