

The Blazed Trail

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

Copyright, 1902, by Stewart Edward White

CHAPTER I.

IN the network of streams draining the eastern portion of Michigan and known as the Saginaw waters the great firm of Morrison & Daly had for many years carried on extensive logging operations in the wilderness.

Now at last, in the early eighties, they reached the end of their holdings. Another winter would finish the cut.

At this juncture Mr. Daly called to him John Radway, a man whom he knew to possess extensive experience, a little capital and a desire for more of both.

"Radway," said he when the two found themselves alone in the main office, "we expect to cut this year some 500,000,000, which will finish our pine holdings in the Saginaw waters. Most of this timber lies over in the Crooked Lake district, and that we expect to put in ourselves. We own, however, 5,000,000 on the Cass branch which we would like to log on contract. Would you care to take the job?"

"How much a thousand do you give?" asked Radway.

"Four dollars," replied the lumberman.

"I'll look at it," replied the jobber.

So Radway got the "descriptions" and a little map divided into townships, sections and quarter sections and went out to look at it. He searched until he found a "blaze" on a tree, the marking on which indicated it as the corner of a section. From this corner the boundary lines were blazed at right angles in either direction. Radway followed the blazed lines. Thus he was able accurately to locate isolated "forties" (forty acres), "eighties," quarter sections and sections in a primeval wilderness. The feat, however, required considerable woodcraft, an exact sense of direction and a pocket compass.

These resources were still further drawn upon for the next task. Radway tramped the woods, hills and valleys to determine the most practical route over which to build a logging road from the standing timber to the shores of Cass branch. He found it to be an affair of some puzzlement. The pines stood on a country rolling with hills, deep with pot holes. It became necessary to dodge in and out, here and there, between the knolls, around and through the swamps, still keeping, however, in the same general direction and preserving always the requisite level or down grade. Radway had no vantage point from which to survey the country. A city man would promptly have lost himself in the tangle, but the woodsman emerged at last on the banks of a stream, leaving behind him a meandering trail of clipped trees.

"I'll take it," said he to Daly.

Daly now proceeded to drive a sharp bargain with him.

Customarily a jobber is paid a certain proportion of the agreed price as each stage of the work is completed. Daly objected to this method of procedure.

"You see, Radway," he explained, "it's our last season in the country. When this lot is lit we want to pull up stakes, so we can't take any chances on not getting that timber in. If you don't finish your job, it keeps us here another season. There can be no doubt, therefore, that you finish your job. In other words, we can't take any chances. If you start the thing, you've got to carry it 'way through."

"I think I can, Mr. Daly," the jobber assured him.

"For that reason," went on Daly, "we object to paying you as the work progresses. We've got to have a guarantee that you don't quit on us and that those logs will be driven down the branch as far as the river in time to catch our drive. Therefore I'm going to make you a good price per thousand, but payable only when the logs are delivered to our river men."

Radway, with his usual mental attitude of one anxious to justify the other man, ended by seeing only his employer's argument. He did not perceive that the latter's proposition introduced into the transaction a gambling element. It became possible for Morrison & Daly to get a certain amount of work short of absolute completion done for nothing.

All this was in August. Radway, who was a good, practical woodsman, set about the job immediately. He gathered a crew, established a camp and began at once to cut roads through the country he had already blazed on his former trip.

Radway's task was not merely to level out and ballast the six feet of a roadbed already constructed, but to cut a way for five miles through the unbroken wilderness. The way had, moreover, to be not less than twenty-five feet wide, needed to be absolutely

Hank marked off and sawed the log lengths, paying due attention to the necessity of avoiding knots, forks and rotten places. Thus some of the logs were eighteen, some sixteen or fourteen and some only twelve feet in length.

Next appeared the teamsters with their little wooden sledges, their steel chains and their tongs. They had been helping the skidders to place the parallel and level beams, or skids, on which the logs were to be piled by the side of the road. The tree which Tom and Hank had just felled lay up a gentle slope from the new travoy road, so little Fabian Laveque, the teamster, clamped the bite of his tongs to the end of the largest or butt log.

"Allez, Mollie!" he cried.

A horse, huge, elephantine, her head down, nose close to her chest, intelligently spying her steps, moved. The log half rolled over, slid three feet and menaced a stump.

"Geel!" cried Laveque.

Mollie stepped twice directly sideways, planted her forefoot on a root she had seen and pulled sharply. The end of the log slid around the stump.

"Allez," commanded Laveque.

And Mollie started gingerly down the hill. She pulled the timber, heavy as an iron safe, here and there through the brush, missing no steps, making no false moves, backing and finally getting out of the way of an unexpected roll with the ease and intelligence of Laveque himself. In five minutes the burden lay by the travoy road. In two minutes more one end of it had been rolled on the little flat wooden sledge and, the other end dragging, it was winding majestically down through the ancient forest.

When Mollie and Fabian had travoyed the log to the skidway they drew it with a bump across the two parallel skids and left it there to be rolled to the top of the pile.

Then Mike McGovern and Bob Stratton and Jim Gladys took charge of it. Mike and Bob were running the cant hooks, while Jim stood on top of the great pile of logs already decked.

A slender, pliable steel chain like a gray snake ran over the top of the pile and disappeared through a pulley to an invisible horse—Jenny, the mate of Mollie. Jim threw the end of this chain down. Bob passed it over and under the log and returned it to Jim, who reached down after it with the hook of his implement. Thus the stick of timber rested in a long loop, one end of which led to the invisible horse, and the other Jim made fast to the top of the pile. He did so by jamming into another log the steel swamp hook with which the chain was armed. When all was made fast the horse started.

"She's a bumper," said Bob. "Look out, Mike!"

The log slid to the foot of the two parallel poles laid slanting up the face of the pile. Then it trembled on the ascent. But one end stuck for an instant, and at once the log took on a dangerous slant. Quick as light Bob and Mike sprang forward, gripped the books of the cant hooks like great thumbs and forefingers, and, while one held with all his power, the other gave a sharp twist upward. The log straightened. It was a master feat of power and the knack of applying strength justly.

At the top of the little incline the timber hovered for a second.

"One more!" sang out Jim to the driver. He poised, stepped lightly up and over and avoided by the safe hairbreadth being crushed when the log rolled. But it did not lie quite straight or even. So Mike cut a short, thick block and all three stirred the heavy timber sufficiently to admit of the blither's insertion.

Then the chain was thrown down for another.

Jenny, harnessed only to a short, straight bar with a hook in it, leaned to her collar and dug her hoofs at the word of command. The driver, close to her tail, held fast the slender steel chain of an ingenious hitch about the ever useful swamp hook. When Jim shouted "Whoa!" from the top of the skidway the driver did not trouble to stop the horse; he merely let go the hook. So the power was shut off suddenly, as is meet and proper in such ticklish business. He turned and walked back, and Jenny, like a dog, without the necessity of command, followed him in slow patience.

Now came Dyer, a sealer, rapidly down the logging road, a small, slender man with a little, turned up mustache. The men disliked him because of his affectation of a city smartness and because he never ate with them, even when there was plenty of room. The sealer's duty at present was to measure the diameter of the logs in each skid-



"Allez!" commanded Laveque.

way and so compute the number of board feet. At the office he tended van, kept the books and looked after supplies.

He approached the skidway rapidly, laid his flexible rule across the face of each log, made a mark on his pine tablets in the column to which the log belonged, thrust the tablet in the pocket of his coat, seized a blue crayon, in a long holder, with which he made an 8 as indication that the log had been scaled, and finally tapped several times strongly with a sledge hammer. On the face of the hammer in relief was an M inside of a delta. This was the company's brand, and so the log was branded as belonging to them. He

swarmed over the skidway, rapid and absorbed, in strange activity to the slower power of the actual skidding. In a moment he moved on to the next scene of operations without having said a word to any of the men.

"A fine thing," said Mike, spitting.

So day after day the work went on. Radway spent his time tramping through the woods, figuring on new work, showing the men how to do things better or differently, discussing minute expedients with the blacksmith, the carpenter, the cook.

He was not without his troubles. First he had not enough men, the snow lacked and then came too abundantly, horses fell sick of colic or calked themselves, supplies ran low unexpectedly, trees turned to "punk," a certain bit of ground proved soft for tramping, and so on. At election time, of course, a number of the men went out.

And one evening, two days after election time, another and important character entered the North woods and our story.

CHAPTER II.

ON the evening in question some thirty or forty miles southeast of Radway's camp a train was crawling over a badly laid track that led toward the Saginaw valley. The whole affair was very crude. To the edge of the right of way pushed the dense swamp, like a black curtain shutting the virgin country from the view of civilization. Across the snow were tracks of animals.

The train consisted of a string of freight cars, one coach divided half and half between baggage and smoker, and a day car occupied by two silent, awkward women and a child. In the smoker lounged a dozen men. They were of various sizes and descriptions, but they all wore heavy blanket mackinaw coats, rubber shoes and thick German socks tied at the knee. The air was so thick with smoke that the men had difficulty in distinguishing objects across the length of the car.

The passengers sprawled in various attitudes, and their occupations were diverse. Three nearest the baggage room door attempted to sing, but without much success. A man in the corner breathed softly through a mouth organ, to the music of which his seat mate, leaning his head sideways, gave close attention. One big fellow with a square beard swaggered back and forth down the aisle offering to every one refreshment from a quart bottle. It was rarely refused. Of the dozen probably three-quarters were more or less drunk.

After a time the smoke became too dense. A short, thickset fellow with an evil, dark face coolly thrust his heel through a window. The conductor, who, with the brakeman and baggage master, was seated in the baggage van, heard the jingle of glass. He arose.

"Guess I'll take up tickets," he remarked. "Perhaps it will quiet the boys down a little."

The conductor was a big man, rawboned and broad, with a hawk face. His every motion showed lean, quick, pantherlike power.

"Let her went," replied the brakeman, rising as a matter of course to follow his chief.

The brakeman was stocky, short and long armed. In the old fighting days Michigan railroads chose their train officials with an eye to their superior deltoids. The two men loomed on the

noisy smoking compartment. "Tickets, please," elicited the conductor sharply.

Most of the men began to fumble about in their pockets, but the three singers and the man who had been offering the quart bottle did not stir.

"Ticket, Jack!" repeated the conductor. "Come on, now!"

The big bearded man leaned uncertainly against the seat.

"Now, look here, Bud," he urged in wheedling tones, "I ain't got no ticket. You know how it is, Bud. I blows my stinks." He fished uncertainly in his pocket and produced the quart bottle, nearly empty. "Have a drink?"

"No," said the conductor sharply.

"A right," replied Jack amiably. "Take one myself." He tipped the bottle, emptied it and hurled it through a window. The conductor paid no apparent attention to the breaking of the glass.

"If you haven't any ticket, you'll have to get off," said he.

The big man straightened up. "You go to blazes!" he snorted, and with the sole of his spiked boot delivered a mighty kick at the conductor's thigh.

The official, agile as a wildcat, leaped back, then forward and knocked the man half the length of the car. You see, he was used to it. Before Jack could regain his feet the official stood over him.

The three men in the corner had also risen and were staggering down the aisle intent on battle. The conductor took in the chances with professional rapidity.

"Get at 'em, Jimmy!" said he.

And as the big man finally swayed to his feet he was seized by the collar and trousers in the grip known to "bouncers" everywhere, hustled to the door, which some one obligingly opened, and hurled from the moving train into the snow. The conductor did not care a straw whether the obstreperous Jack lit on his head or his feet, hit a snow bank or a pile of ties.

The conductor returned to find a rolling, kicking, gouging mass of kinetic energy knocking the varnish off all one end of the car. A head appearing, he coolly batted it three times against a corner of the seat arm, after which he pulled the contestant out by the hair and threw him into a seat, where he lay limp. Then it could be seen that Jimmy had clasped tight in his embrace a leg each of the other two. He hugged them close to his breast and jammed his face down against them to protect his features. They could pound the top of his head and welcome. The only thing he really feared was a kick in the side, and for that there was hardly room.

The conductor stood over the heap, at a manifest advantage.

"You lumber jacks had enough, or do you want to catch it plenty?"

The men, drunk though they were, realized their helplessness. They signified they had had enough. Jimmy thereupon released them and stood up, brushing down his tousled hair with his stubby fingers.

"Now, is it ticket or bounce?" inquired the conductor.

After some difficulty and grumbling the two paid their fare and that of the third, who was still dazed.

The interested spectators of the little drama included two men near the water cooler who were perfectly sober. One of them was perhaps past the best of life, but still straight and vigorous. His lean face was leather brown in contrast to a long mustache and heavy eyebrows bleached nearly white. His eyes were a clear, steady blue and his frame was slender, but wiry. He wore the regulation mackinaw blanket coat, a peaked cap with an extraordinary high crown and buckskin moccasins over long stockings.

The other was younger, not more than twenty-six perhaps, with the clean cut, regular features we have come to



He was seized by the collar.

consider typically American. Eyebrows that curved far down along the temples and eyelashes of a darkness in contrast to the prevailing note of his complexion combined to lend him a rather brooding, soft and melancholy air which a very cursory second examination showed to be fictitious. His eyes, like the woodman's, were steady,

carefully to himself. He considered in turn the different occupations to which he could turn his hand and negatively them one by one. Few business firms would care to employ the son of an shrewd and embezzler as Henry Thorpe. Finally he came to a decision. He communicated this decision to his sister. It would have commended itself more logically to her had she been able to follow step by step the consideration that had led her brother to it. As the event turned, she was forced to accept it blindly. She knew that her brother intended going west, but as to his hopes and plans she was in ignorance. A little sympathy, a little mutual understanding, would have meant a great deal to her, for a girl whose mother she but dimly remembers turns naturally to her next of kin. Helen Thorpe had always admired her brother, but had never before needed him. She had looked upon him as strong, self contained, a little moody.

At the beginning of the row in the smoking car Thorpe laid aside his letter and watched with keen appreciation the direct practicality of the trainmen's method. When the bearded man fell before the conductor's blow, he turned to the individual at his side.

"He knows how to hit, doesn't he?" he observed. "That fellow was knocked well off his feet."

"He does," agreed the other dryly.

They fell into a desultory conversation of fits and starts. Woodsmen of the genuine sort are never talkative, and Thorpe, as has been explained, was constitutionally reticent. In the course of their disjointed remarks Thorpe explained that he was looking for work in the woods and intended first of all to try the Morrison & Daly camps at Beeson lake.

"Know anything about logging?" inquired the stranger.

"Nothing," Thorpe confessed.

"Ain't much show for anything but lumber jacks. What did you think of doing?"

"I don't know," said Thorpe doubtfully. "I have driven horses a good deal. I thought I might drive team."

The woodsman turned slowly and looked Thorpe over with a quizzical eye. Then he faced to the front again and spat.

"Quite like," he replied, still more dryly.

The boy's remark had amused him, and he had showed it, as much as he ever showed anything. Excepting always the river men, the driver of a team commands the highest wages among out of door workers.

It is easier to drive a fire engine than a logging team.

But in spite of the naivete of the remark the woodsman had seen something in Thorpe he liked. Such men become rather expert in the reading of character. He revised his first intention to let the conversation drop.

"I think M. & D. is rather full up just now," he remarked. "I'm walkin' boss over there. The roads is about all made, and roadmaking is what a greenhorn tackles first. They's more chance earlier in the year. But if the old fellow—he strongly accented the first word—"hain't nothin' for you, just ask for Tim Shearer, an' I'll try to put you on the trail for some jobber's camp."

The three who had come into collision with Jimmy and Bud were getting out inquiring. His jaw was square now, settled, his mouth straight. Unlike the other inmates of the car he wore an ordinary business suit, somewhat worn, but of good cut and a style that showed even over the soft flannel shirt. The trousers were, however, bound inside the usual socks and rubbers.

The two seat mates had occupied their time each in his own fashion. The elder stared straight before him and spat with a certain periodicity into the center of the aisle. The younger stretched back lazily in an attitude of ease. Sometimes he smoked a pipe. Twice he read over a letter. It was from his sister and announced her arrival at the little rural village in which he had made arrangements for her to stay. "It is interesting now," she wrote, "though the resources do not look as though they would wear well. I am learning under Mrs. Renwick to sweep and dust and bake and stew and do a multitude of other things which I always vaguely supposed came ready made. I like it, but after I have learned it all I do not believe the practice will appeal to me much. However, I can stand it well enough for a year or two or three, for I am young, and then you will have made your everlasting fortune, of course."

"She's a tramp," said Thorpe to himself, "and she shall have her everlasting fortune if there's such a thing in the country."

He jingled the \$3.00 in his pocket and smiled. That was the extent of his everlasting fortune at present.

The letter had been answered from Detroit.

"I am glad you are settled," he wrote. "At least I know you have enough to eat and a roof over you. I hope sincerely that you will do your best to fit yourself to your new conditions. I

(To be Continued)

IF YOU WISH TO ADVERTISE IN NEWSPAPERS ANYWHERE AT ANYTIME Call on or Write E. C. DAK'S ADVERTISING AGENCY 64 & 66 Merchants' Exchange SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

Notice

All members of the Fisherman's Whist club are ordered to meet at the same place at 12 o'clock noon Jan. 24, weather permitting.