

The Blazed Trail

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

Copyright, 1902, by Stewart Edward White

CHAPTER X.

FOR more than a week Thorpe had journeyed through the forest. His equipment was simple in the extreme. Attached to a heavy leather belt of cartridges hung a two pound ax and a sheath knife. In his pocket reposed a compass, an air tight tin of matches and a map drawn on oiled paper of a district divided into sections. Some few of the sections were colored, which indicated that they belonged to private parties. All the rest was state or government land. He carried in his hand a repeating rifle. The pack, if opened, would have been found to contain a woolen and rubber blanket, fishing tackle, twenty pounds or so of flour, a package of tea, sugar, a slab of bacon carefully wrapped in oiled cloth, salt, a suit of underwear and several extra pairs of thick stockings. To the outside of the pack had been strapped a frying pan, a tin pail and a cup.

He had not met a human being or seen any indications of man excepting always the old blaze of the government survey. Many years before, officials had run careless lines through the country along the section boundaries. These latter stated always the section, the township and the range east or west by number. All Thorpe had to do was to find the same figures on his map. He knew just where he was.

The map he had procured at the United States land office in Detroit. He had set out for the purpose of "looking" a suitable bunch of pine in the northern peninsula, which at the time was practically untouched. Access to the interior could only be obtained on foot or by river. The South Shore railroad had as yet penetrated only as far as Seney. Marquette, Menominee and a few smaller places along the coast were lumbering near at hand, but they shipped entirely by water.

Thorpe, with the farsightedness of the pioneer, had perceived that the exploitation of the upper country was an affair of a few years only. The north would not prove as accessible as it now seemed, for the carrying trade would some day realize that the entire waterway of the great lakes offered an unrivaled outlet. With that discovery would begin a rush to the new country. He resolved to anticipate it and by acquiring his holdings before general attention should be turned that way to obtain the best.

He was without money and practically without friends, while government and state lands cost respectively \$2.50 and \$1.25 an acre, cash down. But he relied on the good sense of capitalists to perceive from the statistics which his explorations would furnish the wonderful advantages of logging a new country with the chain of great lakes as shipping outlet at its very door. In return for his information he would expect a half interest in the enterprise.

Thorpe was by no means the first to see the money in northern pine. Outside the big mill districts already named cuttings of considerable size were already under way, the logs from which were usually sold to the mills of Marquette and Menominee.

But work was on a small scale and with an eye to the immediate present only. It was accomplished by purchasing one forty and cutting a dozen. Thorpe's map showed often near the forks of an important stream a section whose coloring indicated private possession. Legally the owners had the right only to the pine included in the marked sections, but if any one had taken the trouble to visit the district he would have found operations going on for miles up and down stream. The colored squares would prove to be nothing but so many excuses for being on the ground. The bulk of the pine was stolen from unbought state or government land.

This in the old days was a common enough trick.

Thorpe was perfectly conversant with this state of affairs. He knew also that in all probability many of the colored districts on his map represented firms engaged in steals of greater or less magnitude. He was further aware that most of the concerns stole the timber because it was cheaper to steal than to buy, but that they would buy readily enough if forced to do so in order to prevent its acquisition by another. In his exploration, therefore, he decided to employ the utmost circumspection. He would pose as a hunter and fisherman.

For a week he journeyed through magnificent timber, working always more and more to the north, until finally he stood on the shores of Superior. He resolved to follow the shore west

have to spend the summer and perhaps part of the fall in that district. He could hardly expect to escape notice. By the indications on the river he saw, land already taken, but Thorpe hoped to find good timber near the mouth. After several days' hard walking with this object in view he found himself directly north of a bend in the river, so he turned through the woods due south, with the intention of striking in on the stream. This he succeeded in accomplishing some twenty miles inland, where also he discovered a well defined and recently used trail leading up the river. Thorpe camped one night at the bend and then set out to follow the trail.

It led him for upward of ten miles nearly due south, sometimes approaching, sometimes leaving, the river, but keeping always in its direction. The country in general was rolling. Low parallel ridges of gentle declivity glided constantly across his way. Thorpe had never seen a grander forest of pine than that which clothed them.

At the ten mile point he came upon a dam. It was a crude dam, built of logs, whose face consisted of strong buttresses slanted up stream and whose sheer was made of unbarbed timbers laid smoothly side by side at the required angle. At present its gate was open.

The purpose of the dam in this new country did not puzzle him in the least, but its presence bewildered him. Such constructions are often thrown across logging streams at proper intervals in order that the operator may be independent of the spring freshets. The device is common enough, but it is expensive. People do not build dams except in the certainty of some years of logging, and quite extensive logging at that. If the stream happens to be navigable the promoter must first get an improvement charter from a board of control appointed by the state. So Thorpe knew that he had to deal not with a hand to mouth lumber thief, but with a great company preparing to log the country on a big scale.

He continued his journey. At noon he came to another and similar structure. Here he left his pack and pushed ahead in light marching order. About eight miles above the first dam and eighteen from the bend of the river he ran into a "slashing" of the year before. The decapitated stumps were already beginning to turn brown with weather; the tangle of tops and limbs was partially concealed by poplar growths and wild raspberry vines.

To Thorpe this particular clearing became at once of the greatest interest. He scrambled over and through the ugly debris which for a year or two after logging operations cumber the ground. By a rather prolonged search he found what he sought—the "section corners" of the tract, on which the government surveyor had long ago marked the "descriptions." A glance at the map confirmed his suspicions. The slashing lay some two miles north of the sections designated as belonging to private parties. It was government land.

Thorpe sat down, lit a pipe and did a little thinking.

He had that very morning passed through beautiful timber lying much nearer the mouth of the river than either this or the sections farther south. Why had these men deliberately ascended the stream? Why had they stolen timber eighteen miles from the bend when they could equally well have stolen just as good fourteen miles nearer the terminus of their drive?

Thorpe suddenly remembered the two dams and his idea that the men in charge of the river must be wealthy and must intend operating on a large scale. He thought he glimpsed it. After another pipe he felt sure.

The unknowns were indeed going in on a large scale. They intended eventually to log the whole of the Ossawinimakee basin. For this reason they had made their first purchase, planted their first foothold, near the headwaters. Some day they would buy all the standing government pine in the basin, but in the meantime they would steal all they could at a sufficient distance from the lake to minimize the danger of discovery. Every stick cut meant so much less to purchase later on.

Thorpe knew that men occupied in so precarious a business would be keenly on the watch. At the first hint of rivalry they would buy in the timber they had selected. But the situation had set his fighting blood to racing. They undoubtedly wanted the tract down river. Well, so did he!

He purposed to look it over carefully, to ascertain its exact boundaries and what sections it would be necessary to buy in order to include it, and perhaps

even to estimate it in a rough way. In the accomplishment of this he would to the mouth of a fairly large river called the Ossawinimakee. It showed in common with most streams of its kind that a crew of men and 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 land lookers 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 ax Thorpe cleared away the little white trees. He struck the sharp 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 ridgepole and turned in, after a hasty supper, leaving the completion of his permanent camp to the morrow.

In the morning he thatched smooth the roof of the shelter, using for the purpose the thick branches of hemlocks, placing 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.

For some days he 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 appearance of a trapper's camp.

Toward the end of the week he received his first visit. Evening was drawing on. Thorpe was busily engaged in cooking a panful of trout. Suddenly he became aware of a presence at his side.

"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.

"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



"How do?" greeted the newcomer.

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 method 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 2 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.

"The Indian aneared to intend making the birch 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."

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

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

Thorpe ruminated.

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

"Big friend," replied the Indian promptly.

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

"You got 'um 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 got 'um pine," interjected the Indian like a flash.

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

"Good!" exclaimed Injun Charley and fell silent.

With this, the longest conversation the two had attempted in their peculiar acquaintance, Thorpe was forced to be content.

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 Injun Charley busy over the making of a birch bark canoe.

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 wood walker, dressed in broad hats, flannel shirts, coarse trousers tucked in high laced "crucifers" and carrying each a bulging meal sack looped by a cord across the shoulders and chest. Both were armed with long slender scapulars' rules. The first intimation Thorpe received of the presence of these two men was the sound of their voices.

"Hello, Charley!" said one of them.

"What you doing here? Ain't seen you since the Sturgeon district?"

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

"So I see. But what do 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.

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

The land looker arose lazily and sauntered toward the group.

"Howdy?" he drawled. "Got any smokin'?"

"How are you?" replied one of the scalers, eying him sharply and tendering his pouch. Thorpe tilted his pipe deliberately and returned it with a heavy lidded glance of thanks. To all appearances he was one of the lazy, shiftless 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 Charley," drawled Thorpe. "I'm busy now makin' traps." He waved his pipe, calling attention to the pine and rawhide deadfalls.

They chatted a few moments. 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.

Injun Charley was setting about the splitting of a cedar log.

"You see," he remarked. "I big friend."

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.

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 birdseye 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.

Next he ascertained the geographical location of the different clumps and forests, entering the sections, the quarter sections, even the separate forties, in his notebook, 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.

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 to examine the pine. That difficulty Thorpe hoped to overcome by inspiring personal confidence in himself. If he failed to do so he might return with a land looker whom the investor trusted, and the two could re-enact the comedy of this summer. Thorpe hoped, however, to avoid the necessity. He set about a rough estimate of the timber.

One evening just at sunset Thorpe was helping the Indian shape his craft. 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 pines. 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 duffel of all descriptions. 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.

"This is a good place," he said to the guide. "We'll camp here." Then he turned up the steep bank without looking back.

"Hello!" 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 bowlders and took off his hat.

"Say, you've got a great place here! You here all summer? Hello! 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. At first the Indian's stolid countenance seemed a trifle doubtful. After a time it cleared.

"Good!" he grunted.

The other Indian had 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 him.

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

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

But Thorpe declined.

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

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

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

CHAPTER XI.

THE young fellow stayed three weeks and was a constant joy to Thorpe. Thorpe liked the boy because he was open hearted, free from affectation, assumptive of no superiority—in short, because he was direct and sincere. Wallace, on his part, adored in Thorpe the free, open air life, the adventurous quality, the quiet, hidden power, the resourcefulness and the self sufficiency of the pioneer. 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.

Little by little the eager questions 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.

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

He wanted to know what he could do to help.

"Nothing except keep quiet," replied Thorpe. "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 any 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.

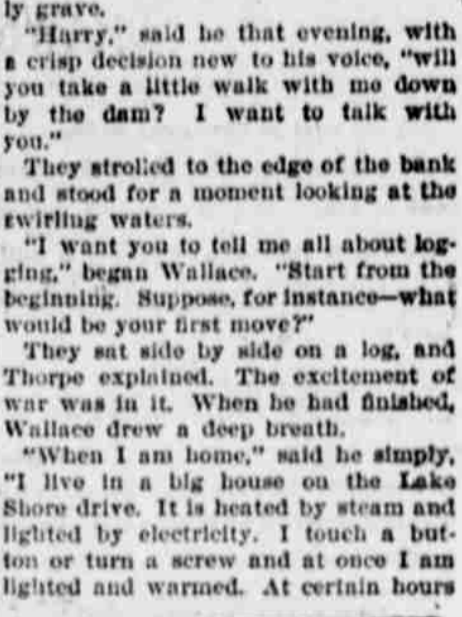
"Harry," said he that evening, with a crisp decision new to his voice, "will you take a little walk with me down by the dam? I want to talk with you."

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—what would be your first move?"

They sat side by side on a log, and Thorpe explained. 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



"Oh, please!" cried the boy.

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 downtown every day, and then I've played golf or tennis or ridden a horse in the park. 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."

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."

Thorpe watched him with sympathetic eyes, but with lips that obstinately refused to say one word.

"I left college at nineteen because my father died," Wallace went on. "I am now just twenty-one. A large estate descended to me, and I have had to care for its investment 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. Now, Harry, I have a proposal to make you. It is this: You need \$30,000 to buy your land. Let me supply it and come in as half partner."

An expression of doubt crossed the land looker'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."

Continued on 5th page.