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The Blazed Trail

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

"Because you originally paid in cash for all that timber on the stump just \$10,000, and you get from Radway saw logs to the value of \$20,000," replied Thorpe sharply.

"Don't you know, young man, that white pine logs on skids will spoil utterly in a summer? Worms get into 'em."

"I do," replied Thorpe, "unless you bark them, which process will cost you about \$1 a thousand. You can find any amount of small purchasers at reduced price. You can sell them easily at \$3. That nets you for your million and a half a little over \$4,000 more.

"Will you give \$5,000?" asked Thorpe. "I will not," replied Daly; then, with a sudden change of humor: "And now I'll do a little talking. I've listened to you just about as long as I'm going to. I have Radway's contract in that safe, and I live up to it. I'll thank you to go plumb to blazes!"

"That's your last word, is it?" asked Thorpe, rising. "It is."

"Then," said he slowly and distinctly, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I intend to collect in full the \$4 a thousand for the three millions and a half Mr. Radway has delivered to you. In return Mr. Radway will purchase of you at the stumpage rates of \$2 a thousand the million and a half he called to put in."

"Furthermore," pursued Thorpe in addition, "I'll repeat my offer before witnesses, and if I win the first suit I'll sue you for the money we could have made by purchasing the extra million and a half before it had a chance to spoil."

This statement had its effect, for it forced an immediate settlement before the pine on the skids should deteriorate. Daly lunged back with a little more deadly earnestness.

"And, lastly," concluded Thorpe, playing his trump card, "the suit from start to finish will be published in every important paper in this country. If you do not believe I have the influence to do this you are at liberty to doubt the fact."

Daly was cogitating many things. He knew that publicity was the last thing to be desired. Thorpe's statement had been made in view of the fact that much of the business of a lumber firm is done on credit. He thought that perhaps a rumor of a big suit going against the firm might weaken confidence. As a matter of fact, this consideration had no weight whatever with the older man, although the threat of publicity actually galled Thorpe.

"I think we can arrange a basis of settlement," he said finally. "Be here tomorrow morning at 10 with Radway."

"By the way," remarked Daly, "I don't believe I know your name."

"Thorpe," was the reply. "Well, Mr. Thorpe," said the lumberman, with cold anger, "if at any time there is anything with my power or influence that you want I'll see that you don't get it."

"The who?" asked Thorpe. "The \$20,000. Radway, grateful beyond expression, insisted on Thorpe's acceptance of an even thousand, and with this money in hand the latter felt justified in taking a vacation for the purpose of visiting his sister."

For the purposes he had in view \$500 would be none too much. The remaining \$1500 he had resolved to invest in his sister's comfort and happiness. He had gradually evolved what seemed to him an excellent plan. He had already perfected it by correspondence with Mrs. Henwick. It was, briefly, this: His Thorpe, would at once hire a servant girl, who would make anything but supervision unnecessary in a small household. The remainder of the money Thorpe had gained had been and an opportunity for study and still retained her home in case of reverse.

These found his sister already a young lady. After the first delight of meeting had passed they sat side by side on the haircloth sofa and took stock of each other.

He scrambled over and through the ugly debris which for a year or two after logging operations cumbered the ground.

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Thorpe, with the farsightedness of the pioneer, had perceived that the exploitation of the upper country was an affair of a few years only.

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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 fringed engaged in steels of greater or less magnitude.

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 to the mouth of a fairly large river called the Osawinimackee. It showed in common with most streams of its size, land already taken, but Thorpe hoped to find good timber near the mouth.

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 near by.

"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.

"What you do?" he inquired after a long silence, punctuated by the puffs of tobacco. "Hunt, trap, fish," replied Thorpe, with equal contentment.

"That night he slept on the ground. Next day he made a better shelter than he had of hunting before the sun was an hour high. He was armed with an old fashioned smooth bore musket loader, and Thorpe was astonished after his new companion's method to find that he hunted deer with fire shot.

"The Indian appeared 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.

CHAPTER X. OR more than a week Thorpe had journeyed through the forest. His equipment was stowed in the extreme. Attached to a heavy leather belt of cartridge hung a two pound ax and a sheath knife.

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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 Osawinimackee 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.

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 had selected. But the situation had set his fighting blood to racing.

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ly 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 makes you think that, Charley?" he asked. "You good man in woods," replied Injun Charley sentimentally, "I tell by way you look at him pine."

Thorpe looked at the Indian again. There seemed to be only one course. "Charley," said he, "why are you staying here with me?"

"Why are you my friend? What have I ever done for you?" "You got 'um chief's eye," replied his companion, with simplicity.

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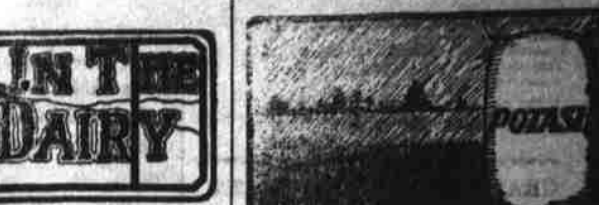
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