CHAPTER XIV.

Law and Lumber.

RAIN fell the following fortnight in a steady downpour that did not cease, even for an hour. Ragged, smokelike clouds hung over the valley at Thirty Mile, dragged so low by their own weight that they not only hid the upper peaks, but shrouded the lower ridges as well. They drove by in interminable files of gray, making slubbeways of every cut and drenching continually the men of the construction gang, who, in spite of the chill of that downfall, still sweated at their labor. But both Steve and Fat Joe, for all that they caught each day a deeper note in the hoarse complaints of those same men—a note no less ominous than was that newer, hoarser one of the swollen river—nevertheless were dull thankful that the ashen sky had at least a tinsel lining. It might have snowed.

A month earlier it had been Steve's plan to span that mile or so of swamp and bridge the river before the cold weather set in. Nor was his altered order of campaign due in any way to the storm which had raised the river and made of the alder dotted stretch of flat bog meadow an oozing, quaking morass. It no longer represented merely a positive not too alluring problem in engineering—that strip of swamp and open water. It had taken on a newer, strategic importance. And the change in Steve's plans, so far as the work at Thirty Mile was concerned, was as much due to the [illegible] which Fat Joe brought home with him one night toward the end of the next week as it was the result of the interview which he had held with Hardwick Elliott himself.

Joe had been a whole day absent on the north end of the line. Alone he had been over every foot of that all but completed stretch which ended at the border of swampland, there at headquarters, troubling himself not at all over the unevenness of the roadbed, satisfied entirely with the surety he gained with every inspected mile that a trainload of logs of a dozen trainloads would stay on the rails when the rails were laid and the day came to set wheels rolling. But the further report he brought back with him was far less reassuring.

"I wonder," Joe mused aloud that night—"I wonder, now, why any man who knows anything about handlin' timber should go to work botherin' himself with skidways leadin' down to the river when he knows, as well as Harrigan should know, that it ain't comin' out that way? It don't seem good sense nor logic to me, unless"—

He stopped there and left his own opinion unfinished. Since the evening Harrigan had stepped out of the main bunk house and disappeared, black rage in his face and a promise to return upon his lips, that lumberman's red head had been conspicuous only because it was absent from the landscape. So far Harrigan had failed to reappear, and Fat Joe's method of apprising his chief of his return to the Reserve company's payroll was distinctly characteristic. But Steve's reception of the news was little more than listless. He seemed to change the subject entirely.

"I don't see why it wouldn't be just as easy or easier," Steve replied, "to cross here on pilings practically the whole distance as it would be to fill and bridge too. And, if we were to look at it in that light, then why wouldn't it be still easier to drive those piles, say, next February or March, while the swamp is still crusted over and hard? It would afford us some sort of footing to work on then other than black ooze and lilypads. Wouldn't it seem so to you?"

"We'd still have that track north of here to lay," Fat Joe advised, "when we work in from the south with steel."

"Surely," Steve admitted. "Of course. But wouldn't that be a better bet than to stand to see our embankment and bridge"—

He broke off there, just as Joe had hesitated a moment before. The undercurrent of meaning for which the latter's ears were waiting came to the surface, however, when Steve began again.

"Suppose, Joe," he pursued lazily—"suppose you had contracted with a railroad—an infant road too young even to be named—to move for you more timber than either of us will ever own, contracted in apparent good faith, when all along in your heart you were certain that the railroad itself would never be able to fulfill its half of the bargain. Granting such a state of affairs, Joe, what do you suppose you would do?"

"Maybe I'd hire me a red headed river dog," came Joe's answer, pat. "Maybe I'd hire me a bully boy boss of white water to build me some skidways to the nearest flood water, so's I could teach the infant railroad you mention that business was business, contract or no contract."

"Of course you would!" Steve agreed instantly, and he might have been complimenting a first primer favorite so pleased was his tone. "Of course you would. I'm afraid that was too easy for you, wasn't it, Joe? But now suppose you were bent on proving to everybody, and particularly to those who had fathered it, what an unfortunate weakling this immature, unnamed child of constructive silence really was. In that event how do you figure you'd conduct yourself?"

Joe smiled oddly, a little balefully. It was magic quick, that change in his expression, as swift as was the thought behind it.

"I'd have my logs all cut and ready to haul as an excuse, wouldn't I?" he inquired, with simulated anxiety. "Could I tell folks, through the newspapers, for instance, that I wasn't strong for letting my timber lie for the grubs to lunch on if I had to square myself?"

"Quite naturally." Until then Steve's face had kept its preternatural gravity. He grinned ever so faintly now. "Very naturally you'd want to save your winter cut."

"Then I'd like to have 'em build a bridge somewheres along the river I aimed to drive—a bridge and a nice dirt embankment, all dressed up with rails and ties and things on top. I'm allowed to suppose I've got an awful long standin' score, ain't I, along with all this timber? Well, that's what I'd like to have 'em do, then. And when I opened her up a few miles up river and she begin to roar, when that first head of water hit the bridge and the sticks begun to grind, I suppose I'd take up my position on the bank where I could watch real well. I'd light me a long, black cigar and murmur sort of languid and sympathetic, 'There goes your railroad, gents!'"

"Such a move in itself would be outside the letter of the contract," Steve expostulated. "Why, they wouldn't dare do anything. They wouldn't dare to begin driving the river before your time was up, much less do damage to your completed work. What excuse—what legal excuse—could they give, even though they were morally certain that you were bound to fail?"

Very slowly, almost pityingly, Joe turned toward him.

"Legal!" he droned. "Moral!" And then he laughed his clear tenor outburst which barely escaped being a giggle. "Dear child, judiciously speaking, law and lumber and morals and mill feet don't mix. They don't mix at all in this section of the country. If they wanted to bother their heads with an alibi they could say it was top of flood and they weren't eager to be hung up just because a brass buttoned conductor promised 'em a through express in the morning. They could say— But what good would explanations do us, huh, if they sent a half million logs sky hootin' into our bridge? It wouldn't save our construction would it?"

He wheeled back to Steve, his manner brisk.

"Do we leave that stretch open?" he asked. "Is that the way you have it figured?"

"I'm afraid we'd better," Steve said.

That was as close as they came to anything resembling a discussion of the change which was growing more and more noticeable in the bearing of the men at Thirty Mile. As far as all outward evidence was concerned Steve seemed to ignore it utterly, to retreat oftener and oftener behind his habit of silence which, even Fat Joe, after several unsuccessful garrulous attempts, gave over trying to penetrate.

It was not the hunger of his own heart; it was neither intolerance of restraint nor mental rebellion against the duties which were holding him so close upriver that had caused the chief engineer of the East Coast work to withdraw so completely within himself, although many times each day his eyes did wander toward the south and Morrison. During that bleak period Steve's thoughts were often of Barbara, but they were not somber thoughts. The very hardness of his life schooling had taught him too well how little of wisdom there is in fretting against the day of action when that day cannot be hurried nor controlled. Steadfastly he refused to let himself brood. If he could not go to her he would not, nevertheless, allow himself to dwell upon that impossibility. Instead his spirit ranged ahead to a hopeful, more or less indefinite and not too distant date when his absence might not seem to threaten too great a cost to those whose matters lay in his trust.

Steve had had little chance for conversation in these days with Garry, now an employee of the company as an assistant to Fat Joe, except for a word or two over a hastily snatched breakfast or perhaps at supper at night, and at night he was usually too tired to talk. But the other's growing restlessness had not escaped his notice. For awhile Garry had seemed to accept his continuance there at camp as a matter of course, and for that very reason neither Fat Joe nor Steve had dignified the thought of his possible departure by so much as a single spoken word. Garry's own actions first began to indicate how incessantly he was debating that question within his own brain. And one night toward the end of the week he finally reached the point of voicing a decision which was old in anticipation to Steve and Joe. They were on the point of going to bed. Garry had risen and then paused. He hesitated and crooked his arms and yawned a trifle too carelessly that evening.

"Well, this finishes another day," he remarked, nor did he realize how soulful were the words. "And I cleaned up the last of the stockroom today, Joe. A swift but accurate workman, eh? I'll leave behind a record unblemished by oversight or sloth. And now—now it's about time, I suppose, I was going back to town."

It was out, nor could the yawn conceal his eagerness. His back was turned, but Steve knew what light was in his eyes. Steve's carelessness was a far neater thing than Garry's had been.

"What's your hurry?" he inquired easily. "Why rush away? And if you think your industry has betrayed you into idleness you're reasoning poorly tonight. Want another job?"

Bantering indifference was the keynote of that reply. Mutually they had adopted it from the very first. It smacked of the freemasonry which always marked Steve's conversations with Fat Joe were they earnest or frivolous beneath the surface. It is always recognizable in the speech of friends such as they, differentiated from actual indifference by an intimacy of inference between the lines which makes such discourse almost foreign to uninitiated ears. But Garry's answer was not in kind. Steve was caught so far off his guard by the question which came flinging back at him that he was glad Garry had not turned.

"What else is there I could do?"

No man save one who was very, very tired could have spoken in such a tone; no man except one who has tried himself in the highest of courts—his own opinion of himself—could have put such a degree of contempt into so simple a query.

"Why—why"— Steve faltered, and then he took command of his own wits again. "There's work enough, don't doubt that," he exclaimed, and laughed a little. "Joe here will be another week or ten days finishing with the fill up yonder. He'll do well if he manages it by then and that, too, with every available hand we have. I don't want to rob him of a single man if I can help it, but I've got to go ahead with the line to the south. To put it concretely, I'm in need of a rodman. Do you think you'd care to oblige?"

Again the hint of banter persisted, but Garry's jaw was tight when he faced suddenly around.

"I will!" he flashed back hoarsely. "I will if it's a man's job. But I'm done with filling a dinky pad with rows of figures all day long. I'm finished with this dry tallying of cans of beans and soap and yards of rope. Do you understand? What work would I have to do?"

Out of the corners of his eyes Steve saw consternation overspread Fat Joe's face. His own was only amused.

"You'll have to swing an ax," he enumerated slowly, "and you'll have to lug a rod and tripod. You'll wade through bog and fight your way through underbrush. And then, for variety, swing an ax some more. If you've never learned yet what it is to be really tired, Garry; if you've never known what it is to go to bed wishing morning would never come, you'll find out what that's like too."

As soon as it was spoken Steve recognized the slip. Watching Garry's eyes widen, he knew that Garry had

"Let it stand, Joe," he directed.

caught it also. For a moment a torrent of words trembled on the latter's lips, and then he swallowed and nodded shortly. The vague dreariness of his acceptance was fully as electrical as the threatened outburst might have been.

"I'll try it," Garry said very simply. "I'll have a try at it tomorrow."

And he pivoted on his heel and passed out.

Some minutes after he had gone Fat Joe, still a little dazed, rose softly and unostentatiously, crossed to a shelf shoulder high on the wall and reached to remove a quart bottle of brandy which Steve, returning home soaked through and through, had brought out and left standing there. But Steve checked him in the very middle of that act.

"Let it stand, Joe," he directed. "Leave it where it is."

As slowly as he had reached for it Joe started to put the bottle back. The very briefness of that order should have been warning enough, but Joe found it impossible to keep to himself his disapproval.

"All right," he acquiesced, "only I can't help remindin' you just the same that when a horse is runnin' his heart out it's kind of superfluous to lay on the whip."

And then the whole accumulation of those days of silent perplexity, of indecision and fruitless mental forays spilled over upon Fat Joe's entirely innocent head. Steve shot around and leveled a peremptory finger.

"Whip—be hanged!" he barked. "Put that bottle back!"

Joe's fingers came away as though the glass had blistered them.

"Land's sakes!" he exclaimed, and in a voice that was chastened and meek when he had caught his breath, "Please, and it's back!"

Chronic ill temper could hardly have persisted in the face of that reply, and Steve's bad been but a mood. His first chuckle was in itself a plea for pardon. He supplemented it aloud.

"I'm sorry, Joe—I'm worried. I've got a job on my hands that bothers me. It appears to be simple enough until I get to planning how to tackle it, and then I can't make any headway at all. But there isn't anything to be gained in hiding that stuff; that's one of the things I need to know. It's better where it is."

Joe waved a hand in bland dismissal of the apology.

"My mistake," he averred, "though your harsh words have hurt me sore. I don't quite savvy it yet, but it's your affair, not mine. You're dealin' and han[illegible]' the chips. And before now I've seen lots of well meanin' bystanders get all mussed up from tryin' to horn into another man's pastime. I'd ought to have knowed better."

CHAPTER XV.

Money.

GARRY entered upon his new duties the following morning in a spirit anything but reassuring to his companion. Up to that time he had made his own industry the butt of much good natured ridicule, viewing it apparently as a sort of vacation novelty amusing enough while the novelty lasted. But he went from task to task that next day in a methodical, dogged fashion that was farthest of all from amiability. Two or three times Steve, trying to spare him needless effort, attempting to show him how to favor blistered hands and aching back, met with rebuffs so curt that he learned to keep his advice to himself. He knew what end Garry was working to achieve. He would have allowed himself to smile over the thought that the other man would be tired enough before night came without trying to make that work any harder, only he did not dare venture that smile.

"You've been trying to help me," Garry said to Steve. "You've been trying to throw me a line. And for a time I tried to catch it, Steve. But it isn't in me to try that hard any more. Some men do things for what there is in it—the pecuniary reward, I mean. Some men—you, for instance—because their self respect won't let them stop, win or lose. But now and then there

"Miriam Burrell!" he breathed.

happens one who keeps on trying only because there is one other person at least who may be the gladder for his success. I don't expect you to understand. I know it will sound small and cowardly to you. It's too lonesome living, Steve, when there's no one who cares whether you live or not!"

"That does not fit your case," Steve objected instantly, "when your danger or your safety keeps a woman watching white faced with terror through the night for your return."

Garry propped himself upon one elbow, the better to see the speaker's countenance.

"My safety!" he repeated blankly. "My return!" And then, wanly grateful, "You are not the sort of man who lies cut lightly, Steve."

And then Stephen O'Mara let him have it—all the story which had lain so many days in his heart. There were times when Garry went even paler during the short recital, times when everything else was submerged by the incredulity that flooded his face. But before Steve had finished the last trace of doubt was gone. Before the end came Garry had bowed his head, this time in flushed, self conscious wonder which transfigured him.

"Miriam Burrell!" he breathed. "Proud, intolerant"—

His head came up. The next instant he voiced the words which Steve most wanted to hear.

"You shouldn't have told me this," said he. "You had no right, unless"—

Steve laughed at him.

"God bless you, boy," he exclaimed. "I asked her if I might. Why, don't you understand that she meant to herself if I didn't? You see, she is—far, far braver than you are, Garry."

Garry lifted his hands and hid his face.

So quietly that his exit made no sound Steve slipped to his feet and passed outside. It had stopped raining. The hardwood ridges, touched by frost, were flaming streaks of color against the rainwashed evergreens when he picked his way down to the river and found a dry stone for a seat. An hour and more he sat there while his thoughts went back over the trail of the years, the trail which had led him from that cabin to a pair of violet eyes and lips that arched like a boy's.

Steve let his mind turn again unreservedly to his own problem that morning. He tried to face sure eyed the road which still stretched ahead. He did not know that Garrett Devereau, the debonaire, the cynical, the world weary and world wise, had broken down and was sobbing noiselessly, as men sob, in the room which he had left, shaking with deep and terrible gasps that racked his very soul. But it was already daybreak; it was trail's end now for Garry. It does make a difference if one knows that some one cares.

Upon their return to Thirty Mile two nights later Joe's attitude of criticism was the first thing which piqued Steve's interest. There was something ludicrous in the former's voice as he sat and anathematized the food which the cook boy brought to the table, even though he devoured hungrily all that his plate would hold. And because Joe was so obviously primed for a sensation that evening out of sheer perversity Steve struggled to draw him into a discussion of a topic which, just as obviously, had no appeal just then.

"What I hope to do," he confided gravely to Garry, "is to finish up at Morrison and make possible the transfer of some of those men up here. We are working only one shift now. With two I figure we could sail along a-fogging. How does that strike you, Joe?"

That was only one of his many attempts, but all of them, save for the inner laughter which they afforded, were totally without result. Joe's answers were monosyllabic, his attention wandering at best. To that particular question he nodded his head spiritlessly.

"This butter ain't none too fresh," he growled sourly, "and I wonder if that cook boy thinks we dote on ham every meal? I don't for one. It may be all right if a man's plumb starving to death, but it don't lend no real elegance to a repast."

That gloomy complaint brought little more than a sparkle to Steve's eyes, but it made Garry lean forward in his place. Throughout the meal while the other two fenced in just such fashion he forgot his own food to listen, delighted anticipation in every feature. And when they had finished supper and pushed back their chairs he stood grinning a little, watching Joe survey that littered room which served as office and sleeping quarters for the chief engineer of "the East Coast company." Fat Joe's gaze swung from wall to wall, from littered corner to heaped up chair. Then he shook his head in despair.

"It looks to me, Steve," he grunted, "as though you ain't never had no real training in tidiness, have you? There don't seem to be no system at all in the way you leave your things around. There's one boot over in that corner; it's got a mate, I know, because I saw you take them off last night. I wouldn't be certain otherwise. And it's the same way with all your things. Just look at this room! A nice place to receive callers in, now ain't it?"

That was the first lead he tendered them, but Steve, rather than gratify him with a direct question, chose to go forward in the dark. He leaned over and followed his usual custom when he wanted to think. He tapped out his pipe.

"But I can always find everything," he defended, "that is, unless you have taken the trouble to put things away. Then it's a toss up that something or other will never be found until it turns up of its own accord. It's not so bad, Joe." He, too, swung to survey the room. "Not so bad! Just a little unsettled, that's all. Are we likely to have any callers, do you think, who would object to this layout?"

Joe snorted, but his eyes were mournful. He knew that there was nothing else to do but yield a part at least.

"We ain't likely to," he murmured. "We're just naturally bound to have 'em. They're comin' in tomorrow, and I ask you again, ain't this a pleasing prospect to greet 'em?"

For all that he seemed to be starting ruefully down the room, he was watching for the surprise that darted across Steve's face. Momentarily the latter had forgotten his assumed air of placidity.

"Tomorrow? Who?" And then Steve laughed. "Go ahead and tell us, Joe. I'm beat! I'll admit that I'm panting with curiosity."

Joe pulled up a chair and dropped into it. It appealed to him, this method, whenever he had the time to spare. His pink face was still innocent of guile.

"I don't mind the men folks," he resumed. "That fat party, I mean, who wears the plaid suits, nor Caleb Hunter, either. Both of them are used to such truck as this. And I reckon it'll tickle the hidies too. But I can see Honey sticking his nose in the air and sniffin' supercilious like the first minute he gets his nose in the door. He ain't going to approve at all, at all—not any way you look at it."

"Honey?"

Both Steve and Garry ignored the rest of Joe's explanation to gasp that single word in concert.

"Who in the world do you mean by 'Honey?'"

"Who could I mean?" Joe demanded collectedly. "I didn't give him the name, did I? I mean that chap Wickersham, who owns the timber north of us. Foreign, ain't he? Sure, I thought so! Well, every time I run across that man's path my heart swells with patriotism. I guess I'm just as glad to be born plain United States."

(To be continued.)

WOMAN ALL RUN DOWN

Made Strong and Well By Vinol

Waynesboro, Pa.—"I was all run down after a hard spell of bronchitis so it was hard for me to keep about. I had pains in my chest and took cold easily. A friend asked me to try Vinol. I did, and it built me up so I am strong and well and I am able to do my housework which I had not done for three months before taking Vinol."—Mrs. Y. R. Hossmoun, Waynesboro, Pa.

Vinol creates an appetite, aids digestion, makes pure blood and creates strength. Your money back if it fails.

HOLLAND & THOMPSON, Druggists, Centreville, Maryland.

The Barbering Business

is as much a profession as that of the doctor, lawyer or banker, and expert care is requisite to a full knowledge of all professions.

Having had an experience of more than twenty years in this business and having served my patrons to their satisfaction during that time, I take this method of anouncing that thesame atention will be given as heretofore.

WM. H. HARD,
Water St. Centreville, Md

MONEY TO LOAN

no mortgage, repayable in installments if desired.

MADISON BROWN,
Attorney-At-Law.

CHICHESTER S PILLS
THE DIAMOND BRAND.
Ladies! Ask your Druggist for Chi-ches-ter s Diamond Brand Pills in Red and Gold metallic boxes, sealed with Blue Ribbon. Take no other. Buy of your Druggist. Ask for CHI-CHES-TER S DIAMOND BRAND PILLS, for 25 years known as Best, Safest, Always Reliable.
SOLD BY DRUGGISTS EVERYWHERE

PARKER'S HAIR BALSAM
A toilet preparation of merit. Helps to eradicate dandruff.
For Restoring Color and Beauty to Gray or Faded Hair.

—and the clear, steady light of the Rayo Lamp makes thinking easier.

Its soft, mellow glow is restful to the eyes.

Steadier than gas—more restful than electricity—cheaper than either.

Use Aladdin Security Oil—the most economical kerosene oil—for best results.

STANDARD OIL COMPANY
(New Jersey)
BALTIMORE, MD
Washington, D. C. Charlotte, N. C
Norfolk, Va. Charleston, W. Va
Richmond, Va Charleston, S. C

Rayo LAMPS

EVENTUALLY

You will be the owner of a Ford Automobile. Why not buy yours now and make 1917 a happy year for yourself and family.

Complete Line of Ford Parts and Accessories Always in Stock.

GEORGE A. HART
SUDLERSVILLE MARYLAND

ESTABLISHED 1884 REFERENCE: STATE BANK OF MD

BAYARD, SON & CO.

GENERAL COMMISSION MERCHANTS

Poultry, Produce, Live Stock, Game, Butter, Eggs, Crabs, Oysters and All Farm and Water Products.

Consign your shipments to us and receive a square deal.

15 EAST CAMDEN STREET

BALTIMORE MARYLAND

WOOLDRIDGE'S
CROP GROWERS
FERTILIZERS
LAND IMPROVERS
HIGH CLASS

SOLD BY
A. HOWARD JOHNSON, Agt.
CENTREVILLE, MD.

$100 REWARD

for the discovery of a man or woman who is not anxious to receive the very highest price for country produce of all kinds.

WE POSITIVELY PAY THE HIGHEST PRICES FOR

POULTRY
EGGS
BUTTER

and all other country produce.

We also carry a complete assortment of staple and fancy groceries and fresh and salt meats.

SMITH'S GROCERY
CENTREVILLE WATER ST. MARYLAND