Derelicts Who Live Like Kings

By NEGLEY FARSON.

TWO hundred feet above the floor of the forest Pavel swung his two bitted ax. *Hugh! Hwap! . . . Hugh! Hwap!* the bright metal bit into the soft Douglas fir. Great yellow-white chips spun out, hovered and then planed down to pitch into the brush. Pavel was cutting a "spar tree."

He readjusted himself, dug his five inch leg spurs deep into the wood and then, sticking his thumb into his mouth, held it up to make sure of the wind. It blew cold on the side of his thumb.

"W-a-y below . . .!" he leaned back on his belt and drove the ax deep into the falling cut. *Zunk!* the green fronted top trembled: *Zunk! Zunk!* Pavel's ears caught the telltale crackling.

"Yare she comes!" At the sigh of the wood's final parting he let go his ax to let it hang by its lanyard and clung like a leech to the tree.

He laughed to see the logging crew scatter; laughed as the huge top crashed like a wave into the saplings, and the top he was on swung in a great sickening arc. It amused this hatchet faced Finn to witness the consternation below him; instead of where we expected he had used a shift in the wind, and—with diabolical accuracy—dropped the top not twenty-five feet from the donkey engine itself. A deft bit of work!

"You better stay up where you are," a frightened Bucker growled savagely, "it's the nearest heaven you'll ever git. . . . You damn pigheaded Finn!"

Crude Humor of High Riggers

Hoping that no one had noticed my goat-like leaps to avoid being killed I nodded assent. There was something crude about this Finlander's humor; and now his posture was insolent. He had climbed up on the top—a trembly, swaying affair, not two feet across—and was standing there, two hundred feet in the air, nonchalantly rolling some Old Chum in a wheat straw.

"How's dat?" he called down, after licking the paper, "pretty nice, eh? Mak you fellers yump like de devil!" He poured satiric laughter down on our heads.

Regardless of the fact that he was keeping us waiting Pavel calmly finished his smoke and at the same time inspected the scenery: a panorama of slumbering forest, a lake, mottled bright green in its shallows, and, beyond, a rim of smoky blue mountains, with glistening white snow on their peaks. At his feet, stretching from us to the lake, a chaos of crashed, broken timber, raw earth and screeching steam donkeys. He swayed there, leaning slightly into the wind.

It made me nervous to watch him, so I conversed with the hook tender: "Ever see a high rigger killed?"

"Killed! I tell you what I saw up at Albernie. We had a young high rigger up there, went up to cut off a top. About a hundred and fifty feet up he come to the branches. Yeah! Dead branches. And his ax went through one of 'em and cut through his life belt. Come down like a shot duck."

"Dead?" the hook tender snorted; "dead as mutton!"

He insisted that I should hear all the details, and ended by saying, ". . . it was Sunday, . . . and his wife was sitting there with her baby."

Pavel's bellow for tackle cut short another tragic recital. Through a pass block, which he had made fast some twenty feet from the top, the glistening 1⅝ inch steel cables were passed up to him. I heard him whistle as he worked at setting the guy lines and leads. From the top of this tree to another, 4,000 feet away on a hill, would soon swing a double skyline flier—the highest development of aerial logging. A gigantic six drum Lidgerwood skidder would pull itself, like a tank, up from the valley to the foot of this tree, and once in operation this rig would be capable of snatching through the air forty tons of logs these 4,000 feet in four minutes!

Highest Paid Job in the Woods

This high rigging, this setting a cobweb of steel, and pitching the great tops so accurately that they would drive a peg in the ground is the highest paid job in the woods. It is also the most dangerous. A good high rigger gets somewhere around $10 a day. And I haven't found any one out here who will deny he deserves it. The hook tender, who is responsible for getting the big sticks out of the woods and into the water, makes about the same wage, and the engineers of the skidders draw down about $7. These, together with the foreman—the "push," they call him out here—are the cream of logging camp aristocracy. An aristocracy, the social ladder of which has for its rungs the substantial footholds of ability, and corresponding good pay. Oddly enough, those whom the layman always pictures as loggers, the men with the ax and the saw—fallers and buckers—these relics are quite a way down in the scale, getting $4.50 per day, as a rule. And as soon as some one invents a practical horizontal cross cut saw worked by a motor these men will go.

The efficiency of these present day camps is appalling. A year ago we had hunted cougar up in this valley. In its somber green depths there were gigantic spruce, eighteen feet through at the base—trees which were already well grown when Coeur de Lion set out for Jerusalem! Great fir, straight as a ramrod, whose soft, fronded boughs met to form Gothic arches hundreds of feet above the floor of the forest. On warm summer days soft winds had sighed through these pillarlike trunks—the *magnificat* of this woodland cathedral. A great herd of elk had followed the banks of its stream.

To-day! To-day this place was a wilderness, a horrible thing like a leprous face of a once beautiful woman. And there on the top of the last of these monarchs grinned that "damned pigheaded Finn," symbolical of all that had come to destroy them. The great spruce are gone—shipped to Japan, or wherever there's a market. And their like will never be seen again in this world—man will not permit them to grow since such "big sticks" are uneconomic to handle. Raw, ugly bunk houses glare in the sun; their refuse is chucked into the stream; a waste of black stumps stretches between us and the water, fire blackened, because it was burned in the spring. A hell of a sight! It's the only fitting description.

A hell! that's what a logging camp looks like; that's what the passerby sees. But turn over the page. . . .

My friend Swanson had once been a sailor. He had come out to the coast on a wind jammer from Hull—184 days round Cape Stiff—with the skipper's dead wife, pickled in whisky, lashed in her coffin just aft of the wheel. And his last act at 'Frisco—before he jumped ship—had been to insert a sheath knife in the ribs of the mate; a receipt—"paid in full!"—for a man killing passage. . . .

That was eighteen years ago; and to-day he is the "push" of No. 2 camp. You can see his houseboat moored close to its shore line . . . the little green painted one, set apart from the others, the one with the flower boxes at all the windows and the nasturtiums trailing its sides.

I asked him once what he had done all those years.

"Yenerally," Swanson replied, "I was huntin' a yob. . . ."

Well, Swanson has got it; as "push" he is receiving $250 a month. Outwardly, he is the same Swanson who "swoggled" the mate, a brute of a man, with a great matted chest like a bear. . . . A fine bucko mate for a hell ship! But under that formidable surface——

One sunset last winter he ran his launch ashore in front of my cabin. A fine buck dropped over its bow (out of season, but that didn't matter). By the stealthy light of a lantern we dressed the deer in my woodshed; and he gave me a quarter. The "chops"—the best part of the venison—he intended to give to "that poor feller Schnitzler," an old German settler, whose shack had just been burned to the ground and whose guns had gone with it. My stove had blown up, so Swanson said, and I made a salmi of teal in the fireplace and sat close to the blazing logs while we ate it.

Man of Blood Talked Rabbits

Throughout the whole of that evening I pumped him, tried to make him talk blood. I wanted to hear him tell how he had disemboweled a man—or at least helped in the process. But Swanson's whole mind was absorbed with the question of rabbits! There is none on this island—wild ones, that is—and a short time ago he had purchased two as pets for his children. These had escaped to the woods, and what Swanson wanted to know was "Can them two fellers steer clear of the martens?" And, providing such was their good fortune "there might be rabbits next spring . . . runnin' all over the place. . . . Yeah! What do you tink about dat?"

Pets, declared Mr. Swanson, are of great use to a man. He told how a cat had once prevented a battle, when he and a "Finlander" were hand logging "up in Valdez Island." The two men had become tired of each other, too close a confinement, and had reached a point where they no longer spoke. It soon became evident that such a state of affairs was impracticable; both were on the edge of black murder when "that Finlander" solved the problem by getting up early one morning—and loudly announcing the program for the day to the cat! In this fashion they managed to work on through the winter. . . .

Another time he asked for some books. I scratched my head and sighed thankfully when I located "The Sea Wolf." "There!" I said to myself, "there's a book that will please him. These rough devils out here will like action like that . . . remind them of old days on the sea. . . ."

But a fortnight later he looked uncomfortable when he handed it back. When forced to give his opinion he shook his head sadly: "I don't like dat feller Yack London . . . there's too much killin' in his book to suit me. . . ."

This from Swanson! I began to make up a new set of values, and have been doing this ever since; for these camps out here hold the men of the world. Wanderers, sea rovers, men from the ends of the earth come to these camps of the coast. The best and the worst white, red yellow and black; they come like the flights of wild duck. Some pitch but for a moment and are soon on their way; others—like the mallards in the reedy bays here about me—find the place much to their liking and make it their home. Some there are—like "that damn pigheaded Finn"—turbulent souls, who roam from camp to camp throughout the Northwest; and some, like Swanson,

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Taking out the logs in a British Columbia Camp. Above—The high rigger who gets $250 per month.