

You must excuse me, Lucretius, for this passionate defence of my poetry. However, I do not understand what all this has to do with the style of my chess-playing."

"Well, you see, Wordsworth, I had expected a style of subtle simplicity from you, which would have been in keeping with your poetic style. Instead, your play has contained those very elements that I find lacking in your poetry: immensity and fierceness! Rather than making delicate, quiet moves, you have been relentless in your aggression. This, then, is the contradiction which I have spied."

"I dare say," replied Wordsworth, "if you really understood my poetry, you could find no contradiction. Perhaps the light will shine a little more brightly when you see the way in which I intend to finish the game."

Lucretius had just played his twenty-fifth move. He sat back in his chair and waited for his opponent to make his reply. Wordsworth thought for a few moments, then raised his hand to touch the most insignificant piece on the board—the King's Rook's Pawn—which was standing passively and defensively in front of his King, and was still on its original square. He pushed the Pawn forward one square (25 . . . . P-R3!!), looked across the table, and whispered, "Zugzwang!"<sup>14</sup>

Lucretius looked at the board in silence for a long while. Then he tipped over his King in Resignation.

Wordsworth said mildly, "Perhaps now you can see what I mean when I say,

To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."<sup>15</sup>

## Magic With a Broadaxe

Edward B. Kennedy

**M**OST people look at a railroad track and see a warning signal, an elevated roadbed, or perhaps an oncoming train. A few persons are sufficiently concerned to observe the two parallel strips of steel which reach out into the distance and seem to point toward their destination. A few among the few may even marvel at the achievements of men who have been able to complete so vast a project with no visible bumps or dips for as many miles as the eye can reach. But rarely does anyone see the connecting links between

14. Literally: *the compulsion to move*. In chess, a person in Zugzwang can make no move without incurring immediate defeat; yet the rules state that he *must* move.

15. Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood."

the rails. A railroad crosstie seldom extracts a glance from a human being beyond the railroad inspection team.

Although it may be difficult to envision a man who has dedicated his life to crossties, some do exist, and such a man was Levi Bolen. He came to my father's place in the middle 1940's to cut the white oak timber on the slope which rises back of the garden and extends a half-mile or more up to the Clark National Forest Game Reserve. Levi possessed the quiet disposition of a confident man. His equipment included two hewing axes, a crosscut saw, and a pair of shoulders that would have made Paul Bunyan envious.

After the trees had been felled, Levi worked alone. From our front yard we could hear the sharp, metronomic blows of his axe clearly. It seemed that the man would never tire; his endurance was that of a machine. When we approached his outdoor workshop, we could see that his labors were fruitful by viewing the square stack of finished crossties. At the end of each succeeding day he would add forty more sturdy pieces of foundation material to his growing total. Furthermore, by observing the man himself at close range, even a child could see that his reward was not in money alone. He was a skilled craftsman, and he was proud of it.

Even though he worked alone and enjoyed his solitude, he did not object to spectators, if they would stand behind him. He was always careful to explain that this was the safest place, because the large, white chips of wood flew to his left and right, and, if the axe slipped from his hands, it would sail out in front of him. But the spectator soon discovered that this was a special vantage point. He was situated like an umpire watching home plate. He could see the arc of flying steel and the deep crevice in the log which resulted. He could see the same scene re-enacted every three or four seconds and marvel each time the blade bit again into the preceding crevice. In an amazingly short time, he could marvel further at the mathematical woodsman who had squared the oak circle.

Any person who has held a broadaxe in his hands is a witness to the fact that it is a heavy, cumbersome instrument. And any person who has attempted to sink one into an oak log can tell you that the task is not for men who are accustomed to cocktail parties. A crosstie-maker is a skilled craftsman. His skills are not learned in a classroom, but the requirements are comparable to skills which are. It is necessary that he recognize the lay of the grain in every piece of timber he hews. The ten-inch width must be measured with a trained eye to within one fourth of an inch. And it is necessary to maintain the strength of a wrestler and the eye of a "three hundred hitter" to perform magic with a broadaxe.