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The Making of 'Val' Pierce

By CONRAD RICHTER.

III.
Val passed on, approached the centre building, from which blue smoke filed, knocked on the open door and asked to see the boss. A common-looking workman in disillusioning faded blue shirt and overalls and high-topped shoes presented himself in the doorway.

"Job?" he ruminated. "Come in and get some cats. What can you do?"

"Not very much," admitted Val. "But I'm game to learn. The last job I had was running an automobile."

"Shofer for a rich man?"

"You might call it that," said Val.

"Well—Barney here's been belly-aching for a buddy since he come. He can break you in. Jake, quit your gawking at the young fellow and give him some beans and coffee." He turned to the youth in crude apology. "The fitch's all, but there's more where it came from. Charley, what the devil are you sticking around here for? You ought to be half way down to Murray Siding by this time."

"Oh, go hang yourself, Bill," said Charley affably, and strolled leisurely out in the direction of the stable.

Not daring to arouse suspicion by confessing that he had not slept the night before, Val accompanied Barney up the soft skidway to the standing timber. His hand wavered on the polished handle of the crosscut saw, but the first tree, a rock oak, driving to the ground, imparted a reacting sense of human power that strengthened the spirit.

Physically, he felt in purgatory. He perspired weakly, the midges and forest flies tormented his hot, moist face, and the food he had bolted at breakfast did not want to stay down.

After a time the palm of each hand began to exhibit a row of bluish water blisters, which finally burst and thenceforth burned, shrinking like an open flesh from ax and saw handles.

By the end of the week, however, he had somewhat hardened. He was at least physically able to note the valley's evening hush as he camped stumbling back to the bunkhouse a step or two behind Barney, bitterly anathematizing himself for the mental shadow that prevented normal enjoyment. At this hour the valley seemed like a child down on its knees in prayer. The only sounds were the ceaseless monologue of the red-eyed vireo; the wild, elusive tinkle of the stream on the rocks and the occasional rumble of a prop wagon returning through the gap from Murray Siding.

A month passed, and he had learned to move a saw without wasted effort, to place the blade of his double-bitted ax in accordance with his vision, to be forcefully tolerant of the midges and mosquitoes, to judge the fall of a stick of timber, to know the cough of the red squirrel from the bark of the gray; to name the swishing song of the high-perched indigo bunting, the mourn of the turtle dove, the foreboding of the black-billed cuckoo; to discriminate by taste and sight between birch and spice bush; to distinguish rock oak from chestnut and red oak, white oak from sour gum, pignut from ash; to answer in kind the rough handgripe of the other members of the crew; to fall into sound sleep with whip-poor-wills racing oratorically outside the window.

There were moments aplenty of distaste and rebellion, but a visualization of waiting prison masonry never failed to minimize his grievances. He felt like a student who, having done a forbidden lesson in the back of the book, turns front to find rudimentary tasks that had looked difficult before now seem comparatively simple. A few moments' reflection found him invariably tractable, eagerly willing to pay the price of midges, aches and sweat, for the boon of remaining free in this sequestered forest valley.

By the time October dispersed the mosquitoes, softened the sunlight, painted the mountains red and gold and impregnated the air with the tang of cold mornings, Val had let go into the tenor of Beaver Valley existence. He could not let go wholly, for there were nights when he tossed with remembrance of the past, and days when he could not unseat the feeling that the others were closing in on him. Twice the unannounced arrival of the inspectors from the railroad company sent him into a state of panic, and once a state forester in brown flannels and puttees, riding in from the state land on Black Mountain, had actually put him to temporary flight.

Then, one Saturday afternoon, working in a strip of hemlock by the seasonally depleted stream, he became indefinitely conscious of some one watching him. Mechanically he continued lopping withered branches, trying to gain some sense of direction. The perspiration, the fringe of hair on his forehead, the gleam of his teeth, his ears seemed to thrust toward the forest on Black Mountain, toward the steep slope,

but he could distinguish nothing except a long familiar gray rock prominent amid the mass of green, and a trio of turkey buzzards sailing silently up in the blue.

He was about to force himself back to work, when, for the fraction of a second, a flash of light flicked in his eyes. It was as if a small mirror on Black Mountain had reflected the sun across his face. Scarcely breathing, he realized that the lenses of a field glass might have done it. Unsteadily he studied the spot from which the flash had come, the foot of a lone pitch pine whose darker green foliage stood out perceptibly from the preponderance of hardwood.

"Barney," he asked, trying to remain calm, "can you see anything under that yellow pine over from that gray rock on Black Mountain?"

Barney concentrated his gaze on the point in question.

"Don't notice anything much in particular," he answered. "What's the idea?"

Val didn't answer. He was steadfastly watching the spot. As he looked, he would have sworn he saw a human figure retreat into the bushes near the bare trunk of the pine. He kept his eyes on the mountain until the effort brought the black dots swarming thickly in his vision, but the figure did not reappear.

He tried to continue work. The ax seemed an unwilling implement of lead. His hands had become unstrung and atremble. It struck him now how queer that he had never heard from Lou. Almost daily the teamsters brought mail for Jones. Barney received and wrote a lengthy letter once a week. But nothing had ever come for James Barth. Could the authorities have caught Lou in the murdered man's machine? Good Lord! Perhaps Lou had already confessed and this was the explanation of a spy on Black Mountain.

Why, in heaven's name, had he stayed in Beaver Valley so long, when there were places where no one would know he had gone!

He tried to yawn naturally.

"Don't feel good," he mentioned to Barney. "Believe I'll call it a day." He drove his ax into the scarred hemlock trunk and started in the direction of the halting whine of the saw. Once out of Barney's sight, however, he cut swiftly to the flat on Sunset mountain and made his way just inside of the edge of timber toward the path traveled daily to and from his home in Griffen valley by Davey, a freckled youth of fifteen or sixteen, who peeled chestnut posts and poles, the only member of the Beaver valley crew who did not work on Sunday.

He found the path with difficulty, a straight, pebbly course running like a tape up the cliff-like side of Sunset mountain. Recovering his breath and strength on the summit, he sat glued to a lichen-tapestried rock by the sweeping expanse of view. Above the solid green wall of Black Mountain rose the dull blue of a second elevation; beyond, the hazier blue of a third and fourth. A fifth might have been cloud or imagination. From this pinnacle on Mount Olympus the earth seemed an endless panorama of lofty blue mountains whose complete numbers were hidden from mortal gaze by the drapery of the horizon.

For more than an hour he drank in the silent spectacle, then rose and crossed the narrow crest to view the land in the direction that he must go. Four successive mountains he counted on this side, and a fifth wedge-shaped mass whose summit towered kingly over the others.

Below him lay Griffen valley, a peaceful, velvety basin of green, unbroken except by a patch of field which from this height glimmered like a mountain lake. He was wondering where he was going to spend the night, when the grating sound of rocks under shoe whirled him face about instantly.

(Continued in next issue.)

Made a Difference.

In Scotland observance of the Sabbath is—or was—very strict, and manual labor on that day is looked on with horror. One Sunday the good wife of Jack was horrified to hear a great knocking in the garden. Going out, she found her husband hammering away at a barrow behind the trees.

"Ma gudness, Jack," said she, "what are ye doing; don't ye know it's the Sabbath?"

"Aye," replied Jack, "but I'm behind the trees, and I must knock the nails in."

Said his better half, "Hist, mon! why dinna ye use screws?"

The first all-steel steamship ever built in Argentina was launched a few weeks ago.

Minard's Liniment Relieves Colds, Etc.

child of the margin of sleep that he needs. Besides keeping him up too late it often produces a condition of mental excitement that disturbs his rest all night. Arithmetic lessons, especially, have no business in the evening hours.

Picot Edge and Hemstitching.

One can cut down the high cost of waists by making them at home but our home dressmaker did not know how to hemstitch the seams and hems of crepe and thin silks to look like those purchased ready made. Nor did she know how to put the tiny picot finish to edges of hems or ruffles.

Both of these finishes can be readily done by any woman who can run a sewing machine.

Suppose you wish to hemstitch the hems upon the front of a waist. Fold and press down the edge, then turn and press the hem the desired width, and cut off an eighth of an inch beyond the turned over edge. Then turn back an eighth of an inch at the edge of the large piece cut off. Baste this turned back edge upon the raw edge of the cut off hem, letting the raw edge extend a little beyond the folded edge.

Thread the machine with buttonhole twist, No. 30 white thread or No. 70 colored crochet cotton, as top thread, and No. 50 cotton for bottom thread. Place the basted pieces over from 20 to 25 thicknesses of newspaper and stitch slowly. Tear off the paper carefully, a few layers at a time, open the seam, press flat, and then pull apart, so the row of hemstitching will show. Stitch down the folded edge of the large piece as close to the hemstitching as possible. Then turn the folded edge of the hem close to the stitching and stitch this also. These stitchings must be done with very fine thread. After a trial or two you will see just how it is done and a little

and then proceeded as follows: "I hab found it necessary, on account ob de astringency ob de hard times an' de general deficiency ob de circulatin' mejum in connection wid this church, t' interduce ma new automatic c'lection box. It is so arranged dat a half dollar or quatah falls on a red plush cushion without noise; a nickel will ring a smol bell distinctually heard by de congregation, an' a suspendah-button, ma fellow mawtels, will flash off a pistol; so you will gov'n yo'selves accordingly. Let de c'lection now po'ceed, while I takes off ma hat an' gibs out a hymn."

Cultivate the Saving Habit.

Money, safely invested, is the most faithful thing in the world. And every sensible person to-day should have some money invested. Money on deposit in a savings bank is invested just as much as money paid for a first-class security.

To be "broke" is a crime—nothing more. Crimes may be pardoned and sins forgiven; but the person who is absolutely "broke" is a fool—and for the fool there is little hope. I do not include the man who may be down and out because of accident. Such a condition may come to any of us; but he, or she, who by prudence and a very small quota of foresight might have sown a few dollars in the field of honest investment, and failed to do so, is not to be pitied.

The foundation of self-esteem is the successful conduct of your affairs. Be your own best friend. And remember that it is a legal as well as a psychological impossibility for money to earn more than a normal rate of interest.

A sort of two-wheeled jack, carried under the front axle of a motor truck of English invention, can be forced to the ground to lift the front by the driver, enabling the vehicle to turn in its own length.

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