THE INVERTED PYRAMID

BY

Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "North of Fifty-three"

(Continued from last issue.)

CHAPTER XI

The quality of persistence in the face of difficulties is one that men are variously endowed with. Hope revives in some breasts sooner than in others. To some the spur of a desire, a need, a conviction, never ceases wholly to rowel them into action. They cannot for long accept defeat or frustration as final. For such, the line of least resistance is closed. Reason, logic, all the chances of success may be against them, but they strive with infinite patience and unflagging courage toward a given end.

Rod Norquay had quite clearly defined Mary Thorn as a given end. Sometimes in analytical mood he took stock of his feelings about her and marveled at the depth and intensity, the consistent urge of this desire. A flare of impatience would burn up. He would be angry with Mary awhile, then sorry for himself. It was, he held, a strange way for a woman to feel—to love a man, to admit frankly that he satisfied her ideal of a man, that her flesh yearned to his after the law of nature—yet to fear, to hold back from the decisive step because of—What? Social differences? Rod dismissed them with a gesture. They existed, but they did not matter. What then? An unexplained reluctance to give up her freedom? Some undivulged ambition? A secret desire to try her own individual wings before they were clipped by marriage?

"You have some queer ideas about the business of living," he said to her impatiently, one day. He had blazed a trail from the upper workings on Valdez to join the path that ran from the Granite Pool to Oliver Thorn's. He had made several journeys over that ridge before Mary went back to town, sometimes in the evening, sometimes on a Sunday afternoon. It was peasant to see the momentary glow in her eyes when he came in.

"I like you in mackinaw and calked boots, Rod," she said irrelevantly. "Are you going to make a profession of logging?"

"I said you have some queer ideas about this business of living," he persisted.

"No, you only think them queer," she said. "They'r sound enough. I don't want to make a blunder."

"You think marrying me might be a blunder."

"I don't want to marry anybody, Rod," she repeated, a statement that never failed to anger him. "Is it so important that one should marry?"

"It's important to me," he said.

"Are you the only one whose will or desire counts?" she inquired. "It isn't like you to take that position about anything."

"Mary, Mary, you know what I mean," he exclaimed. "Life doesn't seem more than half-complete without you in the picture. When we were kids playing together we lived from day to day. But we can't do that now. I can't, anyway. I've either got to be sure of you, or give up all idea of you. All this stuff that seems to stick you—my people and money, and what they'll do to me in disapproval, and all that—it doesn't really amount to anything. If I didn't know how you feel about me I'd say it wasn't worth while combatting such fool impressions."

"Ah. If you found yourself cut off from a great many things you unconsciously value; deprived of things you've accepted as your birthright, you'd begin to change your tune, I think. You wouldn't be human if you didn't," Mary commented. "Anyway, that isn't all, and you know it isn't, Rod," she broke out with unexpected heat. "I'm not so sure as you are that marriage is an end in itself. It's just a step. Probably instinct tends to drive a man and a woman into each other's arms. It seems so. But I can see things ahead of us in such a step that I rather shrink from. And what is just as important, I happen also to see things ahead of me that I rather anticipate, things I want to try and do. I want—oh, what's the use, Rod? We don't get anywhere talking about this. Why can't we just be friends and let it go at that?"

"Could you be just friends with me now?" he challenged.

And when the girl's fundamental truthfulness brought a thoughtful look and a touch of color to her face Rod was answered without words.

It was like swimming upstream, he thought to himself, halting on his way to look down on the tide roaring and foaming through its narrow passage by Little Dent. Manhood wasn't proving quite the careless easy way of his youthful fancy. It had sometimes seemed to him then, with preternatural vision for a boy, that for well-born people the chief trouble lay not in getting things they wanted, but in wanting anything much. His life had seemed to him then a matter of absolute certainties.

And it wasn't. Not by a long shot. He wanted Mary Thorn. He wanted very much to write brilliantly and acceptably about his native land, which he loved for its bigness and rugged beauty as well as for what it had so generously bestowed on him and his. He could neither have one nor accomplish the other. But he would! Oh, yes. He pursed his lips and set his teeth upon that determination, as he lingered on the ridge where the old trail pitched down to the Granite Pool on one side and the new one slanted to the camp at tidewater.

The autumn haze hung like a diaphanous veil over mountains and waterways. Vine maple and alder shone brick-red and pale gold in the low ground. Hawk's Nest lifted its flaming roof across the channel. He wondered if there were a week-end party there. He wondered how they would look at him, these sons and daughters of the well-to-do, if he came stalking up the porch steps in calked boots and Mackinaw shirt. Rod smiled. Even Phil considered him a little too thoroughgoing in his logging career. To the rest, to Grove's crowd, it would simply be a joke. They all believen in work—in getting it done—not in doing it—and most of them were a little tainted with the idea that labor, especially such labor as is hard and poorly paid, was the exclusive privilege of the laboring class. Rod, who had learned a great many astonishing things in two months among men who were not in the least dismayed by sweat and dust and noise, found himself for the moment viewing Grove, the fast crowd Grove traveled with, very much from the logger's point of view.

"If you neither feed yourself, nor clothe yourself nor direct the production of anything useful, nor create anything beautiful, what the hell justification have you for existing?" Andy Hall had once attacked the idea of a leisure class. He had outlined a theory of the leisure class very much in the manner of Veblen. Then he proceeded to attack it, first on moral grounds, then on the basis of its social utility.

Rod found himself half in agreement just then. There was not and had never been in his mind any doubt of the courage, energy, and usefulness of the first Norquays. The original Roderick had reaped for himself and his followers the reward of enterprise initiated by himself. He had handed on his winnings. So far as Rod could see, there was no great virtue in merely standing pat and holding on,—resting on dead men's accomplishments. That was a bog he determined his feet should never sink into. Grove, for instance, was not standing pat. Yet curiously, he had always thought of Grove and the Norquay Trust as a dubious undertaking,—dubious in character and uncertain as to outcome. By all the conventional signs and tokens he was wrong. Grove was certainly moving with purposeful intent. He was a dynamo for energy. Already he was credited with stupendous achievements. But to Rod that seemed a great deal worse than the gentlemanly laissez faire which his father had set as a standared.

"Oh, damn, I wish it were spring again," Rod muttered as he strode down the hill.

Spring was at hand almost before he realized that the vernal equinox had come and gone. But winter had to precede spring. In October the fall rains broke in bitter earnest. The sodden drip of eaves lulled him to sleep at night and greeted him on awakening. He went to work in the morning with his fellows and trudged back at night soaked through heavy clothing. The bunk house reeked with steam from sodden garments festooned above a red-hot stove. Day and night, for weeks on end, gray clouds and drifting mist hovered above the trees. Every gully discharged a stream seaward. To step through a clump of brush meant a shower bath. Everything a man touched, tools, gear, timber, was damp and clammy cold. The thin soil squashed into mud under their boots. The moss was saturated. The great firs dripped like weeping giants. Even the old hands on the coast began to remark profanely that there had never been such rains.

Yet the logs came down. The falling gangs went grumbling into the wet thickets about the base of the trees they must fell. The rigging-slingers and hook tenders cursed as they fumbled the slippery cables. Donkey engineers scowled from beneath the tin shelter over each machine. And Jim Handy prowled in oilskins from gang to gang, silent, eagle-eyed, on the job. Rain or shine the timber came log by log to the booming ground, the boom men with their pikes arranged it in sections, and when the sections grew to a thirty-swifter raft, a tug hauled in, hooked on her towline and the cedar and fir of Valdez began its journey to the mills.

During those sodden weeks Rod Norquay put by all that he had ever been. His work, that opus which had led him to forswear, however briefly, the ease and comfort of Hawk's Nest, was laid away. Not forgotten. He sat sometimes in the evening, dreaming. He had wanted to see what made the wheels go round, to know how and why men labored and endured privation, to see what life was like in the raw. And he was getting insight with a vengeance. He saw men throw down their tools in a passion and quit at a word. He saw new men reel drunkenly down a steamer's gangplank and go to work next morning with aching heads and bloodshot eyes. He saw a snap phrase bring a blow, a fight to a finish. The whole panorama of the timber, trees, men, machinery, shifted before his eyes that winter, gave him food for thought as well as sometimes a flash of something that stirred his pulse. For there were heroic moments, risks, long chances taken and skilfully avoided. A flying limb, a snapped cable, a rolling log. A man had to be alert. It was no place for a dullard. The logger had his pride of calling. It was borne in upon Rod that only tried men followed the woods. It was something of a satisfaction that he qualified as one of them on the job.

It was not so regarded in the family circle, he discovered to his secret amusement. Grove openly disliked the idea of any Norquay mixing with the men. Norquay senior observed dryly that Rod need not make quite so close a contact with logging and loggers. Phil frankly invited him on different occasions to come in out of the wet.

At the Christmas shutdown, foregathered at Grove's house in town, Rod noted the growing concern on his behalf. There was a hint of protest in the jocular remarks about his devotion to logging as a vocation. Grove's thinly veiled contempt, Laska's mild wonder that he should go in for "that sort of thing" nettled Rod.

He sat back, appraising his father, his brothers, the friends of the family, the train of people who came within range of his observation, all well-to-do, all thoroughly insulated against material discomfort, able to command and have their commands obeyed without question. They were as supreme in their respective positions as Jim Handy was on the Valdez job,—more so, because Handy's power was only delegated to him, and these people Rod knew, wealthy merchants, financiers, propertied magnates of various sorts, held their power in their own individual right.

He wondered if they knew their power and how far the roots of such power penetrated the social soil, if they had grasped it with clear purpose and sure intent; and if they would have the resource and determination to keep it when they were challenged by what they called the "rabble"? Rod wondered. There might never be such a challenge. Andy Hall doubted the possibility within several generations. But Rod himself was not so sure. He had none of the purblind middle-class hatred of and contempt for labor agitators, those sometimes sincere and sometimes hypocritical mouthpieces of the muddled aspirations of the wage-workers. Rod had a working knowledge of economics, a trained understanding of cause and effect in the world of industry, in the field of production and distribution. He was without prejudice, and he knew what he knew. Men like Andy Hall, when they did not claw up out of the class where they originated, remained within it and festered. They could never be servilely contented. They had too much force, too positive a character. Their perception was too keen.

It amused Rod to speculate on how his father and Grove, the Deanes, Walls, Richstons, et al would fare if they were ever faced with a situation in which they would have to black their own boots, prepare and serve their own food, wear overalls instead of tailored clothes. They couldn't. That was his cynical conclusion. They wouldn't know how. And they had an attitude which could only be translated as contempt for those who did know how. Somehow, by the grace of God, or chance, or skilful management, they had become entrenched behind material fortifications, their hands grasping the strings of an ample purse. And from behind these fortifications they looked out with narrowed eyes upon lesser folk.

That, it struck Rod all in a heap, was the thing that confronted Mary Thorn when he talked to her of love and marriage. She had grasped the essence of class distinctions. She doubted his—their—power to overcome an idee fixe.

Whereupon he straightway hunted up the place where she boarded and haled her forth to a show and afterward to supper in the Exeter Grill, where he was most likely to encounter some of his own crowd. His cogitations had put him in a defiant mood. He would show them.

He looked across the table into her eyes and wondered if she had always been as keenly aware of the invisible fences about him as he was fast becoming himself. Well, he promised himself lightly, some of those fences were due to be smashed.

CHAPTER XII

Isabel Wall, the pert and pretty sister-in-law of Mr. Grove Norquay, became at last the cause of Rod's first definite breach in the fences.

When summer full-blown came tripping on the heels of spring, Rod left the Valdez camp for good. It had been a wholesome experience. One year in the woods had shown him quite fully the technique of big timber operations. It had shed an unreckoned light, moreover, upon the nature and mental processes of the men who handled the timber, which Rod was sure seldom appeared to the owners of the woods as a matter of any particular importance. He knew himself duly qualified as a practical logger. He was egotist enough to believe himself more capable of getting results without friction than most logging bosses. But he had not set out qualify in timber so much as to get inside the shell of his class and see how and why man in general functioned both in and out of industry. He had covered the first phase that occurred to him. His own individual job, his book, began to nag him again, to assume form proportion, to cry out for embodiment. So he laid aside calked boots and Mackinaws for canvas shoes and flannels, and took up the pleasant ways of Hawk's Nest when June brought the first coho salmon into the rapids and a chair in the shade was a confortable thing.

Perhaps, as Phil put it in fraternal raillery, Isabel thought that if one Norquay in the Wall family was a good thing, two would be better. The truth is that Isabel suddenly became aware of Rod as a man and characteristically sought to annex him by the usual methods. She had finished her education in a presumably fashionable school on the Atlantic seaboard that spring, coincident with Mary Thorn's graduation from the University of B. C. Isabel's social experience had been judicially expanded in the intervals of education. She was twenty now, a sophisticated young person, accustomed to associating with other sophisticated young persons of both sexes. She had seen little of Rod except during summer vacations. For a year she had not seen him at all. Now she seemed to discover him anew and to mark him for her own.

Rod granted her uncommon charm. She was pretty and petite and modish, and she spoke the current lingo with effortless facility. But while she pleased his eye she failed to stir his blood. There was a sufficient reason for Rod's immunity, which of course Isabel did not know.

It became obvious that Isabel was in deadly earnest. And when it became equally obvious to Rod that both families were complacently agreeable to Isabel's maneuverings he grinned first, then grew sober as the remedies he used to cure Isabel merely aggravated the disease.

It wasn't a simple flirtatious liking Isabel had for him. Rod was too keen to make such a mistake. It seemed that this dainty doll-like creature was capable of intense feeling and not too sure in her control of the emotional disturbance. Rod began by being amused. Then he felt sorry. In the end he grew a little alarmed over the net result of being sympathetic. It is highly discomforting to a young man to have a girl weep spontaneously on his chest, unless he conceives it to be his special mission and blessed privilege to soothe this particular damsel's tears. Isabel did that one evening in the shadow of a hoary old cedar in Hawk's Nest. She couldn't help it, she said, after a long embarrassed silence during which she dabbed the tears away. She was a fool and she knew it, but it couldn't be helped. One wasn't responsible for one's feelings, was one?

And Rod, with a little ache in his breast, a great deal of wordless sympathy for Isabel, because he had for a long time suffered that queer state of stifled longing, that seemed sometimes as if it would drive him mad, agreed that one was not. They let it go at that.

(To be continued.)

MUCH TO LEARN

"Does your financee know much about automobiles?"

"Heavens, no; she asked me if I cooled my car by stripping the gears."

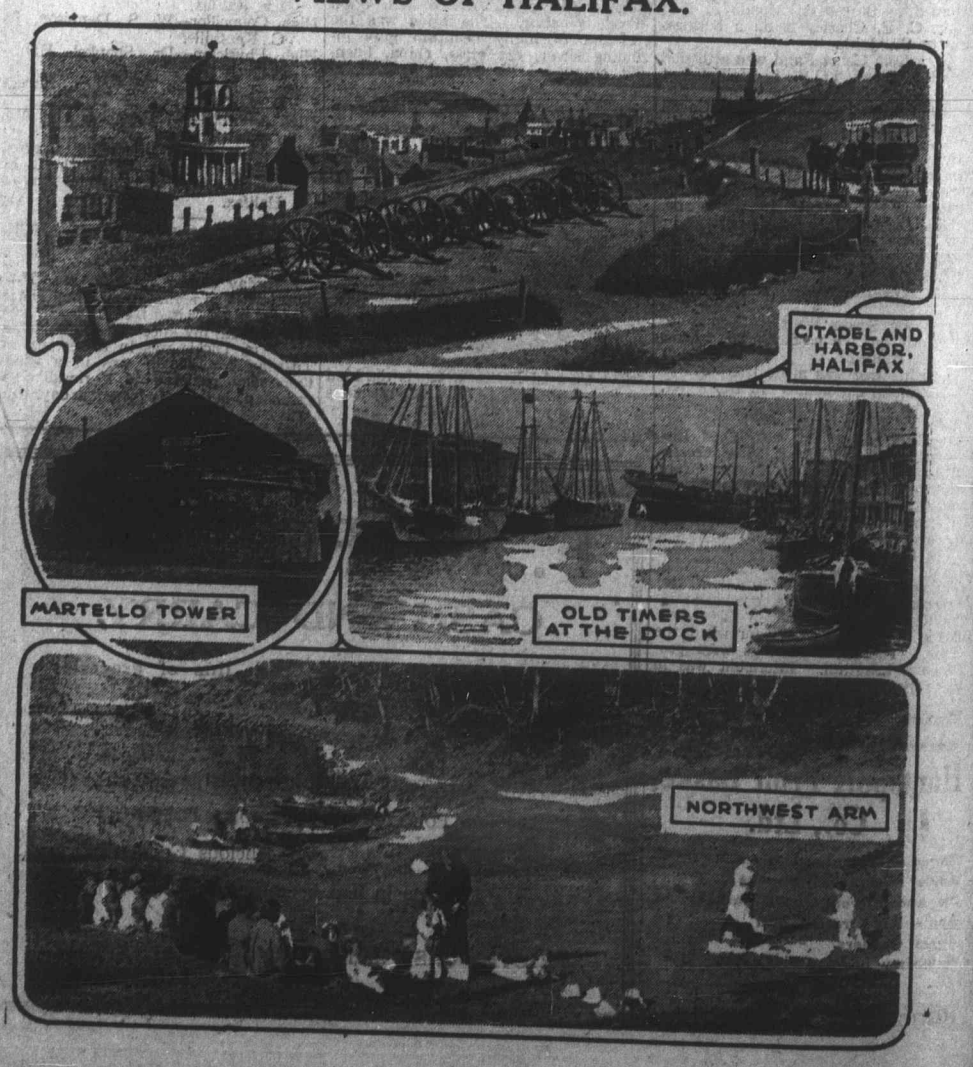
IT PAYS

Two merchants bid for fortunes' prize
In the self-same field of labour,
One had the sense to advertise
And soon bought out his neighbor.

PRINCE OF WALES COMING TO CANADA

This picture almost tells its own story. The Prince of Wales is coming to Canada via the Cunard liner "Berengaria" to New York, and then by a special train to his Western ranch near Calgary. The layout shows the big liner "Berengaria," with the outside lounge of the Imperial suite, which will be occupied by His Royal Highness and party. The other insets include the residence on the ranch, the Prince with his two brothers, Albert and Henry, and also in the lower right corner the Prince with his brother George. The other insets show three views of the "Smiling Prince."

FAMOUS ENGLISH SOCCER TEAM TOURING CANADA

The above photograph shows the members of the Corinthian Football Team, one of the most famous English amateur teams, who are at present touring Canada. They will go across Canada to Vancouver and Victoria. Left to right, back row: N. C. E. Ashton, P. C. Lashmer, J. B. Partridge, A. H. Chadder, H. Davis, J. G. Knight; second row, A. H. Barnard, R. W. de Koven, G. C. Bainbridge, J. S. F. Morrison (captain), C. Wieferd Brown, V. E. Morgan; in front, J. K. Reid, H. J. Lewis, N. F. Robinson.

VIEWS OF HALIFAX.