

# THE INVERTED PYRAMID

BY  
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Author of "North of Fifty-three"

(Continued from last issue.)

With that as a mark to shoot at when summer came again they left the Hiding Place one cool September morning. By the coasting schedule Rod knew a steamer should touch at the logging camp across the Inlet that afternoon. They were leaving reluctantly. Their supplies had stretched to the elastic limit, but the limit had been reached. Time had accelerated his pace. It seemed but yesterday that they had come, in burning July. Now the mornings were touched with autumn chill. The vine maples showed glints of russet, streaks of burnished copper. The alders were growing yellow. Frost touched the leaves at night. New snow had fallen on the high peaks. Rain threatened. It was time to go.

They rowed across the inlet and tied up to the logger's landing. Two men worked on the floating logs, making up a tow. Far in the woods, in a deep valley, they could hear the foot of donkey engines. A train rumbled out on a trestle, dumped five cars of logs with a terrific splash. A clutter of raw, unpainted buildings stood about the shore end of the trestle.

"I'll go see if the storekeeper knows what time the steamer's due," Rod said. "May be able to get a newspaper. Funny. So long as we were in there I never thought about papers. Old habits revive."

He walked the trestle ashore, disappeared among the buildings.

Presently he came into view again, walking slowly, an opened news sheet in his hands, reading as he stepped from timber to timber. Midway, still two hundred yards from the float, he sat down on an abutting platform, and remained there, the paper before his face, until the minutes lengthened to half an hour and Mary grew impatient.

She left the nearest her husband without him giving a sign, so deep was his absorption. He only looked up when she spoke. There was a strange bewilderment on his face, a look of mingled anger and incredulity.

"Why, Rod," she exclaimed. "What is it?"

"He thrust another paper at her."

"Read," he said. "The world's gone crazy. There's a war. There's been war in Europe since early August. And we're in it up to our necks. Read."

CHAPTER XVII

They sat side by side in the autumn sunshine, reading of places drenched with blood—Liege, Louvain, Charleroi, Mons, Cambrai, Namur. The battle of the Marne was over. The prolonged battle of the Aisne was at its height. Rod had commanded every paper in the camp. Page by page, column by column, they conked that incredible account, piecing it out by inference, filling the terrible gaps by vivid conjecture. There remained the primal fact that all Europe was in arms, that men perished by thousands daily, that their own countrymen were crossing the seas to fight.

"Phil's gone," Rod broke a long silence. "Says so here. He left for Valenciennes the other day."

He looked out over the inlet's benign face.

"He'd do that," he said absently. "They'd give him a command at once. He's trained—went to Kingston."

He sat with hands clasped over his knees, silent, absent-eyed. And Mary looked at him with a catch in her throat, filled with intuitive foreboding. Words of which each had a better command than falls to most, failed them. They sat there wandering in the maze of their own thoughts until the shrill whistle of the approaching steamer woke an echo in the hills.

A day and a night on this slow-footed vessel brought them to Vancouver. They passed through the Narrows at dusk, cleared Brockton Point and stood up to the dusky wharves ranged below a vast haze of reflected light. Roof signs twinkled in all the colored extravagance of electrical sign experts could devise. Looming high on a square office building stood *Groze's* heraldry.

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Rod's upper lip drew in a curl. He could not exactly say why. It was involuntary, instinctive. That sign offended him. The taxi that wheeled them to the Vancouver Hotel passed the place, and Rod's lip curled again at sight of the waste illumination upon the richly polished mahogany revealed through the windows of plate glass. Again in their room that curious distaste for his brother's works came over him at an advertisement of the Norquay Trust Company in one of the evening papers he bought. It ran thusly:

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Then he turned to the war news. Wherever he went in the city, for the next two days the war topic hovered on men's lips. The streets wore the panoply of war in the recruiting aspect. Troops drilled in parks, on playgrounds. Bands marched abroad to stir men's blood. There was an edge of expectancy in the air, for the Leipzig, the Dresden, the Nuremberg, and two unknown battleships were loose in the Pacific. No one knew what truth lay in the rumor that any hour might see their shells dropping in the downtown section. There was nothing to stop them. They out-steamed and outgunned any British Squadron in those waters.

Amid this ferment Rod walked the streets, bodily restless, uneasy in his mind. For he had somehow none of the illusions about war that carried many a young man lightly along the line of least resistance in those hectic days. There was no glamor for him in a purely military adventure.

He loved his native country. He was proud of it. It had bestowed upon him a splendid heritage. He did not question a matter of duty. With his temperament and traditions such a questioning was impossible. But he revolted against being a pawn in the European game. He could not muster up an excited, visible hat of the enemy. He did not

respond so readily, as some to the propaganda already loosed so effectively. He wondered a little at the execration and exhortation and invective that poured from the press, the pulpit, the fulminations from every public speaker, the vixenish resolutions of the women's societies. It was as if they were urging each other on to a task for which few had much stomach. It perplexed Rod. If one's country was at war, one must fight. That was plain to him as two plus two. Why should all these non-combatants lash themselves into such a fury over a European frontier, over the ancient feud between the Tueton and Gaul? It amounted to this in his mind: we must fight because our statesmen have committed us to the task; but we will not whip the Gerrman by foaming at the mouth. That's childish.

He met Andy Hall the second day. Before the Province office on Hastings Street there was always a crowd reading the bulletins posted from time to time, studying the war map on which the positions of the opposing armies were kept up to date by little flag-headed pins. The curbstone Boards of Strategy functioned here. Knots of men held heated discussion, or stood silently digesting news. There was a sprinkling of the indifferent, the merely curious.

A man at Rod's elbow broke out: "I'll go. Damn right I'll go—in the ranks of a regiment made up of bankers, bond owners, and politicians. But I don't see 'hem breakin' their necks to sign up. Why should I? I never had nothin' but a job, and poor ones at that. I ain't goin' to fight just for a job."

"Maybe you'll fight for that?" a voice taunted, and with the words came the sound of a blow, and then a scuffle and oaths. Rod turned to look. The bystanders were parting two struggling men. Andy Hall's freckled face glowed genially beside him.

"Even in these times the dissenter is with us," Andy indicated the brawlers. "How are you?"

"So, so," Rod shook hands with the high-rigger. "Still working for us? How did the strike pan out?"

"Oh, they got what they asked. I got fired as soon as old Handy thought things had settled down. Handy thought weeks later. I guess he was afraid I might rib them up to ask for something else." Andy smiled amiably.

"Oh, that was rotten," Rod sympathized.

"Fortunes of war," Hall observed lightly. "Don't do to criticize your master's methods; not if you make your criticism so effective that it costs them money. Then they say you're an agitator and they can you off the job. The working man is mostly a sheep. The bosses know that. When a fellow like me—who isn't a sheep, but who understands and pities the sheep—sets out to show 'em how to get better pay, he either gets taken into the fold and becomes a minor boss or he gets outlawed. Perfectly simple. You must not disorganize a profitable industry by demanding better pay. Industry doesn't like that."

"What do you think of this fracas across the pond?" Rod changed the subject to one that was for him personally, at that moment, much more important.

"Come and have a drink, and I'll tell you," Andy suggested.

They walked west to the Strand bar. Rod looked at his companion as they stood ordering their liquor. The Strand was a far cry from the usual haunt of the logger. He flourished in what Andy called the "slave market" down on Cordova Street, a region of Semitic clothing stores, cheap hotels, employment agencies where the woodsmen flocked in hundreds, gathered in groups along the sidewalk, rioted in the bars, or sought a job with empty pockets.

And Andy Hall was a logger from his head to his heels. That was his trade, the only means of livelihood he ever practiced. But he did not look the typical logger now. Apparently he did not follow the average logger's cycle of a red-hot time in town as a reaction from intensive labor in the woods.

"This fracas interests me more than you'd think, maybe," Andy proceeded over his glass. "In the first place it is inevitable as the result of the constant extension of spheres of influence—which is merely a euphemism for control of certain markets. The world's getting too small for the competitive system. Commercial interests are bound to clash. Armies are the policemen of trade."

Rod smiled. It was not a new nor in any way revolutionary statement. He had heard the same interpretation of world affairs, more subtly expressed, in university classrooms.

"What's the navy?"

"The water patrol," Andy bantered.

"Oh, the liner she's a lady."

"An' she never looks nor 'ceeds."

"The man o' war's 'er husband—"

"Out of the moon or the greatest drum-beater in English letters I answer you."

"It's a wonder you aren't away," Hall changed his tone abruptly. "Your brother's gone. Or have you got better sense?"

"Sense? Is there any sense in a war?" Rod countered. "But we're in it all fellows like me won't go, who will?"

"You've said something," Andy replied quietly. "Leaving aside the sordid causes of war, war itself is the most senseless pastime any nation can engage in. There's a confusion of sentiments, a queer mixture of anger and defiance, vindictive cravings for retaliation, and hatreds that civilized men should have outgrown. An ingrowing fever to see your own side win. Once the first gun pops, it doesn't seem to matter why—any more than it matters to two men scrapping what the scrap started over. What each wants is to whip the other. But this particular war—commerce is at the bottom of it. You know it. You're too wise not to know. Struggle for commercial supremacy has started every war since the Crusades, and a few of the dynastic rampuses. This is a row over property rights, real or potential. And as a member of the propertied class you have a vital interest

in it. The bird who started that fuss in front of the Province wasn't so far wrong. He has nothing to fight for—nothing worth fighting for. You have."

"From a purely material point of view, certainly," Rod answered. "But can't you see any more in it than that?"

"Should I?" Andy asked musingly. "Can there be an obligation of service to one's country without one's country assuming some obligation in return? And does one's country assume any obligation toward such men as me? If it does I don't know what it consists of. The man with nothing but his hands has few rights and no privileges. What does the casual worker, the completely propertyless man receive from his country that he should gladly cross the sea to die for it on foreign soil? Can you tell me? I don't think you can. In that sense one doesn't mean one's country geographically. These mountains we call ours will stand unchanged, the forests will grow, the rivers run to the sea, the salmon go up to the spawning grounds, the birds will mate and sing, whether we win or the Germans, or if both sides fight to the last man and the two races expire. So that really one's country means Bill Jones and Sam Smith and Jack Robinson—human Smithy, by skillful exercise of the acquisitive instinct, acquires ownership of the hills and the forest, and permits me and Bill Jones and Jack Robinson to work for him whenever he can profitably use our labor, and has no responsibility for our welfare at such times as he can't employ and pay us wages, why should we shoot and kill, and be ourselves shot and killed in defense of his hills and forest?"

"That," Andy went on in his low, deliberate voice, "is one way of looking at it, one way of putting it. I'm what they call a common worker. So far as I know, my people have never been anything else but workers, tied to a job because they knew nothing else. I've never had anything but a job myself. I've dug up quite a lot of assorted facts and a variety of knowledge out of books between hours on the job. I've done quite a lot of thinking about what I've seen, and heard and read. Every dollar I've ever had, the food I've eaten, the clothes on my back—since I was nine years old I've earned 'em all by sweat and aching flesh. By way of illustration I'll cite the fact—with no personal reflection, you understand—that the Norway estate employed last year on its timber operations upward of three hundred men. The net profits for the year run over two hundred thousand dollars. That's what your country means to you. But that means nothing to me. I have only myself, my energy, the strength of my arms and a certain skill to sell. And you don't employ me because I'm hungry or need clothes, or because I'm ambitious to better my condition. Oh, no. You don't recognize me as having the slightest claim on you for subsistence. You will only hire me at a wage where my labor can be transformed into cash at a profit to yourself. In slack times I can starve. It doesn't make any difference to you. That attitude and practice is typical of the industrial system of every civilized nation. I present you with the case of the intelligent worker, when he analyzes his situation in and relation to society. I ask you if we, who are the have-nots, should be proud and glad—as they tell us we should be—to die for the perpetuation of this state of affairs?"

Rod had an uncomfortable impression of the perfectly ordered and smoothly moving world he knew being critically examined and condemned by a dispassionate, impartial, and very acute intelligence. As Andy Hall put it, there seemed no bond of common interest, of sentiment, even of common justice to bind them together.

"I don't ask on behalf of his class, nor of himself as an individual. What is there in it for us?" He only asked in moody accents. "Why should we, who have only the shadow, sacrifice ourselves for those who have the substance?"


Only a sophist could make other than one reply. And Rod was no sophist. He was only an earnest and troubled youngster reacting to the day and hour, according to the best traditions of the best of his class. He felt that there was more to be said on the subject than a laconic answer to Andy's "why?" There must be, or his world was a sham, thriving on social usury, and patriotism was a farce. It did not seem to Rod this could be possible. But he could not voice the thing that was in him. It was an emotional certainty, not a reasoned conviction. And he knew that as an irruption to act, the first was by far the greatest driving force in all men.

"I don't know. A man," each man—must answer that for himself," he sputtered. "It's like this. We're all in the

same boat. If everybody stands on his rights and demands a readjustment of a faulty arrangement of things before he will make a single defensive move—we'll be whipped out of hand. In fact, it looks as if the Germans had us staggering now. And I dare say two-thirds of their armies are made up of the working class of Germany—who seem to be quite in accord with their masters' policy of conquest, or they wouldn't put up such a corking fight. If you fellows as a class refuse to meet them at their own game—" he threw out his hands in an eloquent gesture.

"Hell, you think I'm so thick-headed I can't see both sides of the fence?" Andy grunted. "I wasn't speaking of my own class. It's speaking for itself every day—to the recruiting sergeant. I'm speaking to you as a thinking, feeling individual who sees himself being sucked into a whirlpool. I'm trying to point out to you in the most rational manner possible what the real situation is. You can't deny it. It exists. Why, if the bulk, even a working majority of the damn fools that call themselves men, had a few glimmerings of social and economic wisdom there wouldn't be any German or French or Russian or British armies in the field. Only a few handfuls of atavistic adventurers. I'm not by nature a humble, peaceful toiler. I'd just as soon not fight for anything that's worth fighting for, and all the hard fighting isn't done with guns, either. All my life I've seen the show run by arrogant, power-people who aren't nearly so clever as they seem to be. They make a mess of things too often to be really clever. And the rest of us growl and knuckle down to our masters, as to our own inertia, our own lack of intelligence, slaves to the common, well-nourished illusion that to get something for nothing is the solution for all our difficulties. We merit contempt. No one among the well-fed and the cultured who have never soiled their hands with common work has more impatience with the bovine mass than some of us who are of the mass. We lose faith in ourselves and our own kind—but our masters never lose faith in us—in our docility to fetch and carry. They know how to use us without our knowing how it's done. They tell us now that the Germans threaten our lives, our freedom, our country and its cherished institutions. That's true enough. But we risk our lives daily in industry with very much less freedom of choice in the matter than even primitive man had in pursuing his food, clothing, and shelter. What cherished institutions of ours are threatened that we should go five thousand miles to fight in a quarrel between Russians, Germans and French?"

"And still," Andy drummed on the polished bar with his finger tips, "in spite of my reasoned conviction I find myself as much of a herd animal as the rest. Logic tells me this row is the same old thing on a larger scale—an affair in which the have-nots will do the fighting as they do the work. But logic doesn't help me where I live, inside of me, when I see fellows I know, fellows I like, getting ready to go. The old tribal instincts that are stronger and deeper than civilization and industry keep stirring up in me, nagging at me. The flag—it's only a symbol. Patriotism, patriotic duty has only a hollow sound when I hear the phrase used. And still—something gets me—I don't know quite what it is—but it's there. It's a queer pass for me to come to. He finishes whimsically. "Wouldn't it be? Me to go and fight for things and people that I don't believe in? Why should a man find his rational conclusions upset by an emotion he can't define? I stood at the Gulf the other day,




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