Max Clark, 1870, And On

Who Met the Physchological Moment and Turned a Destiny.

James Maxwell Clark, who seldom received anything more dignified from this imposing name than simply "Max", or at most "J. Max", possessed a saving sense of humor that, coupled with a keen intellect and a genial nature, made him an ideal colonist. He was always able to see the lights as well as the shadows that played across the colonist's pathway; and it was this rare quality that sounded the dominant note running through his book, *"Colonial Days,"* making the story, though depicting in graphic terms the tribulations of those days, a most delightful and entertaining story to read.

Max Clark and his brother-in-law, Abner Baker, were more than mere brothers-in-law to each other; they had passed through the closing years of the civil war together, been boon companions through war and peace and now, as fellow colonists had cast their lots together, come weal, come woe, in this new and alluring adventure.

The call of Nathan Meeker for the organization of a colony to settle out West somewhere had found the Clark family on a little rocky farm among the barren hills of eastern Tennessee. Max says in his book that he never questioned his good judgment in leaving that place, but had often wondered why he ever went there. However, a reason that to any one else might have seemed sufficient was found in the hope of escaping the scourge of tuberculosis that threatened in the rigorous climate of his native Wisconsin.

The drab monotony of life among the Tennessee hills had been relieved once a week by the coming of the New York Tribune, every word being read and reread many times; and when Meeker's "Call" appeared it was like a sudden streak of sunshine across a leaden sky, galvanizing the hungry souls of the future colonists into prompt and decisive action. Max sprang from his chair, waving the paper aloft and wildly shouting: "I've struck it; I've struck it."

It took a few minutes for the family to find out exactly what had been struck, but from that moment the household never settled down to the routine of Tennessee life again. The membership fee and credentials were dispatched to New York with all possible speed, and the family gave itself up wholeheartedly to preparations for the great adventure.

In 1870, the wounds of the civil war had not yet fully healed in the South, and the title of "carpet-bagger" that had been bestowed upon Northern political plunderers was still impartially applied to all Northerners; and the Clarks had come from Wisconsin. So, when everything else was done, ready for the start to Colorado, Max, moved by the incurable sense of humor that was his, painted across the new white canvas covering of the wagon in vivid letters the inscription—"Baker & Clark, late Carpet-baggers of Tennessee; Goodby Forever, Sunny Southern Clime."

And then came the hour of departure.

At Louisville, Kentucky, Mrs. Clark and the two small children were placed on board a train for the old Wisconsin home, there to stay among relatives and friends until a home could be prepared for them in the new country; and Max and Abner, with all their belongings, embarked on a steamer to sail down the Ohio and up the Missouri Rivers to Omaha. The first night out, as they were sleeping in their wagon on board the steamer, they were awakened by a voice outside reading the inscription on their wagon; then came a chuckle and the voice remarked: "I'll bet that's a queer old fellow, whoever he may be." Thirty years later it was the owner of that voice to whom the book, *"Colonial Days"* was dedicated. And the name of the owner was Joseph Shattuck.

It had been the intention of the travelers to make the trip from Omaha on westward by wagon, but at Omaha they found that owing to recent Indian troubles on the western plains no single wagon was being allowed to undertake the journey alone, but all were being held until at least a train of thirty were ready to start together. This would cause an indefinite delay, and Clark and Baker were too eager to wait; so they chartered a

car, loaded thereon all their belongings and started by rail. Two days later they pulled in at Cheyenne, Wyoming. There the railroad agent made a charge of $50 for the balance of the journey, which, being equivalent to a dollar a mile, was considered altogether too high; so they unloaded their car, hitched their horses to the covered wagon, and started over the trail-marked prairie to their journey's end, the Greeley that was to be.

They had not gone far when a strange and beautiful and, at least to Baker, new revelation spread out before them. At a short distance ahead and directly in their path appeared a most beautiful lake, placidly shining in the sun, and in its midst a tall pole, more like a flag-staff than anything else. Baker was thrilled to the core with the beauty of it all, but wondered why the pole? Clark, who had been on the plains before, gave no guess but awaited developments, which were not long in coming. First the distance shortened with incredible speed; and then, even while they gazed, the pole resolved itself into a prairie dog that instantly dispelled the illusion by dropping down upon his haunches and darting into a hole at the approach of the wagon. To Baker, who had never before witnessed the hallucination of the desert mirage, the disillusionment was as thrilling as the beautiful lake had been.

That night the brothers slept under their wagon in the middle of the trail, there being no other spot free of cactus affording room enough for a bed. And so tranquil was their sleep that it seemed no time at all until the rising sun proclaimed the coming of the day for which all other days were made; the day set apart for their arrival at the Colony grounds.

They at once hitched up and started without breakfast, but after a time, the needs of the inner man becoming urgent, they stopped at an adobe house near the river bottoms, known later to them as the Fletcher & Abbott Ranch. There was no one at home, but the open house and stable seemed to offer hospitality; so they unhitched, fed and watered their horses, made a fire in the kitchen stove, found a pan of milk and other supplies and soon had a good square breakfast; then, leaving a handful of coins

By the middle of the forenoon they reached the north bank of the Poudre river and found themselves actually in sight of the land of their dreams, the colony grounds. But there was "one more river to cross" and not a bridge in sight, except the railroad bridge. The water was high; they could not ford the river. Now, what was to be done? Must they stop defeated in sight of the goal? Not they; they had traveled too many hundreds of miles to turn back now with the Promised Land in sight. They pondered the problem a while, then a bright idea came. They unhitched the horses, swam them across the river, walked back over the ties of the railroad bridge, and attached the horses by means of a long rope to the tongue of the wagon; then by strength of horses and skill of men they guided the wagon over the bridge, landing safely "on the other side of Jordan," and almost at the entrance to "the sweet fields of Eden."

DISILLUSIONMENT.

It was high noon when they entered the colony grounds in typical emigrant style, covered wagon and all. It was a spectacular entrance quite in keeping with the time, the place and the occasion; and now for a Grand Reception. Many colonists were there, and they should set up a shout of welcome, flock around the wagon, reach in glad hands to the newcomers, and, reading the inscription on the wagon, say many witty things; and everybody should have a happy time in true Western style. But none of this happened, and soon the newcomers were conscious of the fact that they were attracting not the slightest attention. Nobody even saw them.

They stopped, and looked about. Surely they had not made a mistake; this must be Greeley, the place for which they had given up everything else and traveled all these weary miles. Yes, the conclusion was inescapable; it was the place. But what a place!

Looking upon it now for the first time, instead of the realization of their rose-colored dreams, the scales of illusion seemed to fall from their eyes and they saw it in its stark reality, and

wondered what madness had drawn them hither. It was the 25th of June, and the unclouded sun, pouring his searching rays into every inch of the barren land, mercilessly lighted up the rough, primitive buildings, as barren and bare as the prairie of which they were so fittingly a part.

Shallow furrows crossed and recrossed each other at right angles, making a checkerboard of the ground with stakes driven down here and there; and a lot of people were excitedly running hither and thither driving down more stakes. They might have been escaped inmates from some madhouse for all the sense or reason there seemed to be in anything they were doing; the newcomers watched the wild antics for a time, then tragically disillusioned, drove away, their departure as unobserved as their entrance had been. They had no where to go, but jogged along aimlessly and finally stopped at Island Grove and, for the want of any further purpose, pitched their tent and stopped for the night. Almost in perfect silence the two worked together, making their horses comfortable and putting up their tent; then, one on a rude bench and the other on the side of their bunk, sat down to gloomy reverie. All was lost; hope gone; nothing left but disgust with themselves for being such colossal dupes.

At last Baker, drawing a long breath as though reaching a conclusion, declared his intention to "light out" at the first break of day. Then Clark, wholly in sympathy with the sentiment, breathed another long breath and brought forth from somewhere in his innermost consciousness a word that was a question, and set up barriers; he said, "WHERE?"

The question was not answered promptly; in fact not at all; and the long June day passed and the night followed, with still no answer There was no "where" to go

But the morning dawned—without any resemblance to the morning before. They cooked their breakfast, fed their horses and hitched up as though there was some place to go—and drove to the place of the frenzied stake-drivers. There they met Nathan Meeker and argued it out with him, and, strangely enough, somehow felt glad to be bested in the argument. A number of colonists were already on the ground, early as it was, and were bubbling

over with enthusiasm. They seemed glad to have new listeners to tell the big news to, and so they talked.

Clark and Baker listened indifferently, but as the stake-drivers went on to picture the future of the commonwealth they were planting, the beautiful city with its fruitful surrounding farms, its great highways and its humming industries, somehow before they realized it they felt their dreams reviving; the stake-drivers did not seem nearly so crazy as they had the day before, for now there seemed to be a method in their madness; and as they went on to explain how the ridiculous little furrows meant streets and avenues, and the stakes locations for homes and businesses, the whole situation became clear as crystal; and the brothers soon found themselves with hammers and stakes, paper and pencils, rushing about as busy and "crazy" as any other "lunatics" on the ground. If any covered wagon pulled in that day with new and expectant colonists neither saw it, but the lots staked off marked the home of Max Clark to the end of his days.

"A TILT WITH WHISKEY"

(This title quoted from "Colonial Days")

Several months had elapsed since the arrival of Max Clark and Abner Baker, and the Colony was taking on the airs of a settlement that had come to stay.

As more fully stated in another Chapter, the town the colonists founded was a temperance town, a very strictly temperance town. Off at a little distance stood the liquor business looking longingly upon this rich new field going to waste. Might it not come in? Most assuredly it might not. The Liquor Business pondered. Why let a little thing like that stand in the way? Why sacrifice business for such a foolish reason? Ridiculous. So it moved in—in the night—and was all ready and open for business next morning

Now it so happened that on that morning, as Max Clark sat quietly writing letters in his little new shack, a din arose in the street outside, and naturally he stepped out to see what it was all about *The saloon was burning It burnt to the ground.*

While this was in progress, Max and Ralph Meeker, at about the same moment, discovered a keg of whiskey safely outside the fire limits, and Max felt moved to say, "Why burn the saloon and save the whiskey?" At that Ralph picked up the keg and started toward the hungry flames; but just at that psychological moment a restraining hand was laid upon his arm and a smooth voice said, "I wouldn't do that if I were you," and Ralph and Max looked around to find the ever suave and courteous Vice President, General Cameron, beside them; and, out of deference to the man and his high office, the keg was not thrown upon the blaze.

There were also two other reputable witnesses who saw Max while the fire was burning and knew that he had nothing whatever to do with it; but never-the-less, perfect as was this alibi, "justice," that is not only blind, but often deaf and dumb as well and utterly without reason, got Max mixed up with the affair, and he was "detained" for a preliminary hearing, the saloon man charging "malicious destruction of property."

In due time, the "hearing" was held. It was the first big important case that had ever come before a court in Greeley. One judge was not enough; a second had to be called. The hour arrived; the trial was on; Max sat in the prisoner's dock, the two judges on the bench—(very literally bench). The prisoner was nervous; the judges stern and austere.

Now just hold this scene a moment while a circumstance that will fully account for the nervousness of the prisoner is explained.

A short time before this happened, Mrs Clark, who had been staying with friends in Wisconsin, had taken advantage of an opportunity to come west with a brother who would help her with the children on the journey; and this was the day she was to arrive. It is thus that Max himself describes the situation in *"Colonial Days"*:

"After a separation of several months, almost any one, I infer, will be able to appreciate my predicament. Wife coming to meet husband in the new home after months of separation; pleasing anticipation of reunion with the object of her affection.

Meanwhile, the dear man, instead of being at the depot to meet her, as young husbands usually do even after the most temporary of separations, is obliged to send a friend to break the news gently, that, owing to an unfortunate little occurrence, husband couldn't be there; nothing serious, you know, but just a little awkward. And, it is possible, too, that on account of the little occurrence, husband may not be able to get home tonight, because—well, dear madam, to tell you the truth, your husband is on trial for riot and arson, all because he is supposed to have burned down a gentleman's saloon. And it is possible he may go to prison for a few years."

While all this was painfully passing through the mind of the prisoner at the bar, the two judges fixed their eyes upon him and whispered together.

Now it so happened that a look of swift recognition had passed between Max and the second judge, and, running along in Max's mind with the speech Max's friend was to deliver to Max's wife, was the memory of an occurrence similar to the case in court, so far as fire was concerned—only it had been a claim-jumper's [illegible], instead of a saloon that had burned—in which the judge, not then a judge but only a homesteader, had been active. And now this judge fixed keen eyes upon the prisoner.

In fifteen minutes, the train would pull in. Time flew. Ten minutes, and pressing hard toward five. Train this side of Evans; almost whistling for Greeley. The second judge again whispered to the first, and then, fixing his gaze upon the suffering husband, pronounced these golden words:

"Mr. Clark, as nothing of a very serious nature has appeared against you, *you are discharged.*"

And Max beat the train to the station.

THE LITTLE BUNCH OF WHEAT THAT TURNED A DESTINY.

(The following incident may well be called the turning point in the affairs of the struggling colony)

It was only a little bunch of wheat, stunted and starved and forlorn, measuring in its totality, from withered head to blighted

root, not more than twelve inches. But in its feeble grasp it held the destiny of an industry, the fortunes of a commonwealth, and the power of shaping the unwritten history of the arid region that gave it birth.

To trace that little bunch of wheat back to the seed that produced it and onward through its struggle for existence to its literal "place in the sun," is to trace the struggles of the early colonists with the all-important question of irrigation, from almost certain failure to triumphant success. This is the story in its totality.

Max Clark had taken as his portion in the colony possessions a farm north of town, and he and his brother were contending against fearful odds for their first crop. First, they had driven over to the Big Thompson for seed. Returning, the team stuck in the mud and the men were obliged to unload half the grain and return for it later. On the way home with the first half, by what Max called "some inscrutable and diabolical means" one sack had become untied and a little trickle of golden grain marked a path all the way from the river to the farm. Again let Max tell the story:

"We had paid a high price for that wheat, gone a long way after it and had not an ounce to spare. I presume every one has heard the story of the New Englander whose apples rolled, one by one, out of the rear of his cart until when he reached the top of the hill not a single apple was left, and then the man remarked: 'It's no use cussin'; can't do the case justice, no how.' It has been a tradition ever since that our language, rich as it is in wrathful expletives, is, in some emergencies, an utter failure. It was so in our case. I know I am well under the truth when I say that if that sack had been filled with almighty golden dollars and they had slipped, one by one, into the ocean, we could not have felt more disgusted with the result."

And he might have added: "nor found the English language more deficient in appropriate expressions." But, feeble though the language be, it gives some idea of the tremendous value of that lost sack of wheat. But even that was not all. On the last trip they stuck in the Poudre and had to carry the sacks, one by

one, on their backs, across the water. Again hear Max tell it:

"When we had sowed the seed and killed our best horse in digging a lateral down to it through the desert, with anxious eyes we watched its uncertain growth day by day as it pushed its way through the ground, and nursed its sickly vitality with that attenuated little stream of water that came creeping down to it until at last it withered and died like a false hope. Then came a hail storm that would have knocked seventeen vigorous lives out of it if any had been left in it, which there wasn't. And in the end it would have been better if the whole load had been sown along the roadway rather than with such profitless labor scattered upon the land."

And so, feeble plants and strong men struggled together until what should have been the harvest-time arrived, the brothers watching the little shoots grow paler as the Reaper called Death approached, until only a few remained to chant their requiem on the desert air.

While this tragedy was going on, something else was developing.

THE WOOLEN MILL—THAT NEVER WAS.

Not all the members that made up the colony had been farmers, many coming from other industrial vocations. In the minds of these the thought had long been germinating that far too great a proportion of the colony funds had been given to agriculture; ditches had been dug, fences built, and everything that farmers had asked for granted, while nothing whatever had been done toward the establishment of other industries. And so a sentiment had developed for the building of a woolen mill and had reached the point of calling a colony meeting to take definite action before the farmers who had been so wholly engrossed with their own troubles had noticed it. Then a number of them got together to attend the meeting. Max was not among them but happened to meet them near the door of the meeting place. One of them held in his hand a little bunch of starved wheat

exactly like that on Max's own farm. Max asked him for it. They all entered the hall.

The meeting was just ready to begin. The hall was filled, and every man was on his toes in eager expectation of big things to come. The Chairman rapped for order, and the first speaker took the floor. This was none other than General Cameron, the silver-tongued orator of the colony.

He was an impressive speaker, and now he spoke eloquently of the need of the colony for a well-balanced industrial program, and dropping easily into a general consideration of the whole economic problem, he said that even as it is recorded in the Book of Holy Writ that man cannot live by bread alone, so also had it been demonstrated that communities could not prosper by agriculture alone. It had been proved in communities the world over that a diversified program was needed; that over-production of the gross products alone must soon glut the markets of the world unless balanced by a home market furnished by other essential industries. Therefore Greeley should begin the rounding out of her own program by the establishment of a woolen mill.

The speaker took his seat amid ringing and prolonged applause. His had been a masterful effort, a well-sustained and logical argument; and the farmers looked at each other with something akin to despair in their faces. Then Max took the floor.

There was, of course, not much that could be said, but the audience listened respectfully—and indulgently. Max stood a moment as though uncertain as to how to begin, then brought out that little bunch of wheat from under his coat and held it up to view. It was not more than twelve inches long from tip to top; it was starved and withered and it hung its shriveled head as though in shame at being made so conspicuous. Then, when all eyes were centered upon it, Max asked: "Does that look much like glutting the markets of the world?"

The question cut through the audience like the shock of a galvanic battery. Then the speaker followed it up by the statement that it was not so much the problem of "over-production

of gross products" that was troubling the farmers out on the bluffs as it was whether or not they were going to be able to raise enough to keep the colony living for another year.

That was about all he said, but it was enough; that little bunch of wheat did the rest. It brought to the colonists a clear realization that it was not the world problems that they were called upon just then to solve, but the more intimate and pressing one of whether the colony was to live or die. If it would live, food must be produced; and that could not be done unless ditches were enlarged to bring a sufficient supply of water to the crops. And then—everything else was forgotten; new appropriations were made, liberal ones, and all colonists turned with a will and an understanding to the needs of the colony and the work to be done if it would live.

It is not too much to say that from that hour and the incident of that little bunch of wheat, a force was set in motion that long before this date of 1938 has placed Weld County in the very first rank agriculturally of all the counties of the state, and Colorado in an enviable position among the states of the Union.

Not only was the woolen mill not mentioned again at that destiny-shaping meeting, but so far as known has never been since.

SUGGESTING A FITTING MONUMENT.

If the writer of this History should be asked to design a fitting Monument to the Spirit of The Early Colonists, showing their essential part in the development of this great commonwealth, the suggestion would be a bronze statue representing THE FARMER, modeled after the face and figure of Max Clark, holding in his hand a drooping little plant; and on a tablet beneath the figure would be the inscription:

The Man and the Little Bunch of Wheat That Turned the Destiny of a Commonwealth."