The Main Chance

BY

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THIS is an honest, straightforward picture of the life of to-day in a wide awake western town. It gives the reader a pleasant impression of a type of people and a phase of life well worth a closer acquaintance.

It is a crisp, forceful delineation of the career of William Parker, a prosperous banker and promoter, whose beautiful daughter, Evelyn, is the heroine of the story. John Saxton, an enterprising Bostonian, is sent west to close up some ranch and other investments for a Massachusetts trust company. This brings him in contact with varied types of humanity all of whom play an interesting part in a plot involving the manipulation of a traction line, the kidnaping of the banker's child and other events which go to make up an intensely graphic narrative.

THE MAIN CHANCE is a romance of youth, of love, and of success honestly won. It is buoyant, yet full of pathos, wholesome humor, convincing realism, admirable diction and bright sayings. Added to this is a rare, common sense touch that shows the practical side of real western life.

CHAPTER I.

"Well, sir, they say I'm crooked!"

William Porter, president of the Clarkson National Bank, tipped back his swivel chair and watched the effect of his declaration on the young man who sat talking to him.

"That's said of every successful man nowadays, isn't it?" asked John Saxton.

"They say I'm crooked," repeated Porter, with a narrowing of the eyes, "but they don't say it very loud, and I guess they don't any of them want to have to prove it. I'm afraid those Boston friends of yours have given us up as a bad lot, and they've sent you out here to get their money, and I don't blame them. Well, sir; that money's got to come out in time, but it's going to take time and money to get it."

"I believe they sent me because I had plenty of time," said Saxton, smiling.

"Well, we want to you you win out," returned Porter. "And now what can I do to start you off? I warn you solemnly against the hotels in this town; but we've got a fairly decent club up here, and you'd better stay there till you get acquainted. Just look over the papers till I get rid of these letters and I'll be free."

Porter turned to his desk. There was an air of great alertness in his small, lean figure as he pushed buttons to summon various members of the clerical force and rapidly dictated terse telegrams and letters to a stenographer. Saxton was impressed by the banker's perfect confidence and ease.

John Saxton had been sent to Clarkson by the Neponset Trust Company of Boston to represent the interests of a group of clients who had made rash investments in several of the Trans-Missouri States. Foreclosure had, in many instances, resulted in the transfer to themselves of much town and ranch property which was, in the conditions existing in the early '90s, an exceedingly slow asset. It was necessary that some one on the ground should care for these interests. The Clarkson National Bank had been exercising a general supervision, but, as one of the investors told his fellow sufferers in Boston, they should have an agent whom they could call home and abuse, and here was Saxton, a conscientious and steady fellow, who had some knowledge of the country, and who, moreover, needed something to do. Saxton's acquaintance with the West had been gained by a bitter experience of ranching in Wyoming. A blizzard had destroyed his cattle, and the subsequent depression in land values in the neighborhood of his ranch had left him encumbered with a property for which there was no market. His friends had been correct in the assumption that he needed employment, and he was, moreover, glad of the chance to get away from home, where the impression was making headway that he had failed at something in the vague, non-interest-paying West.

"Now," said Porter, presently, scrutinizing a telegram carefully before signing it, "I'll take you up to the office we've been keeping for your people, and show you what it looks like."

The room proved to be a small one at the top of the building. On the ground-glass door was inscribed "The Interstate Irrigation Company." The room contained a safe, a flat-top desk and a few chairs. Several maps hung on the wall, engineers' charts of ranch lands and irrigation ditches.

"It ain't pretty," said Porter, critically, "but if you don't like it you can move when you get ready. The bank is your landlord, and we don't charge you much for it. You've doubtless got your inventory of stuff with you, and here in the safe you'll find the accounts of these companies, copies of public records relating to them, and so on. You're going up against a pretty tough proposition, young man. You'll hear a hard luck story wherever you go out here just now; people who owe your friends money will be mighty sorry they can't pay. Many of the ranch lands your people own will be worth something after a while. That Colorado irrigation scheme ought to pan out in time, and I believe it will; but you've got to nurse all these things. Make your principals let you alone. Those fellows get in a hurry at the wrong time—that's my experience with Eastern investors. Tell them to go to Europe—get rid of them for a while, and make them give you a chance to work for them. They're not the only pebbles. I'll send the combination of the safe up by the boy, and you can get a bird's-eye view of the situation before lunch. Mr. Wheaton, our cashier, is away to-day, but he's familiar with these matters and will be glad to help you when he gets home. When you get stuck call on us. And drop down about 12:30 and go up to the club for lunch. Take it easy; you can't do it all in one day."

"I hope I shan't be a nuisance to you," said the younger man. "I'm going to fight it out on the best lines I know how—if it takes several summers."

"Well, it'll take them all right," said Porter, sententiously.

Left to himself Saxton examined his new quarters, found a feather duster hanging in a corner and brushed the rirt from the scanty furniture. This done he sat down by the open window, through which the breeze came cool out of the great valley; and here he could see, far over the roofs and spires of the town, the bluffs that marked the broad bed of the tawny Missouri. He was not as buoyant as his last words to the banker implied. Here he was, he reflected, a man of good education, as such things go, who had lost his patrimony in a single venture. He had been sent, partly out of compassion, he felt, to take charge of investments that were admitted to be almost hopelessly bad. The salary promised would provide for him comfortably, and that was about all; anything further would depend upon himself, the secretary of the Neponset Trust Company had told him; it would, he felt, depend much more particularly on the making over by benign powers of the considerable part of the earth's surface in which his principals' money lay hidden. As his eyes wandered to one of the office walls, the black train of a great transcontinental railroad caught and held his attention. On one of its northern prongs lay the region of his first defeat.

"Three years of life are up there," he meditated, "and all my good dollars are scattered along the right of way." Many things came back to him vividly—how the wind used to howl around the little ranch house, and how he rode through the snow among his dying cattle in the great storm that had been his undoing. With his eyes still resting on the map, he recurred to his early school days and to his four years at Harvard. There was a burden of heartache in these recollections. None of the professions had appealed to him, and he had not heeded his father's wish that he enter the law. The elder Saxton, who was himself a lawyer of moderate success, died before John's graduation; he had lost his mother in his youth, and his only remaining relative was a sister who married before he left college.

A review of these brief and discouraging annals did not hearten him; but he fell back upon the better mood with which he had begun the morning; he had a new chance, and he proposed to make the best of it. He put aside his coat and hat, and opened his desk. The banker had sent up the combination of the safe and Saxton began inspecting its contents and putting his office in order.

The books and papers began to interest him, and he was soon classifying the properties that had fallen to his care. He was so deeply occupied that he did not mark the flight of time and was surprised when a boy came with a message from Porter that he was ready to go to luncheon.

"You mustn't overdo the thing, young man," said the banker, amiably, as he closed his desk. "Don't you adopt our Western method of working all the hours there are. I do it now because my neighbors and customers would talk about me if I didn't, and say that I had lost my grip in my old age."

The Clarkson Club stood at the edge of the commercial district, and its brick walls rose, hot and staring in the July sun as Porter and Saxton approached.

"Here we are," said Porter, leading the way into the wide hall. "We'll arrange about your business relations later. There's a very bad lunch ready upstairs, and we'll go against that first."

There were only a few men in the dining-room, seated at a round table. Porter exchanged salutations with them as he passed on to a small table at the end of the room. Those who were of his own age called Porter, "Billy," and he included them all in the careless nod of old acquaintance.

They went from the table for an inspection of the club, and arranged with the clerk in the office for a room on the third floor. They stopped in the lounging room, where the men from the round table were now talking or looking at newspapers. Porter introduced Saxton to all of them. Several of the men who shook hands with Saxton were railroad officials, but nearly every line of business was represented.

"If you're going with me," said Porter, "you'd better get a move on you." The whole group went out together, Porter leaving Saxton to the others, with that confidence in human friendliness which is peculiar to the social intercourse of men. They made him feel their honest wish to consider him one of themselves, making a point of saying to him, as they dropped out one by one, that they hoped to see him often. Porter led the way back down Varney street, carrying his hat in his hand. He said at the bank door: "Now you make them give you what you want at the club. I've got a house up here on Varney street—come up for dinner to-morrow night and we'll see if we can't raise a breeze for you. It's hotter than Suez here, and you'd better take my advice about starting in slow."

He went into the bank and Saxton took the elevator for his own office.

CHAPTER II.

Saxton was not over-sensitive, but the stiffness and hardness of the club house were not without their disagreeable impression on him as he sat at dinner toward the close of his first day in Clarkson. Two of the men to whom Porter had introduced him at noon proved to be fellow lodgers, and they exchanged greetings with him from the table where they sat together. They unsociably read their evening papers as they ate, and left before he finished. He was watching the fading colors of a brilliant sunset when a young man appeared at the door, and after a brief inspection of Saxton's back walked over to him.

"Aren't you Mr. Saxton? I thought you must be he. My name is Raridan. Don't let me break in on your meditations," he added, taking the chair which the waiter drew out for him. "I met Mr. Porter a while ago, and he adjured me to be good to you. I don't know whether this is obeying orders"—he broke off in a laugh—"that depends on the point of view."

"You are guilty of a very Christian act," Saxton said. "I was just wondering whether, after the sun had gone down behind that ridge over there, the world would still be going round."

"The world never stops entirely here," returned Raridan, "but the motion sometimes gets very slow. Mr. Porter tells me that you're to be one of us. Let me congratulate us—and you!"

Warrick Raridan was, socially speaking, the most available man in the Clarkson Blue Book. He was a graduate in law who did not practice, for he had, unfortunately, been left alone in the world at 26, with an income that seemed wholly adequate for his immediate or future needs. He maintained an office, which was fairly well equipped with the literature of his profession, but this was merely to take away the reproach of his busier fellow citizens. Raridan's office was the rendezvous for a variety of committees to which he was appointed by such unrelated bodies as the Clarkson Dramatic Club and the Diocesan Board of Missions of the Episcopal Church. He appeared every Sunday at the cathedral, which was the fashionable church in Clarkson, where he passed the plate for the alms and oblations of the well-dressed congregation.

He was capable of quixotism of the most whimsical sort. He had, for a year, taken his meals at a cheap boarding-house in order that he might maintain two Indian boys in school. He was not at all aggrieved when, at the end of the first year, they ran away and resumed tribal relations with their brethren. He chaffed himself about it to his friends.

It was not enough to say that Warry Raridan could lead a german or tie an Ascot tie better than any other man on the Missouri River; for he was also the best informed man in that same strenuous valley concerning the traditions of the English stage, and was a fairly good actor himself, as amateurs go. He had a slight literary gift, which he cultivated for his own amusement. His humor was fine and keen, and he occasionally wrote screeds for the local papers, or mailed pleasant jingles to his intimate friends.

"I'll wager that if you stay here a year you'll never leave," said Raridan, as they went downstairs together. "I've been about a good deal, and know that we who live here miss a lot of comfort and amusement which go as a matter of course in older towns. But there's a roominess and expansiveness about things out here that I like, and I believe most men who strike it early enough like it, and are lonesome for it if they go away.

"I think I understand how you feel about it," said Saxton. "There were times in Wyoming when Western life seemed pretty arid, but when I went back to Boston I was homesick for Cheyenne."

(To be continued.)

MODERN UNDERTAKING.

Methods That Have Greatly Simplified the Caring for the Dead.

Modern methods of undertaking now call for the highest possible skill in embalming and arranging every detail of burial.

From the old methods of placing a body on ice, with its attendant insanitary conditions, the undertaker has reached a high point of perfection in embalming, the New York Sun says, but not content with the advanced methods experiments are now under way which will, it is contended, make it unnecessary even to make any incision in a body when the embalming process is being performed.

One of the most advanced undertakers in this country says that within the next five years it will be possible to embalm by placing the body in an air-tight chamber and by subjecting it to a pressure of the gases of certain embalming materials to perform the work which is now done by injecting fluids into the veins.

Several firms in New York and other large cities have done much to relieve families of the very troublesome work which follows death in small houses, boarding houses or hotels by fitting up chapels where bodies are taken until ready for burial. Embalming is done in the establishment, burial clothes are furnished and watchers if required.

These firms also have clergymen to perform services, lawyers to attend to wills or insurance papers.

Frying Eggs.

The most disagreeable part of frying eggs is the sputtering and flying of the hot fat. This may be avoided by sifting a little flour in the pan before adding the eggs. This you will find to work like a charm and especially will the difference be noticed where there is a large family to supply.

The State of New Jersey has imported five stallions from Great Britain to enable its farmers to produce a higher type of horses.

THE LESSON.

Unfaltering fathers who made the day
And whose firm-wrought words into deeds succeeded,
Comes there not a voice from your lips of clay
That other Fourth-of-Julys are needed?

When Privilege fats at the public purse,
When Rights are pillaged, or starve unheeded,
Then sooner or later, for better or worse,
Another Fourth-of-July is needed.

When the people's tribunes taint the law
Till the stream runs rank and poison-weeded,
When they pilfer the wheat and leave us straw,
Another Fourth-of-July is needed.

When the treadmill prisons the child of toil
Till the baby brows are wan and beaded,
Wherever such shadow blights the soil
Another Fourth-of-July is needed.

While a race still drinks of the bitter cup
And the earth with the victims' bones is seeded,
The cry of the blood-blotched stones goes up
That another Fourth-of-July is needed.

For the fearless fathers who made the day
Far more to the world than the day they deeded;
The spirit still lives, though the lips are clay,
When another Fourth-of-July is needed.
—Edmund Vance Cook.

The Crosspatch Man's Fourth o' July

The Crosspatch Man was sick again, and this time it must be pretty bad, for all the morning Meredith had been watching the servants spread straw before the house and muffle the big, shiny door-bell.

"Poor man!" mamma said, pityingly. "He is sick so often!"

"But he's a Crosspatch Man!" muttered Meredith stiffly. Then he repented and looked as shamefaced as a very little boy with a very round, dimpled face could look. "I'm sorry he's ve-ry sick," he said, slowly. "I s'pose it hurts even Crosspatch Men."

Mamma did not notice. She was having her little noon "gossip" with papa, and they were still talking about their invalid neighbor.

"It isn't quite so bad as it seems, you know," papa was saying. "He always has the straw laid down and things muffled when he has one of his worst nervous attacks. It doesn't mean all that it does in most cases. He is terribly afflicted by noise at almost any time."

"Noise! I should think so!" That was from Meredith, who pricked up his ears at the word. Didn't he know how the Crosspatch Man felt 'bout a noise? Didn't he belong to the Rudd Street Second? Wasn't he captain? And oh, my, the times he'd seen the Crosspatch Man a-scowling and a-fuming, when they marched past his window!

"But Fourth of July will be a terrible day to him—poor man!" went on mamma's gentle voice. That made Meredith start a little. He had been thinking about Fourth o' July, too. (Did he think much of anything else nowadays?) He had been going over in his mind all the glorious program of the day. For the Rudd Street Second was going to celebrate in a worthy manner. They were going to even outdo themselves each year—and hadn't they had the proud honor of being the noisiest street in the city for two Fourth o' Julys a-running? Let 'em just wait till they heard this Fourth o' July!

It was three days off. That would give the Crosspatch Man time to have the straw taken up and the bell unmuffled, for his worst "times" never lasted more than two or three days.

"Then he'll have to cotton up his ears," mused Meredith, philosophically, watching the big foreign servant that wore a turban go back and forth past the Crosspatch Man's window. The house Meredith lived in and the Crosspatch Man's house were quite close together, so it was easy to watch things.

Unfortunately for an invalid with the terrible affliction called "nerves," Rudd Street was a regular nest of boys. There were boys everywhere on it. You ran against boys when you went east, and boys ran against you when you went west. Boys sprang up in the most unexpected places. The houses seemed to be running over with boys. And really, there was at least one boy—and on an average two or three—in every house on Meredith's side, except in the Crosspatch Man's house. Oh, dear me, no, there weren't any boys there!

On the other side of the street you had to skip the "middlest" house and Miss Quilhot and Miss Eromathea's—oh, yes, and the minister's house, of course. Miss Quillot and Miss Eromathea were old maids, and the minister—oh, no, he wasn't an old maid, but you couldn't expect him to have boys in the house, for how could he ever write his sermons?

So it was, as I said, an unfortunate street to have "nerves" on. And the Crosspatch Man had so many!

The three days in between soon went away, and it was the night—the very night—before it! There were only a few hours more, for of course you didn't have to wait till the sun rose on Fourth of July.

Meredith had drilled the Rudd Street Second for the last time, and dispersed his men. He was on his way home to supper. Going by the Crosspatch Man's house, he heard voices distinctly issuing from an open window. He couldn't help hearing, it was so quiet in the street. Perhaps it was the 'lull before the storm."

"The sahib cannot bear it," a gentle, soothing voice was saying, but Meredit recognized the indignation mixed with the pity in it. "The sahib will be again sick."

Then came Meredith's astonishment, for the Crosspatch Man's voice was answering, and it was quite calm and gentle; and it said:

"Of course I shall be sick again, Hari! I've made all my plans to perish. But what can you expect? The little chaps must have their Fourth o' July. I was a little chap myself—once. Shut the window, Hari. There's a suspicion of a draught."

Meredith stood still in sheer amazement, and watched the turban-man close the window. He was a little chap himself once, the Crosspatch Man was! And how kind his voice had sounded—not a bit crosspatchy! Then Meredith remembered how weary and full of pain it had sounded, too. It made him sorry for the Crosspatch Man, sorrier than he had ever been before.

"He's a-dreadin' it like sixty. He's 'spectin' to perish," Meredith said aloud. "It's goin' to make him sick of course—that's what he said to the turban-man. An' he was a little chap once, an' his voice was kind an' tired out."

Then Meredith went home and perched himself up on the banister post in the hall, to think. That was where he always thought things—big things, you know. This was, oh, my, such a big thing!

"I'm cap'n," mused Meredith, knitting his little fair brows. "I can say, 'Go, an' thou ghost,' like the man in the Bible; but they'll be dreadful disappointed, the Rudd Street Seconds will be. Still—well, he's sick an' he had a kind spot in his voice, an' he used to be a little chap, too, so of course he used to bang things an' make noises. I don't think he sounded much like a Crosspatch Man."

In a little while, after a little more tough thinking, Meredith slipped down and out of the door, up the street. He got together the Rudd Street Seconds and made a little speech, as a captain may, to his men.

The next day the city and all America celebrated Fourth o' July, and Rudd Street was famous again, but this time for being the very quietest street in all the city! There were just as many boys in it, too, as ever.

The Crosspatch Man's white, nervous face smoothed and calmed as the day wore on, and at last it actually smiled in a gentle way, as if he was thinking about something pleasant.

And the captain of the Rudd Street Second and his brave men, drilling and popping and banging in a distant street, were happy, too.—Youth's Companion.

Facts About Firecrackers.

The greater part of the almost $2,000,000 worth of firecrackers annually exported by China comes to New York. And the United States stands next to China in its use of them. Thousands of Chinese men, women and children work at the making of firecrackers, for there are no manufactories there, the work being done by hand. Tney receive only about $1.40 for making 10,000 firecrackers, laboring from six in the morning until 11 at night seven days a week. So a Chinese woman or child works like a slave for two days to earn what is spent on a few bunches of firecrackers by the urchin bent on doing justice to the Glorious Fourth.

MAKING READY FOR THE FOURTH.

MEMORIES OF THE FOURTH.

Have you ever mused, in silence, upon a summer's day,
And let your thoughts run riot, and your feelings have full sway,
As you sprawled full-length upon the grass in some secluded dell
And breathed the balmy country air, and smelt the country smell?
And as you muse,
And gently snooze,
Between thinks,
You remember those jinks,
When spirits were high
On the Fourth of July.

There was little Willie Browning, the worst of all the boys,
Who had a sure-nuff cannon that made all kinds of noise;
And when the cannon wouldn't go, he blew into the muzzle,
But what become of Willie's teeth has always been a puzzle.
How the folks looked askance
At the seats of our pants
When those giant skyrockets
Went off in our pockets.
Gee whiz!
What fun the Fourth is!

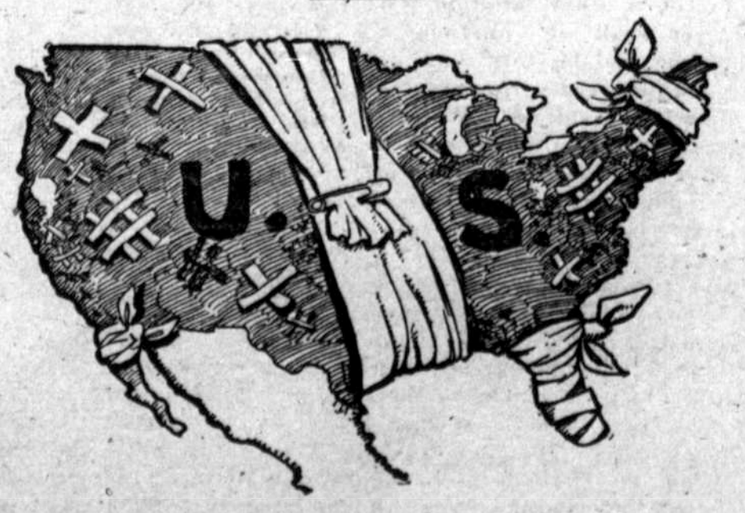
When the red-hot July sun began to wink the clouds away,
We were out with whoops and shoutings to celebrate the day;
With piece of punk in one hand and crackers in the other,
We'd troop home later in the day for linseed oil—and MOTHER.
But our burns
Were small concerns—
Our hearts were light,
Injuries slight—
Not even a sigh
On the Fourth of July.

And as you lie and ponder, the thought comes home to you
That your youngest boy now celebrates the way you used to do,
And the mother whom he bawls for to have those small wounds dressed
Is the woman who long years ago you swore you loved the best.
But what funny things
Memory brings—
Who would have thought
That I would be caught
With a tear in my eye,
On the Fourth of July?

The Absentminded Man.

"What day does the Fourth of July come on this year?" asked the absent-minded man.

"On Sunday."

"Yes, but what day of the month?"

THE DAY AFTER THE "GLORIOUS FOURTH."