

THE MAN MERRIWELL

By James M. Cain

ILLUSTRATED BY M. L. GLUMENTHAL

THROUGH the streets of a little town in the state of Maine, on a winter night in the early '90's, a woman was racing madly. Behind her, in half-hearted fashion, limped a man. As he puffed for breath he besought her to ease the pace.

"There's no hurry," he kept repeating, and in between times he tried to reassess with her.

Of course, he admitted, he was glad Willis had come home. Any man would be glad if his only son had run away and then come back again. But since, if the boy had kept body and soul together for so long a time, all on his own, it stood to reason he wouldn't up and die in the first place that could take them to hell home. And another thing—just because a fellow had picked his head in the deer and said Willis was bad, why had they left the meeting and lit out this way hell-bent for election? They ought to have stayed until the meeting was over. It wouldn't hurt Willis to wait a little while. It would teach him a lesson. Maybe then he would get it through his head that when he ran away from home he might have to whittle his chips awhile before he saw his folks.

And as he argued thus the voice of Parson Patten sounded the least bit watchful; for as it happened, Brother Nickerson was to expound the Book of Revelation at the meeting tonight, with the aid of a great chart, whatever would be depicted all the queer creatures of the Apocalypse. And when Brother Nickerson expounded the Book of Revelation, a man didn't stay away if he could help it.

The Prodigal

HIS wife paid him no heed whatever. Leaving him far behind, she ran on, ploughing through snowdrifts and scrabbling over icy pavements. In a few minutes she was flinging open a door, racing down a hall and bursting into a kitchen, there to fly into the arms of a tall, lean youth who had been thumbing himself out by the parental stove.

Her joy was brief. For this boy of sixteen, who had ideas so strange that he never needs run away from a home where he had always lived out of the world, had come home with ideas straight still. No penitent prodigal, he, ready to atone for his sins by settling down to the first useful occupation that might present itself. Not at all. He pleaded guilty to nothing; he had money in his pocket and clothes on his back; and then, he seemed to think, proved that he had not wanted his time. As for a useful occupation—poof! He had loftier aspirations. His lordly dreams, it appeared, were filled with the swoosh of batons, the snorting of buffaloes and the whooping of Comanches. In brief, he would an asther be, and sign his name to books.

Far, far into the night his father and mother talked over the blow that had befallen them. "How'd he get that fool idea in his head?" fretted the father. "Seems like to me after he spent six months out in the world he would of learnt some sense."

"I was hoping he would be a preacher," said the mother sadly.

"I was hoping he would be a carpenter, and maybe earn enough to pay for his keep," replied the father. "I know



"I Was Napping We Would Be a Preacher," Said the Mother Judy

where I can get him a job at a dollar and a half a day right now, and he can make two and a half as soon as he learns the trade." His voice grew warm as the full exuberance of the situation began to dawn on him. "Dog-gone it!" he exclaimed. "I got a notion to take him over to that job tomorrow anyhow. I got a notion to put him to work and see if that don't beat some sense in his head." And as he stooed six feet three, and was so huge in proportion that Abraham Lincoln had once singled him out of a crowd and challenged him to a nail-splitting contest, it seemed that he was able to make good on his notion.

"No, you can't do that," said the mother quickly.

"What's going to stop us?"

"He might run away again."

"Yeah, he sure is half-headed." The father was silent a few minutes. "Well," he reflected after a time, "you got to admit he's got the pluck." Dark though the future might appear, he could not resist a sneaking pride that his son had gone over to Biddesford, the mill town, and held

his own there without asking help from anybody. "He sure ain't afraid of nothing," he mused.

The rafter sighed. The plank in question seemed a long way from the ministry and the Book of Revelation.

"Gonna we better leave him alone," said the father. "I don't know much about this writing business; it isn't in my line. But it's a cinch he ain't like no other boy that we ever seen, so maybe he knows what he's doing."

"Yes, I guess we better leave him be," said the rafter sadly.

And the decision, as doubt, was a momentous one for the boy who was snoring away in another part of the house. For this William Gilbert Patten was presently to receive his eminent name as Eustis L. Standish, and in no great length of time to give a writing world that robust Rosas of them all, the Hon. Frank Merrivell, A.B., Yale.

He did not, of course, call for an act as have the prodigies. For a close half-grown from his boyhood one fell asleep. He had not, in fact, even thought of Frank at this time; other matters were more pressing. For one thing, although his parents were considerably fit for the moment to an attitude of watchful waiting, they were practical folk; and if the usafracts of literature were not visible pretty soon, they might deliver an ultimatum that would mean the ministry, the carpentry, or another trip into the cold, cold world. For another thing, there was a little affair of honor with Mr. Gooch, boss of the mill at Biddesford,

"A Bad Man"

M. L. GOOCH, is firing him, had not only refused to give him the raise he demanded but had hidden him up to get some hair on his face, else be thankful to work for the nicey cents a day he was getting. And it had become his ambition first to get some hair on his face, and second to make enough money to go over to Biddesford and map-happy fingers at Mr. Gooch and Mr. Gooch's \$3000 a year. So high-he's for the lop-top.

After three weeks, however, things looked bleak indeed. His first story, *A Bad Man*, had hardly been dry on the paper before he shipped it off to the Banner Weekly, a publication of the Meers, Beads & Adams, in New York, and it was rejected by return mail. What was almost as distressing, he had not come back with the note of rejection. With heavy heart Parson Patten went to work on another.

The *Pride of Sandy Flat*. To his father, who made inquiries a little more pointed than were courtesy demanded, he made evasive replies, neglecting to mention the note of rejection.

"It always takes a little time," he explained. "A whole lot of editors have got to read the stuff before they take it."

By the time the *Pride of Sandy Flat* was done he was ill indeed, and when he sent the story off he included a very humble letter to the editor of the Banner Weekly, Mr. Orville J. Victor, in which he respectfully asked whether he revealed any talent as a writer. And P. S.—where was his other story?

He trembled when he opened the reply. Yes, said Mr. Victor, literary talent was plainly visible. The *Pride of Sandy Flat* was accepted. Through some oversight A Bad Man had not been returned, but new that it had had a second reading it, too, was accepted. Check was enclosed to pay for both stories—for six dollars.

He drew a long breath. Perhaps out of that moment he got something which enabled him to describe as feelingly, in later years, how Merrivell felt when the plotters had been foiled and our friends would beat the bush at last,

"Heard from those stories today," he said nonchalantly, tossing the check to his father as he sat down to the supper table that night.

Long and hard did the older Patten stare at it. "How long did it take you to do these stories?" he asked.

"A couple of weeks, I guess."

"It'll fit," said the elder Patten, in the manner of a man who makes mental calculations.

The third story, which was really a short novel, sold for seventy-five dollars. The check he showed not only to his father but to Henry Clark, a friend. And that night a boy pedaled frantically up to the village store on his high-wheeled bicycle and burst into the room where men were buying cut plug, twist and loose chewing.

"Willie Patten got seventy-five dollars for one of them stories he's writing!" exclaimed the boy.

Up spoke Hossie Hardie, the school-teacher. "Henry Clark," he said sternly, "you shan't up with that foolishness. Willie Patten didn't get sense enough to make seventy-five dollars even if he worked for it; let alone making it by something he wrote."

But Henry Clark insisted that he had seen the check; and later on Bill Patten came in and confirmed the great news about his son, and excitement was intense in Corinna that night. The fourth story, a full-length novel, sold for \$150, and by that time Willie Patten felt himself seasoned for a venture he had had in mind for some time. He would try his hand at dime novels.

The Birth of the Dime Novel

A SINGULAR ambition! Not at that time. It is now quite forgotten that the dime novel has an ancient and thoroughly honorable history. In the beginning it was not the biography of detectives, barn-thieves and trail robbers at all, but the historian of an epic achievement—the conquest of a continent. Its originator was Eustace F. Beadle, a native of Utica, New York.

In 1857, when he was in his thirties, Beadle made a trip from Buffalo, where he had set up shop as a printer, to Nebraska, where he had taken up land and expected to settle. For various reasons his enterprise did not turn out very well, and he was forced to come back. But he had seen things that opened his eyes. He had found our first hand what was happening on the plains; he had had his own provisions stolen by Indians and had come into unexpectedly close contact with a scalping expedition.

What he saw convinced him that there was something radically wrong with the literature that his

country was producing. The imaginative tales turned out by the disciples of Irving, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, and Poe might add to the size in a library, but they were woefully out of touch with the times. Such stuff, it seemed to him, gaped at the clouds while the elephants were marching by; the real remains of America, the great field for her literature, lay in the West. That was the land that was on everybody's tongue; that was the land that was forever on the floor of Congress, with great debates on whether Missouri should be admitted slave or free, and whether we should insist on fifty-four forty or eight; that was the land where supermen were rolling back a frontier of Indians and buffaloes; that was the land where life had color, flavor and zip; that was the land that people wanted to read about.

Accordingly, as soon as he could get his affairs in order, he moved to New York and prepared to start his saga. His plan, first, was to catch up on his debts. Life as it was lived on the plains, his plan, second, was to sell them for ten cents.

When they heard the price at which the books were to be sold, his friends threw up their hands and threatened to have him put in the body hatchet. Other publishers, when rumors reached them, smiled. It was a pretty dream, they said, but the thing couldn't be done. Beadle went ahead with his preparations. It took him a year or two, selling joke books, song books and such things, to get together the necessary money, but presently he was ready. He would need a printer, he realized, so he engaged Robert Adams, who had set type for him in Buffalo. He would need an editor, so he engaged a shrewd young man named Orville J. Victor, the same Victor who many years later was to write a letter of encouragement to a very discouraged young man living in Coonico, Maine.

Victor soon made connections with a

staff of writers; and on June 15, 1860, Beadle published his first dime novel. It was called *Macbeth*, or the Indian War of the White Hunter, and it was written by Ann S. W. Stephens, who followed it with a number of others. It set the pattern for Beadle publications for a long time to come. In fact it was a little booklet of 128 pages, about the size of a baseball guide. The printing was on white rag paper and compares favorably with good printing today. The cover was of heavy salmon-colored paper, bearing on the front a steel engraving of the heroine. The story itself was most digested. Several of the chapters start off with quotations from poetry; the style is rather literary; there is no suggestion of cheapness anywhere in it. It had a sale, in its first year, of 300,000 copies, and within a few years it had been translated into five languages.

Foreign Influence

MALASKEA was followed by others in rapid succession. Some of them, in their day, were celebrated. Seth Jones, or the Captives of the Fratress, by Edward S. Ellis, published also in 1860, had a sale of 750,000 copies, and was translated into seven languages. Massa Gelles, or Christians Among the Slaves, by Mrs. Motta Victor, wife of the editor, caused almost as much talk during the war as Uncle Tom's Cabin. When Henry Ward Beecher came back from England, where he had gone as Lincoln's representative, he wrote that this little book had done much to influence British public opinion. Lincoln himself, after Beadle had sent him a little package of samples, became a dime-novel fan. The soldiers in camp, finding that dime novels helped to while away many a tedious day,

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Frank Morrison Won All the Harvard Games Single-handed in the Last Minute of Play.

THE MAN MERRIWELL

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gobbled them up by the million, boosting sales beyond Beadle's wildest dreams. By the time the war came to an end the experiment was as assured success. In 1868 Robert Adams died, and Beadle took his two brothers, David Adams and William Adams into partnership, the firm becoming Beadle & Adams, under which name it was to do business for thirty years. Beadle was dead. It was his turn to ask, "Who's hokey now?"

To this flourishing concern Willie Patten submitted his first dime novels. They were, at the most charitable estimate, pretty bad: Clear-Grit Cal, the Never-Say-Die Detective; Fire-Eye, the Thugs' Terrier; Wild Yukon, the Lone Ranger Rider, and so on. But they were published. Money began to pour in—or at least so it seemed in Corinna. Still, Patten's eyes bulged many a time at the bookshelves which his queer uncle had collected from all of those tattered old at the village stores they shook their heads and marveled, for all this sneaked of black magic.

So, after four years of it, when he was just turned twenty-one, Willie Patten decided it was time for him to go to New York. He had a little money now; he had served his apprenticeship as a writer; he had even, on the money received from the sale of *The Corinna Owl*, a weekly newspaper that he had started, taken a trip West and viewed at first hand the scenes the epic tales he had been writing. Within a short time he wound up all his affairs and was ready to start.

All his affairs? Not quite. There was a little affair of honor, one that involved the light but gaudy hair that now grew on his face, and the \$2500 he had made in the past year as compared with a certain \$1800.

When he got off the train at Ridgedale he headed straight for the mill. "Where's Gooch?" he demanded of the first millhand he met.

"Hey, Willie!" exclaimed his former buddy. "Boggs! I didn't hardly know you at first. You're a sight handsomer than you was. . . . Gooch! Ain't you heared Gooch is dead."

Ten Years After

Col. Prentiss Ingraham leaped frantically around his small room in Fifty-eighth Street and glared belligerently at Patten, who had buckled up his long legs on a trunk.

"Na, sal!" he roared, while his small frame quivered with indignation. "The West's storv' will be dead. So long as the American people have one drop of red blood left in their veins, I tell you they're gonna' read West's storv's!"

"Custer's been dead pretty near twenty years," said Patten.

"Buffalo Bill ain't dead!" the colonel shot back with heat that was parablemic, since, through the medium of the dime novel, he was Buffalo Bill's official biographer. "If you think he is," he went on, "go down to Philadelphia, where he's showin' now, and watch him shoot. He can hold up his end of it, even with that little Oakley gal."

"They say she's pretty," said Patten, who had an eye to such things.

"—as a picture," said the colonel, who also had an eye to such things and stretched his wrinkly necktie out. "And while you're down there, just count the people that come to see that Wild West show and see if Buffalo Bill is dead yet. And if you'll pardon a little pride of authorship, I'd just like to call to yo' 'tentation that my last stories about Buffalo Bill are sellin' bigger than ever. No, sal, Buffalo Bill's not dead, and neither is the West's storv'."

Patten listened with half an ear. He was an older Patten now, with ten years in the literary trenches behind him, several of them devoted almost exclusively to this same kind of Western story that he was

now beginning to have his doubts about. They had been glorious years in all truth. He had come down to a New York that was probably grander than any New York before or since. It was a New York as yet innocent of Subways, wherein you traveled uproot and downtown on elevated roads that still carried the original and once-tousen on every street down by lower Brooklyn Bridge was still one of the wonders of the modern world, and Steve Brodie had just settled the big argument by jumping off it and living to tell the story. The theatrical district still lay between Fourteenth and Twenty-third Streets; grand opera was given in the Academy of Music on Fourteenth, backed by Tasy Pastor's Theater and Huber's Museum; Maggie Cleo was just then singing Throw Him Down, McConaughy! John L. Sullivan had expressed his opinion slightly more than one or the other of his three Irish gangs still ravaged the Bowery, where gardenias, open of front so you could see the drinkers and the dancing girls within, lined most of the way. The Fulton Building was still the tallest building in the United States, and visitors to New York ascended in its dome of "solid gold" to refresh themselves with a bird's-eye view of the city. The Alhambra House still attracted many customers with its celebrated oil paintings of the female nude. It was a wide-open town, with everybody having a running good time.

Portrait of a Modest Man

Patten loved it. Especially he loved the汇报性 of it. This crowd loved to be fooled and it god-darnedfully didn't give a hoot how often it was fooled, so it was fooled by a good show. He loved the humbugs who provided the literary show, who hammed up preposterous tales about Indians chasing pioneers over the plains and being in turn chased by a thundering herd of bison. They were a platterpunk crew, who loved the West because it was the big show, and who were as much a part of it as the advised press agent is part of a circus creation like Joseph E. Badger, whose master-creation was Mustang Sam. "You ax who I be? I'm Mustang Sam, the high-spirited-mack of E. Pinturicchio Unum. . . . I jus' yell louder, run harder, ride faster, shoot straighter, jump higher, tell bigger lies, eat more pure beef, and jump outside o' more chain lightning' than any two-legged critter as was ever puffed." Oh Coonsie, who lived in Iowa, and was one of the few dime-novel writers crazy enough to invent himself publicly. Edward L. Wheeler, the called every paper he could find, was suspected of never having been further West than West Philadelphia. Harlan F. Halsey, who wrote the delectable detective stories signed Old Sleuth; John R. Coryell, who originated the Nick Carter stories; Buckskin Sam, properly known as Sam H. Hall, who occasionally showed his virile Western smashup by going on a shooting rampage at his home in Wilmington, Delaware.

And Patten laughed as loud as any at the melodramas staged daily by Buffalo Bill and Ned Baseline, his first official biographer known in private life as Col. E. Z. C. Justice. That was when they were first trying to pass over Buffalo Bill as a character in dime-store fiction. Six or eight times a day, both Cody and Justice, in full Western regalia, would come galloping down Broadway and Times Square at the office of the publisher in Rose Street. Obviously they were occupied with business of the very first importance; actually they were occupied with nothing more important than to provide a show for the crowd that always awaited them, and incidentally to make a little extra publicity for the Buffalo Bill stories.

Most of all, Patten loved this Gilded Age Ingraham who was now pacing the

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feet in each wild excitement at the very suggestion that the Western story might be on its last legs. The colonel had lived such a life that when he recounted his most pugnacious experience he was thought to be waxing up chapters for his next story. He had fought in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy; he had suffered in Austria, in Coss, in Africa, in Cuba, and with Juarez in Mexico. He had shot buffalo with Buffalo Bill, to help finance the celebrated contract with the Kansas Pacific Railroad. And the best of it is that Cody delivered the sum of more than \$5000 buffaloes to be served as meat in the construction camps and thereby earned his highly valuable meander. When Cody and Burdine had a disagreement, the colonel was Cody's biographer. And so well did he do his job that Buffalo Bill became such a character as not even Cody had dreamed was possible. There is wavy a schoolboy, even now, who is astonished to learn, in sixth-grade history, that this magnifico of the colonel's own life actually lived and breathed. Add to all this the fact that the colonel was a gentleless of the old school, and you could cut in rived hamster veins, and he stands out as a most colorful writing man.

Opportunity Knocks

Now, however, Patten was beginning to be worried about the Western stories. This was not entirely a matter of art. It was more a question of bread and butter. Since the night when he had come back home from the Biedenfeld mill, and had written stories for his employer, it was apparent that his pen writing were beginning to look hazy and frayed around the edges. Who more he lent a very dubious air to the colonel's catalog of Buffalo Bill.

"It just like what they're saying about that contradiction that this fool Hayes is moonkeying around with," the colonel was saying. "Those there say it's going to put the horse out of business. Well, if Hayes was to hawk a whetstone on his machine, maybe it might do for a peanut roaster. Or if he was to put some oil around it, maybe it might do for a cage or a flycatcher. I think dog they've got ever at Worth's Mill."

"It just like out of business? Come over here, Gil—just look at those going out to the paupers. Don't you just love to see 'em step? Gil, there's some things that won't never be put out of business. One of them is the horse and the other is the West's story—that gave the horse his proper place in literature. If I do say so myself."

Shortly afterward Patten joined his family at Casco, Maine, where they had moved from Corinna, more than ever convinced that he had to find a new field. He was to continue to raise his living by his pen. He had been landed there when he received a letter from G. Smith, president of Street & Smith, in regard to a new series of books. By this time—1893—Street & Smith had long since taken the leadership of the dime-novel field away from Beadle & Adams. The firm had been started in 1855, several years before Beadle went into business, but had not published dime novels until after Beadle had demonstrated that the thing could be done. Then gradually it had pulled ahead, until by now it was the leading publisher in the field. No doubt the death of Beadle, in 1884, had much to do with the dwindling prosperity of the firm.

Mr. Smith wanted to know if Patten would be interested in doing a new series of stories for his boys. Patten wrote for more details and Mr. Smith replied as follows:

December 16, 1893.

GILBERT PATTEN, Esq.

CASCO, MAINE.

Dear Sir:—Rephrasing to your favor of December 13, at hand today, we beg to state that the material of which we wrote you, we are but last hour informed by a man whom we have the pleasure of consulting something in the line of the Jack Harkaway stories, Guy Burdine

series which we are running in Good News and the Island School Series, all of which are expected to you under separate cover, the idea being to have a story continuing a series of which will appear once a week, preceded by suitable illustrations. It would be an advantage to the series to have introduced the D. C. Heath Co., the Bradfords, and other older dealers that you may be familiar with.

So what we know of your work, we believe you can give us what we require, and would be pleased to have you write some of these stories at once.

It is understood that you will be well remunerated to make a contract with you to cover twenty thousand words weekly for this literary and a sufficient number of Good News stories to keep the Island School Series in the line of Good News, if you believe you can turn out this amount of work.

It is important that the main characters in the stories be such as will appeal to the young. Dick Lightfoot, Jim Harkaway, Guy Burdine, Don Kirk is a character in two previous stories by Patten; on this name will depend the title for the library.

The object of this series is to interest young readers in the career of a young man at a boarding school, preferably a military or a naval academy. The stories should differ from the Jack Harkaway series in that the hero should be a boy, not a girl. Our idea is to have, say, twelve stories, each complete in itself, but like the links in a chain, all dealing with life at the academy. By this time the reader will have become quite familiar with the characters of the hero, and the author will also no doubt have exhausted most of the peaks and eminences that naturally occur.

After the first few stories, the hero is obliged to leave the academy, or take it upon himself to leave. It is essential that he should come into a considerable amount of money at this period. When he leaves the academy he should be in a position to go into business or start a career. In fact any of the characters you have introduced and made prominent in the story. A little love element would also not be amiss, but it must be handled with care.

When the hero is once projected on his travels there is an infinite variety of incident to choose from. In the Island School Series, published by one of our London publishers, there is a series of stories on the subject of travel, with exercises. This material you are at liberty to use freely, with our heroes as the central character, of course, and up-to-date dialogue.

We are thinking, though tentatively in thirty stories, of this, we would bring the hero back and have him go to college, say, Yale University; whence we could take him on his travels again to Europe, South America, etc.

If you will send us some samples of school life, you will be able to do them all, as we shall assist you in the matter of local color for the stories of travel.

The hero, of course, will be a good, solid, constitutional fellow, fully equipped the Island School material, kindly yours to us.

Yours truly,

Patten hadn't got half through this before he knew that this was what he had been looking for. He would get away from the absurdities of Western fiction and give the boys something they could believe in. Also, he would give them a hero they could really admire. And he would try to build the stories on character rather than on incident, and in that way make them live.

Preparedness in a Name

Frank Merrill was agreed upon as the name of the hero, this name suggesting the kind of boy Patten had in mind. And lost the import of the name he lost on the youthful readers. Patten was careful to describe Frank on Page 1 of the first story, thus: "His face was frank, open and winning, but the merry light that usually dwelt in his eyes was now banished by a look of sorrow."

And so on. In order that the series could be continued by others if Patten fell ill or got tired of the art, or something of the sort, it was necessary that he have a name deposed. Burt L. Standish had agreed upon this, as being a good, substantial American name. The pay was to be the princely sum of fifty dollars a week.

Finally Patten was ready to write the first story, to be called Frank Merrill; or, First Days at Fardale. As he hatched up to his typewriter he wrinkled to himself, for there popped into his head a story that was going the rounds about the colonel. It seems that somebody had asked the colonel how he managed to think of plots in such seeming profusion.

"First," the colonel said, "I take a situation, and then I work forward from that."

"Yes, colonel, but what do you mean by that?"

"Crack! Crack! Crack! These more redskins hit the dust," snickered the colonel. "There you have it. Now go on with your story."

"Better start it off in style," thought Patten, and this is what he wrote:

CHAPTER I

FRANK MADE A POSE

"Get out!"

"Thump! A shrill hand of pain."

"Ring it! That's my dog!"

"Tut-tut! The first time for me!"

"Coff! A blow from as sharp west as the boyish owner of a white-piping paddle stammering by the ground, while paper bags of pop corn were scattered around and scattered their snowy contents around."

"That was a cowardly blow!"

Fast-Writing Records

And so on. As may be imagined, the colonel sat at the end of the case from Frank; and fitting it was that the dog would be ever ready to salivate over magnificent meat at the spectacle of a cowardly blow.

"It was an awful job, and don't you forget it," says Patten, looking back at the beginning of the Merrill experiment. "Twenty thousand words a week! That means more than a million words a year—at the rate of one full-length novel a month. And when you turn out stuff that for seventeen years you're grinding away. All the Merrill stories have been written and gathered into books. Two hundred and four of them, costing only a dollar apiece, and how many miles of travel there were when I wrote them there were when I left like a horse in an old country treadmill. I ground and I ground and I ground, and it seemed as though there never would be an end to it."

For the new series was a success from the start. The first number, published April 18, 1896, sold out completely; within three months the circulation of the Tip-Top Library, with Frank Merrill as its leading character, had reached 75,000, with new readers their nickels clutched in their dirty little fists, managing up to the news stands every Saturday. And to satisfy them, Patten settled down to the laborious business of grinding out 20,000 words a week every week in the year.

"Over a period of years," he goes on, "I imagine that comes pretty close to setting a record. But don't get the idea that I was a remarkably fast writer. There were plenty of them who could turn it out a lot faster than I could. One time Beadle & Adams needed a serial in a hurry, and Victor looked Edward L. Wheeler in the room with a pile of paper. After two days there was a 30,000-word novel. I don't say it was a good novel, but anyway it was a novel."

"But the colonel held that. There was some merriment among the boys. Victor, I think, had the idea that the hero had to be a boy, and when Victor wired him, in Washington, it was within two days of publication time. The colonel sat right down and began to write. It almost killed him, but at the end of twenty-four hours he had a 33,000-word story in the real."

"But over a long pull I probably turned out as much as any of the rest, and maybe a little more. The first year was the worst, because I hadn't any system into it. On the first start I transposed the sheet of paper a right way, then wrote down. I didn't think I could possibly get a story a week. I used to write a lot of them up in Maine, and if I didn't make a certain express with my copy, there wouldn't be any story that week. And more than once I finished the story so late I had to run down to the station and hand the envelope to the man on the mail car; the train would be already in and ready to pull out."

"After a while it came easier. I blocked the stories out thirteen at a time. Why thirteen? Well, there are fifty-two weeks

in the year, and when you divide fifty-two by four you get thirteen, not twelve. Then I saved myself a lot of work by learning to dictate to a stenographer. My fingers get sore hanging out that much copy on a machine. The dictation scheme accounts for one thing that many people laugh about in the Merrill stories—a stilted effect in the dialogue. I guess a phrase is true. But you shoot 4000 words a day at a stenographer, and when we transcribe her notes, we have to work harder to make it sound. Easy style is nice, breezy dialogue, especially when you have a chance to shape up your work. No chance for that during the Merrill. That was rough-and-ready writing, and if you couldn't do it that way, you couldn't do it at all."

"Pete?" I never had much trouble with pets. No, I wasn't like the colonel; I didn't start with a situation and work forward from that. I built all these stories around a character. If you will read the first Merrill story you will see what I mean. That is a story about a number of boys, but it has a natural ally, which were candidates for admission to Fardale Academy. One of them, as a result of the brawl at the railroad station which opens the story, takes a dislike to Merrivell and plots to keep him out of the academy. Is the course of the feud, Merrivell resists the beautiful Anna from a mad dog after the other boy had fled; he emerges triumphant from a fist fight and two or three other scrapes that he stumble into. Superficially, that is a story made up of highly improbable incident. Look a little closer and you will see that Frank succeeds in getting into the academy and in having a good character. Even in the end, when he is freed from a cemetery vault into which his bad master had locked him, his rescuer is the same little shaver whom he had befriended a few days before at the railroad station in the scuffle over the dog."

Character in a Crucible

"All the Merrill stories were built on the same formula—to test Frank in some critical way so that certain sides of his nature were thrown into high relief. Yes, one of his qualities was courage. But they laugh about Frank's bravery now. As a matter of fact, he was not brave; he was scared often, and badly scared at that. Much more important was his loyalty—something that boys esteem more than anything else. No matter how hard pressed Frank might be, he never played anybody a dirty trick. Of course, it was my business to see that he was hard pressed in every story. He was always getting into jams, so that if he would only run against his friends he could make a million dollars. Of course he never did it. Another quality was a sense of humor. Another was a sense of justice, a capacity to see the other fellow's side. And another was a little bit of tact. I used to teach him tact.

"But he had a lot of very bad qualities too. One of them was a love for gambling. Frank's battle to overcome this furnished many a chapter in the series, and the boys, I judge, found it just as absorbing as a lot of so-called action."

The popular story based on character was a novelty then; the publishers, although they had themselves suggested the idea, were a little appalled at the lengths to which Patten carried it. One day while he was at luncheon with O. G. Smith and his brother G. F., Smith said to the agent & O. G. Smith, "I want to know whether the stories could be made to have more action—incidents, you know, excitement, something going on."

Patten, a little surprised, asked where the stories seemed to lag.

"Well," said Smith, "last week you had a story that shows what I mean. For two pages Merrill does nothing but talk care of his horse—feeds him, waters him, rests

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him, and so on. I don't believe that appeals to boys.

"I think you're wrong," said Patten. "In the first place, Merrivell has been repeatedly identified as a human character. He is kind to animals; it is part of his nature. In the second place, nine-tenths of the boys who read these stories are of the age when they crazy over horses. They know all about horses. And when they read how Merrivell was considerate of his horse, that brings the story close home to them. Those two pages are just as interesting to them as though I had had Frank ride the horse in front of the house and grab the girl on the veranda. Great action is the old of action. Action is what killed the old dime novel. It is all right for a few pages, but it gets pretty tedious unless there is some character raised up in it that you can get interested in." Smith was still dubious. "I'll ask you one thing," said Patten: "Do the stories sell?"

Smith laughed. Turning to his brother he said: "I guess Patten's got us there. The stories sell all right. If they haven't got excitement, they've got something, as we might as well like him and let him do his stories his own way."

"That's right," Patten explained, "except perhaps the heroes. When you're writing regular fiction, you draw your characters from life. But when you're writing for boys, you draw your characters from the imaginary world that boys live in. When I conceived Frank, I think I bit on approximately the boy that every kid would like to be. Not, mind you, the boy that every kid ought to be. That was the Horatio Alger idea—a moral in every story. But my boy pointed no moral; he was just every boy's ideal picture of himself. And I never did anything cleverer than when I made Frank right in the first story, an expert ventriloquist."

"The kids had all heard of this trick, and they had all gone out back of the barn to practice, in a secret effort to acquire it. So when Frank appeared as a master of this mysterious art they fell in love with him at once."

"But Frank wasn't the only character. There had to be others, especially villains. For a long time Bart Hodge was the chief villain of the series. He was the boy who caused the little pop-vine tender at the railroad station. Bart, however, eventually received his well-deserved and befitting Frank's chosen friend. Then there was Porfus del Norte, who appeared when I took Frank out West for a time."

The Greatest Villain of All

"Friends have told me that Porfus del Norte was the greatest villain of all literature. He had every human depravity, and a few depravities that had not heretofore been regarded as human. He stopped at nothing—not even mayhem. His word was not worth the breath it took to utter it. He had not the slightest chivalry toward women and children. He was associated with low characters. He was prideful of plots, schemes and intrigues. His lighted word was a curse."

"Then there had to be comic characters. It is a curious thing, but you cannot give boys real humor. They do not understand it. Slapstick is what they get has out. That is the reason for such characters as Harry Rattler, who always said things like 'I see fly—I mean, I feel silly.' Boys think that very funny. And Hans Dannerwart, the Dutch boy; and Ephraim Galup, the lank Yankee boy, who, every time things began to get hot, would moan, 'I wish I was to burn on the farm.'

"Only twice did I draw characters from life. Once was when I used a friend of mine, Capt. Walter Wiley, and put him into the story. Wiley was a postmaster fellow, and he went over great with the boys. In the stories he was always referred to as the 'Wileyman.'

"The other time was a little different." Here Patten pauses to laugh. "One time I met a lady I knew, up in Maine—a Mrs. Gardner, and she said to me, 'Mr. Patten, my boy reads about Frank Merrivell every week, and he wants to know if you couldn't get him into a story.'"

"I said that I would be easy enough, and I asked her two or three questions about what kind of looking boy he was, since I had never seen him, and one or two other things about him, and then I put him into a story. He only appeared for a sentence or two, did Earl Gardner, as a freshman at Yale who wanted to meet the great Frank Merrivell, but never had the chance, and I thought that would be the end of it. But within two weeks I had a hundred letters from boys all over the country, demanding that I give them more about Earl Gardner. So Earl Gardner became one of the most popular characters in the series."

A Real Boy Hero

"A trust," said O. Henry, "is its own weakest point"; and the same principle held true for Merrivell. It was his very popularity that led to his downfall. For in spite of all that Patten did to stink his growth, he grew bigger and bigger and older and older, until no boy in the world could be expected to take an interest in him. His story, indeed, for a long time, had faded from his life. It is the memory of Patten's stepmother efforts to keep alive the spark of youth within him. Other characters right along right along for the same age for years. Matt and Jeff look the same now as they did seventeen years ago: the Katzenjammer Kids never grew up, and neither does Chester Gump.

But Merrivell had no such luck. He was the idol of thousands of boys who kept him as high as clouds of other boys' new keep book on Babe Ruth. When Frank had finished the first year at Fardale he had to go on to second year; there was no more chance that he could hold on to repeat the course than that the old boy could take a nap. And after four years at Fardale he was through at Fardale; his next question was what to do with him; next, in accordance with the original plan, he went to Yale. He was a great boy at Yale; he made the football team every year, and was all the Harvard game single-handed in the last minute of play. He was elected to all the last fraternities; he led his class with busters. In fact he was easily the most remarkable student that Old Eli ever had.

But at the end of his junior year, the same old question came up: in another year he would graduate, and he was, or a man, out of the line of boys from which the situation warranted selecting. The circulation was as yet \$100,000; much depended on Merrivell, as far as the publishers were concerned, and also so far as Patten was concerned. His original \$50 a week, after a number of raises, had become \$150; and in the early 1900's this was not to be assumed at.

To gain time to think, Patten took Frank out of Yale. He contrived a dastardly plot whereby Frank lost all his money and had to go to work on a railroad. Here, at least, it would be harder for the boys to keep up on the hero, since there were no college seniors running the show so easily. And while Frank worked on the locomotives, Patten raced his brain as to what to do. And finally he decided he would retire

Frank and invent a long-lost brother, much younger than Frank, who would rouseawake juvenile interest.

So Frank settled the great stories on the railroad, earned his fortune, went back to college, graduated at the end of a year, and the stage was all set for Dick. The advent of Dick presented some difficulties, as Frank was an only child, as all the readers knew. Nevertheless, Merrivell perchance takes a mysterious trip, and Patten let it be known that on this trip he had married, and Dick Merrivell was the result of that union. So Dick Merrivell finally appears on the scene, much to the surprise of Frank, as may be imagined.

But Dick was a big flop. The readers still marvelled at the wonder, of course, for the name Merrivell was potent. But the boys never took to Dick as they had taken to Frank.

"The reason," says Patten, "was that Dick was not the character that Frank was. I couldn't make him a replica of Frank, you know; he had to be different. But it was Frank who really stood for every boy's dreams. Dick was all right, but not many boys wanted to be like him. And then I myself had a good reader. Frank's versatility was a big plus. But Dick's capacity to talk and talk and talk never went over. It just didn't click, I guess I had written Merrivell too long."

And so, after a few years of Dick, the Merrivell series came to an end. After Patten gave it up, two or three others tried to carry on, but without success.

Frank's Long-Lost Brother

Shortly after the Merrivell stories started, Beadle & Adams closed their doors. About the same time, Patten and Arthur Groom, first editor of *Smart Set*, persuaded Street & Smith to give the colossus a birth. And there he continued to recruit the glories of Buffalo Bill, but as ever-dwindling chapters.

In 1904, just before he died, the colossus went up to Patten in Maine.

"How's Little Lord Merrivewther?" he asked.

"Paying a hundred and fifty a week," said Patten. "How's Buffalo Bill?"

"Dead," said the colossus. "Cord," not "Buffalo Bill" in." He sighed. "Gosh, he sounded," something happened to this country. Things aren't what they used to be."

In addition to the Merrivell stories, Patten has written seventy novels of standard length, besides innumerable serials and short stories that were never gathered into book form. The Merrivells, in revised form, are still on sale on the newsstands. He estimates that in his life he has written 40,000,000 words of fiction, or enough to fill eight foot-foot shelves. He is now plain Gilbert Patten, having dropped the Willises because it reminded him of the days when he was called Willie. Oddly enough, although he is easily the country's most popular novelist, you will not find him in Who's Who.

"Did I ever Merrivell?" he says. "Not at first. Those early stories were more of a joke to me than anything else. But when it got so that a half million kids were reading them every week—and I think there were that many, when you stop to think how the stories were lent from hand to hand—I began to realize that I had about the biggest chance to influence the youth of this country that any man ever had. And when you get the messiah complex you are lost. You I loved him. And I loved him most because no boy, if he followed in his tracks, ever did anything that he need be ashamed of."

