

New Mexico Quarterly

Volume 33 | Issue 4

Article 3

1963

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Recommended Citation

Nolan, Paul T.. "J W Crawford's The Dregs." *New Mexico Quarterly* 33, 4 (1963). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol33/iss4/3>

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Paul T. Nolan

J. W. CRAWFORD'S "THE DREGS"

A NEW MEXICO PIONEER IN THE SHORT DRAMA

One spring night in 1963, an audience at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette watched a performance of *The Dregs* by John Wallace Crawford. It was the first performance of the play in almost a half century, and for those in the audience interested only in the content of an art form, *The Dregs* was, at best, an interesting museum piece, a bit of Americana, a prohibition drama in the style of *Ten Nights in a Barroom* and *The Drunkard*, a play that would be wonderful farce if "played straight." For those in the audience interested in dramatic form itself, on the other hand, the "weaknesses" of the play—its melodramatic diction, its trick ending, its stereotyped characterization—were simply elements that obscured, but did not hide, the real theatrical merits of the play. Any thoughtful evaluation of the play suggests that the form that Crawford created for *The Dregs*—like the forms that Odets used in *Waiting for Lefty* and Beckett used for *Krapp's Last Tape*—is one full of artistic possibilities and should be studied as a pioneer form in the short drama.

Crawford himself probably did not understand the possibilities of the form he created. By 1907, when he copyrighted *The Dregs*, he had built a reputation as a "Western poet," calling himself "Captain Jack, the Poet Scout"; and in both his poetry and in his other, conventional, plays, he used his literary talents to create a picture of himself as the "representative man of the West"—brave, adventurous, gentle with women and children, a friend of wild nature, and intolerant of savages, Mormons, cigarettes, dime novels, and draft-dodgers. He was distinguished from the other Western scouts only by the fact that he was a working poet and a professed prohibitionist, two aspects of his career that he worked into almost everything he wrote.

I

Crawford was born in County Donegal, Ireland, on March 4, 1847, the son of John Austin and Susie Wallace Crawford. The father, a Glasgow tailor, had been something of a political revolutionist and had fled Scotland for Ireland to escape arrest "for some seditious utterance." He had met and married Miss Wallace, the daughter of another Scotch exile, in Ireland. The 1840's and '50's were distressing years for Ireland; and to add to the difficulties, the father became a drunkard.¹ In 1854, "to escape from dissolute associates," he came to America, finding work as a coal miner in Minersville, Pennsylvania. The family waited in Ireland for four years; but when it became obvious that Crawford was not going to return, Mrs. Crawford went to Pennsylvania, found her husband, and brought the children to America in 1858. Captain Jack, then eleven years old, found employment in the mines at one dollar and seventy-five cents a week.²

With the outbreak of the Civil War, the elder Crawford enlisted in the Union Army. Captain Jack tried to enlist, but he was twice rejected because of his youth. Finally, before his sixteenth birthday, he was accepted for service in the 48th Pennsylvania Volunteers. At Spottsylvania, on May 12, 1864, he was badly wounded and sent to Saterlee Hospital in West Philadelphia. At this time, he was illiterate; but a Sister of Charity taught him to read and write during his convalescence. Later when he was a public lecturer, he often told the story of writing his first letter to his mother. After recovering from his wounds, he was sent back into action; and, on April 2, 1865, he was again wounded, this time at Petersburg. After his recovery, the war was over and he returned home. A short time later his mother and father died, his mother exacting a deathbed promise from him that he would never touch liquor, another episode that he used often in his public lectures.³

Crawford remained in Pennsylvania for the next five years. In 1869 he was married to Anna Marie Stokes of Numidia, Pennsylvania; and a short time afterward, he went west to the Indian country of the Dakotas. He was variously employed and during the Indian uprisings was named chief of a citizens' group, the Black Hills Rangers. It was with this position that he became known as Captain Jack. Crawford is said to have been one of the first seven men to enter the Black Hills region after the Custer expedition of 1874; and by April 25, 1876, he was well enough established in the area to be listed as a member of the

Board of Trustees of Custer City. During the Sioux War of 1876, he was employed as a scout for the army, serving under Generals Merritt and Crook; and on August 24, 1876, he succeeded William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) as Merritt's chief of scouts.⁴

In the fall of 1876 Buffalo Bill was touring the country with a play, *Life on the Border*, which he alternated with his standard show, *Scouts of the Prairie*. He starred Captain Jack in *Life on the Border*.⁵ Although this experience in show business suited Crawford's ambitions, he was not, as he later wrote to Buffalo Bill, pleased with his treatment as a member of the company. His salary was too low, he complained; and, moreover, he said that Buffalo Bill, while drunk, had seriously wounded him in a reenactment of the Yellow Hand-Buffalo Bill fight and had, moreover, left him stranded and "at death's door" in Virginia City, Nevada.⁶

While recovering from this wound in Virginia City, Crawford collaborated with a Sam Smith, who had written one successful play, *Struck Oil*. The product of this collaboration—*Fonda; Or, The Trapper's Dream*—was taken to San Francisco with Captain Jack in the starring role. Alfred Dampier, a manager of the Theater Royal Melbourne, saw *Fonda* and suggested to Crawford that he bring the play to Australia for a season. It was planned that the cast would include five American Indians, the first to be seen in Australia. Crawford, however, needed five hundred dollars for expenses; so he "thought of the offer of help from the man [Buffalo Bill] who had left him stranded and at death's door. . . ." He wrote to Cody, received assurances that the money was available for him, and made his plans. The money never arrived, however; and Crawford was forced to leave show business for other employment.⁷

He accepted an offer to scout for General Hatch, then warring with the Indians in New Mexico and Arizona. For the next ten years Crawford spent most of his time scouting for the army; but he seems, also, to have started his career as a public lecturer, to have done some prospecting, and to have started some ranching activity. In 1886, he was retired as an army scout and was appointed by Robert Lincoln, "then secretary of war, as a reward for his services to the government,"⁸ custodian of Fort Craig, New Mexico.

For all accounts, it was Mrs. Crawford and their children who took care of the duties at the fort while Captain Jack roamed the country in search of fame and fortune. He maintained a ranch near San Marcial, did some mining in New Mexico and Colorado, and gained some

reputation as a popular lecturer, especially for prohibitionist causes.⁹ In 1898 he went to Alaska for the Gold Rush, but after two unsuccessful years there, he returned to the United States to open a play in San Francisco.¹⁰ Although for the next seventeen years of his life, he maintained a legal residence in New Mexico and dressed the role of the "Western Scout," after his Alaskan adventure, Crawford spent most of his time lecturing, writing, and acting in the Midwest, East, and South. On February 28, 1917, he died in New York, just a month after the death of Buffalo Bill. He is buried in the National Cemetery in Brooklyn.¹¹

II

Although Crawford did not learn to write until he was sixteen years old, once he had learned, he seems to have spent every free moment in his "literary development." As early as 1876, when a Captain James E. Smith¹² met him in the Dakotas, Captain Jack already had a regional reputation for his verses, and some of his prose accounts of the Indian wars had been published in the city newspapers of Chicago and New York. In 1879 he borrowed money to bring out a collection of his verses: *The Poet Scout: A Book of Song and Story*, which proved popular enough to be twice republished, in 1886 and 1891, in enlarged versions. In 1886, too, he had published a second volume of verse, *From Darkness Into Light and Other Poems*. In 1893 appeared yet another volume of verse, *Camp Fire Sparks*; in 1904, a fourth work, *Lariattes*; in 1905, a fifth, *The Broncho Book*; and in 1908, a sixth, *Whar' the Hand o' God Is Seen*.

During these years, too, he wrote more than a hundred short stories and articles for various small publications. In all of this work (and frequently he used the same poem in several different volumes), Crawford argued for the simple rustic life, for the colonization of the West by military rule, for a life of sobriety, free from the taint of cigarettes, dime novels, and liquor. He championed various causes: aid for the veterans and orphans, prohibition, the rights of the miners. His heroes were General Grant, McKinley, Harrison, Teddy Roosevelt, Taft, Wild Bill Hickok, Custer, and Billy the Kid. His villains were Cleveland, Wilson, pacifists, drunkards, formal religionists, Indians who would not be tamed, writers of dime novels. Always, however, the personality of Captain Jack, the Poet Scout, was Crawford's main con-

cern. He was always the real hero—honest, sober, sane, second only to Wild Bill with a gun, second to no one on a horse; and he was always modest.

Crawford thought of himself primarily as a poet, but poetry was for him only a part of the characterization that he was creating—the dialogue of his hero, Captain Jack. The character that he created—a man of giant ego, little tolerance, and great success in all endeavors—is more the result of faulty poetics than of his private character. Crawford wanted fame and fortune; and, although he complained bitterly about the untruthfulness of the dime novelists, his notions of fame and fortune were largely based on the standards found in the dime novels. His plays had for him two responsibilities—to be successful as theater and to popularize the character of Captain Jack; and although he seems to have had little real success with any of them, from his first experience with the theater, he was continually composing and revising his dramas.

After the failure to finance the Australian tour of *Fonda*, he kept the manuscript and revised it with a new title, *California Through Death Valley*, copyrighted in 1879. Under this title, the play seems never to have been produced, but as *The Trapper's Daughter*, it was a starring vehicle for Texas Jack (John B. Omohundro) at the Adelphia Theater in Denver on March 16, 1880.¹³ The character of the scout, the hero of the play, is an idealized portrait of Crawford; and in the only extant copy of the play—the author's copyright manuscript in the Library of Congress—he is called "Jack Crawford," and he is a poet and a scout. In 1888, Crawford copyrighted this play again, this time under the title of *Fonda; or, The Trapper's Dream*.¹⁴

The following year, 1889, he copyrighted another play, *Tat; or Edna, The Veteran's Daughter*, a border drama in four acts. No known copy of this play exists; but another play, *The Mighty Truth; or, In Clouds or Sunshine*, a drama in three acts, copyrighted in 1896, is obviously the same play revised. For this play, Crawford announced that he had the help of James Barton Adams, a Western newspaper man and poet. Crawford said that Barton "did the real literary work on *Tat* while . . . he did the gymnastics and hurdles with an occasional song." Judging from the play and Crawford's poetry, however, Barton's part in the writing of the play was probably more a question of cutting than of writing. As in *Fonda*, Crawford, the Poet Scout, is again the hero; and it is the same character, but a few years older. He tames the wild Indians, saves the pure maiden, and reforms a fellow

scout, Bill Wilde, all the while reciting his poetry and his pathetic tales and teaching the other characters in the play to do the same.

In 1908 Crawford copyrighted his last full-length play, *Colonel Bob: A Western Pastoral*, which he wrote in collaboration with a Marie Madison, who then had written several mildly successful melodramas. Colonel Bob is a characterization of the "mature" Jack Crawford. Crawford was at the time over sixty, and evidently the play was written for him; but the character of Colonel Bob appears to be in his late thirties or early forties. The New Mexico scene—the wild woodland that taught Colonel Bob the lessons of nature and humanity—plays a large part in this drama, as does the Alaskan scene; but in the play, in contrast to the hard facts of Crawford's life, Alaska opens its treasures to the Poet Scout, Colonel Bob.

The year before he copyrighted *Colonel Bob*, in 1907, Crawford had copyrighted *The Dregs*—seemingly the only one-act play he ever wrote. From all existing evidence, he used *The Dregs*, which he subtitled "A Monologue," as a part of his performance on the lecture platform. It is interesting to note, however, that in writing his autobiography for the various volumes of *Who's Who in America*, he listed himself as the author of all his various volumes of poetry, of his short stories, but of only three of his plays: *Fonda*, *Tat*, and *Colonel Bob*. No mention is made of *The Dregs*.

III

The Dregs is the only one of Crawford's works that does not star the Poet Scout. Even when he wrote his poem about the death of General Custer, it is less about Custer than about Crawford. In *The Dregs*, however, he uses materials that had become closely associated with him throughout his career. The final speech of the play, for example, "The Toast to Women," had been included in two of his volumes of poetry and had been one of his favorite pieces for recitation on the platform. But the only character to appear in the play, Frank, is never the person that Crawford saw himself to be, although he may well have been the person that he sometimes unconsciously longed to be—educated, wealthy, a student; and the person he sometimes feared he would become—unsuccessful and a drunkard.

The main action of the drama—the fall of a young man from a fortunate position to disgrace through the evils of alcohol—is admit-

tedly melodramatic. The relentlessness of the fall—in some respects like a Greek tragedy—is weakened by the quick and mountainous load of catastrophes—loss of job, loss of child, loss of wife, loss of self-respect, loss of mind, loss of life. The other characters of the play, although they appear only by inference, are stereotypes: Ted and Jim, the good friends; Bill, the bartender; Mary, the faithful wife; the little boy. The dialogue is that odd mixture of cliché, pretentious rhetoric, and folksiness that makes the most seriously expressed sentiments seem a burlesque of themselves. The ending seems to be a most amateurish attempt to save a “happy ending” from a bad mess at all cost.

In spite of these faults, however, *The Dregs* is a remarkable drama. Crawford, judging from his notes to the actor, had given considerable attention to the working out of the theatrics; and in the space of about fifteen minutes, he makes his characters—not merely Frank, but all the characters who people Frank's dream—come alive. By the intensity of the pacing, Bill, Mary, the members of the crowd, all take on flesh and blood. Like Euripides' *Medea*, we may not believe that they are realistic, but we know they are there. And the dream device, which at first seems merely a convenient way of ending the drama, upon reflection becomes the heart of the play. Unfortunately Frank's dream is not so profound an experience as Tom Wingfield's memory of *The Glass Menagerie*; but this fault is Frank's, not *The Dregs*. The device, itself, is a good one.

Although even the most ardent admirer of Captain Jack Crawford would have to admit to a thousand faults in this play, yet *The Dregs*, for all its faults, is a most interesting theatrical experience, quite unlike anything else written by Crawford and quite unlike anything else in the American theater of its time.

NOTES

1. "Crawford, John Wallace (Captain Jack)," *Dictionary of American Biography*, IV (1930), pp. 522-23.
2. Leigh Irvine, "Biographical Sketch," in *The Poet Scout: A Book of Song and Story*. St. Paul, Minn.: Price-McGill.
3. *Ibid.*, p. xi.
4. *DAB*, IV, pp. 522-23.
5. Henry Blackman Sell and Victor Weybright, *Buffalo Bill and The Wild West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 127-28.
6. Permission to use this letter and other unpublished materials in the Crawford family collection was given to me by Mrs. Buford Richardson, Crawford's great-granddaughter, Socorro, New Mexico. I am grateful to her and to other members of Crawford's family and his friends for considerable aid. I would especially like to acknowledge my debt to Miss Dorothy Virgin, Santa Fe, New Mexico, for countless aids.
7. An unpublished, untitled manuscript in the Crawford family collection. It was written sometime around 1905 and seems to have been an introduction given to Crawford before one of his lectures. The author is unknown.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *DAB*, IV, pp. 522-23.
10. "Captain Jack Is Going: His Play To Be Put On In Frisco," *Dawson Daily News*, June 15, 1900, 1.
11. "Capt. Jack Crawford Dead," *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1917, 11.
12. *A Famous Battery and Its Campaigns, 1861-'64: The Career of Corporal James Tanner in War and Peace, Early Days in the Black Hills with Some Account of Capt. Jack Crawford, The Poet Scout*. Washington: W. H. Lowdermilk & Co., 1892, pp. 218-20.
13. Herschel C. Logan, *Buckskin and Satin: The Life of Texas Jack*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Press, 1950, p. 100.
14. The only extant copies of any of Crawford's plays are those that were submitted by the author for copyright protection. The typed manuscripts of four of these plays are still on file in the Library of Congress: "Fonda; or The Trapper's Dream by J. W. Crawford, New York, D:32709, Nov. 19, 1888"; "The Mighty Truth; or, In Clouds Or Sunshine: A drama in 3 Acts by Capt. Jack Crawford, 90 p., typewritten, San Marcial, N.M., D:2585, Jan. 6, 1896"; "The Dregs: A Monologue, by J. Crawford, 11 p., typed, San Marcial, Mexico [sic], D:11354, Sept. 16, 1907," and "Colonel Bob: A Western Pastoral in 5 Acts, by M. Madison and J. Crawford, 91 p., typed, Chicago, Ill., D:12696, Apr. 7, 1908."

THE DREGS

A MONOLOGUE BY JOHN W. CRAWFORD

The scene is a student's room. There is a mantle L. with an open fireplace in which a fire is smouldering. On the mantle is a picture of a pretty young woman and a glass of water. A round table stands L. C. on which is a half-empty bottle and three wine glasses. Armchair near fireplace and other furniture to make the room appear comfortable and well-to-do. A window upstage shows a snow-covered landscape without. Door L. in F. If possible, a calcium light should be used for effects; and otherwise the whole monologue should be played in an otherwise dark house except where stated that lights should be "turned on full." If calcium is not obtainable, a strong lamp with reflector can be used.

As the scene is disclosed, Frank is discovered at door looking off L., the moonlight shining full on him. Lights of stage on full. (Voices of young men heard singing gradually dying away.)

FRANK. *(Calling after supposed friends.)* Goodnight, boys, see you tomorrow. Goodnight. *(Voices reply and take up singing again, die away in the distance.)*

FRANK. *(Closes door and goes over to fireplace rubbing his hands over the coals and singing to himself.)* "For we are jolly good fellows, Yes, we are jolly good fellows, As nobody can deny." *(Puts hand to his head as if dizzy.)* Whew, I'm dizzy. The cold air and the sudden heat—it isn't good to sit so near the fire. *(Moves back to table.)* But what's cosier than a bottle between friends and a blaze to cheer on a cold winter night like this. Jolly boys, Ted and Jim. Good wholesome fellows. They know how to drink and when to quit. So do I. No danger of becoming a drunkard when a fellow can quit at the right time. *(Takes up his half-filled wine glass.)* Why, they even stepped off with half a glass behind. That shows self control and the gentleman. Well, I'll have a nightcap and go to bed. Here's to your

future lives, Fellows. May you never want for what you've left in the glass. (*Then turns to picture on the mantle.*) And here's to you, sweet Mary, and the day I'll call you mine. I'll drink to you, my other heart, in sparkling ruddy. (*Drinks all that is in the glass.*) How it warms a man. It creeps through the veins like love and warms the heart, though it dulls the brain. (*Sings softly.*) "For we are jolly, good fellows . . ." (*Falls asleep singing.*)

(*Very far away in the distance the voices of the others are heard completely dying away. The scene becomes dark. Lights all out, during which time Frank quickly puts on top coat and evening hat. When calcium is turned on, he is standing in what is apparently a barroom. Scenery of same can be dispensed with, but can be used if procurable.*)

FRANK: (*Addressing supposed companions.*) Hello, Boys, have a drink. Don't go. It's early yet. My wife don't complain. Why should yours? Give me the dice box, Bill. I'll show you how badly I can throw and pay the price of drinks for my folly. (*Throws dice and laughs.*) See? I told you so. A whiskey straight, please. Wine has lost its flavor, and, say, Boys, I was drunk last night. Think of it, I, who boasted I knew when to quit—I was under the table. But my lady never knew it. She thought I was sick, poor girl, and this morning she was worrying about my hollow eyes and pale face. I felt ashamed, and I ought to feel ashamed now, but I couldn't go by somehow. The odor of this place drew me in. I wonder if you fellows know how much the smell of liquor has to do with making a drunkard? I believe if liquor were odorless, it wouldn't be half so hard to pass a rum shop. (*Turns suddenly in surprise.*) Why, little one, what are you doing here? This is no place for a lady. Yes, you're right. It's no place for a gentleman either. Yes, I know. I didn't feel well, and I thought I'd take a little brandy before I came home. Run along. That's a dear girl, Mary. I'll come in a minute. Just as soon as I settle this little bill. Run along, Dear, and wait outside if you like. Run along now. I

(*The light is turned off, and when again turned on, Frank is seen very drunk, feeling in his pockets and speaking to a supposed wife.*)

FRANK. I haven't any money. Don't be a fool, Mary. Don't snivel. I hate tears. It's weak and foolish to cry when it can't be helped.

Well, it can't, I tell you. I didn't get drunk purpously. It was an . . . acci . . . accident. I was cold, and the plashe was warm, and the schtuff went to me head. Hic. I'm sorry, but I'll go an' borrow it if the little fellow's sick. You can't be without money, I know that; an' I love the little one, even if I don't deserve him. Oh, I know I don't, Mary. I don't deserve him or you. I'm a beasht, or I wouldn't have come home like thish. I know it. Don't worry, Kid. I'll do better. Before Heaven, I'll do better. Jusht give me another chance. I'll borrow the money. Wait here. (*Staggers away.*)

Light is turned full off. When again turned on, Frank is L. C. in pleading attitude.

FRANK. Say, Bill, lend me a dollar, will you? The little fellow is sick, and I've spent all my money here. Yes, I lost my job today. That's true, but I'll get it back tomorrow all right. Where did you hear about it? Bad news travels fasht, don't it? Well, never mind: I'll find another plashe if I don't go back to the old one. Jusht lend me a dollar, will you? I need it badly, Bill. Haven't got it? Why, Bill, you've got a drawer full of money there. It's yours. Why I've spent a barrel of money here, but I won't lower myself by begging you for a single cent. Jim will let me have it; don't trouble yourself, Bill. (*Staggers over to R.*) Say, Jim, can't you lend me a dollar? Yes, it has come to this, even though we used to boast we'd never be drunkards. You're drunk now, and we've both been drunk at this table many a time together. So for the sake of old times, lend me a dollar, Jim. Haven't got it? I believe you, Boy, for I know you'd let me have it if you could. (*Turning angrily to C.*) Good heavens, Mary, haven't I told you many a time never to come here after me? I'm not drinking. God help me, I'm begging—begging for you and the boy. Yes, even that. What do you want? What? (*Shrieks.*) What? (*Staggers upstage.*) Bill, Bill, tell me what she said. Did she say my boy was dead? That neither she nor he needs me any longer? Is that what she said, Bill? Can it be true? Mary, Mary, for the love of heaven, wait for me. (*Staggers across to R. C.*) I'm sober as a judge. You needn't turn from me. Tell me the truth, or are you just trying me? The boy isn't dead, is he? He isn't cold and silent. Don't tell me, Mary. Don't tell me those little hands will never lead Papa home again . . . those little lips will never welcome me with

their beautiful smile. Don't tell me I've murdered . . . murdered him, Mary. Yet I have. I've murdered my boy—my beautiful boy. There's nothing to live for now. Yes, there is, Mary. I'll live for you. Listen, Mary, if you'll forgive me, I'll promise never to touch another drop. Yes, I know, I've promised it a hundred times, but I'll keep my word now. You believe me, don't you, Mary? What? You won't give me another chance? You never want to see my face again? Mary, Mary, you don't need me, but I need you, Mary, more than ever. For the sake of the boy, won't you give me another chance? Mary, don't go like that . . . don't go like that. I'll try . . . Mary . . . Mary. . . . God help me now. (*He is overcome with emotion.*)

Lights are turned off and in darkness Frank changes, by turning coat wrong side out. The actor wears a coat which is good on one side and ragged on the other, thus enabling him to make a quick change. In pocket, have a little powdered charcoal, which by dexterous application to face and neck can give a grizzled appearance to character, but this must be practiced so as to know just how to apply it in the dark. Then apply a little cornstarch to hair at the temples. Have a soft tattered hat in pocket also. This change must be made quickly and when the light is again turned on, Frank appears as a fallen sot and speaks in a husky voice. As light is turned on stage, Frank is at extreme R. in darkness and saunters in the full light, as though entering a barroom.

FRANK: Hello, Bill, never expected to see me again, did you? Yes, I know this is a rather tony place for me now, but I found a quarter, and I thought I'd like to spend it here, to try to awaken old dreams with the sight of old faces once more. Give me a whiskey straight—one of the old timers. Say, Bill, what's become of Ted and Jim? Gone to the bad? Ted's reformed, has he? I'm glad of that. He has more sand than I. What, Jim's dead? Poor old Jim. He always went the pace whatever he set out to do. Say, Bill, do you remember the last time I was in here? It's been ten years, but it seems like a hundred. I lost them both that night, Bill, the boy and Mary, for she left me as I deserved, and heaven took the little one away—as I deserved. I haven't heard of her since. (*Looks suddenly to R. in a startled manner.*) Great heaven, Bill, there she is as sure as I'm

alive. That's Mary, and isn't she dressed? She looks like a swell, Bill. I wonder if she'd speak to me. (*He approaches his supposed wife and speaks to her.*)

FRANK: Mary. Mary, I know you, so you needn't turn away. I may be a fallen drunkard, but I've still got a right to ask how you came by such finery, for you were my wife once. You remember that? (*Staggers back.*) Married? Married to another man. And you've forgotten that you ever cared for me. I suppose you've forgotten the boy, too, for maybe you have other children? You have—and you never think of us now? Ah, yes, you think of him, but not of me. I don't blame you. I'm not worth a thought. I never was a good husband, and I hope you have one such as you deserve. God bless you, Mary, I haven't a hard thought of you. Only I might have been a better man if you'd given me another chance when I needed you most. Yes, I know. You were tired of giving me chances. You gave me many, but one more might have won the day, when we lost our boy. But I suppose it wasn't worthwhile. Goodbye. I won't keep you standing here. People will wonder at us; so go on your way and may all the happiness on earth be yours. You are drinking life's cup of happiness where it is sweetest, and I am draining its dregs. It's not likely we'll ever meet again. Goodbye. Goodbye. (*Stands looking off R.*)

FRANK: There she goes, and I almost hated her once because she would not let me wreck her life. Yet she leaves me now with tears in her eyes. God bless her. But they were tears of pity—not regret. Why should she regret? Why should she?

(*Light goes out. In the darkness the actor darkens under the eyes and quickly puts on unkept grey wig. When light is again turned on, he is seen old and broken.*)

FRANK: (*Staggers to C., laughs croakingly.*) Bill, it's me. Somehow, I'm like a bad penny. Give me a drink for old times, Bill. Anything as long as it's strong—anything. Ah. (*Drinks.*) That's like an oasis in the desert of my soul. It's many a day since I tasted such stuff as that. Say, Bill, do you know what brought me here today? I saw her again—Mary, my wife. And I saw the man she's married. I'm glad she left me, Bill, for he's the right kind of man to protect a

woman. I never was. But, Bill, the old loneliness stole around my heart like a hungry hand, clutching and tearing it out of me, and I've come creeping back to the old scenes in hope of finding some crumbs of comfort in their memory. Bill, I don't know, what's been wrong with me, do you? I just think I didn't care. No matter how much I protested I wanted to be better, I think I loved myself more than all the world. And that's why I couldn't reform. A drunkard is the meanest egotist on God's green earth. He starts with an overweening confidence in himself—thinking he has enough self-control to stop when he will, though he drink as he will. Why, he's only dealing out the rope to hang himself. That's why he gets to be a drunkard. And, by and by, he begins to pity himself. And the more he pities himself, the more he loves himself; and the more he loves himself, the more he indulges his appetite. His selfish egotism grows stronger as his manhood wanes. The drunkard is proud of his fall. Don't believe the man who tells you he is ashamed of it, as long as his inebriated state makes him an object of pity or interest to others. Say, Bill, give me another drink? I've got a pain in my heart I don't like. Don't laugh. I have a heart, and it's aching—aching just as hard as a heart can ache if it is aching only for myself. Somehow I can't get the sight of the little one's face from before me today. He seems to haunt me. I see his eyes everywhere. And, Bill, I heard them whispering at the station house when they pulled me in. Someone said I was getting daffy. Do you believe it? I'd rather die than go to the madhouse, Bill, and that's what's in store for me, if I go to the hospital with the horrors much more often. I believe I will die. God help me, I believe I'm dying now. Oh, you can laugh, but if you knew how tight that hand is clutching at my heart and how hard it is for the old thing to beat, you wouldn't wonder. Bill, have you a heart? Dying? What if I am? The world won't miss me. I won't leave a bubble on the surface of its life. Not a soul will care—or see what I might have been, what I might have done in the world with my talents and my chances. God gave me great talents, Bill, and I wasted them as I wasted a sweet woman's love. Now I'm dying like a weak . . . dying (*Laughs hollowly.*) That's a strange thought—dying . . . dying. (*Rubs his eyes.*) See how the light fades and see how the mocking faces grin at me in the shadows. (*Begins to rave.*) See how the clouds lower over me. They are holding back the wild horses. They mean to turn them loose on me. Hold them back, for God's sake, hold them back. Don't you know

they'll trample me to death, you fools. They are coming—coming. See them . . . hundreds . . . aye, thousands. Hear the thunder of their hoofs. See their flaming eyes and see Mary. Mary, where are you? Give me your hand. Save me, save me from all this awful darkness and terror. Save me. Where is my boy? All is darkness. Even my boy is not there, but I hear the horses coming. Hear them? They are coming—coming—the horses of the night

(He falls dead in C. of stage. Light goes out full. Actor discards wig and with a cloth well greased with cold cream or vaseline wipes stains thoroughly from his face, turns coat and throws hat from stage. All lights turned on full show him asleep in his chair before the fire as in the beginning on the monologue.)

FRANK: *(Springing to his feet in terror.)* The horses . . . the horses Stop them. Oh God, Mary . . . Mary hold me . . . hold me . . . I . . . I *(He looks around then wakens thoroughly, but appears dazed.)* Where am I? Merciful heaven be praised. It was a dream. *(Laughs.)* Thank God for that. And Mary *(kisses her photo)*, sweet girl, she wouldn't help me. Oh, I know better than that. She would never let go of me. But after all, what does it mean? Isn't it the truth? Isn't it possible it could be me? Of course, the wine went to me head. And I thought I knew when to stop. There is only one time for me, and that is now and forever.

(Takes bottle by neck in one hand and Mary's photo in the other.)

FRANK: Mary, sweetheart, this pledge is to you. I've drunk my last drop, forever more, amen. *(Breaks the bottle on the hearth and rises addressing the picture.)* Mary, darling Mary, never again shall I drink to your health in that which may send your husband reeling home to abuse whom he should love and cherish. Never again in that which may send a mother's boy to a drunkard's grace and maybe her girl to a life of shame. No, not that, but rather *(takes a glass of water from the table)* in God's life-giving water, pure as her chastity, clear as her intuitions, bright as her smile, sparkling as the laughter of her eyes, strong and sustaining as her love. In the crystal water I will drink to her, that she may remain queen, regent in the empire she has already won, grounded deep as the universe in love,

built up and enthroned in the hearts of the world. I will drink to her, the full-blown flower of creation's morning, of which man is but the bud and blossom—to her, who in childhood clasps our little hands and teaches us the first prayer to the great All-father; who comes to us in youth with good counsel and advice; and who, when our feet go down into the dark shadows, smooths the pillow of death as no other can, to her who is the flower of flowers, the pearl of pearls, God's last, but God's best gift to man—woman—peerless, pure, sweet, royal woman. I drink to your health in God's own beverage—cold, sparkling water.

(Drinks and holds up glass in a toast to the audience.)

CURTAIN

NOTE: This edition of *The Dregs* is based on the typed copyright manuscript (1907) in the Library of Congress; and, except for minor corrections in punctuation and spelling, it follows that manuscript.