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**"THE CONSTANT QUESTION OF FINANCES":
THE ORDEAL OF F. MARION CRAWFORD**

Neal R. Shipley

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst

"I find...Crawford himself—to whom I have fallen a
helpless victim—of the last magnificence."

Henry James to Mrs. Waldo Story
17 June 1899

"If you could see my life from within me for a week,
you would understand what war means..."

F. Marion Crawford to Isabella Stewart Gardner
23 August 1896

To a generation of readers between 1882 and the First World War, F. Marion Crawford epitomized the romantic novelist. In forty-four novels, he consistently presented to his readers a world of idealized characters and romantic plots and settings, a conservative, traditional alternative to the literary innovations of the late nineteenth century. The public responded by making him one of the most successful novelists of his day. Though he never attained the phenomenal sales of one of the "literary fevers" of the 1890s—of Kipling, for instance, or "Ian Maclaren"—he enjoyed several major successes and was, overall, sufficiently popular and respected that he could on occasion be described as America's greatest novelist.¹

Much of the interest in Crawford's novels stemmed from the public's perception of Crawford himself. He appeared to have combined successfully the ordinarily incompatible roles of romantic adventurer and gentleman. It was generally believed that much of the romantic content of his novels derived from incidents and experiences in his own life. He was the trusted friend of Mediterranean peasants and sailors, of Turkish beys and mysterious Orientals, and seemed able to move unobtrusively through any setting, no matter how exotic, invariably possessed of whatever language or patois, philosophy or practical skill, was requisite. It was said that he spoke at least twenty languages like a native and possessed such specialized skills as the best method for defending oneself with a dagger. On the other hand, his life was perfectly respectable: there was never the slightest suggestion of the Bohemianism or the captiousness about society or its institutions that made so many other authors suspect to a middle class readership. He

was an exemplary husband and father and was venerated by his servants. Villa Crawford, his home in Sorrento, where he lived in great state, was one of the best-known literary residences in the world. He dressed conservatively, advanced religion, and was an ornament of the best society in Europe and America. Throughout his career he was praised for the blamelessness of his subject matter and treatment. There was no doubt but that in reading Crawford's novels one was dealing with a gentleman, one who, in his writing, suggested the gifted raconteur discoursing over the port and cigars. To the public, then, Crawford was first and foremost a gentleman, a cosmopolitan aristocrat, whose novels were the by-products of a cultured, leisured, and eminently enviable life.

There was, at the same time, a minority opinion, usually held by authors and critics of a realist point of view, which argued that Crawford's popular readership missed his real significance. His youth in papal Rome, his background of Roman palaces, Sorrentine villas, and storm-wracked Apulian castles, his adventures in India and the Near East, his bold seafaring in his own yacht, all proclaimed Crawford a true romantic in an age of conformity and bourgeois drabness. Henry James, for instance, despised Crawford's novels but was at the same time deeply impressed by their author. Crawford's life, full of color and adventure, was his real achievement.²

The reality of Crawford's life, however, was radically different from that assumed by either admirers or critics. Instead of a life of romance, glamor, and ease, Crawford's was one of sacrifice, pain, and bitter frustration. This he steadfastly concealed from friends and critics and even, so far as was possible, from his family. He revealed the truth only to his publisher, Frederick Macmillan. Their correspondence, which covers twenty-six years, reveals with painful clarity the desperate race Crawford ran against sickness, financial hardship, and disappointment.³

Crawford more or less fell into a literary career. The loss of his mother's fortune in the Panic of 1873 meant that he was obliged to earn his livelihood, a prospect he faced with considerable reluctance. He was considered by friends and relatives, and evidently by himself, to be so richly talented that he needed only to choose how and when to distinguish himself. He briefly edited a newspaper in India, studied languages with vague thoughts of teaching, considered a career in opera, and probably hoped to fashion a career in public life, starting as the protégé of his uncle, Sam Ward, the well-known and popular lobbyist. While waiting for something to turn up, he fell into casual journalism and book reviewing, then gradually, under prodding from his uncle, began to work on a novel based loosely on his experience in India. This novel, published in December 1882 as *Mr. Isaacs: A Tale of Modern India*, had a completely unexpected popular and critical success.

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Critics praised the novel for freshness, for its intellectual content, and for its chaste and pleasing prose. In the United States, Crawford was compared to Bulwer Lytton and Sir Edwin Arnold, while in France he was grouped with Howells, James, and Cable as the hope of American letters. In England, Mrs. Oliphant raised the intriguing possibility that the advent of Crawford might somehow be meant as compensation for the recent losses of Anthony Trollope and Charles Reade.⁴ Virtually every critic agreed that the novel bore signs of the future greatness of its author. Crowning everything, it soon became known that Mr. Gladstone had taken time out from Home Rule and the Eastern Question to read *Mr. Isaacs* and pronounced it "a literary marvel." Equally gratifying, the novel sold 13,000 copies by June 1883 in the United States alone, where it was the best-seller of 1883, and its publisher, Macmillan and Company, was obliged to reprint it nine times in the first year.

By the time *Mr. Isaacs* appeared, Crawford had already finished his second novel and was starting on his third. It certainly looked as though Crawford had found a profession at last, but he did not yet see things that way. In February 1883, he informed his mother that authorship "...is not the one thing I have to do before I die...I must lay my hand to a greater implement than the story teller's pen."⁵ Presumably, he still hoped for a career in politics or public service, or perhaps he considered himself primarily a social or philosophical thinker. In the meantime, however, fiction was convenient, respectable, and profitable.⁶ Novel-writing was something to do until a more satisfactory profession appeared. Until this happened, advances on royalties and the sale of copyrights provided his only income. Crawford's first extant letter to Frederick Macmillan, dated 5 March 1883, concerns terms for his second novel, *Dr. Claudius*. Macmillan paid Crawford £500 for the outright sale of the copyright.⁷

Crawford spent the summer of 1883 in Sorrento, where he bought a *felucca* and sailed the southern coasts of Italy. Mostly, though, he worked. Installed in the *calata* between his hotel and the beach, the reformed idler began his fourth novel on 3 June and, cracking along at the rate of 5000 words a day, finished it on 24 July. His sister observed that he lacked "...the tormenting doubt of self-criticism."⁸ Despite this remarkable industry and much evidence of success, there were clear signs of personal and professional trouble as early as the autumn of 1883. Despite the large advances on his first books, Crawford had already run out of money and attempted to anticipate his royalties from Macmillan and Company. He apologized for this gaffe to Frederick Macmillan, explaining that he was not an "agricultural capitalist" but was, rather, a "market gardener."⁹ Crawford had started his career as an

author broke and a year later, despite the publication of four books, had not caught up. He never did. From the publication of his first novel onward, Crawford lived on the advances of his publisher. These advances were paid, often with considerable reluctance, because of his personal friendship with Frederick Macmillan. In other words, to continue Crawford's own analogy, he was the literary equivalent of a sharecropper. The effect of this rapid output on Crawford's promising reputation was soon detected by critics. As early as January 1884 William Morton Payne, influential literary critic of *The Dial*, observed pointedly that Crawford's fourth novel was not so bad, considering his rate of production. He urged Crawford to resist temptations to cash in on his early success and instead to work to perfect his craft: if he did this, Payne argued, he could hope to rank among major American authors.¹⁰ Crawford could not have followed this advice even if he had wanted to, because when the pages stopped the money stopped. In early 1884, he began a new novel, his fifth. Shortly thereafter, he travelled to Constantinople to court a young American girl and, in addition to his personal interests there, managed to work on his sixth novel and collect material for his seventh.

Crawford's marriage, though clearly a love-match, had the additional benefit of providing him with an apparently wealthy and influential father-in-law, General Hiram Berdan. Through the general, Crawford appeared to have found the alternative career he had been seeking. Crawford informed his family that his future plans would be contingent on the general's. "His affairs are on the gigantic scale that pleases me," Crawford wrote his mother, and there was talk of the young couple settling in New York or Washington, where Crawford would continue to write while he made the transition to some sort of role in General Berdan's vast and lucrative enterprises. This plan soon faded, the young couple settled in Italy instead, and Crawford continued to write. Still, there was the comforting thought that the general's daughter was wealthy—"Bessie has quite a nice little fortune..." American relatives were assured—though for various reasons the fortune was not available at the time. Nevertheless, it was taken for granted that the general was worth millions from his patents and armament deals.¹¹

With his marriage, Crawford entered upon the career of a full-time writer in earnest. Hitherto he had spent only part of each day writing, usually the morning, but after marriage he spent the greater part of every day at his writing desk. He finished his sixth novel in January 1885 and was soon at work on three new novels, including *Saracinesca*, his most ambitious undertaking to date and the first of a series. By May he described himself as "...desperately busy...I get up at 4 a.m. and work all day." In this manner he managed to write a novel in

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twenty-four days, a chapter a day with breaks only on Sunday.¹² He was now earning large amounts of money. In January 1885, he reviewed his sales in England and the United States and, on the basis of these calculations, demanded the impressive price of £2500 from Macmillan's for one year's copyright on a new novel in both countries. "My recent success," he wrote Frederick Macmillan, "and the continued sales of my books make it impossible for me to make such engagements as I formerly was very glad to make." Macmillan eventually bargained him down to £1250 and the following November paid him the same amount for rights to his next novel. In January 1886 Crawford calculated that he would earn £2500 in eighteen months from *Saracinesca* alone, and this was soon improved by an arrangement about American rights. He also wrote a short story and magazine articles and his novels were beginning to appear regularly in translation. He began to sketch a libretto based on his novel *Zoroaster*, at the behest of Gounod, he wrote Macmillan, and there was even talk of an award from the French Academy. Crawford had become a major literary industry.¹³

1887 was probably the high-point of Crawford's adult life. In the spring Frederick Macmillan voluntarily raised his regular royalty from 10% to 15%. "I trust," Crawford wrote him, "that your doing so proves that my books are selling well. I suppose that a few years more will decide whether the sale will be permanent."¹⁴ Later the same year Crawford signaled his personal success as well as the recovery of his family's fortunes by the acquisition of two properties. First, he bought the Villa de Renzis in Sant'Agnello, Sorrento, which he had been renting since 1885. As Villa Crawford, this property was soon to become one of the best-known literary residences in the world and a symbol of the success and respectability of the profession of letters. Shortly afterward, in August, Crawford signed a thirty year lease on the Torre San Niccola, in Apulia, on the Gulf of Policastro. These acquisitions neatly represented the dominant aspects of Crawford's personality. In the villa, he was the rich and cultivated man of the world; here he lived in great state, surrounded by servants, opulent furnishings, and the attentions of the rich and stylish. In Castle San Niccola, on the other hand, he was the lonely, brooding artist, living simply and attended only by a simple, faithful retainer.¹⁵ To this point, descriptions of Crawford still echo those of his childhood and youth: he was strikingly handsome, with a buoyant and cheerful personality, and he radiated power, vitality, and enthusiasm.

The tide turned quickly. Ironically, it was probably the acquisition of Villa Crawford, widely interpreted as the capstone of his success, that ended his halcyon days. To raise capital for the purchase of the villa,

Crawford turned to his publisher. Between March and May 1887 Crawford and Frederick Macmillan negotiated the terms of a contract whereby the former received £4000 in return for the British and colonial rights to several of his novels. On 12 May Crawford, in gratitude, wrote Macmillan that "...my best efforts shall always be at the service of your house" and on 26 July, in the midst of a heat wave, wrote "Thanks to you, I am the fortunate possessor of the coolest house in Italy."¹⁶ On 20 October, however, Crawford was obliged to admit that his most recent book had not had much success as a serial, and a financial statement which arrived shortly afterward from Macmillan's produced a distinct chill. The sales of two of his earlier books had fallen off sooner than expected and Crawford acknowledged that it would be some time before the firm recovered the advances it had made to him. He longed for the sales of a Lew Wallace and despaired at the success of the Reverend E. P. Roe, whose popularity in the United States was at the time the subject of much comment. More immediately, however, he had spent the whole £4000 given him in midsummer and now needed something which would bring an immediate return.¹⁷ He concentrated on the current novel, *Sant'Ilario*, and on 5 January 1888 proposed to sell it outright because of his financial needs. "The price—I speak like a shopkeeper!—would be about three thousand pounds." This was, he admitted, quite a stiff price, but he bolstered his arguments by references to sales of *Saracinesca*. Macmillan balked at the price and on 4 March Crawford sent him the manuscript for consideration, assuring him that, though his handwriting had grown smaller, the book contained 163,308 words, sufficient to make a "very solid three volume book." Macmillan finally accepted the terms, but with obvious reluctance.¹⁸ Failing to recognize the danger signs, Crawford soon brought up the subject of the price for his next novel, *Greifenstein*.

The firm's offer for *Greifenstein*, transmitted by George Macmillan this time, was a rude shock: £1100 for an advance on royalties and for colonial rights. The sudden appearance of George Macmillan, a cousin of Frederick Macmillan and also a partner in the firm, is not explained in the correspondence, but it is clear that he was brought in to play the heavy. Crawford had to be brought down to earth and George Macmillan was appointed to accomplish the task. In a pained response on 23 July, Crawford said that such terms would mean a sacrifice for him; the book had been pronounced "thoroughly German" by a competent critic and would undoubtedly sell well. Frederick Macmillan entered the correspondence at this point, but only to offer his help in placing the manuscript as a magazine serial. Crawford insisted that he wanted the same terms as he had received for *Sant'Ilario*. On 30 August he sent Frederick Macmillan the manuscript for his personal attention,

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but it did not work this time: Macmillan simply offered further advice on writing for serials but held fast to the firm's original offer. Crawford lowered his price to £2000. Macmillan's made a final offer of £1500, which Crawford, without ready alternatives, was obliged to accept. However, in his letter of acceptance, he proposed the sale to Macmillan's of those copyrights still in his hands. This provoked another frank and painful exchange. The firm offered a mere £200 for the remaining copyrights. Crawford was shocked and the firm then backed up its offer by a detailed analysis of his recent sales. "It appears," Crawford replied, "from the statements that you have advanced so much upon the various royalties, that I am not likely to receive anything more from them, and, what is worse, it is to be feared that you will not recover all you have paid. I live too much out of the world to understand the practical side of such things." Despite the clear drift of the discussion, Crawford suggested publication of a collected edition of his works. Macmillan's quietly ignored the idea. Crawford said he would prefer to retain the copyrights at royalty rather than sacrifice them for so little. The following month he telegraphed for the money.¹⁹

By 1889, just as he appeared most successful to outsiders, Crawford entered a period of profound crisis. Between November 1884 and late 1887 he had produced six novels, as well as short stories and articles. Crawford had been producing work so fast that his publisher had to schedule publication dates very carefully to avoid glutting the market, and still he had no financial security. Everything—villa, castles, social position, yacht—all depended on the ceaseless production of saleable pages. Thanks to the equivocal generosity of Frederick Macmillan, he could not even fall back on royalties, since these had been anticipated well in advance and then the copyrights sold. By 1889 Crawford had begun to stretch himself physically—and some said intellectually—as far as he could go, and still he was only barely keeping his head above water financially. It took an iron will to face the writing desk each morning and to know that he must work throughout the day, with scarcely any diversion, and then be obliged to shoulder the same burden the following morning. Between 1889 and 1892 a series of crises profoundly altered Crawford's personality and attitude toward life and work.

For nearly ten years, Crawford continued to hope that General Berdan might one day prove his rescuer. In a letter to Frederick Macmillan in 1888, Crawford alluded to the possibility that he might not have to write for a living much longer. The following year he again said that he might give up writing indefinitely, and in late 1889 to early 1890 actually ceased writing for several months, but asked Macmillan not to announce his retirement just yet. Behind this

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behavior was Crawford's hope of a large settlement for his wife's family in the case of the Berdan Firearms Manufacturing Company *versus* the United States. General Berdan had filed suit against the United States government in 1887 for infringement of two patents he had taken out for improvements in breechloading firearms. The case was complex and highly technical and very large sums of money were involved. Inevitably, the case was drawn out far beyond Crawford's naive hope of a definitive verdict in early 1890. Crawford gaily informed Macmillan in June 1890 that the general stood to gain nearly £200,000 by the suit, the outcome of which Crawford took for granted, but in the meantime he was so desperate for money that he drew repeatedly on Macmillan's drafts before their due date. Judgment in the Berdan case was finally entered in December 1890, but for only \$96,004.36. The decision was immediately cross-appealed to the United States Supreme Court. This was unfortunate. General Berdan dropped dead in Washington in March 1893, whereupon it was revealed that the total assets of the Berdan Firearms Company amounted to \$13.40. There was also, of course, the prospect of a settlement in the case against the government, and the effort of maintaining the suit fell on Crawford. The case dragged on until January 1895, when the Supreme Court affirmed the earlier verdict, leaving the Berdan heirs precisely where they had been five years earlier but with greatly increased legal costs. It is not clear now precisely how this settlement was eventually distributed after costs had been paid, but it is clear that Bessie Berdan Crawford never held any significant personal capital. Her "nice little fortune" was a smoke screen put up by her father.²⁰

More serious than the failure of the Berdan expectations was the failure of Crawford's health. Beginning in 1889, he suffered from fainting fits, stomach cramps, and rapid weight loss—he lost fifty pounds in a brief period in early 1890—despite which he was obliged to work full time. After his brief respite in 1889, Crawford was writing again with his usual industry in early 1890. By May 1890 he had three different manuscripts in preparation. His illness was at first considered a symptom of stress and overwork, but in fact it represented the onset of the disease that plagued Crawford for the rest of his life and caused his premature death. This disease was pulmonary and was usually referred to as asthma by Crawford and others, but Crawford's wife specifically referred to "bacilli" in a letter to Macmillan, and others refer to lung hemorrhages, so tuberculosis is clearly indicated—though he may have had asthma as well. Judging from photographs and contemporary comments, Crawford aged rapidly in the course of the 1890's.²¹

Finally, overshadowing everything else, Crawford and his wife became estranged. We have no evidence about exactly when this

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estrangement began, nor if there was a precipitating incident, but family difficulties may explain his itinerary in 1890. A *de facto* separation was apparent to anyone who cared to notice by 1892, at which point his platonic relationships with Marchesa Theodoli and with Mrs. Isabella Stewart Gardner resumed.²²

In 1892, after about three years of financial worry, ill health, and domestic unhappiness, a radically different Crawford appears. Henceforth he is a bitter, cynical, disillusioned man, obsessed with images of death and futility, weary of life. He felt that he had died in all the ways that mattered, that his continued physical existence was something in the nature of an irrelevant coda to a life that had ended in the early 1890's. When on one occasion Mrs. Gardner reproved him for a slighting reference to an artist's work, he answered that any criticism had been unintentional: "In the realm of the dead the works of men are not much appreciated." In 1898 he wrote to the same correspondent "I feel now as if I were writing after my own death, in a curious, posthumous way...I seem to feel nothing anymore." He was "...a man for whom life holds nothing, and who would readily part with it."²³

Financial pressures and domestic unhappiness induced him to accept the offer of a lecture tour in the United States in 1892. With this tour he began a series of fourteen trans-Atlantic trips, the last of which was made in 1907. From this point onward, he existed only to write. During his visit in 1893-1894, he moved into a relative's house in Washington, D. C., and vowed to complete two full triple-deckers by the end of the year or die in the attempt. It was no idle boast. He was almost continuously at his writing desk daily from 7:30 a.m. till 10:00 p.m. He nibbled on a store of dry provisions which he kept in his room and a servant made coffee when he called for it. "The world is an ink pot," he wrote Mrs. Gardner, "I am the pen and the devil dips me." By November he was writing a chapter a day but was still hard-pressed: one volume was on its way to Boston and the printer within half an hour of its completion. Galley proofs for the first triple-decker had to be corrected as he wrote the second. "An hour's amusement means the loss of an hour, to be made up by writing at night," he told Mrs. Gardner, "It is not gay." Early in the New Year he moved to New York, to his "loft" in the Macmillan building, where he quickly turned out a slight novel set in Bar Harbor and then began another, more substantial novel, his twenty-fifth. Once established in his spartan flat above the Macmillan offices, Crawford did little but write, and everything was arranged to that end. "I live as though I were training for a race and do nothing whatever which could lose me an ounce of energy...I think I should hurt anybody who interrupted me."²⁴ Between 1892 and 1897 he wrote thirteen novels, bringing his total to

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twenty-nine in fifteen years; in addition, he wrote a brief critical study of the novel, a "romantic history" of Constantinople, a book on Bar Harbor, thirteen articles and reviews for American magazines, and began research for two large, popular histories. As always, this tremendous effort was caused by Crawford's insatiable demand for money. It was extremely expensive to be the "Prince of Sorrento," even if the villa sat empty for long stretches at a time. Bessie Crawford and the children maintained a residence in Rome, firmly avoiding the villa during the winter; during the summer, they divided their time between the villa and various resorts and spas in the north of the peninsula. Crawford himself was in the United States much of the time and when in Europe travelled and sailed extensively. The villa, for all its symbolism and expense, actually sat idle much of the year, and was used at best no more often than the average summer home.

By 1889, Crawford was regularly apologizing to Frederick Macmillan for anticipating his royalties and throughout the following decade he continuously, desperately, badgered his publisher for money. In 1893, for example, he apologized for an attempt to "plunder" the firm by explaining "I have been so hard driven of late that details—even important ones—have become confused in my mind...I am in urgent need of funds." In a rare burst of passion, Crawford complained of his many responsibilities, concluding "...being less than half a man, I am expected to be three whole ones and an author into the bargain." Frederick Macmillan was no doubt sympathetic, but he was running a business and had to keep Crawford's advances within some sort of bounds. He advanced only £800 for *The Ralstons* in 1894, though he raised the royalty to 20%, and made the same arrangements for *Casa Braccio* later the same year. The company advanced £1400 for Crawford's next novel, but then fell back to a mere £900, ignoring Crawford's suggestion that it raise the latter advance to £1000 "for the sake of a round number." 1896 was a particularly tight year for Crawford. In the spring of that year he told Frederick Macmillan that he was again "hard up" and by the summer was asking for fresh advances in the form of notes, blaming his difficulties on disappointing sales in America. In August he wrote "My position is urgent and critical in the extreme," and he appealed to Macmillan to help him. At length, the firm, with obvious reluctance, bailed him out with another advance of £1000, to be paid out in four installments. But the following June he was pleading again for more advances. The firm continued to reduce the amount it was willing to advance, offering only £350 for a projected novel in 1898. Crawford ruefully replied that such a sum was "not a very persuasive argument" for writing anything.²⁵

Constant financial pressure forced Crawford into a second, more elaborate speaking tour of the United States in 1897-1898. His

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manager, Colonel J. B. Pond, observed that the first thing Crawford did on tour was carefully to arrange his writing materials. He wrote constantly as he toured the country, writing on pads held on his knees in trains and snatching odd minutes under gas lights while waiting for connections. In Colorado he began to cough, perhaps as the result of visiting a smelter, then had two hemorrhages in one night. He recovered sufficiently to continue the tour but became seriously ill in Oregon. Despite doctors' warnings, he persevered in the lecture tour and finished in Minnesota in April 1898. He later made light of his illness and Colonel Pond announced a couple of years later that Crawford had completely recovered. Crawford's cousin, Maud Howe Elliott, was more accurate when she referred to the contract for the tour as Crawford's death warrant. He had just over a decade to live when he finished the tour and he fought illness and weakness constantly. Despite the effort and terrible cost of the tour, within six months of completing it Crawford was again broke. He had to ask Frederick Macmillan for £1000 "as a personal favor."²⁶

If Crawford had been able to lead a normal life after returning from the United States in 1898, or better yet, the quiet, retired life he craved, he might well have lived a normal life span. But the juggling act he had been performing with increased desperation for fifteen years could not be interrupted or ended; rather, a sense of urgency developed as he realized how frail his health was and how vulnerable his family would be if he failed to provide for their futures. The effect on his own life of his mother's financial reverses must have been constantly before him. Though he discussed finances with Frederick Macmillan, Crawford did not reveal the whole, tangled story even to him and nobody realized the extent to which he had based his life on advances and overdrafts. Consequently, instead of husbanding his strength to the degree compatible with earning an adequate, if reduced, income, Crawford decided to redouble his efforts by writing plays and histories. These were intended to complement, not supplant, his novels: in addition to his histories and plays, Crawford wrote fifteen novels in the last decade of his life. The production of plays and histories, on top of the heavy commitment to writing novels, would have strained the physical resources of a strong man, and quickly depleted the strength of the barely convalescent Crawford. He maintained the effort for five years, until he was no longer physically able to continue, by which time it had become apparent that, despite some successes, the expenditure of mental and physical effort had not paid off in the literal sense. He could probably have earned as much overall if he had concentrated on novels.²⁷ It looks very much as though Crawford decided to burn up his reserves of energy in a furious effort to achieve financial security for his family and one can imagine the bitterness with which he realized

that his gamble had not paid off. He must have realized that he was killing himself, but he had hoped to kill himself to some advantage to his family. The last decade of Crawford's life, when he appeared to the world so glamorous, assured, and fortunate, when he came to be known as "Marion the Magnificent" and "The Prince of Sorrento," was, in fact, a period of desperate struggle. Behind the urbane and elegant façade there was a grimly heroic struggle.

Most novelists dreamed of the financial rewards that could result from the successful dramatization of one of their books. Crawford had considered such a possibility for several years. There had been considerable discussion over the years about the dramatic potential of *Zoroaster*, and there was a flurry of excitement when Abraham Erlanger, the producer of *Ben Hur*, talked about staging it, but nothing came of it. Crawford originally wrote *Marion Darche* as a play for Augustin Daly, but recast it as a novel when Daly refused to stage it. Crawford helped to dramatize his second novel, *Dr. Claudius*, but the resulting production closed after a week's run. In 1899, George C. Tyler, fresh from his extremely lucrative production of Hall Caine's *The Christian*, and Viola Allen, his star, travelled to Italy to discuss with Crawford the possibility of staging one of his works. They eventually agreed on Crawford's current novel, *In Old Madrid*, which Crawford retitled *In the Palace of the King*, and worked on through the autumn. The play premiered in North Adams, Massachusetts, in September 1900 and when revisions were needed Crawford travelled to the United States and toured with the company. Tyler was reminded of Robert Louis Stevenson's long struggle against tuberculosis and said many years later "You didn't realize just how wonderful a person F. Marion Crawford was till you knew how sick he was."²⁸

In the Palace of the King was a success when it finally appeared in New York. Crawford never mentioned profits to anyone and Tyler confined himself to general expressions of euphoria, so there is no way of determining how much the play earned. The success of this play apparently brought Crawford to the attention of Sarah Bernhardt, who asked him in early 1901 for a play. He proposed one on the subject of Francesca da Rimini and, after several months of negotiation, she signed a contract in September 1901. Crawford was swiftly pulled into her vortex. After many uncertainties, the play opened in Paris on 22 April 1902 and was taken to London the following June. By later summer it was clear that the play was a success neither with the public nor with Bernhardt, who came to realize that Crawford's Francesca was an unsympathetic character.²⁹ After this relative disappointment Crawford continued to write for the stage, but mostly without success. He worked on a play for Martin-Harvey, but nothing came of it; Viola Allen asked for material but was so fickle that Bessie Crawford

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proposed throwing her out a window. Other projects were discussed and possibly even completed, but Crawford had only one further play actually produced, at the very end of his life.³⁰

In writing his historical works, Crawford had no intention of attempting conventional academic scholarship. He planned, instead, to produce "romantic" histories which relied on local color and imaginative insight. He began *Ave Roma Immortalis* in August 1896 and planned to finish the following spring but soon found that he had seriously underestimated the work involved. It dragged on past the scheduled completion date and he took the manuscript along on the lecture tour of the United States in 1898, where he worked on it between public appearances and bouts of illness. It was finally finished, a year and a half late, in time for holiday sales in late 1898. It was fairly well received, at least in the United States, but Crawford complained to Frederick Macmillan that he had hurt himself financially by attempting so arduous and complex a work. He got better terms from Macmillan for the book which appeared in 1900 as *The Rulers of the South* and moved on to *Salve Venetia*, which appeared in 1905.

Crawford's greatest hope along the line of serious history, though, was for a biography of Pope Leo XIII. He proposed the topic to Frederick Macmillan in late 1898 and eventually persuaded the very sceptical publisher to accept the idea and to advance him £1000. Crawford agreed to deliver the manuscript either in August 1899 or as soon after the death of the pope, then in his eighty-ninth year, as possible. At first, Crawford moved along swiftly on the project but then, for reasons not clear, let it drop for nearly four years. The pope persisted doggedly in good health, which removed the sense of urgency. The biography came swiftly to the forefront again in the summer of 1903, when the pope became seriously ill. By this point, Crawford had acquired a mysterious collaborator, a man who had access to state documents and purportedly worked daily under the pope's personal supervision. As reports came in from the secret collaborator, Crawford's plans became ever more grandiose. He proposed a "monumental" study of the papacy since 1846, which would include startling revelations. The pope died in July and according to the contract the biography should have been ready in time to catch public interest. Instead, the project began to come apart.

Crawford eventually revealed to a troubled Frederick Macmillan that his mysterious colleague was Count Eduardo Soderini, an important Vatican functionary, though not so important as Crawford had suggested. Count Soderini stubbornly withheld all material from Crawford until early 1904, when he suddenly unleashed a torrent. First Crawford received a manuscript containing 130,000 from the count, then another mass of material arrived, pushing the estimated total to

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750,000, but then an additional 300,000 words came—and all of this dealt only with the opening years of the pontificate of Pius IX, Leo XIII's predecessor. Complications quickly ensued and Crawford began drastically to reinterpret his role. He now referred to himself as merely the translator of Soderini's material. Macmillan's recognized a deteriorating situation when they saw one and began to apply pressure on Crawford, to whom they had long ago given the advance. Crawford, for his part, had long ago received and spent the £1000 in advance money and needed more, but the firm, which had been extraordinarily lenient, could hardly overlook the money. By 1906 Soderini was challenging all contracts and demanding new terms. Signs of megalomania appeared. Crawford, pressed from both sides, was at length obliged to accept the indebtedness and recommend that Macmillan's break off all contact with the count. Crawford predicted, accurately, that Soderini would go on churning out pages for years to come. The Soderini affair was a serious blow to Crawford. He had counted on the prestige and income the biography would bring him and he had invested heavily in the scheme. In the end, all he had to show for his effort was a lien on his royalties.³¹

Meanwhile, the spate of novels continued. By now Crawford had few illusions about their quality. In a letter to the Duchess of Sermoneta he referred to them as "pot-boilers."

The effort involved in these projects was virtually suicidal to a man in Crawford's condition. He began to weaken in the summer of 1903 but travelled as usual to the United States that fall, where he worked on two novels and tried to cope with the problems created by Soderini. When he returned to Europe in April 1904 Bessie Crawford was deeply distressed by his frailty and thought he had been undermined by a winter in New York and by "constant anxiety and disappointments." Despite his weakness, he continued to write. In July 1904 three of his children contracted typhoid and nearly died. Crawford helped nurse them, but when not needed in the sickrooms he wrote. He called writing by now "...a sort of mental intoxication." He made his customary visit to the United States in the autumn of 1904 but suffered a complete collapse on his return to Italy. He was desperately ill until the following spring and the doctors virtually gave him up, despite which he still managed to dictate three or four hours a day to his daughters.³²

During the summer of 1905 Crawford visited Scotland for his health. Even there, though, he worked constantly, revising proofs, translating, and working on two novels simultaneously. His problems were intensifying. His fundamental problem, what he now referred to familiarly as "the usual thing," or "my usual condition," or "the constant question of finances," had been worsened by his illness, by the Soderini fiasco, and by Macmillan's growing caution. Crawford had

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already heavily drawn on future royalties and had nearly died, so by 1905 the company began to protect itself. By September 1905 Crawford was even more than ordinarily hard-pressed for money, but only after his very strong personal appeal to Frederick Macmillan was the firm willing to advance £1000 for work in progress. This time the firm demanded the deposit in London of a coin collection of equal value as security for the advance. As always, the relief was only temporary. By the spring of 1906 Crawford announced his "usual dry condition" and gaily proposed "a shower of gold as a spring cure!" Macmillan did not respond. A month later Crawford wrote plaintively that he had been counting on advances which the firm had declined to make. He told Frederick Macmillan that he was planning another novel set in Rome for the fall because "People always seem to like any Roman nonsense." By May Crawford was "distinctly hard-up" and Macmillan agreed to an advance on the next novel, but only on publication. The firm appears to have decided to give no advances without manuscript in hand but Crawford persisted, writing in November "...if I am not actually in trouble, I am unpleasantly near borrowing." Finally, in early December, the firm relented and sent him an advance of £1000, which was immediately swallowed up. The following January Crawford proclaimed himself "a starving author" to Frederick Macmillan.³³

After his visit to Scotland, Crawford remained in relatively good health for nearly two years. He was soon working at the old pace, constantly churning out manuscript for Macmillan's. The appearance of restored health was only an illusion, however, and Crawford knew it. He had used up his reserves. He was now at the mercy of climate, accident, or casual illness. At the same time, his financial condition steadily deteriorated. In the spring of 1907 his Italian bankers applied pressure on him to repay an overdraft of £1000. He began to propose various schemes for raising money to Frederick Macmillan, such as continuing to publish with his firm in Great Britain but finding another publisher in the United States. Macmillan promptly vetoed that idea and Crawford answered that he had expected such a response. By August 1907 he was in financial trouble once again and asked if Frederick Macmillan could devise any "pleasant fiction" to advance him more money.³⁴

By late 1907 Crawford was again seriously ill, though desperately trying to work on his current novel. In October, his wife reported that she had accomplished the unheard-of feat of keeping her husband from writing for a whole week. Nevertheless, by the end of the month Crawford was able to propose that he and Macmillan "go shares" on the anticipated profits of the play Crawford was working on. By January 1908 he was so weak that he had to be carried upstairs by servants, but he soon recovered sufficiently to request another advance and to

complain that his books were not advertised by Macmillan's, though Edith Wharton's "latest atrocity" was. In the spring he was able to resume work on the current novel and in June signed another contract, calling for an advance of £1000. It was his last contract. In the autumn he fell sick once again and, writing sporadically, slowly declined to his death in April 1909.³⁵

His delicate balancing act collapsed instantly on his death. Bessie Crawford apparently had some inkling of the true state of affairs, because she wrote to Frederick Macmillan about financial matters on Easter Sunday, before her husband was buried, which was out of character. She was already planning to reduce expenses. Crawford, she explained, had refused ever to discuss the family's finances with her, and consequently "I feel...as if I were a poor little ruderless [sic] boat tossed about on a great cruel ocean...I have not the very faintest idea how stand as to the future." She demonstrated how little she knew by asking how much she could expect from her husband's last two books and how much from the previous forty-odd. By the following Monday she had learned a lot. The bank, moving swiftly, had attached her personal capital of 25,000 *lire* to cover her husband's overdraft leaving her with a personal estate of 4,000 *lire*, besides a small life insurance policy in the United States. She had also learned somehow about the advances and the sold copyrights, and she was appalled. "Starvation is what we have before us..." she wrote Macmillan, and asked him to announce in London the sale of Villa Crawford and its furnishings. The library and yacht were to be sold separately. "Is there no money at all that ought to come to me from the 'White Sister' [Crawford's last book] or have you given Marion advanced money on it?" She had already discharged most of the servants. In the meantime she borrowed small amounts from her mother and from a friend.³⁶

Eventually, things eased somewhat for her. Crawford's last play, "The White Sister," was successful and ran until early 1911, and this would have brought something. She was able to keep the villa after all and continued to live on there for some years, but evidently on a much reduced scale.

Crawford's books continued to sell for some time, though precise figures are not available. *Khaled*, published in 1891, finally showed a profit for Macmillan's in 1918, though several, such as *The Ralstons* and *Casa Braccio* never did. There were occasional posthumous honors, such as the request by the Republic of San Marino for a complete set of his works. But probably the best idea of what would have happened to Crawford had he lived is afforded by the experience of H. Rider Haggard, whose career and private life paralleled Crawford's remarkably. Haggard continued to be a popular author up till the First World War. Then there was an inexorable decline in sales and general interest until in

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November 1918 he described himself as the "deadest of dead letters."³⁷ By then, such a phrase described many pre-War authors, including Crawford.

NOTES

¹For the only scholarly account of Crawford's life and work see John Pilkington, Jr., *Francis Marion Crawford* (New York, 1964).

²For James' opinion of Crawford's novels, see Leon Edel, ed. *Henry James Letters* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 3: 27-29. Professor Edel has restored Crawford's name, deleted by Percy Lubbock's earlier edition, thus confirming Professor Pilkington's conjecture. Pilkington, *Crawford*, 204, n.1.

³Crawford's letters to Macmillan and Company are now in the British Library, *Additional Manuscripts* 54935-54938, volumes CL-CLIII.

Frederick Macmillan (1851-1936) became a partner in the firm in 1876. On the incorporation of the business in 1896 he became chairman and served in that capacity until his death. He was knighted in 1909.

⁴*Atlantic Monthly*, 51 (1883), 408-411 [unsigned review by George E. Lathrop]; Th. Bentzon [Mme Blanc], "Les Nouveaux Romanciers américains—F. Marion Crawford," *Review des Deux Mondes*, 15 April 1884, pp. 859-890; Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, "Three Young Novelists," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 136 (1884), 296-316. The other new novelists praised by Mrs. Oliphant—all, like Crawford, "happily above all discussion of sex"—were F. Anstey (Thomas Anstey Guthrie) and J. F. Fergus. See also John Pilkington, Jr., "The Genesis of *Mr. Isaacs*," *UMSE*, o.s. 2 (1961), 29-39.

⁵Harvard University, Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1002).

⁶Crawford told his mother in February 1883 that he might make as much as \$4000 during his first year as an author, but "...it is improbable that such luck can last." Two months later, he raised the figure to \$6000. He told Sam Ward that he had made on *Dr. Claudius* half of what Thackeray had got for *Vanity Fair*. Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1002, 1003, 1006).

⁷British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54935 (1-2). The pound sterling was equivalent to approximately \$4.85 in 1883. Crawford and Macmillan nearly always discussed business in sterling.

⁸Mrs. Winthrop Chanler, *Roman Spring* (Boston, 1934), pp. 151-152.

⁹British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54935 (16-17).

¹⁰*The Dial*, 4 (1884), 229. By September 1885 Payne decided that Crawford had exhausted himself (*The Dial*, 5: 122) and thereafter slated him unmercifully. Th. Bentzon came to the same conclusion at about the same time ("L'esprit les plus inventif doit redouter le succès facile."), *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 August 1885, pp. 654-682. Crawford was never mentioned again in its pages.

¹¹Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1047-1048); Maud Howe Elliott, *My Cousin F. Marion Crawford* (New York, 1934), p. 189. The general promised his daughter \$100,000 if an invention worked out. Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1042).

¹²Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1051, 1057-1058).

¹³British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54935 (27-29, 34-35, 51-52, 58-59).

¹⁴British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54935 (91-92).

¹⁵For the acquisition of the tower, see Mary Crawford Fraser, *Italian Yesterdays* (New York, 1913), 1: 56-58. The tower is described in Crawford's short story "For the Blood is the Life," *Wandering Ghosts* (New York, 1911), pp. 165-194.

¹⁶British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54935 (91-92, 94-95, 99-100, 103, 105-106).

¹⁷British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54935 (118-119). For Roe and his popularity, see Charles H. Sergel, "The Comparative Popularity of Authors," *The Critic*, 27 August 1887, pp. 99-100. Sergel assigned the figure 1000 to the most popular author in his survey, Reverend Roe, and scaled other authors proportionately by their comparative sales. On this scale, Crawford at 41 places just ahead of Robert Louis Stevenson (40).

¹⁸British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54935 (126-129).

¹⁹British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54935 (243-159).

²⁰British Library, *Add. Mss.* (149, 158-163, 175-178). Crawford was not impressed by his close familiarity with the U.S. Congress. "The Senate wrangles and the House jeers, and the Committees are all on their baggy kneed hindlegs...." Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Letter to Mrs. Gardner dated 28 June 1894.

²¹British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54938 (127).

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²²Crawford had fallen in love as a youth with Marchesa Theodoli, born Lily Conrad, an expatriated American. She re-entered his life in 1892, when he and she planned to collaborate on a novel set in early nineteenth century Italy, to be based on her family papers. Through Crawford's intermediation the Marchesa published a novel, *Under Pressure*, with Macmillan in 1892. He was staying with her at her country estate at San Vito Romano when the first copy of the novel arrived. British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54936 (17-18, 33-34, 37-38). Crawford did collaborate with the Duchess of Sermoneta, another confidante. She wrote a short story which was his basis for "The Undesirable Governess." Vittoria Colonna, Duchess of Sermoneta, *Things Past* (New York, 1929), pp. 110-124.

²³Gardner Museum. Letters to Mrs. Gardner dated 9 October 1893 and 2 October 1898.

²⁴Gardner Museum. Letters dated 19 August, 9 October, 16 November, 25 November, 26 November, 28 November, 1893; and undated 1894.

²⁵British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54936 (44-45, 69-70, 90-91, 93-96, 99-100, 105-106, 114-115, 118).

²⁶See J. B. Pond, *Eccentricities of Genius* (New York, 1900), pp. 455-464; Elliott, *Crawford*, pp. 275-276.

²⁷British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54936 (105-106, 119-120).

²⁸George C. Tyler, "Not That It Matters," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 10 February 1934, pp. 16-17.

²⁹Francesca da Rimini was a popular subject at the time. Besides Crawford, Stephen Phillips and Gabriele D'Annunzio also wrote plays on the legend. See the review of all three plays by Edith Wharton, "The Three Francescas," *The North American Review*, 175 (1902), 17-30. She much preferred Crawford's play.

³⁰British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54938 (117-118, 121-123).

³¹British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54936 (*passim*); 54937 (*passim*).

³²British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54937 (47-48); 54938 (133-134).

³³British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54937 (106-116, 134-135, 138-139, 149-150, 175-176); 54938 (5-6).

³⁴British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54938 (11-12, 18-22, 32-33).

³⁵British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54938 (44-46, 63-64, 66-67, 78-80).

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³⁶British Library, *Add. Mss.* 54938 (181-186, 192-193).

³⁷Morton N. Cohen, *Rider Haggard* (New York, 1961), p. 269.