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THREE PLAYS

BY

J.W. (CAPT. JACK) CRAWFORD

An Experiment in Myth-Making

by

PAUL T. NOLAN

University of Southwestern Louisiana



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For
Mrs. Buford Richardson

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**INTRODUCTION:
AN EXPERIMENT IN MYTH-MAKING**



John Wallace (Capt. Jack) Crawford, 1847-1917
(From picture taken about 1908)

I. THE MAKING OF A HERO

I want a hero: an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one

Byron's *Don Juan*

One of the major obsessions of nineteenth-century America, especially during those years following the Civil War, was the making and destroying of heroes. With an insatiability that has made even such excellent studies as Dixon Wecter's *The Hero in America* seem slight and incomplete when measured against the subject, American myth-makers scooped up experience by the shovelful and fashioned of it a Great Man, a creature whose maimed corpse sometimes later served as part of the next shovelful. It was, then as now, an age of rankings – an age of only one first place; and if it were sometimes difficult to make absolute judgments, if one hero could not be destroyed to make way for a new one, separate Valhallas were created for each. Washington was the greatest of presidents, Lincoln the greatest of *modern* presidents, Grant the greatest of *living* presidents.

Each arena of American life was allowed its own champion. In art, there was Whistler; in jesting, there was Twain; in finance, there was Carnegie; in victory, there was Grant; in defeat, there was Lee; in poetry, there was Whitman; in theatre, there was Booth; in science, there was Edison. But, as Dixon Wecter argues, "the cowboy remains to many young Americans the hero par excellence",¹ and the ideal cowboy was not the Texas

¹ *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 347.

drover, but the multi-talented great man of the Wild West.

Every serious candidate for the hero's role had to be something more than merely a successful practitioner of his craft or profession. He had to be a wise man, but simple; a man of the people with a touch of the aristocrat; a man of great accomplishments, yet with a touch of sadness, a burning memory of some tragic loss – an Ann Rutledge, “Wedded to him . . . through separation”; a “lost cause”, but not one “to mourn or keep alive in the thoughts of the children under our training”; a mysterious Creole lady in New Orleans to explain why the “poet of love” never married. And he had to be a poet. It was not necessary that he write poetry, of course, simply that he live it.²

The greatest hero of the West, in the eyes not only of Americans but of the entire world, was Buffalo Bill, William F. Cody. He was, in fact, an exceptional man; but his greatest accomplishment was that – perhaps more than any other American in history – he professionalized the role of the hero and made it his lifetime work. As a public figure he was all things to all men – handsome, daring, a wit, a good fellow, a “possibility for the presidency”, a “genuine war hero” with a Congressional Medal of Honor to prove it (some claim to the title of Colonel and a little more to the title of Honorable), an author, an actor, a friend of the common man, a hobnobber with kings, a protector of women, children, and the dog with a can tied to its tail.³ He was the ideal Western Hero, a pattern for all Americans. If, however, he offered a blueprint for the making of a hero, he was also a challenge. There is room only for one “best”; and whenever the word *West* was involved, he had the title.

His success in capturing the title brought him both detractors and imitators, but perhaps no other American of his time

² Henry and Dana Lee Thomas in their *50 Great Americans* (New York, Doubleday & Company, 1948) give evidence that these standards still prevail. In describing the life of Eugene Victor Debs, for example, they write: “Eugene Debs was a poet. But he didn't write poetry; he lived it” (p. 303).

³ See Henry Blackman Sell and Victor Weybright, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1955) for a well-balanced evaluation of Cody's achievement as a public personality.

worked so long and so hard to dislodge Buffalo Bill and take his place as did John Wallace Crawford, "Capt. Jack, The Poet Scout". Crawford, however, except for minor skirmishes now and then, seldom launched his attacks publicly on the man himself, nor even on the ideal directly. Rather he sought with all the talent at his command, and all he could borrow, to create a counter-Western Hero, much like the Buffalo Bill hero in many of its particulars, yet alien to it in its basic assumptions.

Buffalo Bill, it seems fair to state, is established firmly in American mythology as the central figure of the Wild West Show, a new kind of drama that anticipated the motion pictures to bring the moving image of the frontier to urban audiences around the world. He and his show were the wild man and his environment "caged" for safe viewing. Crawford, on the other hand, used the conventional forms to bring the viewer to the frontier, stopping the action so that one could see and hear the "heroic" under the rags and noise. Cody is always riding by at breakneck speed; Crawford sits by the campfire. If Cody achieved the greater popular success (and there can be little doubt that he did), Crawford gave the more detailed study, made his hero in a more consistent pattern, left a fuller record of one idea of what the Western Hero was to his age – a man of heroic deeds and modest claims, large talk and petty quibbles, spoken hopes and silent fears, action-filled performances and amazing pretensions.

Crawford's hero has little of the heroic splendor of Buffalo Bill's taking "The first scalp for Custer!" He has none of the flamboyant humor of Buffalo Bill's introducing European royalty to the joys of brushing one's teeth with rye whisky. But if the Crawford hero is less attractive, less dashing, even less charitable, he is, at the same time, a more realistic human being, in spite of his pretensions. He is more nearly a reflection of the virtues and vices of mortal men, the raw materials from which heroes are made. Buffalo Bill was born in a dime novel and modified to fit the events in the life of William F. Cody. Captain Jack was an attempt to view the events in the life of John W. Crawford in an heroic manner.

Cody used the "Wild West Show" and the dime novel. Crawford used the lecture platform, didactic poetry and prose, and the nineteenth-century heroic drama to create his image of the Western Hero. It is principally in the three plays that make up this edition that one may see the most complete picture of the Crawford hero, for in his drama Crawford created a hero who was not only an actor, but a poet and lecturer as well. These plays, until recently lost and forgotten in the copyright files of the Library of Congress,⁴ were never published and achieved but little popularity when they were performed on the stage, and they have, until now, never been examined as a "biography" of the Crawford hero. Even a superficial reading of them, however, reveals that the central figure – Jack Crawford, Jack Wallace, Colonel Bob Danforth – is intended as a most serious attempt to create the Crawford hero, the Poet-Hero of the West.

1

The Crawford hero is introduced in the first play as a young scout and hunter, Jack Crawford. He is, in some superficial aspects, a kind of Manfred – a man of great personal powers and wide learning – but he has not yet "suffered", and he certainly has never committed any sin. In fact, there is something boyish, something simple, even innocent, about the young scout of the hills that suggests that Crawford must have had some difficulty in playing the role in later years. Crawford, the man and the actor, saw himself as appearing younger than his years. He was, however, almost thirty when the play was first produced, and he was still playing the role in his fifties. The Crawford hero of *Fonda*, however, is more nearly a Jack Harkaway wearing white ducks in the Black Hills or a Frank Merriwell on vacation from Yale than he is a wild, untutored son of nature, already past the first bloom of youth.

It is true that Crawford, the character, describes himself as

⁴ For a discussion of the present state of these manuscripts, see my article, "Research Projects Waiting: The Forgotten Dramas of Provincial America", *Western Speech*, XXVII (Summer, 1963), 142–50.

a "careless wanderer", calls the wilderness his home, and claims the "lonely mountains" as his "abiding place". It is true, too, that from the scant evidence of the play, we are able to deduce that he has been a hunter of the hills for some time. He has built a close friendship with Bill Williams, who after thirty years in the mountains has become almost a stranger to civilized man; and it is suggested that such a close relationship could be possible only after many shared experiences. He has hunted buffalo; he has cut his way "through a gang of yelping Indians"; he has tackled an "old bar with nothin'" but his hunting knife.

He has, moreover, had sufficient exposure to the lonely life of the mountain man to recognize that "home" is a place, as Bill Williams reminds him, "whar the wild flowers grow and whar leetle birds will come and sing for you". He has found in the wilderness a place of contentment, and he can ask rhetorically, "... where can it [contentment] be so fully enjoyed as amid the wild grandeur of the great Western Plains?"

If, however, Crawford, the Young Scout of the Hills, is a free soul, a careless wanderer in the wilderness, he is also a product of a conventional educational system. In contrast to most of the other characters in the play, Crawford speaks a formal English. His description of "a true Mormon" – "a treacherous, licentious villain . . . [whose] doctrines [may] spread and flourish until they become a power and a might" – puts him at the feet of Dr. Samuel Johnson, not in nature's classroom.

He is not only a poet, but he lives by the rules of rhyme and, like a Walt Whitman, seems to promise that one night spent with him will teach the secret of all poetry. He not only leads the pioneers to safety, but he also calls them to order for a "regular old country hoedown". He teaches songs to Baby, "the pet of the train". His influence on John Henry is such that John Henry catches poetry from him as "a boy catches measles"; and although John Henry's poetry, even in the judgment of the other characters in the play, is not the sort that a good teacher should desire, we are made aware that Crawford, the Young Scout of the Hills, does teach those about him to feel poetically. Even in the midst of danger, in his hand-to-hand fight

with the Indian, Piute Sam, the Young Scout, like Cyrano de Bergerac, must overcome his foe to a tune that rhymes: "Before you can crow at my overthrow, / Now at it we go, giving blow for blow." He is, finally, a man ready for civilization. He leaves the mountains happily for "this new land", in which he "will find hearts full of love and human sympathy . . . the new peaceful life". The Young Scout is no Huck Finn in revolt against civilization.

Jack Crawford's virtues are assumed in *Fonda*. It is his "nature to assist anyone who needs a friend". All women are safe with him because of the love that he bears his "mother in Heaven"; and they may be sure of his protection because he swears on his mother's "pure name". He is beloved by children; Baby gathers "a nice little bunch of flowers for Captain Jack" because he is "her sweetheart". He is a friend of animals; his horse, Antelope, is famed for its beauty and is an evidence of his good care. He is courageous and of good cheer, much given to laughter, especially in the face of danger. He is patriotic, having faith in the future of this "great Western nation". He is ready for the age of invention; he can, for example, explain the mysteries of the daguerreotype to old Bill Williams. He is kind. Fonda, in fact, describes him as "most kind and good", a true friend. Even his enemies, the Mormons, recognize him as a man of great courage, "a daredevil".

For all of his virtues and talents, however, his wants are fairly simple. He wishes a peaceful home and a girl with simple, wholesome tastes – a child of the Kentucky mountains, a "trapper's daughter". She is, however, like Jack, also capable of speaking in formal English. The Crawford hero in *Fonda* is totally unaware of either great fortune or fame. He is unknown except to his friends, and even a simple homestead with the pioneers is an improvement in his standard of living.

2

In *The Mighty Truth*; or, *In Clouds or Sunshine*, the Crawford hero, at least mechanically, appears to be more a creation by

the playwright and less "simple autobiography". He is, at least, called Jack Wallace, rather than Jack Crawford. He is, however, in most respects, merely the Young Scout grown a few years older, a few experiences wiser, a bit better known. He is still Captain Jack, and now the title suggests not mere affection but also authority. He is a "government scout" in the Black Hills, the foe of the renegade white and the savage Indian, one of the advance soldiers in the "building of this great Western nation". In other respects, the Crawford hero in *The Mighty Truth* has become more particularized, and there is more attempt made to create a national hero out of him.

Jack Crawford, the hero of *Fonda*, is, in the main, shown only in broad strokes. He has the conventional virtues — strength, kindness, courage; and he has the conventional biases — anti-Mormon and anti-Indian, biases he holds with somewhat less force than do the lesser characters. Jack Wallace is in no way a denial of Jack Crawford, of course; and in some respects, he is merely an expanded version. In this expansion, however, as Crawford becomes Wallace, a change occurs that amounts almost to a different characterization.

Wallace's diction, for example, is not so consistently formal as is Crawford's. The hero of *The Mighty Truth* sprinkles his conversation with *ain't's*, *kinder's*, *reckon's*, and *durn's*. It can, also, be as formal — in its "flights of rhetoric" — as anything in *Fonda*. Wallace, for example, cautions against a show of force by Bill Wilde and his men in these terms: "An unwise show might cause a bloody war, and war to us on the frontier means death and devastation." On the one hand, the lapses in Wallace's diction seem to be partly explained in terms of his family background. Crawford, everything in *Fonda* suggests, has had a formal education. The hero of *The Mighty Truth*, however, knows two childhoods. "Back in the sunrise country", he had a happy childhood. Then his father became "a slave to rum", and he knew "want and poverty". There is here a faint suggestion of the myth of the "fallen aristocrat", a type of nineteenth-century hero best exemplified by Robert E. Lee;⁵ but there is a stronger

⁵ See Wecter's chapter, "Lee: The Aristocrat as Hero", in *The Hero in*

suggestion of the Horatio Alger hero of *Making His Way, Shifting for Himself*, or *Julius, the Street Boy*. In Edna's story of being "the sole support of her aged and crippled father", one can see by Wallace's response that she is describing a situation which he knows first hand. Wallace's mixture of diction reflects his "natural nobility", his years of "want and poverty", and the success of his hard struggle in "making his way".

In another way, this mixture of diction is less an indication of his past years than of Wallace's broad poetic talents. He speaks the language of all men – both the formally educated and the simple children of nature. He can, when occasion demands, don a disguise and speak the language of a drunken trooper, Corporal Bill of Company D, even though Wallace is a professed and outspoken prohibitionist. The role of the hero as poet is even more pronounced in *The Mighty Truth* than in *Fonda*, for now the Crawford hero is not merely a poet by reputation. We see him in action, and it is entirely consistent that the final curtain should fall on Wallace as he recites his original poem, "Chip's God".

Wallace's physical powers – in contrast to Crawford's which were used mainly for the sheer joy of conflict, for the killing of a "bar" – now have a social purpose. He is not a free hunter of the hills, but he has governmental obligations to Fort Laramie. He has, we are informed by Bill Wilde, rescued the Wilson family and "on many occasions has taken chances in his noble unselfish efforts to aid those in danger . . .". He is quick to offer not only his gun, but also his heart. He adopts the young boy Ed, and when Ed proves to be the beautiful Edna, he has heart enough to love her, too. The Colonel recognizes that Wallace is a "brave and noble" warrior, but he is also aware that Jack possesses such a "great, big heart" that he stands in danger of being betrayed by it. He is, of course, an excellent gunfighter, fast and accurate; but greater than his skill is his devotion. He has, Bill Wilde proclaims, "genuine Western grit".

America, pp. 273–306, for a discussion of this aspect of American hero worship.

Wallace has, on the one hand, those qualities associated with General Custer and Buffalo Bill. He too, for example, is known to the Indians as "Long Hair", and he is feared by them as a "great warrior". This kinship with the "famous Indian fighters" is emphasized by his christening his horse "Custer".

He has, on the other hand, qualities unclaimed – and probably undesired – by the other scouts. He is a professed prohibitionist, a man who can by his "pathetic tales" bring even the wildest of Western men to take the "Murphy pledge". He is more conventionally patriotic, a "member of that patriotic order"; and his choices are frequently directed by organizational associations. In *Fonda*, the Crawford hero is a friend to "those in need". In *The Mighty Truth*, he is friend to those who have in any way shared in the war: "No dead comrade's child shall know want and suffering as long as I am able to lift a hand to ward it off." He recognizes that his appeal to organizational patriotism has deeper claims than those to humanity itself. When the Colonel cautions him against charity to the young, homeless boy, Jack informs the Colonel that this boy is no mere waif. He is the child of a former comrade in arms, and the Colonel bows before his reasoning. He is, however, not a Confederate-hater. The Civil War is of less concern to him for its purpose – the freeing of the slaves or the saving of the Union – than as an experience. Those who fought in the war, and their families, have a bond of friendship not to be shared with those who were not part of that experience. Wallace is, finally, distinguished from the other Western heroes in his total disregard for wealth. He knows that Bill Wilde and his men are growing rich with their mining, but he gives no indication that he sets any value on this wealth.

If the hero of *The Mighty Truth* suggests that he had less opportunity for formal study than does the hero of *Fonda*, he is still something of a scholar. In this respect the Crawford hero is closer to the tradition now kept alive by the hero of the television series, *Have Gun, Will Travel*, than to the tradition of Buffalo Bill, who frequently poked fun at his own "literary labors" and who considered himself less a "poet of the West"

than a "teller of tall tales" in the Davy Crockett tradition. Jack Wallace, for example, knows the ways of civilization and can instruct the young mountain girl, Tat, that the town word for *trading post* is *store*, and he knows the mysteries of the bustle. He converses easily with the college-trained Chip and with the Colonel. He is aware, too, of the march of social progress, and he explains the woman suffrage movement to Bill Wilde. He has, however, become a little more conservative. In *Fonda*, he applauds the women who demand their rights to be heard and defends the right of the former slave, the "Black Republican", to vote. In *The Mighty Truth*, however, he views the suffrage movement in Wyoming as a threat to the *status quo*, as an attempt to overthrow established authority: "... the women have all the rights of men and want more."

Like the hero of *Fonda*, however, Wallace seems to desire only an opportunity to live simply and to serve. He seemingly will make his residence in Cheyenne, a growing town with a bright future; but there is no suggestion that he has changed his view that "the trail to the wild, free life" is the one that "the true scout loves so well". Edna, however, is a more sophisticated bride than Fonda. She is city-bred and has traveled through such large cities as Chicago and Omaha, apparently with some skill. She is, moreover, a kind of Horatio Alger figure. She knows how to work, and in her work – because of her beauty and natural merit – she attracts the unwanted attentions of the mill owner's son. Wallace does not strive for fame and fortune; but if both should come, he will have a bride prepared to preside at the tea table.

3

The West of *Colonel Bob* is no longer the new frontier, the land of movement, the land of the future. It has, in fact, become a retreat from the rest of the world. It is more comfortable, and less dangerous, than the new frontier, Alaska; it is less a jungle than the old civilization, the East. The Crawford hero, now promoted from *Captain Jack* to *Colonel Bob*, has become a fully

matured man; and this growth has come because of his accomplishments and because of his sorrows, which have made of him a hero, equally fit to lead in the wilderness or in civilization.

The description of the Crawford hero is given in the *dramatis personae*: "a typical Western man who has grown up with the country and been nicknamed Colonel Bob through recognition of his services as a leader of men in the community". He is, however, more than a man of the West; his career embodies the plan of salvation for the East as well. He is the "whole American".

Colonel Bob gives the most complete account of the Crawford hero to be found in any of the works. As a boy he lost both his parents, "learned his letters" at the newsboys' home, employed this education to read "cheap stories", was corrupted by his reading and influenced to leave the newsboys' home (and boot-blackening as well) and go West to "scalp Injuns an' be a great man".

The West remains throughout this play as the "great cure" — the means of salvation for body, mind, and soul; however, the "corruption" of this image in the dime novels and the Wild West show is destroying youth. The Eastern boy, yearning for the freedom of the Western desperadoes, finds that they "are not heroes. They are just common thieves and rascals." The West is merely wild nature, a remove from civilization, that has proved the downfall of many a "romantic youth",⁶ unless that experience is guided. In *Fonda*, the guide is the old mountain man, Bill Williams; but in *Colonel Bob*, the only real guide is

⁶ At the same time Crawford was writing *Colonel Bob*, he also wrote a romanticized account, "How I Met Billy the Kid", a typed copy of which is owned by Mrs. Buford Richardson, Socorro, N. M. According to this account, Billy the Kid charged Crawford to tell the story of his "down-fall": "Captain Jack", said Billy, "I'm awful, awful bad, but if I'd a know'd you five years ago I'd never been an outlaw. You're the only man I've ever know'd as made me feel as if I was talkin' to my girl and made me feel womanish. I want you to do me a favor. When I'm gone tell the boys — tell 'em like you talked to me an' they'll believe you! Tell 'em cigarettes was my starter, then hard cider, then a little wine given to me by a girl and then bad books and then whiskey. Tell the boys and tell 'em I asked you to afore they killed me."

the good woman, the Mother. Even Colonel Bob, himself, cannot redeem his friend, Jim.

Colonel Bob, when he ran away from the newsboys' home to seek adventure in the West, found such a guide in a "big-hearted woman [who] took" him in hand "and got all the nonsense out of" him. He was a "young seed" and with the proper gardener, the Mother, and the proper soil, the West, he grew to splendid manhood and achieved the mystic gift of seeing "the hand of God" in all things.

In both *Fonda* and *The Mighty Truth*, the Crawford hero gives suggestions that he knew the advantages of a "cultured home" before tragedy struck; however, in *Colonel Bob*, it is quite clear that the hero is a self-made man.⁷ He is already a full-grown hero in all the conventional terms, and his reputation is not limited merely to this Western community. He has, because the newspapers "got in the habit" of writing about him, become almost a national shrine; and his mere association with a stock company attracts "big money" and "important men". He is, moreover, not merely a man of action; he is, also, the great reformer. He saves Jim's life at the risk of his own life, dragging "him out of brawls"; and he has "spent a small fortune to sober him up and keep him sober".

Above all else, however, he is the great philosopher, the natural wise man who reads the will of God in all matters. He understands the relationship of nature to God and art to nature, and in all matters, "... where God isn't to be seen Bob doesn't care to go, even in fancy". Although he admits that "deep" poetry is, perhaps, beyond his understanding, in truth he recognizes that such poetry is beneath his concern, for it has substituted artifice for heart. He has had little formal education; but even those who intend to dupe him are aware "... he's not unlearned".

Colonel Bob's basic understanding of primary experiences –

⁷ John G. Scorer wrote an introduction for Crawford's *Lariattes: A Book of Poems and Recitations* (Sigourney, Iowa, William A. Bell, 1904), in which he proclaimed: "Captain Crawford is a self-made man, and he has no reason to feel ashamed of the job. In gleaning for the golden grains of knowledge in the great field of education, he never had the assistance of school teacher or a school book" (p. 5).

his poor youth in the city and his growth to manhood in the wilderness – and his “vision of God” make it possible for him to understand the proper relationship between labor and capital. Unlike the Crawford hero of the first two plays, Colonel Bob is concerned with “gold”. But “I don’t think it’s right for a man to take a million out of a hole in the ground because he happens to be the legal owner and have the man who’s diggin’ it out for him almost starving”. When wealth comes to him, he is generous with his friends; but beyond these immediate personal uses, he sees in wealth only the means of “forgetting” his tragic loss.

Any sense of “tragic loss” in Jack Crawford or Jack Wallace is little more than an immediate fear that they are to lose a loved one through separation. Crawford fears to lose either Bill Williams or Fonda; Wallace fears to lose either Ed or Edna. They suffer a good deal in contemplation, but since the audience is aware that neither is to experience any of the losses about which he is apprehensive, the “suffering” is really an exercise in humanity, an evidence that the Crawford hero can suffer manfully if he ever needs to do so. Colonel Bob, however, has had losses. His wife deserted him and took his young son, Davy, from him. These losses, he tells all, are profound, making his “heart ache with the old raspin’ pain”, filling his life with an abiding sense of loneliness. Both alone and in company, he often has “the blues real bad”. He has wounds that never heal, “the kind that bleed and bleed in spite of all you kin do”.

Colonel Bob’s “tragic loss” is, however, not merely the loss of his wife and child. He has been in pain for many years because of the loss of his boy, but when they are reunited, he places his son in boarding school and goes to Europe to forget another loss, the loss of Helen. There will be, we are assured, always a “tragic loss”. With the conclusion of the play, for example, both his son and the woman he loves are restored to him; but as the curtain falls, the death of his first wife, although she was unfaithful, gives him a new source of “tragic loss”, and only his belief in God can ease the pain. He is less a Manfred, for he has never sinned, than he is a Prometheus, suffering for mankind.

As factual biography, the three plays have some differences in the life story of the Crawford hero, differences that would almost make it appear that the hero of *Fonda* and the hero of *Colonel Bob* are basically different characters. These differences, however, seem to be less the result of a change in the playwright's attitude about the nature of the Crawford hero than the simple result of two basic necessities. Colonel Bob is still a young man, but he is older than the young hero of *Fonda*. It must be remembered that Crawford wrote these plays to be performed by himself, and he was almost thirty when he created the character of Jack Crawford for *Fonda*; he was almost sixty when he created the character of Colonel Bob. The West, moreover, had changed in these years. In Crawford's early years, the frontier was a promise of an opportunity to "grow up with the country"; but by the turn of the century, it had become a chance to "grow rich with the nation". These two basic changes in the man and his environment account for the differences in the details of the background of the Crawford hero, but in all three plays, the basic assumptions made in the creation of the Crawford hero remain the same.

The Crawford hero is by nature a regal person, "a prince of men".⁸ Everything in him suggests he possesses royal blood, but that he has been, by circumstances, denied the privileges of his birth. He has made his way up in the world by service to others; and, although he is a man among men, a hunter, a scout, a great warrior, his principal service is always a moral one. He gives "sermons" on art, society, child-rearing, education, language,

⁸ Among the Crawford papers owned by Mrs. Richardson is a typed copy of an introduction given of Crawford by Flavius Brobst, "before an immense audience, at the Citronelle Chautauqua, Alabama, on March 28th, 1905". Brobst spoke of Crawford's claims to be a "prince of men". "I would introduce him as a prince", Brobst said, "But what I have seen and known of princes of the blood in foreign lands compels me to shrink from the thought of introducing this man with such a polluted title. I would introduce him as a royal fellow — a king, but when I recall that, of the many kings I have seen, only one there was that I would touch my hat to, such degraded characters were they, that I cannot find it in my heart to address him by that besmirched title. I will cordially introduce him by a grand title. I introduce this man as one of the manliest of men whom I have met on both sides of the globe."

style. Those who listen to him – all children, brave men, and worthy women – profit from his teaching. He makes of them poets and painters; he saves them from prison and a drunkard's grave. He has, moreover, charity even for those who defy him. He saves the Mormons from a hanging they justly deserve; he saves a dishonest Wall Street promotor from jail. The source of his strength is courage and a pure heart, buttressed by the memory of a "pure woman", his natural mother or a foster mother. He falls in love with a speed that would damn Romeo as a laggard, but his love is largely platonic, a product of his need to protect rather than of any urge to possess. It is of significance that the only woman that the Crawford hero marries, Millie, is unfaithful.

The Crawford hero makes it clear that he is no Buffalo Bill. Colonel Bob refuses to "tote around a lot of Indians" and call himself "a wild west show". He wishes the newspapers would stop writing about him. He views the glorification of the "Western hero" in the dime novel as a crime against truth, a betrayal of the innocent. He knows the haunting loneliness of a Manfred, but he never sins. He has the stoic courage of a Robert E. Lee, but he is never on the losing side. He has the mastery of a General Grant, but he is never duped and never drunk. He has the good humor of a Mark Twain, but he is never aware of his own absurdity. He is a man who could be a "social lion" in the East, a conqueror in the West, an educator of the ignorant, a reformer of the unsophisticated. And above all else, he is humble, modest, and unassuming – a man whose accomplishments speak for themselves, a man who neither needs, nor wants, a press agent. He is all of the American heroes of the nineteenth century rolled into one, but without a fault, without even a minor vice. He never does a mean thing, never says a foolish word. It is, perhaps, Crawford's failure to provide his hero with a flaw that accounts for the fact that the Crawford Hero is less a man than a robot and that, especially in *The Mighty Truth* and *Colonel Bob*, he is offensive in his virtues. When the Crawford hero is viewed in the context of his author's life, however, the failure is understandable.

II. THE RAW MATERIALS OF LIFE

In life he finds nothing insignificant; all tells for destiny and character; nothing that God made is contemptible . . . Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material.

William Dean Howells,
Criticism and Fiction

Colonel Bob as a critic of art applies the literary principles of Howells to all art. The artist must show life as it appears to be – the New Mexican scene needs the burro; but the artist must also show in everything he creates “the hand of God”. The artist could, of course, select the most meaningful details, but the total picture must be recognizable, and it must communicate to its audience a sense of the worth of the subject.

John Wallace Crawford as an artist had a single purpose – to translate his life into an artwork. In truth, he had rich material for either the realist or the romanticist. His life is the “American experiment” in brief. Born in Ireland, the son of a Scottish political refugee, he came to America as a child, worked in the coal mines, fought in the Civil War, moved West to fight the Indians and build an empire, and returned to the East to “preach” the lessons of life. He was an immigrant from Europe, a volunteer in war, an empire-builder in the West, an adventurer in Alaska, a performer and educator in the Middle West, East, and South.¹ He was a “voice of old Scotland” the “poet scout of the West”, a “hobnobber” with the “best people”, an actor,

¹ Both *The Dictionary of American Biography* and the various volumes of *Who's Who in America*, from 1899 to 1917, contain short accounts of his life.

a philosopher, lecturer, and prohibitionist, a voice crying in the wilderness against the un-American influences threatening the manliness and security of the nation.

In all of his "creative work" – in his poetry, his prose tales, his lectures, his plays – he has but one hero and one experience – that hero's response to his environment. In spite of the fact that he spoke on subjects in terms of his own experiences, he neglected great chunks of his life, left years with only a slight comment. In the main outlines, the Crawford hero in these three plays has a history that closely parallels the private life of the author. In important details, however, the Crawford hero is not merely the autobiographical image of its creator. He hides his creator as often as he reveals him. For better or for worse, the Crawford hero is John Wallace Crawford as he would have been and as he wanted his public to see him.

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In the "Preface" to his first book of poems, *The Poet Scout: A Book of Song and Story*, Crawford told his readers, "I have never figured as a hero of fiction or dime novels, and have refused to allow my name to be used in connection with that kind of literature; hence I come to you with my 'Poet Scout' in a measure unheralded."² Following this "Preface", a "Biographical Sketch" of Crawford by Leigh Irvine appears, an account undoubtedly sanctioned by Crawford himself.

"Captain Crawford's character is unique, and his life is full of incident",³ Irvine begins his sketch; but in the description of the incidents, much is omitted. Irvine, for example, gives almost a full page to Crawford's "genealogy", but almost nothing of Crawford's experiences as a child in famine-ridden Ireland.

² *The Poet Scout: A Book of Song and Story* "by Captain Jack Crawford" was first published in 1879, but the "Preface" does not appear until the 1886 issue (published by Funk & Wagnalls, New York). All citations from *The Poet Scout* are taken from the 1886 edition, unless otherwise noted (p. i).

³ "Biographical Sketch", p. vii.