

out a story in his mind from beginning to end, plot, conversation and all, before he put his pen to paper. Mr. Crawford replied:

"My method of working is somewhat the same, though I do not go as far as the wording of the novel or the conversation. I know how the story is to end, however, before it begins, and the hardest work of the novel is generally done when I begin to write. I first study out the plot and outline the chapters and situations, often sitting for a day at my desk with my pen in hand and accomplishing practically nothing. I make the outline as complete as possible, writing out the heads of chapters, arranging the climaxes and constructing in short a skeleton of the novel. I then begin to write and work along steadily as far as I can, according to my schedule, until the book is completed. Of course, I have sometimes to change from the first outline, but not much."

"Have you regular habits of work?" I asked.

"Not particularly so," replied Mr. Crawford, "save that I work all the time. I rise very early, have a cup of coffee, and I write steadily along until lunch time. Then, after a slight rest, I write on until dinner. I find that I do some of my best work when I write rapidly, and after outlining the novel, I wish to push my work as far as possible until it is completed."

"How about the conversations in your stories, Mr. Crawford; do you remember the good things you hear, or does the conversation come to you in the natural development of your characters?"

"The individuality of my characters is of the greatest importance to me in my writing," replied Mr. Crawford. "I take no notes of anything, but I know my characters. They are real persons to me when I am writing about them and I actually seem to hear them talking in my ears as I write. If they were not real to me I could not tell their story, nor make them talk naturally. It is a curious thing, however, that in writing these conversations sentences occur to me that will aid me in the development of the latter part of the story. I reserve these for the advance chapters and put them down where they naturally come in."

"I suppose you think of your characters often when you are not writing; do they live with you?"

"Yes; this is especially so with the characters of my Italian stories, as, for instance, Saracinesca and Corona. I know just what they would say or do under certain circumstances, and I often think of them and with them."

"You have written a great many novels, Mr. Crawford, I should think your work would grow easier for you as you write?"

"In some respects it does," replied Mr. Crawford, "in other respects not. As far as the mere machinery of the work is concerned, it is much easier and I can write faster, but as far as my sense of proportion is concerned, it is harder. I find that I am in danger of making my stories too sensational and I have to guard against being too effusive. You see, I have been writing now for a long time. I wrote 'Mr. Isaacs' thirteen years ago, and have written altogether twenty-eight novels."

"Still, Mr. Crawford, you are only about forty. You are just at the begin-

ning of your prime. Some of the greatest of our novelists have done their best work after that age."

"Yes," was the reply, Thackeray wrote 'Vanity Fair' after he was forty. Walter Scott did not begin the Waverley novels until he was forty-two. But you must remember that Scott had written the most of his poems before that and Thackeray had been dabbling in all kinds of writing. But think what a capital those men had in their past experiences as a basis for their stories. This is a great thing for a novelist at the beginning of his writing. You must not, however, understand me as trying to pose as a great novelist. I am not. I have only written a few stories which some of the people are kind enough to like."

"I think you are too modest, by a great deal, Mr. Crawford," said I. You have a strong hold on a vast number of people, and many of your novels will last."

"I don't know," replied Mr. Crawford.

"When did you first realize you could write stories?" I asked.

"It was when I wrote 'Mr. Isaacs,' my first novel. I had then been writing for seven years and had done nearly every kind of literary work except fiction. I did not think I could write fiction. I did not believe that I had enough imagination. It was my uncle, Sam Ward, who urged me to try it."

"How did your success affect you?"

"It was, of course, a great pleasure," was the reply. "I began at once to feel the change, and within three months my life was modeled on a different basis. After writing 'Mr. Isaacs' and before it was published, I had written Dr. Cladius doing it in the intervals of my other work. As soon as 'Mr. Isaacs' appeared the editor of the Atlantic Monthly made me a good offer to write a serial for him. I wrote it, and I have been writing fiction from that day to this."

"A great many people, Mr. Crawford, notably college professors, think that there is some secret purpose contained in every book, some mission which the author is trying to further. What is your end in novel writing?"

"It is that of most literary men," was the reply. "It is to interest and to amuse in order that I may make money out of it. I write novels because it pays me to write them, and because it is my mode of making a living. I have no great lessons to teach, nor moral ends to further. Novels written for such purposes seldom succeed. A man might be able to write one such story, but not many. It requires a peculiar nature to write a great novel of that kind, such, for instance, as that of Abraham Lincoln. Had he been a novel writer he could, from the outcome of his soul, have made a great moral novel."

"Speaking of morality in novels, Mr. Crawford, why is it there is such a difference between the English school of novelists and those of the French and Italian?"

"It is largely because of the difference in the people and in the standards after which the stories are modeled. All English and American stories are written as though they were to be read by but one person, and that is the young girl. Nothing that she should not know is put into them, and if anything of a different nature is admitted it must be so clothed that she will not understand its immoral tendencies, and that the married person

can only see the truth by reading between the lines. The Italian and the French novels are written for the married women, and not for the girl. It might be better for our fiction if we had two classes of novels—one for the girl and the other for the married people. I have often thought of it, but there is no way in which it could be done. Were this country Russia the books might all pass through the hands of a censor who could stamp the great red letter 'A' like that on the breast of Hester Prynne, in the 'Scarlet Letter,' upon their backs and provide that such books should not be sold to girls nor be read by them. But no! it would even then be impossible to prevent their falling into the girls' hands. The more they were forbidden, the more they would be anxious to get them; and you know enough about American girls to know that they would get them, too."

"How about Zola's novels, what do you think of them?"

"I am fond of Zola," replied Mr. Crawford. "His books are very strong. There are about twenty-five bad pages in each one of them that might be cut out, and I think these could be cut out without hurting the stories. Zola never paints vice in bright colors, and with him sin is never attractive."

"Speaking of America," Mr. Crawford, "is this a good field for novel writing? Is not life too slow here?"

"I think not," replied Mr. Crawford. "American life is as full of exciting situations and interesting characters as any on the globe. We are, next to the English, the most sentimental people of the world. We far surpass the Latin races, such as the Spanish, French and Italian, in this regard."

"And yet, Mr. Crawford, these are the races in which the flame of love is supposed to burn the brightest?"

"The flame among them is oftener that of passion than of love. Love in its highest form is, I believe, found among us and the English."

"You have spent the great part of your life abroad, Mr. Crawford, is it a good thing for an American to live long away from his country?"

"I don't think it has hurt my Americanism if that is what you mean," replied Mr. Crawford. "You have to get away from America now and then to see what big things and great things our country and our people are. I am proud of my Americanism, and though I was born in Italy I am an American in every sense of the word."

"Do you think the great American novel has yet been written?"

"No, I do not," replied Mr. Crawford. "You cannot name one, I venture, which you would call by that title. When such a novel appears it will stand out above all others. It will, I suppose, come in time. It will hardly be produced in New York or New England. These are not the centers of Americanism. It will probably be written by a man from the middle west."

Frank G. Carpenter

WEST VIRGINIA CONFERENCE.

CHATLETTEBURG, Ky.,  
January 27, 1896.

We are laboring in Boyd county at present and enjoying the hospitality of Kentucky's sons and daughters, while