STEPHEN CRANE

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

EXTENDED ANNOTATED EDITION

The Red Badge of Courage

An Episode of the American Civil War

Stephen Crane

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Stephen Crane – A Biographical Sketch

By Thomas L. Raymond

Stephen Crane is a name which suggests a Newarker as strongly as any name can. One of the seven men who represented Newark in a boundary settlement, with some men from Elizabeth, on a hill out in Weequahic Park, was Jasper Crane, who was one of the founders of Newark, two hundred and fifty-five years ago, and whose farm came to the southwest corner of Broad and Market streets. One of his descendants, Stephen Crane, was a member of the Continental Congress and had four sons who were soldiers in the Revolution. From Jasper Crane and Stephen Crane was descended our Stephen Crane, who also won fame, but not the sort his ancestors had, for he won his in the world of letters, as a great artist of his craft.

His father, the Reverend Jonathan Townley Crane, D.D., was born in Connecticut Farms and later moved to Newark. He became a Methodist, — his family had been Presbyterians, I fancy, until his generation,— and was Pastor of the Central Methodist Church on Market Street, and later Presiding Elder of the Methodist Conference for Newark. His wife was Mary Helen Peck, and both were strong in intellect, writers, he of theology, she, after his death, for the "New York Tribune." It was in Newark, at 14 Mulberry Place, that Stephen Crane, whose memory we honor tonight, was born on November 1,1871. The simple red brick three-story house still stands there, a ghost of the dear old Newark of the seventies and eighties, when its streets were quiet and shady and its life serene. To realize that such a life as Crane's came from such a house and such surroundings requires some forcing of the imagination. He was the youngest of fourteen children, and it is evident that the family supply of theology and religious

piety had run out before this last Crane was born, for he does not seem a likely heir of such ancestors. He was taken from Newark in 1874, when his father, in the itinerancy of his ministry, was called elsewhere.

The Cranes moved from Newark to Bloomington, which is across the Raritan River from Bound Brook, where they lived for two years. Stephen's brother Edmund tells some amusing stories of him in his early years. The boys, of whom there were seven in the family at this time, used to go down to the river to swim, taking Stevie with them. He says: "We often took Stevie bathing with us in the Raritan River about half a mile above the bridge. There was a smooth, sandy bar extending from the south bank across the river, very shallow near the shore and growing deeper toward the middle of the river. Stevie would wade in the shallows watched by one of us. Wading breast deep in water he would stretch out his arms and waving his hands, would achieve what he called 'fimming.' He started to 'fim' to 'Wee-wee' (Willie), my next older brother, who was farther out in the river. As the depth gradually increased the water came up to his chin, then to his mouth, and then to his eyes, but he kept steadily on, and I plucked him out, gasping but unscared, just as his yellow hair was going under. We boys were naturally delighted with his grit."

From Bloomington the family removed to Paterson and two years later to Port Jervis, where Stephen first went to school. He was eight years old before beginning school. Because of his delicate health he had not been sent to school before this and it seems his parents had not attempted to teach him in any formal way; but his mind was active and bright and he soon passed from class to class until he was studying in classes with children older than himself. In 1880 his father died and his mother took the family to Newark, where they lived for a short while in

the Roseville section, then went to live again in Port Jervis. About two years later they removed to Asbury Park, where Townley Crane, an older brother, was in charge of a news bureau for the "New York Herald" and "Sun" and the "Philadelphia Press." Stephen attended school in Asbury Park, and in 1888 we find him reporting "Shore News" as an aid to his brother Townley. Mrs. Crane at this time was reporting the religious news of Ocean Grove. Townley's connection with the "Tribune" was terminated abruptly in the fall of 1888 through a very amusing incident. It seems that young Stephen reported a parade of a certain patriotic order in Asbury Park in the summer of 1892, but in his report of it, he gave full play to his sense of humor and "made a burlesque of the whole performance," ridiculing the marchers, their clothes, and the way they marched. The order was growing very strong in numbers and influence at this time, and the Republicans were anxious to obtain their votes for Harrison and Reid, who were that year running for President and Vice-President. The story Crane had written was approved by William J. Devereux, who was in charge of the news bureau because of Townley's absence, without careful reading. Thinking it of little importance, he sent it on and it duly appeared the next morning in print. It caused great indignation among the men of the order in the State of New York, and in fact everywhere, and since Whitelaw Reid was the editor of the "Tribune" and Republican candidate for Vice-President, it turned them against the ticket.

The state, the vote of which decided the election, was carried by Cleveland by about a thousand votes, and so it has been said that Crane made Cleveland President of the United States. This is Mr. Devereux's account of the incident, and it appeared contemporaneously, I believe, in the "Trenton Times." Others tell of a parade of labor men upon which Crane's comments were equally unwelcome,

but in which he treated the subject from another point of view, that of the social psychologist, and we are left to choose between the two accounts. Both stories relate to the same incident, however, but Billy Devereux's is far more colorful.

The process of educating Stephen Crane was never completed in the academic sense. It is said that he went to Pennington Seminary, then to the Hudson River Institute at Claverack, New York, a military school, then to Lafayette College in 1890, where he remained but two terms, then to Syracuse University, which he left after one year, in 1891. Though endowed with a fine mind and a penetrating intelligence, he was a poor scholar; bad in his English, fond of going out of nights and smoking a pipe; not a hard worker; unreasonably often absent from his classes, a possible cause of the abrupt termination of his stay at Lafayette; but "a good fellow," considerate, gentle, though ready to use his fists in a good cause with effect when necessary; a baseball player, and a good one. Finally, we are told that while at college he spent what time he could in typesetting rooms of local newspapers, and that this very elementary stage in literature inspired him with the desire to write. One more item of interest about his college days: he read a great deal, but out of his courses, and into late hours of the night. This is the picture of Stephen Crane at school and college which I gather from the many sources of information placed in my hands. It is a probable picture, and his later life gives no contradiction to the truth of it. It is very interesting also. Genius cannot be harnessed; the school of genius is unorganized and undisciplined, and we cannot but feel that all through these years, no doubt vastly irksome to him, he had his eye on his goal, he knew what he was about; consciously or unconsciously he was fitting himself for his remarkable career.

On leaving college he was fated, however, to find himself in a far more bitter school — the school of poverty and disappointment, of fruitless effort and failure of recognition; a school in which he paid with hunger for the printing of his first book; in which he once said: "I would give my future literary career for twenty-three dollars in cash at this minute." After leaving college he sought work without success on some New York newspaper, toiling through Park Row, upstairs and downstairs, from one editor's office to another; but was obliged to take a position in a mercantile house, which he soon gave up. He went through all the poverty and privation in these days that one must know who determines to live his own life and express his own soul, but at last was employed by the "Tribune," on the staff of which he worked for over a year. Crane later joined the staff of the "Newark Morning Times," a journal whose short career will be recalled by some of us old grayheads. He worked for the "Times" a short while for $10 a week and then returned to New York City. Here he lived a life of great poverty, writing special articles for Sunday newspapers and doing any writing he could to make a living.

He came to know the men who were then prominent in the literary circle of New York —Richard Watson Gilder, Hamlin Garland, Thomas Masson, Edward Townsend, and others. He investigated the life of the East Side and of the slums. The urge of art was strong in him and he wrote his first novel, "Maggie, a Girl of the Streets," a story of a sordid family of the slums, for which he unsuccessfully tried to find a publisher. Eventually it was privately printed and published under the pseudonym of Johnstone Smith, and came to the notice of William Dean Howells, who recognized at once the genius of its author. From this time Howells was his friend, encouraging him, helping him, and giving him his start. Then came the book that proved the

turning-point in his career, bringing him from obscurity into full light as a writer of great force and imagination, "The Red Badge of Courage," published by Appleton in 1895, after first appearing in a Philadelphia newspaper. "The Black Riders and Other Lines" followed, published by Copeland and Day in Boston in 1895 in beautiful form, a choice little book which I predict collectors will seize upon. This was followed by "George's Mother" (1896); "The Little Regiment and Other Episodes of the American Civil War" (1896); "The Third Violet" (1897); "The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure" (1898); "The Monster" (1899); "Whilomville Stories" (1900); "Wounds in the Rain" (1900); "Great Battles of the World" (1901); "The O'Ruddy" (1903), which at his death was unfinished and was completed by his friend Robert Barr.

Upon these books the judgment of Stephen Crane as an artist must be based. It is, I think, a rich product for so short a life. It is apparent that writing books in New York City, lover of action and adventure that he was, had made him restless, and no doubt Crane gladly seized the opportunity to go to Cuba, where the uprising that led to the Spanish-American War was well under way. In the fall of 1896 he was engaged as correspondent for the "New York Journal." Having determined upon this adventure, he was obliged to await the secret sailing of the filibustering ship that was to take him to Cuba. Receiving sudden notice of its time of departure, and having no opportunity to arrange his private affairs, he wrote his brother hasty directions for their disposition in case of his death, which he evidently anticipated as a likely result of his enterprise. The steamer was wrecked off the Florida coast, and for several days and nights he and three others of the crew were tossed about on "the abrupt waves," as he calls them. He tells his story in "The Open Boat," and splendid reading it is! They were at last rescued, dragged up on the beach,

one of them dead, after Crane and one of the others had done all the rowing, taking their turns at rest in the wet bottom of the storm-tossed little boat. This fearful experience must have injured his health permanently; still he did not give up his intention of going on to Cuba but waited around to find other means of getting there. After futile efforts, he writes his brother in March, 1897: "I have been for over a month among the swamps further South [of Jacksonville], wading miserably to and fro in an attempt to avoid our darned U. S. navy. It can't be done. I am through trying. I have changed all my plans and am going to Crete."

He was not yet weary of adventure. The Graeco-Turkish war had broken out, and before resting up from one terrible experience he was rushing to another, planning to go to the scene of war in Crete as correspondent of the "New York Journal." Apparently he went to Crete by way of England. This was his first visit to England, and it was here in all likelihood that he was engaged as field correspondent of the "Westminster Gazette." When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, he was back in New York, and the spirit of adventure took him off" again to Cuba as war correspondent of the "New York Journal" and the "New York World." He was at Guantanamo, Santiago, and Havana and in Porto Rico. He was mentioned in official dispatches for gallantry under fire with the marines near Guantanamo. Did he leave Cuba after the war by way of Mexico? It is merely a surmise of mine that he did, because some of his stories in "The Open Boat and Other Tales" indicate an intimate acquaintance with Mexico City, the Mexican plains, and Mexican life generally. He certainly knows the American bar in Mexico City, the adobe hut, the Mexican peasant, the Mexican sky and night. He knows his Texas also, and in all probability he came back to New York leisurely through Mexico and Texas, filling his mind on the way with those impressions, sharp of outline and rich in

color, of what he saw and heard, of which he has written so beautifully in many short stories. I especially recall "The Bride comes to Yellow Sky,""The Five White Mice," "One Dash—Horses" as fine glimpses of life in Mexico and in Texas.

Though I have not seen any of his articles as war correspondent, several of the admirers of his literary work express the opinion that he made a great mistake in attempting to do other than imaginative writing. He was evidently not a success at journalistic writing at any time in his career. Unhappily it was the hardships of the sort of journalistic work he had chosen that injured his health and laid the foundation for tuberculosis which developed later and brought his young and remarkable life to an all too early close. He had tasted of the sweets of life in England on his first visit there in 1897, and the lure seems to have called him back after his return from the war in Cuba. He had friends there; he was understood and appreciated by the best minds in literature; English life appealed to him, and no doubt his shattered health was a further motive in his determination to live in England. No wonder he felt the spell of England when we find he had such friends there as Joseph Conrad, H.G. Wells, and Ford Madox Hueffer. Each has written of him since his death in the highest appreciation of his art, and it is apparent that his personality was extremely attractive to each apart from his art. There are charming little personal touches of reminiscence in these few, too few, pages that these men have written. Conrad says: "My wife and I like best to remember him riding to meet us at the gate of the Park at Brede. Born master of his sincere impressions, he was also born horseman. He never appeared so happy or so much to advantage as on the back of a horse.... Those who have read his little tale 'Horses' and the story of 'The Open Boat,' in the volume of that name, know with what fine

understanding he loved horses and the sea. And his passage on this earth was like that of a horseman riding swiftly in the dawn of a day fated to be short and without sunshine." These words are from one of the most eminent men of letters of today, and one considered by many the greatest living novelist in the English language. When he went to England with his wife, whom he had married in 1898, and whose maiden name was Cora Taylor, they lived at first in a little house in Limpsfield, in Surrey, a short way out of London.

When I was in England in 1912 I spent most of my time in London, making trips to Oxford and Canterbury but otherwise seeing little of England. It is a curious coincidence, however, that I did spend several days in Limpsfield visiting some friends. It is but a short trip from London, but the little place is a charming example of an ancient English town, in the midst of English country, with its narrow winding principal street through the centre densely lined with very old and very diminutive houses, with casement windows of diamond paned leaded glass. At the head of the street is the thirteenth century parish church crumbling in its Gothic beauty, and outside the town is the great stretch of "common grounds" inevitable in an English village. There are, off from the main street, some beautiful houses, old and new, with their charming gardens and stately trees, and altogether one can hardly imagine a more delightful place for a writer to be in. I did not see the house in which Crane lived, but we have a vivid picture of him in those days from the pen of that fine writer, brave soldier, and generous friend and critic of young artists and young movements, Ford Madox Hueffer, in his recently published "Thus to Revisit." He was placed in a wonderful environment here for a young man of letters. Joseph Conrad and Hueffer lived nearby; a few miles away was the great Henry James, himself an American by birth; and I

have a most delightful memory of a Mr. Pye and his interesting wife and daughters, who had one of those charming places off the main street, and whose wonderful house and garden have been an inspiration for me ever since. They were the friends of Rupert Brooke, Charles Ricketts, Robert Bridges, Sturge Moore, and many others of those finest intellects in England, and were no doubt typical of the residents of the place. This will give some idea of the environment in which Crane found himself in Limpsfield.

The literary crowd in England sought Crane out and made much of him, and evidently took him to their hearts at the same time rendering full appreciation of his genius; nevertheless he had very hard sledding, incurred large debts, and was greatly worried about his future; but he lived the wild kind of life he loved, sitting around in his shirt sleeves, wearing riding breeches and leggings with a great Colt in his belt, and roaming over the country on what Hueffer calls "a great coach horse." Hueffer was visiting at his house one evening, awaiting with his wife his return from London. When Crane arrived he announced that he had received a commission to write anything he was moved to at twenty pounds for a thousand words. He radiated gladness that night, and proceeded to rent an abandoned and unrestored Elizabethan manor house, called Brede Place. There he lived the life of a Tudor baron of the sixteenth century. The floors were covered with rushes, and bones were thrown from the table to be gnawed by the stray dogs and lost cats that filled the house. Hosts of miscellaneous guests partook of the bizarre hospitality of its master, who sat upstairs in a little room over the front porch writing to earn the money to support it all. This is Hueffer's picture. Meanwhile a dread disease was sapping away his life, and finally he went to the Black Forest in Germany in the vain hope of recovery; but his

hardships and exposure in the wars had too deeply marked him, and he died at Badenweiler on June 5, 1900. He is buried in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Thus passed from this world in his thirtieth year one who in a short life had made for his name a permanent place in English literature. The Newark-born boy had strayed far from home in thought as well as in deed. His legend is in the making. I have tried to gather all the fragments of information together and make a consecutive story of them, but have been obliged to resort freely to conjecture. No attempt seems to have been made to write his biography, and such facts as I have been able to make use of have been gathered through the enterprise and interest of Professor Max Herzberg, Mr. William Hamilton Osborne and others, who have most kindly placed at my disposal the results of their efforts.

Crane was a lovable fellow, inspiring affection in all who knew him, every one calling him "Stevie," "dear Stevie," "poor Stevie"; he was careless of his material affairs; he liked the active life—horseback riding, baseball playing; he was fond of the sea, of horses, of guns; he loved adventure, free living, and outdoor life; and he was brave, indeed he wore his own red badge of courage. He was short and slight of figure, his hair light, his eyes blue, and his complexion swarthy—the ensemble was handsome. He lived the life of privation, of poverty, and of adventure so typical of genius; he preferred independence to comfort, and an interesting life to a dull and prosperous one, that he might express himself and have his say. He was quiet and thoughtful in manner but brilliant in conversation, adopting the rough speech of the street though quite capable on occasion of using the splendid English of the classics.

The East Side of New York and the life of the very poor, the gangster, the woman of the streets, the bartender of the slums, the Mexican greaser, the Texas cowboy, the ordinary sailor,—these were an open book to him and the material for his art. He mastered their manners and their speech, and could think in their terms. Yet he knew letters! One cannot read him without feeling that He knew English and French literature. He had studied Flaubert, Maupassant, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Henry James. He used "the most economical forms,"—to quote Hueffer again, a phrase that I like,— wrote forcibly and simply; he was a master of words, and hated extra words and digressions, as well as both rhyme and formal meter. In short, he had a method and knew what he was doing.

In this he is rare. In this he was, unconsciously probably, one of the founders of a school. We must recall that he wrote in the famous nineties, was of the nineties, and was in England during the nineties. This was one of the most marvelous periods of flowering that the arts have known; a great renaissance in writing and the graphic arts was under way, and an English critic like Hueffer can place Crane beside Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and William H. Hudson as the pioneers of a new method of writing English fiction, a method in which effect was not to be gained by sensational plot, by rhetorical descriptions, by padding out the story, by unnecessary words and lines, but one in which "the most economical of forms" was used, in which truth was aimed at, in which the effect came from reality rather than from artificial means. And yet such writing is all art. The highest craftsmanship is required. The effects appearing so simple on the page are far from being arrived at as simply as it would seem.

"The Black Riders and Other Lines" is one of the earliest volumes of so-called free verse, though the mighty

Whitman, of course, had begun to use it fifty years before. I look upon "The Black Riders "as a momentous book in English verse, and it was in this and in the free verse of Hueffer that the splendid modern school of Ezra Pound, T. S. Elliot, and others had its source.

Hear this poem:

In Heaven,
Some little blades of grass
Stood before God.
"What did you do?"
Then all save one of the little blades
Began eagerly to relate
The merits of their lives.
This one stayed a small way behind,
Ashamed.
Presently, God said,
"And what did you do?"
The little blade answered,
"Oh, my Lord,
"Memory is bitter to me,
"For if ever I did good deeds,
"I know not of them."
Then God, in all his splendor,
Arose from his throne.
"Oh, best little blade of grass!" he said.
This is another:

There were many who went in huddled procession,
They knew not whither;
But, at any rate, success or calamity,
Would attend all in equality.
There was one who sought a new road.
He went into direful thickets,
And ultimately he died thus, alone;

But they said he had courage.

So much for the form of his verse; its substance is that of a gentle, generous, but blindingly true and sharp view of this complicated life of ours and its problems; it is the attitude of one who says," We know not good nor evil"; of the divine One who said, "Judge not that ye be not judged." It is the pitiless picture of us as we are in our own hearts and in our own souls as contrasted with the agreeable and smug portrait we draw of ourselves to make our lives easier.

"The Red Badge of Courage" is an amazing book. Written by one who had never seen or smelled the smoke of battle, he lives for us again the life of a young soldier boy from a farm in New York State, in his late teens, who goes out to war gaily enough, but who is subjected to months of inaction in camp. What troubles him under the tension of camp life is how he will act under fire when fire comes. He is not at all sure of himself, but dares not confess to his comrades. He tries in vain to find some similar emotion in his fellow soldiers. He stands bravely, if unconsciously so, the first violent impact of war. The enemy retreats; he and the other troops relax, relieved immensely; but no sooner have they thrown their weary bodies on the ground than the enemy is seen coming toward them again. Many run away in panic and he with them. Crane lives the life of this boy, who later wins glory on the field, and for four days—the action of the book is but four days—we know him as we know ourselves or better. It is magnificent writing: no word is wasted, we can skip no page, we must follow this mind as long as the mirror is upheld for us. This book must take its place and will among the great books of English literature.

Confucius once said: "In the beginning of my relations with men I heard their words, and I believed their actions conformed to them. Now, in my relations with men, I hear

their words, but I examine their actions." This is true psychology, and Crane is very much interested in this phase of psychology. His characters are continually saying what they do not mean from one motive or another. In "The Red Badge of Courage," Henry Fleming, the hero, himself full of doubt about his own courage, but never expressing the doubt, seeks to find the thoughts of the other soldiers, but their words convey no sign of the fear in their hearts. In "The Third Violet" we find two lovers continually saying what they do not mean. The cowardice of love makes liars of them, and each is helpless to discover the mind of the other. And we find this same theme running through many of his books. Men's faces and words are a stone wall behind which we cannot penetrate the thought. This is the phenomenon of life that attracts him; the impact of personalities whose motives are inscrutable, one to the other. It is one of the deepest studies in which man can engage—the interpreting of the human mind. During the years that I have been reading, I have come to feel a sort of personal presence of the writers whose works attract me. With such a man as Crane, as with Whitman or Walter Pater, Dostoevsky or Henry James, I can read anything they have written with delight because their minds have become familiar to me and reading them is like hearing them talk. It becomes more and more the man and less and less his work, as is the case with certain friends we have known. His works are merely an expression of him, part of the atmosphere he radiates. He has no good and no bad novels or essays or poems for me, because in all he says I come to know him better, and can talk with him more intimately. Of course I know his work varies in quality; but he is my friend, my guide, my inspiration—part of my life. I have felt this curiously enough about Stephen Crane. This may not be intelligent criticism, but I know if I can stand as much of any one friend's society as he will give me, there must be something unusually fine about that friend, and so I feel