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STEPHEN CRANE

MAGGIE

and other stories

Introduction by Francis R. Gemme

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STEPHEN CRANE

AIRMONT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
22 EAST 60TH STREET · NEW YORK 10022

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ISBN: 0-8049-0166-X MAGGIE AND OTHER STORIES

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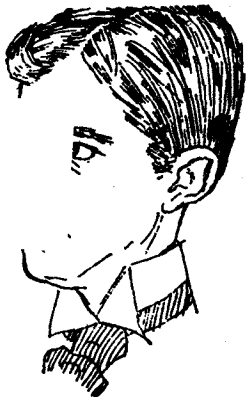

Introduction

Stephen Crane is one of the more fascinating writers in American literature. He published his two greatest works, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) and *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), in his early twenties and died at twenty-eight, leaving behind him a cloudy mixture of "the man and the myth." Crane, like the enigmatic Edgar Allan Poe, became a source of legend, perhaps because he was able to achieve so much in such a short span of time.

The stories in this collection are gleaned from the ninety pieces of short fiction comprising the Crane canon. The selections range from tales of the Bowery, such as "Maggie" and "The Men in the Storm," to tales of war, such as "A Mystery of Heroism" and "Virtue in War," and from stories of the sea, "The Open Boat," and the West, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," to unique stories of small town life, such as "The Monster," "The Knife," and "His New Mittens." The present volume contains the best of Stephen Crane and is representative of the author's genius in style, imagery, symbolism, subject matter, and cumulative artistic achievement.

Stephen Crane was born on November 1, 1871 in Newark, New Jersey. The fourteenth and youngest child of the

Reverend Dr. Jonathan T. Crane, a Methodist minister, and Mary Peck Crane, the future writer first attended school in Port Jervis, New York, where his father held a pastorate. The Port Jervis of his youth became the "Whilomville" of his later writings. When Crane was eight, his father died and the family moved to Asbury Park, New Jersey. A few years later he attended briefly a succession of boarding schools and colleges: in 1886 he registered at Pennington (N.J.) Seminary where he remained until January 1888 when he attended Claverack College near Hudson, New York. One semester of further study of engineering at Lafayette College in the fall of 1890 and another semester at Syracuse University in the spring of 1891 completed his formal education. He had begun his writing career during the summers by doing pieces for his brother's news bureau in Asbury Park; during his time at Syracuse he not only published articles in the *New York Tribune* and contributed sketches to the *Syracuse University Herald,* but also distinguished himself as a baseball player on the Syracuse nine. He began to write *Maggie* during this period.

In the fall of 1891, Crane decided to establish himself as a writer and journalist in New York City. He published several "Sullivan County Sketches" in 1892 and the following year issued at his own expense, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets,* under the pseudonym of Johnston Smith. The novel realistically pictures "The girl, Maggie [who] blossomed in a mud puddle," a young woman entrapped and victimized by the "tatters, grime, and dirt of Rum Alley," who succumbs finally to the environment which would today euphemistically be termed "disadvantaged" or "culturally deprived." The first edition of this work, daring in subject matter and even bolder in style was a dismal failure; even a reissue under the author's then well-known name in 1896 met with little literary or financial success. It was not until the depressed environment of the hardened and deprived 1930's that *Maggie* found an empathic audience. The same can be said for "The Men in the Storm," which can be considered as a sketch of the proletarian condition. Crane's tales of the Bowery are more in tune with the modern sensibility and its emphasis on isolation, alienation, and dis-

association than they were with the waning genteel tradition at the turn of the century.

With the publication of *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895, Stephen Crane became an international literary celebrity. Ironically, it was England which first recognized what Carl Van Doren has called, "One of the clearest cases of genius in American fiction." Robert Frost, the best-known American poet of this century, was to experience a similar initial discovery and recognition in England nearly a generation later. It is surely the highest tribute to human imagination and artistic achievement that Crane wrote *Maggie,* a dramatic and powerful depiction of the seamy side of life without having yet experienced such conditions and that he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage,* one of the classic war novels of all literature, without having seen a battle. Concerning the latter work, Ernest Hemingway commented: "Crane wrote it before he had ever seen any war. But he had read the contemporary accounts, had heard the old soldiers . . . talk, and above all he had seen Matthew Brady's wonderful photographs. Creating his story out of this material he wrote that great boy's dream of war that was to be truer to how war is than any war the boy who wrote it would ever live to see . . . it is one of the finest books of our literature . . . it is all as much of one piece as a great poem is."

Stephen Crane crammed a great deal of experience into the last several years of his life. Wars and women, literary fame and friendships, journalistic deadlines and the gossip and slander which attends public figures, especially artists, days of plenty and times of physical trial and economic hardship were all crowded into Crane's brief life. In 1895, Crane reported on the West for the Bacheller News Syndicate; the following year he was in Jacksonville, Florida, reporting on the Cuban insurrection; in 1897 he covered the Greco-Turkish War; and by 1898 he was writing dispatches for Pulitzer on the Spanish-American War and on events in Puerto Rico for the Hearst papers. "The Open Boat," the adventure story of four men shipwrecked off the coast of Florida, presenting an archetypal confrontation of struggling man and indifferent nature and climaxed with

Crane's ironic touch, was derived from the author's own experience with a shipwreck off the Florida coast in 1897. The fast pace of Crane's public and private life was abruptly ended when he suffered a massive tubercular hemorrhage at a Christmas party in England in 1899; he died the following June while recuperating in Germany.

While several of the author's works appeared posthumously, Crane had published actively following the *Red Badge* (1895). His other works included three volumes of poetry, *The Black Riders* (1895), *A Souvenir and a Medley* (1896), and *War is Kind* (1899), and several volumes of fiction: *George's Mother* (1896), another picture of slum life, *The Little Regiment and Other Episodes of the American Civil War* (1896), *The Third Violet* (1897), a novel about artists, *The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure* (1898), *Active Service* (1899), a novel set against the background of the Greco-Turkish War, and two more collections of tales, *The Monster and Other Stories* (1899) and *Whilomville Stories* (1900). The standard collected edition is *The Work of Stephen Crane,* edited by Wilson Follett, 1925-1926. The revival of interest in Crane is usually associated with the publication of Thomas Beer's *Stephen Crane, A Study in American Letters* (1923), an impressionistic and sometimes brilliant biography.

Modern students and readers of Stephen Crane have gained much from prolific work of Robert Wooster Stallman, Professor of English at the University of Connecticut, under whom the writer of this introduction had the privilege to study American literature and bibliography. Once described as "the single, most energetic, successful, and embattled of Crane scholar-critics," Robert Stallman has done more to create interest in this unique American writer than any other living critic. His sometimes controversial and always imaginative explications of Crane's works have elicited a critical dialogue which would fill several volumes. He has edited volumes of Crane's *Letters,* the *New York City Sketches, An Omnibus,* the *War Dispatches,* and the *Sullivan County Sketches* and written numerous introductions, reviews, entries in reference works, and critical articles. Currently this dean of Crane scholars is preparing

two volumes of criticism about Crane and an updated bibliography as well as completing the definitive biography. The latter work is scheduled for publication in the near future and can be viewed as the culmination of the Crane revival begun by Thomas Beer in the 1920's.

The stories in this edition will provide the reader with some lesser-known tales by Crane as well as several stories which have become classics in American literature. One does not have to read deeply into this volume before he recognizes the artistry and permanency of an author who owes his recognition in this century to scholarly criticism, yet who will be read and admired long after his interpreters are forgotten; such is the rightful fate of the greatest artists.

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Contents

Virtue in War

I

Gates had left the regular army in 1890, those parts of him which had not been frozen having been well fried. He took with him nothing but an oaken constitution and a knowledge of the plains and the best wishes of his fellow officers. The Standard Oil Company differs from the United States Government in that it understands the value of the loyal and intelligent services of good men and is almost certain to reward them at the expense of incapable men. This curious practice emanates from no beneficent emotion of the Standard Oil Company, on whose feelings you could not make a scar with a hammer and chisel. It is simply that the Standard Oil Company knows more than the United States Government and makes use of virtue whenever virtue is to its advantage. In 1890, Gates really felt in his bones that if he lived a rigorously correct life and several score of his classmates and intimate friends died off, he would get command of a troop of horse by the time he was unfitted by age to be an active cavalry leader. He left the service of the United States and entered the service of the Standard Oil Company. In the course of time he knew that if he lived a rigorously correct life, his position and income would develop strictly in parallel with the worth of his wisdom and experience, and he would not have to walk on the corpses of his friends.

But he was not happier. Part of his heart was in a barracks, and it was not enough to discourse of the old regiment over the port and cigars to ears which were polite

enough to betray a languid ignorance. Finally came the year 1898, and Gates dropped the Standard Oil Company as if it were hot. He hit the steel trail to Washington and there fought the first serious action of the war. Like most Americans, he had a native state, and one morning he found himself major in a volunteer infantry regiment whose voice had a peculiar, sharp twang to it which he could remember from childhood. The colonel welcomed the West Pointer with loud cries of joy; the lieutenant colonel looked at him with the pebbly eye of distrust; and the senior major, having had up to this time the best battalion in the regiment, strongly disapproved of him. There were only two majors, so the lieutenant colonel commanded the first battalion, which gave him an occupation. Lieutenant colonels under the new rules do not always have occupations. Gates got the third battalion—four companies commanded by intelligent officers who could gauge the opinions of their men at two thousand yards and govern themselves accordingly. The battalion was immensely interested in the new major. It thought it ought to develop views about him. It thought it was its blankety-blank business to find out immediately if it liked him personally. In the company streets the talk was nothing else. Among the noncommissioned officers there were eleven old soldiers of the regular army, and they knew—and cared—that Gates had held commission in the "Sixteenth Cavalry"—as *Harper's Weekly* says. Over this fact they rejoiced and were glad, and they stood by to jump lively when he took command. He would know his work and he would know *their* work, and then in battle there would be killed only what men were absolutely necessary and the sick list would be comparatively free of fools.

The commander of the second battalion had been called by an Atlanta paper: "Major Rickets C. Carmony, the commander of the second battalion of the 307th ——, is when at home one of the biggest wholesale hardware dealers in his state. Last evening he had ice cream, at his own expense, served out at the regular mess of the battalion, and after dinner the men gathered about his

tent where three hearty cheers for the popular major were given." Carmony had bought twelve copies of this newspaper and mailed them home to his friends.

In Gates's battalion there were more kicks than ice cream, and there was no ice cream at all. Indignation ran high at the rapid manner in which he proceeded to make soldiers of them. Some of his officers hinted finally that the men wouldn't stand it. They were saying that they had enlisted to fight for their country—yes, but they weren't going to be bullied day in and day out by a perfect stranger. They were patriots, they were, and just as good men as ever stepped—just as good as Gates or anybody like him. But gradually, despite itself, the battalion progressed. The men were not altogether conscious of it. They evolved rather blindly. Presently there were fights with Carmony's crowd as to which was the better battalion at drills, and at last there was no argument. It was generally admitted that Gates commanded the crack battalion. The men, believing that the beginning and the end of all soldiering was in these drills of precision, were somewhat reconciled to their major when they began to understand more of what he was trying to do for them, but they were still fiery, untamed patriots of lofty pride and they resented his manner toward them. It was abrupt and sharp.

The time came when everybody knew that the Fifth Army Corps was the corps designated for the first active service in Cuba. The officers and men of the 307th observed with despair that their regiment was not in the Fifth Army Corps. The colonel was a strategist. He understood everything in a flash. Without a moment's hesitation, he obtained leave and mounted the night express for Washington. There he drove senators and congressmen in span, tandem, and four-in-hand. With the telegraph he stirred so deeply the governor, the people, and the newspapers of his state that whenever on a quiet night the President put his head out of the White House he could hear the distant vast commonwealth humming with indignation. And as it is well known that the Chief Executive listens to the voice of the people, the 307th was transferred to the Fifth Army Corps. It was sent at once to Tampa,

where it was brigaded with two dusty regiments of regulars, who looked at it calmly and said nothing. The brigade commander happened to be no less a person than Gates's old colonel in the "Sixteenth Cavalry"—as *Harper's Weekly* says—and Gates was cheered. The old man's rather solemn look brightened when he saw Gates in the 307th. There was a great deal of battering and pounding and banging for the 307th at Tampa, but the men stood it more in wonder than in anger. The two regular regiments carried them along when they could and when they couldn't waited impatiently for them to come up. Undoubtedly the regulars wished the volunteers were in garrison at Sitka, but they said practically nothing. They minded their own regiments. The colonel was an invaluable man in a telegraph office. When came the scramble for transports, the colonel retired to a telegraph office and talked so ably to Washington that the authorities pushed a number of corps aside and made way for the 307th, as if on it depended everything. The regiment got one of the best transports, and after a series of delays and some starts, and an equal number of returns, they finally sailed for Cuba.

II

Now Gates had a singular adventure on the second morning after his arrival at Atlanta to take his post as a major in the 307th.

He was in his tent, writing, when suddenly the flap was flung away and a tall young private stepped inside.

"Well, Maje," said the newcomer genially, "how goes it?"

The major's head flashed up, but he spoke without heat.

"Come to attention and salute."

"Huh!" said the private.

"Come to attention and salute."

The private looked at him in resentful amazement, and then inquired:

"Ye ain't mad, are ye? Ain't nothin' to get huffy about, is there?"

"I— Come to attention and salute."

"Well," drawled the private, as he stared, "seein' as ye are so darn perticular, I don't care if I do—if it'll make yer meals set on yer stomick any better."

Drawing a long breath and grinning ironically, he lazily pulled his heels together and saluted with a flourish.

"There," he said, with a return to his earlier genial manner. "How's that suit ye, Maje?"

There was a silence which to an impartial observer would have seemed pregnant with dynamite and bloody death. Then the major cleared his throat and coldly said:

"And now, what is your business?"

"Who—me?" asked the private. "Oh, I just sorter dropped in." With a deeper meaning, he added, "Sorter dropped in in a friendly way, thinkin' ye was mebbe a different kind of a feller from what ye be."

The inference was clearly marked.

It was now Gates's turn to stare, and stare he unfeignedly did.

"Go back to your quarters," he said at length.

The volunteer became very angry.

"Oh, ye needn't be so up-in-th'-air, need ye? Don't know's I'm dead anxious to inflict my company on yer since I've had a good look at ye. There may be men in this here battalion what's had just as much edjewcation as you have, and I'm damned if they ain't got better *manners*. Good mornin'," he said with dignity; and passing out of the tent, he flung the flap back in place with an air of slamming it as if it had been a door. He made his way back to his company street, striding high. He was furious. He met a large crowd of his comrades.

"What's the matter, Lige?" asked one, who noted his temper.

"Oh, nothin'," answered Lige with terrible feeling. "Nothin'. I jest been lookin' over the new major—that's all."

"What's he like?" asked another.

"Like?" cried Lige. "He's like nothin'. He ain't out'n the same kittle as us. No. Gawd made him all by himself—sep'rate. He's a speshul produc', he is, an' he won't have no truck with jest common—*men,* like you be."

He made a venomous gesture which included them all.

"Did he set on ye?" asked the soldier.

"Set on me? No," replied Lige with contempt. "I set on *him.* I sized 'im up in a minute. 'Oh, I don't know,' I says, as I was comin' out, 'guess you ain't the only man in the world,' I says."

For a time Lige Wigram was quite a hero. He endlessly repeated the tale of his adventure, and men admired him for so soon taking the conceit out of the new officer. Lige was proud to think of himself as a plain and simple patriot who had refused to endure any high-soaring nonsense.

But he came to believe that he had not disturbed the singular composure of the major, and this concreted his hatred. He hated Gates, not as a soldier sometimes hates an officer, a hatred half of fear. Lige hated as man to man. And he was enraged to see that so far from gaining any hatred in return, he seemed incapable of making Gates have any thought of him save as a unit in a body of three hundred men. Lige might just as well have gone and grimaced at the obelisk in Central Park.

When the battalion became the best in the regiment, he had no part in the pride of the companies. He was sorry when men began to speak well of Gates. He was really a very consistent hater.

III

The transport occupied by the 307th was commanded by some sort of a Scandinavian, who was afraid of the shadows of his own topmasts. He would have run his steamer away from a floating Gainsborough hat, and in fact, he ran her away from less on some occasions. The officers, wishing to arrive with the other transports, sometimes remonstrated, and to them he talked of his owners. Every officer in the convoying warships loathed him, for in case any hostile vessel should appear, they did not see