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THIE USED BADGE OF COURAGE

BY STEPHEN CRANE

EDITED BY Richard Chase

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STEPHEN CRANE

The Red Badge of Courage

EDITE WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

by Richard Chase

STEPHEN CRANE was born in 1871 in Newark, New Jersey, and all of his significant works were written in the 1890's; he died of tuberculosis in 1900. Into this short life Crane concentrated much activity. He wrote voluminously both as an author and as a newspaper reporter. He was a war correspondent in Cuba and in Greece. His conduct was unconventional and finally notorious, and although Poe, Whitman, and even the young Melville might be said in some sense to have preceded him as bohemians, it was Crane who established the modern legend in this country of the literary bohemian - by consorting with low life, by asserting his isolation and intransigence in opposition to the conventionality of middle-class life. A part of this legend, as Crane lived it, was his series of unhappy love affairs, and his attachments, which were at once neurotic and chivalric, to prostitutes older than himself. The legend culminates at Brede Place, a ruined manor house in England where Crane wrote and lived in colorful disarray during a part of the last two years of his life and where he seems to have found his only approach to a satisfactory relation with a woman in his attachment to Cora Taylor, formerly the proprietress of a bawdy house in Jacksonville, Florida, called the Hotel de Dream.

Yet the real hero of Crane's rather self-conscious legend, which he both wrote and lived, is not so much the literary bohemian as the war-correspondent-novelist. The novelist who imagined war in The Red Badge of Courage felt compelled not only to experience the real thing, as a correspondent, but to relive both in fantasy and reality, the action described in The Red Badge — the testing of oneself, that is, in extreme situations of violence and danger. Whereas some writers find the ultimate meaning of life in wholeness or peace, or in some image of organized social life, or in religious belief, Crane finds it in the behavior and the emotions of an individual in the midst of violence. When one has sensed Crane's almost mystical attraction to war and extreme individual terror, one may well conclude that the emotions involved were

more important to Crane than the moral or spiritual significance of overcoming fear. In finding the typical meanings of modern life in situations of violence, Crane resembles many other modern writers — as different as Mayakovsky, Trotsky, Georges Sorel, and André Malraux. In American literature, one notices a resemblance between Crane and Ambrose Bierce, but it is Ernest Hemingway, also a war-correspondent-novelist, who most fully embodied in his life and his works the legend created by Crane, though we may sometimes feel that compared with the extremist Crane, Hemingway is a prudent, peace-loving citizen.

Like the other significant new writers of his generation — Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser — Crane is, generally speaking, of the "naturalist" school. London and Dreiser, however, did not become well known until after the turn of the century, and among the new fictional works of the 1890's the novels and stories of Crane and Norris are the most important. In the previous decade the talents of Henry James, Howells, and Mark Twain had come to a fulfillment in books like *The Portrait of a Lady, A Modern Instance*, and *Huckleberry Finn*. These older writers continued to write throughout the nineties and on into the twentieth century, but they had set their signatures to an epoch by 1890, and the next decade was ready for something new.

Intellectual and literary currents that were never to affect James, Howells, and Twain were already in the air by the time Stephen Crane began to write. It is not easy to say just how consciously aware of these currents Crane was. He was not a great reader; furthermore, like so many modern American writers from Whitman to Hemingway, he was always quick to disclaim that he was an intellectual of any sort, or even a literary man. He probably read more than he would admit to, but his remarks on books he may or may not have read are characteristically off-hand or joking (when someone asked him if his poems had been influenced by Mallarmé, he replied, "I don't know much about Irish authors"). Yet Crane's books obviously reflect the literary spirit of the time. No single term will adequately describe this literary spirit, because it was complicated and excitingly diverse, because it affected different writers in different ways, and because it never found its full expression in a body of writings (as did the spirit of the 1920's, for example). This decade has been called variously by literary historians "the seminal period," "the critical period," "the watershed of modern American literature." Everyone agrees that, although there was something abortive about the new literature of the nineties (tragically symbolized by the short lives of Crane and Norris), it does constitute a brilliant episode between the older authors of the Gilded Age and the writers of the next generations — Faulkner, Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, Eliot, Pound and others — who, along with Dreiser, were to bring modern literature to the fulfillment that was forecast but not achieved in the 1890's.

Thinking of Crane particularly, one can name some of the attitudes and ideas that came into the American literary consciousness for the first time in the nineties. Most important was the new naturalism, which found a literary program in the novels and essays of Zola and a theoretical basis in Darwin. The elements of naturalism are plainly to be seen in such stories as Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, George's Mother, and The Red Badge of Courage. There is the stress on heredity and environment as these limit or make impossible the operation of free choice in human conduct; there is the candid reportage of the sordid and brutelike in human life; there is the testing of human strength in a context of violence and struggle. Also there is a new impulse toward radical social protest. This had been learned in part from Crane's friend and advocate, Howells, who had himself become increasingly concerned with social injustice. But the new writers agreed that Howells' rather too gentlemanly brand of literary realism would not allow fiction to become the mode of passionate social criticism they thought it should be.

We hear this note of social protest strongly sounded, for example, in Crane's Maggie and Norris' The Octopus. The note is strong, but we had better observe that it is also ambiguous. The reader of Crane and Norris is not always clear whether they are protesting against social injustice (or even looking at it) or whether they are really concerned with cosmic injustice and the deplorable but picturesque workings of human instinct and animality. These authors often seem to be writing fictions in which the images and ideas of naturalism are abstracted from real social situations and made into the components of a rather gaudy melodrama or grotesquely ironic comedy. Ideologically their works tend to be neutral or self-contradictory. Are they on the side of the working class and opposed to the capitalist class? Questions

like this are seldom relevant to Crane or Norris, because one can find no satisfactory answer. They were purer artists, especially Crane, than we sometimes realize, and the overemphasis on the social intention of their writings is something we have not unlearned since critical opinion began to make this overemphasis in the 1930's.

Crane's naturalism, then, involves less observation of social detail and social reality than does Norris', and far less than does Dreiser's. Apart from all his theories about literature and naturalism, Dreiser is by instinct a novelist — that is, a writer who presents firmly observed and fully dramatized characters seen in social situations which are themselves fully reported, authenticated, and dramatized. By comparison, Crane is a romancer, and his naturalism remains relatively poetic, abstract, pure, and impressionistic. With few exceptions — Pete, the bartender, in Maggie, and perhaps the mother and son in George's Mother — Crane's characters strike us as being figures or ideas about people rather than real people. His settings tend to be barely adequate to authenticate the action that occurs in them — as in The Red Badge. Compared with Dreiser and despite his newspaper training, Crane seems to have observed but a small part of human life and of the world. He is a more showy, colorful, witty, ironic writer than Dreiser, and perhaps in his narrow way a more profound writer, but of course he has little of Dreiser's cumulative realism and none of his slowly amassed tragic situations.

I think no one will deny that compared with Hawthorne and Melville, or even with Henry James and Mark Twain, Stephen Crane is a modern writer — almost, one might say, a twentieth-century writer. His frankness, his bohemianism, his naturalism, his entire alienation from everything genteel, aristocratic, or puritan testify to his modernity. Yet it may be worthwhile to define a little further the basis of Crane's modernity, because some recent Crane criticism has very much exaggerated Crane's similarity to the classic American authors by speaking of him as "a symbolist," as one might speak of Hawthorne and Melville as symbolists (see especially Stephen Crane: An Omnibus, edited by R. W. Stallman). I myself have referred to Crane in the above paragraph as a "romancer" and this is a term I have elsewhere applied to the classic writers (see The American Novel and Its Tradition, New York, 1957). The general tendency of criticism and scholarship

has recently been to ignore the modernity of modern American writers, in order to show their similarity to the older writers and thus to demonstrate that there is a continuous, indeed almost monolithic and unchanging, American literary tradition. This critical effort, so directly opposite to that of twenty and thirty years ago, is too obviously a reflection of the generally conservative academic spirit of the 1950's. It is time to assert once again that things change, that modern American literature is different from classic American literature. Crane is not Hawthorne or Melville, even though he is, like them (but in a different way), a tale teller and romancer rather than a novelist properly so-called. But he is not a symbolist of the sort Mr. Stallman makes him out to be. If he is a symbolist at all, it is only in the sense that any writer with a poetic turn of mind will inevitably introduce symbols into his writing. But the symbols are local and limited in reference, and sometimes they seem no more than decorative. They are not, like the symbols in *Moby-Dick*, richly connotative and mutually interwoven in a structure of meaning. The well-known test case in Crane comes at the end of Chapter IX of The Red Badge, in the truly marvelous scene where Jim Conklin, "the tall soldier," dies in a kind of crucifixion, or at least a death dance, the last line in the chapter being "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer." * There is undeniably a Christian feeling and some Christian imagery in this scene, including the initials of the tall soldier. But it seems we are going pretty far if we accompany Mr. Stallman on his explanations of the "wafer" as a communion wafer. Why shouldn't it just as well be a wafer of wax, such as is affixed to legal documents? Crane was writing his book on legal paper which he had obtained from his lawyer brother. Nor does it seem useful to think that the word "sun" is a pun on "Son." No, the symbols are not like those in Melville; they do not mean so much. Religious symbolism does not, as Mr. Stallman alleges, "toolmark the whole book." The Red Badge is not a "symbolic construct." In fact it is hard to think of so episodic and wayward a volume as being a "construct" of any kind.

Why is the symbolism of Crane and the other moderns different from that of Melville and Hawthorne? One might put it this way,

^{*} It is of interest that Crane undoubtedly borrowed this symbol from Kipling's *The Light That Failed*, wherein he read, "The sun shone, a blood-red wafer, on the water."

with the help of D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence writes, in Studies in Classic American Literature, that the fiction of the older writers has a kind of doubleness or "duplicity" because they were explicitly conventional moralists but implicitly impassioned destroyers of conventional morality. Thus there is in their works a "tight mental allegiance given to a morality which the passional self repudiates." The life of passion and impulse is powerful in the classic writers, but it is deeply sublimated and can thus be represented to us only by symbols that are complex and profound enough to lead us down beneath the surface towards the deeper meanings. But by the time of Crane this fecund source of symbolism has been largely lost, for the simple reason that the conventional morality which overlaid the instinctual life has been openly abandoned. The contrast between overt morality and hidden impulse is no longer a secret, to be represented only indirectly. It has been brought out into the open and has been made the "whole point."

Because Crane always had his eyes on this and related contrasts, he is an ironist. And what he loses in symbolism he gains in irony. He loves to make a wryly observed contrast between conventional morality and the passions which govern actual human conduct; this he does, for example, in *Maggie* throughout, capping the climax with Maggie's brutal and besotted mother condescending to "fergive" her daughter in the name, presumably, of decent Christian ethics. Crane is a master at demonstrating the sometimes wild discrepancies between man's fantasies and ideals, on the one hand, and, on the other, the trapped and fated creature he actually is. From one point of view, the theme of *The Red Badge* and George's Mother is the familiar one about the young man who has romantic, adolescent, or egotistic illusions about war or about his place in the world. This theme is commonly carried through, especially in the traditional European novel, by tracing the process of education by which the youth matures and learns to square his thoughts and dreams about reality with reality itself. There is some attempt to do this in *The Red Badge*, particularly at the end, but Crane seems half-hearted about carrying things through to the moral conclusion and inclined to point out and poetically dramatize the discrepancy between illusion and fact, and let it go at that. Many different instances of irony can be found in Crane's stories: for example, the agonizing position of the men in "The Open

Boat"—so near to shore and safety and yet so much at the mercy of the sea. To generalize, one might say that the recurring, perhaps obsessive, idea in Crane's writing is that man must believe what is obviously not true—namely, that he is a rational creature whose mind through thought and the imagination of the ideal can control and give significance to human conduct. The truth, Crane believes, is that man is pretty much at the mercy not only of his own illusions but of superior social and cosmic forces and of his own instincts.

This pessimistic view is shared by many modern American writers, and it must be admitted that Crane is not able, as some of the others have been, to present a compensating idea of human worth or power of endurance. He has little of that large sympathy for human beings, or for his own characters, which in Dreiser's novels leaves us with the sense of human value which is really at odds with the bleak naturalist doctrine. Nor does Crane ever give us more than the barest sketch of a code of stoic individual conduct and endurance such as we find in Hemingway. In the end Crane's irony and his naturalism are rather severe limitations, and although critics continue the long attempt to moralize Crane, to find a sustained theme, for example, of spiritual death and rebirth in The Red Badge, or even a sustained theme of advancing maturity, such themes are only sketchily there, if at all. On the other hand, Crane's narrowness and amoralism have their positive advantages. What he lacks in humanity, he gains in poetry. His prose writings, more so than his verse, make him the supreme poet of American naturalism. It is an extreme poetry - brilliant, abstract, not quite human, written by an obsessional and selfdestructive poet.

Before we look more specifically at some of Crane's writings, a word needs to be said about "impressionism," because beginning with early comments such as H. G. Wells' commendation of *The Red Badge*, people have been applying that word to Crane. Impressionism, along with aestheticism, as practiced in European writing, painting, and music, made itself felt in American literature in the 1890's. This we can see in some of Crane's attitudes towards life and art, as well as in the insistent and often fascinating color-painting of his language (his titles themselves suggest this: *The Red Badge*, "The Blue Hotel," "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky"). But it is not only his color painting, or occasional *pointil*-

lisme, that makes us think of Crane as an impressionist. He composes his stories impressionistically too. That is, he composes by episodes that are related more by mood and image than by plot, theme, and character — as in The Red Badge. Only rarely does he succeed in unifying all these ingredients in one episode of any length — as in that almost perfect story "The Open Boat." The fact that in Crane, as in other writers of his time, impressionism and naturalism come together should not surprise us if we reflect that, despite its peculiar effectiveness and beauty, impressionism, like naturalism, has implications that are pessimistic, irrationalist, and amoral since its technique is to break down into a shimmering flow of experience the three dimensions that symbolized rationality and religious and social order in traditional art.

Maggie: A Girl of the Streets was Crane's first significant fiction and was written when he was only twenty or twenty-one. The youthful author submitted his shocker to the Century Magazine, and the editor, Richard Watson Gilder, one of the three-named literary moguls of the day, predictably rejected it. Failing to find a publisher, Crane borrowed enough money to get the book printed by a printer of medical and religious books, and Maggie appeared in yellow covers in 1893. The book attracted almost no attention, and only in retrospect can we see what an important document in the new naturalist movement had appeared. As Crane himself wrote of his book, "it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless." The familiar naturalistic theme of the progressive degeneration of the characters under the pressure not only of environment but of heredity and mischance is driven through with relentless irony, and perhaps only a little too much of gas-lit 1890's melodrama and impressionist "art work" for the modern taste. Pete, with his jazzy line of conversation ("Say, Mag, I'm stuck on yer shape. It's outa sight.") is, of course, the cause of Maggie's fall. He is predatory, but, be it noted, not predatory enough to survive in the city-jungle world; he has no final defenses against women more predacious than he or against what Crane rather quaintly calls "cocktails." Crane knew that his best effects were accomplished over the short run (his standard criticism of literary works by himself and by other people was, "too long"), and he showed good judgment in cutting down in sucessive versions of the novelette the story of Maggie's final descent to extinction. As it stands in the revised edition of 1896, it is a brief chapter (XVII) that has been so conventionalized and simplified as to be a form of allegory, but it is all the more effective for being so.

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George's Mother (1896) was written apparently during 1893–94, at the same time that Crane was working on The Red Badge. In the beautifully written passages detailing George's romantic fantasies, alcoholic and nonalcoholic, about himself, we often catch the tone of similar fantasies entertained by Henry Fleming. But in George's Mother the ironies are furnished again by the hard facts of city life. Except for its dramatic power and the noncommittal quality of its moral view, the story would be indistinguishable from a temperance tract, holding up for our edification the awful decline of a youth who betrays his mother, stops going to prayer meetings, and takes to liquor and low companions. The novelette has some fine passages of realistic description, such as the picture of the loiterers in front of the corner saloon and the heroic drinking bout at old Bleecker's place. There is more of the psychology of human relationship in this story than in most of Crane's works, and this may be attributed to the fact that George and his mother are not too remote projections of Crane and his own mother, a strong Methodist and lecturer on religious subjects (not that Crane himself took to liquor — he apparently drank very little).

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Once in a while a piece of writing comes along that one wants to call a miraculous emanation. This seems a good description of The Red Badge of Courage (1895), which is certainly one of the best of American fictions, despite its lack of unity and the embarrassment the author seems to feel about the necessity of pointing a moral. The embarrassment is plain enough in the vague and pretentious language of the last five paragraphs, which surely have nothing to recommend them but the description of the sky. But one is amazed that Crane, not even born at the time of the Civil War, could with such meager documentation give his story of a frightened private in the Union forces so much authenticity. In the months shortly after its publication Crane's novel became a tremendous success, and the author was a famous, as well as a notorious man for the remaining few years of his life. One cherishes The Red Badge partly because it is so bright an ornament in the

very small body of distinguished writings about the war which Americans are agreed was the one supreme tragic experience of the national life. Since Crane's time (it began before), there has appeared an overwhelming body of biographical, historical, and fictional writings about the Civil War, but aside from the biographies and histories, besides the Confederate romances of John Esten Cooke and all their numerous progeny, what remains? — Whitman's Drum Taps and Specimen Days, J. W. DeForest's Miss Ravenel's Conversion, Melville's Battle Pieces, Bierce's In the Midst of Life, along with the paintings of Winslow Homer and the photographs of Matthew Brady.

Not that Crane's knowledge of the war, specifically the battle of Chancellorsville, was entirely miraculous. He doubtless did more reading and conversed more about the war than we know. He clearly borrowed from a book by Colonel W. F. Hinman called Corporal Si Klegg and His "Pard" (1887), and it is more than possible that he may have learned something about writing war fiction from both Zola's Débâcle and Tolstoy's Sebastopol. Nevertheless The Red Badge is a stunning achievement for a young man of twenty-three or twenty-four.

As I have said, Crane's novel has no real "symbolic" center to which everything else is somehow related, nor does it need one. But if it had, I think it would be the great scene in the forest "chapel," where the fleeing Henry discovers the decaying corpse. Here is the discovery of what Crane rather grandiosely calls "the great death," and it is one of the most memorable in a literature rich in such discoveries. For in much of the best American fiction and poetry, death, and not rebirth or life, is "the mother of beauty," as Wallace Stevens says in "Sunday Morning." This could be easily documented from the works of Cooper, Bryant, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Hemingway, to draw up an incomplete and seemingly motley list. Crane, in other words, shares with these writers a certain mysticism of death which, although it has proven itself the mother of beauty, is not by that token the mother of salvation, of moral progress, or enhanced maturity. It won't do to mistake an amoral extremism or a sheer objectivism or romantic nihilism for morality, as so many people do in discussing Crane. Because he doesn't do this, Mr. C. C. Walcutt seems to me to have written about the best comments on The Red Badge, in his useful book called American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream, Minneapolis, 1956. One judges that Mr. Walcutt is only slightly exaggerating when he says that Crane "makes us see Henry Fleming as an emotional puppet controlled by whatever sight he sees at the moment," that when Henry does return to the battle it is not as a valiant adult but "in a blind rage that turns him into an animal," that if there is "any one point in the book" it is that "Henry has never been able to evaluate his conduct," and that what interests Crane most is not the moral he thinks he ought to draw but "the insanely grotesque and incongruous world of battle." All this is not by way of demoting The Red Badge from its high place because it is morally equivocal or not moral at all. It remains the marvelous piece of writing we have always taken it to be. One only wants to see it for what it is; presumably that is all an author wants from his readers.

The short story called "The Veteran" (1896) gives us a glimpse of Henry Fleming as Crane briefly imagined him to be in old age. It is not the best of Crane's shorter pieces, but it arouses interesting, and disturbing, speculations as to why the author should have wanted to immolate his best-known character in a holocaust. "A

The short story called "The Veteran" (1896) gives us a glimpse of Henry Fleming as Crane briefly imagined him to be in old age. It is not the best of Crane's shorter pieces, but it arouses interesting, and disturbing, speculations as to why the author should have wanted to immolate his best-known character in a holocaust. "A Mystery of Heroism" (1895) beautifully portrays the heroicpathetic attempt of a soldier to fetch a bucket of water under fire. "An Episode of War" (1899), as perfect a thing as Crane wrote, tells the story of "how the lieutenant lost his arm" and conveys once again the mystical, one might almost say, religious feelings aroused in Crane by war.

In 1895 Crane went on a junket to the far West. It seems to have been for him the sort of pilgrimage of discovery every eastern American wants to make at least once in his life. Two of Crane's best stories — "The Blue Hotel" (1899) and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (1898) — reflect the western trip. The lonely blue hotel in Nebraska, the "shaky and quick-eyed Swede" with his fears and his lurid notions about "the wild West," the flaring up of tempers, the elemental raging of the blizzard make an admirable situation for Crane's superb dramatization of violence and the mixture of fantasy, realism, and fear that leads men to violent acts. At the end of the story we read that the murder of the Swede, like every sin, "is the result of a collaboration." But although this has its moral significance, because it seems to allot guilt to all concerned, Crane does not appear to be really interested, as his friend Howells would have been, in "moral complicity" — the

complicated web of human motive and choice, that is, which results in acts of good or evil. As usual, what seems to interest Crane is the irrationality, the mystery of human acts, and one feels that he is saying, not so much that everyone concerned with the death of the Swede is guilty, as that nobody is. Human motives are inscrutable, and are perhaps in some way a reflection of the cosmos itself as imagined in the blizzard, of which Crane says, "one was a coxcomb not to die in it." In contrast to this dire story, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" is all light, clarity, pace, and humor — the kind of western humor that reminds us of episodes in Mark Twain's Roughing It. Everything depends on the anticlimax, where the rampaging Scratchy Wilson, who is bent on shooting up the town, is brought under control not as usual by Jack Potter, the marshal, but by the mere astonishing confrontation with Potter's bride, whom Potter, hitherto strictly a man's man, has brought to Yellow Sky.

There are moments in reading Stephen Crane when one feels that he was trying to do things which could not quite satisfactorily be done in his time but had to wait for a later generation. We say to ourselves, Now if Hemingway were doing this, or Faulkner, it would be done better. No such thoughts occur, however, in reading "The Open Boat" (1898) — part of which, as it were, is Hemingway (see, for example, the sequence of dialogue about the Mosquito Inlet Light near the beginning of the story). If some readers object to the occasionally too gaudy coloration of Crane's writing, they will be pleased by the limited palette of this story, the first sentence of which is "None of them knew the color of the sky." The dialogue is terse and true, without straining, as Crane's dialogue sometimes does, after a too close transcription of dialect and pronunciation (Whatta yiz tink yiz doin', etc.). It is impossible to imagine a more perfectly unified fiction than "The Open Boat," and Crane's characteristic irony, under-keyed here, but all the more powerful for that, achieves in this story a universal significance and is free of the element of nihilism we come across in some of Crane's other work. "The whole affair is absurd," the men in the boat reflect at one point, and whether we give this an existentialist, theological, or other meaning, we cannot miss its tragic commentary on human life. The reader of "The Open Boat" will find pleasure in Crane's newspaper style as seen in "Stephen Crane's Own Story" and instruction in comparing different narrative techniques detailing related events.

"The Monster" (1899) is the story of how a Negro is mutilated in saving a boy from a fire and how the boy's father and family are gradually ostracized by the local townspeople because the father insists on caring for the Negro in his home. In one way this story differs markedly from most of Crane's best writings — here the author has his eye not only on one or two people and their fates but on the whole social surrounding too. There is at least enough observation of the manners and morals of a small American town to make us think of Crane's Whilomville in connection with, say, Mark Twain's Hadleyburg and Sinclair Lewis' Gopher Prairie. The story is made a little false by Crane's too obsessive identification with the Negro and the fact that the author has stacked the deck in his favor by relying too much, for interest and motive, on what could not possibly fail to be arresting anywhere at any time — a horribly mutilated Negro. Nevertheless, before Crane has finished he has written a memorable story (even though it trails off rather badly toward the end), not the least virtue of which is the unusual one (for Crane) of depicting the community tensions, fears, and prejudices of small-town America.

Crane published two volumes of poems: The Black Ridges and

Crane published two volumes of poems: The Black Riders and Other Lines, 1895, and War Is Kind, 1899. So entirely original are these poems that scholars and critics have always had difficulty in "placing" Crane in relation to other poets and to poetic tradition. He perhaps got the idea of writing irregular lines from reading Whitman. Quite possibly Emily Dickinson, whose poems Howells enthusiastically read to him on one occasion, suggested to Crane that, unlike the conventional poetry of his time, good poetry might be terse, witty, and imagistic, rather than rhetorical and discursive. But the fact is that, as has often been observed, he does not sound like either Whitman or Emily Dickinson. At any rate these brief verses, which Crane called "lines" or referred to sardonically as his "pills," forecast many of the formal qualities of the new poetry that began to appear in America and England after 1912. Yet his poetry, even though it is interesting and valuable rather than great, has seldom received full or accurate recognition from modern criticism.

Crane himself placed a high value on his poems, speaking of

them as a "more ambitious effort" than The Red Badge. His poems, he says, "give my ideas of life as a whole, so far as I know it." By comparison he thought The Red Badge "a mere episode" which is suggestive but also seems to prove that Crane is one more author who can't be counted on to judge the relative worth of his own writings. Taking Crane at his own word, one would conclude that although there are certain vivid "ideas of life" in these poems, they are not ideas of life "as a whole," even so far as Stephen Crane knew it. In his poetry as in his prose, Crane is narrow, limited, brilliant, ironic, sometimes profound, sometimes merely cynical. Crane likes the parable or fable form, and his poems often sound like the Bible, which is the only book that may be said unhesitatingly to have influenced these poems. His "pills," teaching a wry or sardonic lesson about human weakness, vanity, or illusion, vary in complexity from "I saw a man pursuing" and the humorous "A man said to the universe" to the satire on Darwinian ethics in "The trees in the garden." Crane is openly blasphemous and repeatedly chides, curses, or banishes the God of his Methodist family tradition, because, as he concludes, no God could rule the mad, cruel, and inhuman universe our reason shows it to be, unless He were "cold," like the God of "A man adrift on a slim spar" or jealous, hostile, and retributive like the God in "A spirit sped." This latter poem in particular, however, may well convince the reader that Crane is, in tone and temperament, though not belief, more religious than he at first seems to be. He is sometimes a love poet too, as in the perfect "Should the wide world roll away." And in the difficult but haunting poem beginning "The chatter of a death-demon" there is a dark interweaving of eroticism with violent death. He does not usually try anything but the short form, yet twice he succeeds superbly at greater length -"A man adrift on a slim spar" (already mentioned) and in "Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind."

However we approach the prose and poems of Crane, and versatile as these are, we are struck by how much of the human spectacle is left out of them and by how many of the techniques, ideas, and emotions of the great novels of the past they forego. H. G. Wells was impressed in reading Crane by how much had been left out, but he decided, correctly, that Crane's limitations are his strength and that they constitute his originality and his modernity. Wells wrote of Crane that "in style, in method, and in all that is