

STEPHEN CRANE

PROSE AND POETRY

Maggie: A Girl of the Streets

The Red Badge of Courage

Stories, Sketches, and Journalism

Poetry

J.C. Levenson, ed.



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IV

Yes, I have a thousand tongues,
 And nine and ninety-nine lie.
 Though I strive to use the one,
 It will make no melody at my will,
 But is dead in my mouth.

V

Once there came a man
 Who said,
 "Range me all men of the world in rows."
 And instantly
 There was terrific clamor among the people
 Against being ranged in rows.
 There was a loud quarrel, world-wide.
 It endured for ages;
 And blood was shed
 By those who would not stand in rows,
 And by those who pined to stand in rows.
 Eventually, the man went to death, weeping.
 And those who staid in bloody scuffle
 Knew not the great simplicity.

VI

God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.
 With the infinite skill of an all-master
 Made He the hull and the sails,
 Held He the rudder
 Ready for adjustment.
 Erect stood He, scanning His work proudly.
 Then—at fateful time—a wrong called,
 And God turned, heeding.
 Lo, the ship, at this opportunity, slipped slyly,
 Making cunning noiseless travel down the ways.
 So that, forever rudderless, it went upon the seas
 Going ridiculous voyages,
 Making quaint progress,

Turning as with serious purpose
 Before stupid winds.
 And there were many in the sky
 Who laughed at this thing.

VII *

Mystic shadow, bending near me,
 Who art thou?
 Whence come ye?
 And—tell me—is it fair
 Or is the truth bitter as eaten fire?
 Tell me!
 Fear not that I should quaver,
 For I dare—I dare.
 Then, tell me!

VIII

I looked here
 I looked there
 No where could I see my love.
 And—this time—
 She was in my heart.
 Truly then I have no complaint
 For 'though she be fair and fairer
 She is none so fair as she
 In my heart.

IX

I stood upon a high place,
 And saw, below, many devils
 Running, leaping,
 And carousing in sin.
 One looked up, grinning,
 And said, "Comrade! Brother!"

X *

Should the wide world roll away
 Leaving black terror
 Limitless night,
 Nor God, nor man, nor place to stand
 Would be to me essential
 If thou and thy white arms were there
 And the fall to doom a long way.

XI

In a lonely place,
 I encountered a sage
 Who sat, all still,
 Regarding a newspaper.
 He accosted me:
 "Sir, what is this?"
 Then I saw that I was greater,
 Aye, greater than this sage.
 I answered him at once,
 "Old, old man, it is the wisdom of the age."
 The sage looked upon me with admiration.

XII *

"And the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the
 heads of the children, even unto the third and fourth
 generation of them that hate me."

Well, then, I hate Thee, unrighteous picture;
 Wicked image, I hate Thee;
 So, strike with Thy vengeance
 The heads of those little men
 Who come blindly.
 It will be a brave thing.

XIII

If there is a witness to my little life,
 To my tiny throes and struggles,
 He sees a fool;
 And it is not fine for gods to menace fools.

XIV

There was crimson clash of war.
 Lands turned black and bare;
 Women wept;
 Babes ran, wondering.
 There came one who understood not these things.
 He said, "Why is this?"
 Whereupon a million strove to answer him.
 There was such intricate clamor of tongues,
 That still the reason was not.

XV

"Tell brave deeds of war."

Then they recounted tales,—
 "There were stern stands
 "And bitter runs for glory."

Ah, I think there were braver deeds.

XVI

Charity, thou art a lie,
 A toy of women,
 A pleasure of certain men.
 In the presence of justice,
 Lo, the walls of the temple
 Are visible
 Through thy form of sudden shadows.

XVII

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.

XVIII

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 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.

XIX

A god in wrath
 Was beating a man;
 He cuffed him loudly
 With thunderous blows
 That rang and rolled over the earth.

All people came running.
 The man screamed and struggled,
 And bit madly at the feet of the god.
 The people cried,
 "Ah, what a wicked man!"
 And—
 "Ah, what a redoubtable god!"

XX*

A learned man came to me once.
 He said, "I know the way,—come."
 And I was overjoyed at this.
 Together we hastened.
 Soon, too soon, were we
 Where my eyes were useless,
 And I knew not the ways of my feet.
 I clung to the hand of my friend;
 But at last he cried, "I am lost."

XXI*

There was, before me,
 Mile upon mile
 Of snow, ice, burning sand.
 And yet I could look beyond all this,
 To a place of infinite beauty;
 And I could see the loveliness of her
 Who walked in the shade of the trees.
 When I gazed,
 All was lost
 But this place of beauty and her.
 When I gazed,
 And in my gazing, desired,
 Then came again
 Mile upon mile,
 Of snow, ice, burning sand.

XXII

Once I saw mountains angry,
 And ranged in battle-front.
 Against them stood a little man;
 Aye, he was no bigger than my finger.
 I laughed, and spoke to one near me,
 "Will he prevail?"
 "Surely," replied this other;
 "His grandfathers beat them many times."
 Then did I see much virtue in grandfathers,—
 At least, for the little man
 Who stood against the mountains.

XXIII *

Places among the stars,
 Soft gardens near the sun,
 Keep your distant beauty;
 Shed no beams upon my weak heart.
 Since she is here
 In a place of blackness,
 Not your golden days
 Nor your silver nights
 Can call me to you.
 Since she is here
 In a place of blackness,
 Here I stay and wait.

XXIV *

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
 Round and round they sped.
 I was disturbed at this;
 I accosted the man.
 "It is futile," I said,
 "You can never——"

"You lie," he cried,
 And ran on.

XXV

Behold, the grave of a wicked man,
 And near it, a stern spirit.

There came a drooping maid with violets,
 But the spirit grasped her arm.
 "No flowers for him," he said.
 The maid wept:
 "Ah, I loved him."
 But the spirit, grim and frowning:
 "No flowers for him."

Now, this is it——
 If the spirit was just,
 Why did the maid weep?

XXVI *

There was set before me a mighty hill,
 And long days I climbed
 Through regions of snow.
 When I had before me the summit-view,
 It seemed that my labor
 Had been to see gardens
 Lying at impossible distances.

XXVII

A youth in apparel that glittered
 Went to walk in a grim forest.
 There he met an assassin
 Attired all in garb of old days;
 He, scowling through the thickets,
 And dagger poised quivering,
 Rushed upon the youth.
 "Sir," said this latter,
 "I am enchanted, believe me,
 "To die, thus,
 "In this medieval fashion,

"According to the best legends;
 "Ah, what joy!"
 Then took he the wound, smiling,
 And died, content.

XXVIII

"Truth," said a traveller,
 "Is a rock, a mighty fortress;
 "Often have I been to it,
 "Even to its highest tower,
 "From whence the world looks black."

"Truth," said a traveller,
 "Is a breath, a wind,
 "A shadow, a phantom;
 "Long have I pursued it,
 "But never have I touched
 "The hem of its garment."

And I believed the second traveller;
 For truth was to me
 A breath, a wind,
 A shadow, a phantom,
 And never had I touched
 The hem of its garment.

XXIX

Behold, from the land of the farther suns
 I returned.
 And I was in a reptile-swarming place,
 Peopled, otherwise, with grimaces,
 Shrouded above in black impenetrableness.
 I shrank, loathing,
 Sick with it.
 And I said to him,
 "What is this?"

He made answer slowly,
 "Spirit, this is a world;
 "This was your home."

XXX*

Supposing that I should have the courage
 To let a red sword of virtue
 Plunge into my heart,
 Letting to the weeds of the ground
 My sinful blood,
 What can you offer me?
 A gardened castle?
 A flowery kingdom?

What? A hope?
 Then hence with your red sword of virtue.

XXXI

Many workmen
 Built a huge ball of masonry
 Upon a mountain-top.
 Then they went to the valley below,
 And turned to behold their work.
 "It is grand," they said;
 They loved the thing.

Of a sudden, it moved:
 It came upon them swiftly;
 It crushed them all to blood.
 But some had opportunity to squeal.

XXXII

Two or three angels
 Came near to the earth.
 They saw a fat church.
 Little black streams of people

XLIX *

I stood musing in a black world,
 Not knowing where to direct my feet.
 And I saw the quick stream of men
 Pouring ceaselessly,
 Filled with eager faces,
 A torrent of desire.
 I called to them,
 "Where do you go? What do you see?"
 A thousand voices called to me.
 A thousand fingers pointed.
 "Look! Look! There!"

I know not of it.
 But, lo! in the far sky shone a radiance
 Ineffable, divine,—
 A vision painted upon a pall;
 And sometimes it was,
 And sometimes it was not.
 I hesitated.
 Then from the stream
 Came roaring voices,
 Impatient:
 "Look! Look! There!"

So again I saw,
 And leaped, unhesitant,
 And struggled and fumed
 With outspread clutching fingers.
 The hard hills tore my flesh;
 The ways bit my feet.
 At last I looked again.

No radiance in the far sky,
 Ineffable, divine;
 No vision painted upon a pall;
 And always my eyes ached for the light.
 Then I cried in despair,
 "I see nothing! Oh, where do I go?"

The torrent turned again its faces:
 "Look! Look! There!"

And at the blindness of my spirit
 They screamed,
 "Fool! Fool! Fool!"

L

You say you are holy,
 And that
 Because I have not seen you sin.
 Aye, but there are those
 Who see you sin, my friend.

LI

A man went before a strange god,—
 The god of many men, sadly wise.
 And the deity thundered loudly,
 Fat with rage, and puffing,
 "Kneel, mortal, and cringe
 "And grovel and do homage
 "To my particularly sublime majesty."

The man fled.

Then the man went to another god,—
 The god of his inner thoughts.
 And this one looked at him
 With soft eyes
 Lit with infinite comprehension,
 And said, "My poor child!"

LII

Why do you strive for greatness, fool?
 Go pluck a bough and wear it.
 It is as sufficing.

Well, he is dead,
 And there went your opportunity.
 Let it be your grief
 That he is dead
 And your opportunity gone;
 For, in that, you were a coward.

LXII

There was a man who lived a life of fire.
 Even upon the fabric of time,
 Where purple becomes orange
 And orange purple,
 This life glowed,
 A dire red stain, indelible;
 Yet when he was dead,
 He saw that he had not lived.

LXIII

There was a great cathedral.
 To solemn songs,
 A white procession
 Moved toward the altar.
 The chief man there
 Was erect, and bore himself proudly.
 Yet some could see him cringe,
 As in a place of danger,
 Throwing frightened glances into the air,
 A-start at threatening faces of the past.

LXIV *

Friend, your white beard sweeps the ground.
 Why do you stand, expectant?
 Do you hope to see it
 In one of your withered days?
 With your old eyes
 Do you hope to see

The triumphal march of justice?
 Do not wait, friend.
 Take your white beard
 And your old eyes
 To more tender lands.

LXV

Once, I knew a fine song,
 —It is true, believe me,—
 It was all of birds,
 And I held them in a basket;
 When I opened the wicket,
 Heavens! They all flew away.
 I cried, "Come back, little thoughts!"
 But they only laughed.
 They flew on
 Until they were as sand
 Thrown between me and the sky.

LXVI

If I should cast off this tattered coat,
 And go free into the mighty sky;
 If I should find nothing there
 But a vast blue,
 Echoless, ignorant,—
 What then?

LXVII

God lay dead in Heaven;
 Angels sang the hymn of the end;
 Purple winds went moaning,
 Their wings drip-dripping
 With blood
 That fell upon the earth.
 It, groaning thing,
 Turned black and sank.

"The sea bids you mourn, oh, pines
 "Sing low in the moonlight.
 "He sends tale of the land of doom
 "Of place where endless falls
 "A rain of women's tears
 "And men in grey robes
 "—Men in grey robes—
 "Chant the unknown pain."

"What says the sea, little shell?
 "What says the sea?
 "Long has our brother been silent to us
 "Kept his message for the ships
 "Puny ships, silly ships."

"The sea bids you teach, oh, pines
 "Sing low in the moonlight.
 "Teach the gold of patience
 "Cry gospel of gentle hands
 "Cry a brotherhood of hearts
 "The sea bids you teach, oh, pines."

"And where is the reward, little shell?
 "What says the sea?
 "Long has our brother been silent to us
 "Kept his message for the ships
 "Puny ships, silly ships."
 "No word says the sea, oh, pines
 "No word says the sea.
 "Long will your brother be silent to you
 "Keep his message for the ships
 "Oh, puny pines, silly pines."

To the maiden
 The sea was blue meadow
 Alive with little froth-people
 Singing.

To the sailor, wrecked,
 The sea was dead grey walls
 Superlative in vacancy
 Upon which nevertheless at fateful time,
 Was written
 The grim hatred of nature.

..... *

A little ink more or less!
 It surely can't matter?
 Even the sky and the opulent sea,
 The plains and the hills, aloof,
 Hear the uproar of all these books.
 But it is only a little ink more or less.

What?
 You define me God with these trinkets?
 Can my misery meal on an ordered walking
 Of surpliced numbskulls?
 And a fanfare of lights?
 Or even upon the measured pulpiting
 Of the familiar false and true?
 Is this God?
 Where, then, is hell?
 Show me some bastard mushroom
 Sprung from a pollution of blood.
 It is better.

Where is God?

.....

"Have you ever made a just man?"
 "Oh, I have made three," answered God
 "But two of them are dead
 "And the third—
 "Listen! Listen!
 "And you will hear the thud of his defeat."

On the desert
 A silence from the moon's deepest valley.
 Fire-rays fall athwart the robes
 Of hooded men, squat and dumb.
 Before them, a woman
 Moves to the blowing of shrill whistles
 And distant-thunder of drums
 While slow things, sinuous, dull with terrible color
 Sleepily fondle her body
 Or move at her will, swishing stealthily over the sand.
 The snakes whisper softly;
 The whispering, whispering snakes
 Dreaming and swaying and staring
 But always whispering, softly whispering.
 The wind streams from the lone reaches
 Of Arabia, solemn with night,
 And the wild fire makes shimmer of blood
 Over the robes of the hooded men
 Squat and dumb.
 Bands of moving bronze, emerald, yellow,
 Circle the throat and the arms of her
 And over the sands serpents move warily
 Slow, menacing and submissive,
 Swinging to the whistles and drums,
 The whispering, whispering snakes,
 Dreaming and swaying and staring
 But always whispering, softly whispering.
 The dignity of the accursèd;
 The glory of slavery, despair, death
 Is in the dance of the whispering snakes.

A newspaper is a collection of half-injustices
 Which, bawled by boys from mile to mile,
 Spreads its curious opinion
 To a million merciful and sneering men,

While families cuddle the joys of the fireside
 When spurred by tale of dire lone agony.
 A newspaper is a court
 Where every one is kindly and unfairly tried
 By a squalor of honest men.
 A newspaper is a market
 Where wisdom sells its freedom
 And melons are crowned by the crowd.
 A newspaper is a game
 Where his error scores the player victory
 While another's skill wins death.
 A newspaper is a symbol;
 It is fetless life's chronicle,
 A collection of loud tales
 Concentrating eternal stupidities,
 That in remote ages lived unaltered,
 Roaming through a fenceless world.

*

The wayfarer
 Perceiving the pathway to truth
 Was struck with astonishment.
 It was thickly grown with weeds.
 "Ha," he said,
 "I see that none has passed here
 "In a long time."
 Later he saw that each weed
 Was a singular knife.
 "Well," he mumbled at last,
 "Doubtless there are other roads."

A slant of sun on dull brown walls
 A forgotten sky of bashful blue.

Men born of wrong, men born of right
 Men of the new battalions
 —The blue battalions—

The clang of swords is Thy wisdom
 The wounded make gestures like Thy Son's
 The feet of mad horses is one part,
 —Aye, another is the hand of a mother on the brow
 of a son.

Then swift as they charge through a shadow,
 The men of the new battalions
 —Blue battalions—

God lead them high. God lead them far
 Lead them far, lead them high
 These new battalions
 —The blue battalions—.



A man adrift on a slim spar
 A horizon smaller than the rim of a bottle
 Tented waves rearing lashed dark points
 The near whine of froth in circles.
 God is cold.

The incessant raise and swing of the sea
 And growl after growl of crest
 The sinkings, green, seething, endless
 The upheaval half-completed.
 God is cold.

The seas are in the hollow of The Hand;
 Oceans may be turned to a spray
 Raining down through the stars
 Because of a gesture of pity toward a babe.
 Oceans may become grey ashes,
 Die with a long moan and a roar
 Amid the tumult of the fishes.

And the cries of the ships,
 Because The Hand beckons the mice.

A horizon smaller than a doomed assassin's cap,
 Inky, surging tumults
 A reeling, drunken sky and no sky
 A pale hand sliding from a polished spar.
 God is cold.

The puff of a coat imprisoning air.
 A face kissing the water-death
 A weary slow sway of a lost hand
 And the sea, the moving sea, the sea.

God is cold.

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There exists the eternal fact of conflict
 And—next—a mere sense of locality.
 Afterward we derive sustenance from the winds.
 Afterward we grip upon this sense of locality.
 Afterward, we become patriots.
 The godly vice of patriotism makes us slaves,
 And—let us surrender to this falsity
 Let us be patriots

Then welcome us the practical men
 Thrumming on a thousand drums
 The practical men, God help us.
 They cry aloud to be led to war
 Ah—
 They have been poltroons on a thousand fields
 And the sacked sad city of New York is their record
 Furious to face the Spaniard, these people, and crawling
 worms before their task
 They name serfs and send charity in bulk to better men
 They play at being free, these people of New York
 Who are too well-dressed to protest against infamy.