

The Red Badge of Courage- REVIEWS

George Wyndham on Crane's remarkable book, *New Review*

January 1896, xiv, 30-40

Wyndham (1863-1913) was a veteran of the Coldstream Guards, Member of Parliament and Chief Secretary for Ireland, critic for the *National Observer* and the *New Review*, and an editor of *Shakespeare's Poems* (1898), Ronsard, and North's Plutarch. This article is one of the best written on Crane's work and was praised by other critics, including [Joseph Conrad](#) and [Harold Frederic](#).

All men are aware of antagonism and desire, or at the least are conscious, even in the nursery, that their hearts are the destined theatres of these emotions; all have felt or heard of their violence; all know that, unlike other emotions, these must often be translated into the glittering drama of decisive speech and deed; all, in short, expect to be lovers, and peer at the possibility of fighting. And yet how hard it is for the tried to compare notes, for the untried to anticipate experience! Love and war have been the themes of song and story in every language since the beginning of the world, love-making and fighting the supreme romances of most men and most nations; but any one man knows little enough of either beyond the remembered record of his own chances and achievements, and knows still less whither to turn in order to learn more. We resent this ignorance as a slur on our manhood, and snatch at every chance of dispelling it. And at first, in the scientific 'climate' of our time, we are disposed to ask for documents: for loveletters, and letters written from the field of battle. These we imagine, if collected and classified, might supply the evidence for an induction. But, on second thoughts, we remember that such love-letters as have been published are, for the most part, not nearer to life than romantic literature, but further removed from it by many stages: that they are feeble echoes of conventional art not immediate reflections, but blurred impressions of used plates carelessly copied from meretricious paintings. And so it is with the evidence at first hand upon war. The letters and journals of soldiers and subordinate officers in the field are often of a more pathetic interest than most love-letters; but to the searcher after truth they are still disappointing, for they deal almost exclusively with matters beyond the possibilities of the writer's acquaintance. They are all of surmises of what dear ones are doing at home, or of the enemy's intentions and the general's plans for outwitting him: they reflect the writer's love and professional ambition, but hardly ever the new things he has heard and seen and felt. And when they attempt these things they sink to the level of the love-letters, and become mere repetitions of accepted forms.

I can remember one letter from an English private, describing an engagement in which some eighty men were killed and wounded out of a force of eight thousand: he wrote of comrades in his own battalion 'falling like sheep,' and gave no clue to the country in which he served. It might have been in Siberia or the Sahara, against savages or civilised troops; you could glean nothing except that he had listened to patriotic songs in music halls at home. Perhaps the most intimate love-letters and battle-letters never get printed at all. But, as it is, you cannot generalise from collections of documents as you can from collections of ferns and beetles: there is not, and there never can be, a science of the perceptions and emotions which thrill young lovers and recruits. The modern soldier is a little less laconic than his medieval forbear. Indeed he could hardly surpass the tantalising reserve of, say, Thomas Denyes, a gentleman who fights at Towton, and sums up the carnage of thirty-eight thousand men in a single sentence: 'Oure Sovereign Lord hath wonne the feld.' But it is

astonishing to note how little even the modern soldier manages to say. He receives rude and swift answers in the field to the questions that haunted his boyish dreams, but he keeps the secret with masonic self-possession.

Marbot's *Memoirs* and, in a lesser degree, Tomkinson's *Diary of a Cavalry Officer* are both admirable as personal accounts of the Peninsular Campaign, but the warfare they describe is almost as obsolete as that of the Roses, and, even if it were not so, they scarcely attempt the recreation of intense moments by the revelation of their imprint on the minds that endured them. And, on the score of art and of reticence, one is glad that they do not. Their authors were gallant soldiers waging war in fact, and not artists reproducing it in fiction. They satisfy the special curiosity of men interested in strategy and tactics, not the universal curiosity of Man the potential Combatant. He is fascinated by the picturesque and emotional aspects of battle, and the experts tell him little of either. To gratify that curiosity you must turn from the Soldier to the Artist, who is trained both to see and tell, or inspired, even without seeing, to divine what things have been and must be. Some may rebel against accepting his evidence, since it is impossible to prove the truth of his report. But it is equally impossible to prove the beauty of his accomplishment. Yet both are patent to every one capable of accepting truth or beauty, and by a surer warrant than any chance coincidence of individual experience and taste.

Mr. Stephen Crane, the author of *The Red Badge of Courage*, is a great artist, with something new to say, and consequently, with a new way of saying it. His theme, indeed, is an old one, but old themes re-handled anew in the light of novel experience, are the stuff out of which masterpieces are made, and in *The Red Badge of Courage* Mr. Crane has surely contrived a masterpiece. He writes of war the ominous and alluring possibility for every man, since the heir of all the ages has won and must keep his inheritance by secular combat. The conditions of the age-long contention have changed and will change, but its certainty is coeval with progress: so long as there are things worth fighting for fighting will last, and the fashion of fighting will change under the reciprocal stresses of rival intentions. Hence its double interest of abiding necessity and ceaseless variation. Of all these variations the most marked has followed, within the memory of most of us, upon the adoption of long-range weapons of precision, and continues to develop, under our eyes, with the development of rapidity infiring. And yet, with the exception of Zola's *La Debacle*, no considerable attempt has been made to pourtray war under its new conditions. The old stories are less trustworthy than ever as guides to the experiences which a man may expect in battle and to the emotions which those experiences are likely to arouse. No doubt the prime factors in the personal problem the chances of death and mutilation continue to be about the same. In these respects it matters little whether you are pierced by a bullet at two thousand yards or stabbed at hands' play with a dagger. We know that the most appalling death-rolls of recent campaigns have been more than equalled in ancient warfare; and, apart from history, it is dear that, unless one side runs away, neither can win save by the infliction of decisive losses. But although these personal risks continue to be essentially the same, the picturesque and emotional aspects of war are completely altered by every change in the shape and circumstance of imminent death. And these are the fit materials for literature the things which even dull men remember with the undying imagination of poets, but which, for lack of the writer's art, they cannot communicate. The sights flashed indelibly on the retina of the eye; the sounds that after long silences suddenly cypher; the stench that sickens in after-life at any chance allusion to decay; or, stirred by these, the storms of passions that force yells of defiance out of inarticulate clowns; the winds of fear that sweep by night along prostrate ranks, with the acceleration of trains and the noise as of a whole town waking from nightmare with stertorous, indrawn gasps these colossal facts of the senses and the soul are the only colours in which the very image of war can be painted. Mr. Crane has composed his palette with these colours, and has painted a picture that challenges comparison with the most vivid senses of Tolstoi's *la Guerre et la Paix* or of Zola's *La Debacle*. This is unstinted praise, but I feel bound to give it after reading the book twice and

comparing it with Zola's *Sedan* and Tolstoy's account of Rostow's squadron for the first time under fire. Indeed, I think that Mr. Crane's picture of war is more complete than Tolstoy's, more true than Zola's. Rostow's sensations are conveyed by Tolstoy with touches more subtle than any to be found even in his *Sebastopol*, but they make but a brief passage in a long book, much else of which is devoted to the theory that Napoleon and his marshals were mere waifs on a tide of humanity or to the analysis of divers characters exposed to civilian experiences. Zola, on the other hand, compiles an accurate catalogue of almost all that is terrible and nauseating in war; but it is his own catalogue of facts made in cold blood, and not the procession of flashing images shot through the senses into one brain and fluctuating there with its rhythm of exaltation and fatigue. *La Debacle* gives the whole truth, the truth of science, as it is observed by a shrewd intellect, but not the truth of experience as it is felt in fragments magnified or diminished in accordance with the patient's mood. The terrible things in war are not always terrible; the nauseating things do not always sicken. On the contrary, it is even these which sometimes lift the soul to heights from which they become invisible. And, again, at other times, it is the little miseries of most ignoble insignificance which fret through the last fibres of endurance.

Mr. Crane, for his distinction, has hit on a new device, or at least on one which has never been used before with such consistency and effect. In order to show the features of modern war, he takes a subject a youth with a peculiar temperament, capable of exaltation and yet morbidly sensitive. Then he traces the successive impressions made on such a temperament, from minute to minute, during two days of heavy fighting. He stages the drama of war, so to speak, within the mind of one man, and then admits you as to a theatre. You may, if you please, object that this youth is unlike most other young men who serve in the ranks, and that the same events would have impressed the average man differently; but you are convinced that this man's soul is truly drawn, and that the impressions made in it are faithfully rendered. The youth's temperament is merely the medium which the artist has chosen: that it is exceptionally plastic makes but for the deeper incision of his work. It follows from Mr. Crane's method that he creates by his art even such a first-hand report of war as we seek in vain among the journals and letters of soldiers. But the book is not written in the form of an autobiography: the author narrates. He is therefore at liberty to give scenery and action, down to the slightest gestures and outward signs of inward elation or suffering, and he does this with the vigour and terseness of a master. Had he put his descriptions of scenery and his atmospheric effects, or his reports of overheard conversations, into the mouth of his youth, their very excellence would have belied all likelihood. Yet in all his descriptions and all his reports he confines himself only to such things as that youth heard and saw, and, of these, only to such as influenced his emotions. By this compromise he combines the strength and truth of a monodrama with the directness and colour of the best narrative prose. The monodrama suffices for the Iyr: all emotion of Tennyson's *Maud*; but in Browning's *Martin Relf* you feel the constraint of a form which in his *Ring and the Book* entails repetition often intolerable.

Mr. Crane discovers his youth, Henry Fleming, in a phase of disillusion. It is some monotonous months since boyish 'visions of brokenbladed glory' impelled him to enlist in the Northern Army towards the middle of the American war.

[Paraphrases approximately the first three chapters which Wyndham characterises as 'furl of such vivid impressions, half of sense and half of imagination'.]

From this moment, reached on the thirtieth page, the drama races through another hundred and sixty pages to the end of the book, and to read those pages is in itself an experience of breathless, lambent, detonating life. So brilliant and detached are the images evoked that, like illuminated bodies actually seen, they leave their fever-bright phantasms floating before the brain. You may shut the book, but you still see the battle-flags 'jerked about madly in the smoke,' or sinking with

'dying gestures of despair,' the men 'dropping here and there like bundles'; the captain shot dead with 'an astonished and sorrowful look as if he thought some friend had done him an ill-turn'; and the litter of corpses, 'twisted in fantastic contortions,' as if 'they had fallen from some great height, dumped out upon the ground from the sky.' The book is full of sensuous impressions that leap out from the picture: of gestures, attitudes, grimaces, that flash into portentous definition, like faces from the climbing clouds of nightmare. It leaves the imagination bounded with a 'dense wall of smoke, furiously slit and slashed by the knife-like fire from the rifles.' It leaves, in short, such indelible traces as are left by the actual experience of war. The picture shows grisly shadows and vermilion splashes, but, as in the vast drama it reflects so truly, these features, though insistent, are small in size, and are lost in the immensity of the theatre. The tranquil forest stands around; the 'fairy-blue of the sky' is over it all. And, as in the actual experience of war, the impressions which these startling features inflict, though acute, are localised and not too deep: are as it were mere pin-pricks, or, at worst, clean cuts from a lances in a body thrilled with currents of physical excitement and sopped with anesthetics of emotion. Here is the author's description of a forlorn hope:

[Quotes from ch. 19 'As the regiment swung' to 'new and unknown land' and 'In front of the colours' to 'went from his mind'.]

This passage directly challenges comparison with Zola's scene, in which the lieutenant and the old tradition, of an invincible Frenchman over-running the world 'between his bottle and his girl,' expire together among the morsels of a bullet-eaten flag. Mr. Crane has probably read *La Debacle*, and wittingly threw down his glove. One can only say that he is justified of his courage.

Mr. Crane's method, when dealing with things seen and heard, is akin to Zola's: he omits nothing and extenuates nothing, save the actual blasphemy and obscenity of a soldier's oaths. These he indicates, sufficiently for any purpose of art, by brief allusions to their vigour and variety. Even Zola has rarely surpassed the appalling realism of Jim Conkin's death in Chapter X. Indeed, there is little to criticise in Mr. Crane's observation, except an undue subordination of the shrill cry of bullets to the sharp crashing of rifles. He omits the long chromatic whine defining its invisible arc in the air, and the fretful snatch a few feet from the listener's head. In addition to this gift of observation, Mr. Crane has at command the imaginative phrase. The firing follows a retreat as with 'yellings of eager metallic hounds'; the men at their mechanic loading and firing are like 'fiends jiggling heavily in the smoke'; in a lull before the attack 'there passed slowly the intense moments that precede the tempest'; then, after single shots, 'the battle roar settled to a rolling thunder, which was a single long explosion.' And, as I have said, when Mr. Crane deals with things felt he gives a truer report than Zola. He postulates his hero's temperament a daydreamer given over to morbid self-analysis who enlists, not from any deep-seated belief in the holiness of fighting for his country, but in hasty pursuit of a vanishing ambition. This choice enables Mr. Crane to double his picturesque advantage with an ethical advantage equally great. Not only is his youth, like the sufferer in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, super-sensitive to every pin-prick of sensation: he is also a delicate meter of emotion and fancy. In such a nature the waves of feeling take exaggerated curves, and hallucination haunts the brain. Thus, when awaiting the first attack, his mind is thronged with vivid images of a circus he had seen as a boy: it is there in definite detail, even as the Apothecary's shop usurps Romeo's mind at the crisis of his fate. And thus also, like Herodotus' Aristodemus, he vacillates between cowardice and heroism. Nothing could well be more subtle than his self-deception and that sudden enlightenment which leads him to 'throw aside his mental pamphlets on the philosophy of the retreated and rules for the guidance of the damned.' His soul is of that kind which, 'sick with self love,' can only be saved 'so as by fire'; and it is saved when the battle-bond of brotherhood is born within it, and is found plainly of deeper import than the cause for which he and his comrades fight, even as that cause is loftier than his personal ambition. By his

choice of a hero Mr. Crane displays in the same work a pageant of the senses and a tragedy of the soul.

But he does not obtrude his moral. The 'tall soldier' and the lieutenant are brave and content throughout, the one by custom as a veteran, the other by constitution as a hero. But the two boys, the youth and his friend, 'the loud soldier,' are at first querulous braggarts, but at the last they are transmuted by danger until either might truly say:

we have proved we have hearts in a cause, we are noble still, And myself have awaked, as it seems, to the better mind; It is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill; I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind, I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assigned.

Let no man cast a stone of contempt at these two lads during their earlier weakness until he has fully gauged the jarring discordance of battle. To be jostled on a platform when you have lost your luggage and missed your train on an errand of vital importance gives a truer pre-taste of war than any field-day; yet many a well-disciplined man will denounce the universe upon slighter provocation. It is enough that these two were boys and that they became men.

Yet must it be said that this youth's emotional experience was singular. In a battle there are a few physical cowards, abjects born with defective circulations, who literally turn blue at the approach of danger, and a few on whom danger acts like the keen, rare atmosphere of snow-clad peaks. But between these extremes come many to whom danger is as strong wine, with the multitude which gladly accepts the 'iron laws of tradition' and finds welcome support in 'a moving box.' To this youth, as the cool dawn of his first day's fighting changed by infinitesimal gradations to a feverish noon, the whole evolution pointed to 'a trap'; but I have seen another youth under like circumstances toss a pumpkin into the air and spit it on his sword. To this youth the very landscape was filled with 'the stealthy approach of death.' You are convinced by the author's art that it was so to this man. But to others, as the clamour increases, it is as if the serenity of the morning had taken refuge in their brains. This man 'stumbles over the stones as he runs breathlessly forward'; another realises for the first time how right it is to be adroit even in running. The movement of his body becomes an art, which is not self-conscious, since its whole intention is to impress others within the limits of a modest decorum. We know that both love and courage teach this mastery over the details of living. You can tell from the way one woman, out of all the myriads, walks down Piccadilly, that she is at last aware of love. And you can tell from the way a man enters a surgery or runs toward a firing-line that he, too, realises how wholly the justification of any one life lies in its perfect adjustment to others. The woman in love, the man in battle, may each say, for their moment, with the artist, 'I was made perfect too.' They also are of the few to whom 'God whispers in the ear.'

But had Mr. Crane taken an average man he would have written an ordinary story, whereas he has written one which is certain to last. It is glorious to see his youth discover courage in the bed-rock of primeval antagonism after the collapse of his tinsel bravado; it is something higher to see him raise upon that rock the temple of resignation. Mr. Crane, as an artist, achieves by his singleness of purpose a truer and completer picture of war than either Tolstoi, bent also upon proving the insignificance of heroes, or Zola, bent also upon prophesying the regeneration of France. That is much; but it is more that his work of art, when completed, chimes with the universal experience of mankind; that his heroes find in their extreme danger, if not confidence in their leaders and conviction in their cause, at least the conviction that most men do what they can or, at most, what they must. We have few good accounts of battles many of shipwrecks; and we know that, just as the storm rises, so does the commonplace captain show as a god, and the hysterical passenger as a cheerful heroine.

It is but a further step to recognise all life for a battle and his earth for a vessel lost in space. We may then infer that virtues easy in moments of distress may be useful also in everyday experience.

Harold Frederic, review, *New York Times*

January 26, 1896, 22

Frederic (1856-98) was London correspondent for the *New York Times*. His best-known novel, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, outsold *The Red Badge* in 1896.

Two weeks before Frederic's long review appeared, he published the following short note in his column of general news from London in the *New York Times*, 12 January 1896:

The general reader, however, is talking a hundred times more about *The Red Badge of Courage*, written by Stephen Crane, who is presumably an American, but is said to be quite young and unknown, though he is understood to be living here. I have never known any other book to make its own way among the critics so absolutely swiftly. Everybody who reads it talks of nothing else. The *Saturday Review* gives it nearly two pages at the head of its list today, and everywhere else it is getting exceptional attention.

Who in London knows about Stephen Crane? The question is one of genuine interest here. It happens, annoyingly enough, that the one publishing person who might throw some light on the answer is for the moment absent from town. Other sources yield only the meagre information that the name is believed to be a real, and not an assumed, one, and that its owner is understood to be a very young man, indeed. That he is an American, or, at least, learned to read and write in America, is obvious enough. The mere presence in his vocabulary of the verb 'loan' would settle that, if the proof were not otherwise blazoned on every page of his extraordinary book. For this mysteriously unknown youth has really written an extraordinary book. *The Red Badge of Courage* appeared a couple of months ago, unheralded and unnoticed, in a series which, under the distinctive label of 'Pioneer,' is popularly supposed to present fiction more or less after the order of *The Green Carnation*, which was also of that lot. The first one who mentioned in my hearing that this *Red Badge* was well worth reading happened to be a person whose literary admirations serve me generally as warnings what to avoid, and I remembered the title languidly from that standpoint of self-protection. A little later others began to speak of it. All at once, every bookish person had it at his tongue's end. It was clearly a book to read, and I read it. Even as I did so, reviews burst forth in a dozen different quarters, hailing it as extraordinary. Some were naturally more excited and voluble than others, but all the critics showed, and continue to show, their sense of being in the presence of something not like other things. [George Wyndham](#), M.P., has already written of it in *The New*

Review as 'a remarkable book.' Other magazine editors have articles about it in preparation, and it is evident that for the next few months it is to be more talked about than anything else in current literature. It seems almost equally certain that it will be kept alive, as one of the deathless books which must be read by everybody who desires to be, or to seem, a connoisseur of modern fiction.

If there were in existence any books of a similar character, one could start confidently by saying that it was the best of its kind. But it has no fellows. It is a book outside of all classification. So unlike anything else is it that the temptation rises to deny that it is a book at all. When one searches for comparisons, they can only be found by culling out selected portions from the trunks of masterpieces, and considering these detached fragments, one by one, with reference to the *Red Badge*, which is itself a fragment, and yet is complete. 'Thus one lifts the best battle pictures from Tolstoi's great *War and Peace*, from Balzac's *Chouans*, from Hugo's *Les Miserables*, and the forest fight in '93,' from Prosper Merimee's assault of the redoubt, from Zola's *La Debacle* and *Attack on the Mill*, (it is strange enough that equivalents in the literature of our own language do not suggest themselves) and studies them side by side with this tremendously effective battle painting by the unknown youngster. Positively they are cold and ineffectual beside it. The praise may sound exaggerated, but really it is inadequate. These renowned battle descriptions of the big men are made to seem all wrong. The *Red Badge* impels the feeling that the actual truth about a battle has never been guessed before.

In construction the book is as original as in its unique grasp of a new grouping of old materials. All the historic and prescribed machinery of the romance is thrust aside. One barely knows the name of the hero; it is only dimly sketched in that he was a farm boy and had a mother when he enlisted. These facts recur to him once or twice, they play no larger part in the reader's mind. Only two other characters are mentioned by name Jim Conkin and Wilson; more often even they are spoken of as the tall soldier and the loud soldier. Not a word is expended on telling where they come from, or who they are. They pass across the picture, or shift from one posture to another in its moving composition, with the impersonality of one's chance fellow-passengers in a railroad car. There is a lieutenant who swears new oaths all the while, another officer with a red beard, and two or three still vaguer figures, revealed here and there through the smoke. We do not know, or seek to know, their names, or anything about them except what, staring through the eyes of Henry Fleming, we are permitted to see. The regiment itself, the refugees from other regiments in the crowded flight, and the enemy on the other side of the fence, are differentiated only as they wear blue or gray. We never get their color out of our mind's eye. This exhausts the dramatic personae of the book, and yet it is more vehemently alive and heaving with dramatic human action than any other book of our time. The people are all strangers to us, but the sight of them stirs the profoundest emotions of interest in our breasts. What they do appeals as vividly to our consciousness as if we had known them all our life.

The central idea of the book is of less importance than the magnificent graft of externals upon it. We begin with the young raw recruit, hearing that at last his regiment is going to see some fighting, and brooding over the problem of his own behavior under fire. We

follow his perturbed meditations through thirty pages, which cover a week or so of this menace of action. Then suddenly, with one gray morning, the ordeal breaks abruptly over the youngster's head. We go with him, so close that he is never out of sight, for two terribly crowded days, and then the book is at an end. This cross-section of his experience is made a part of our own. We see with his eyes, think with his mind, quail or thrill with his nerves. He strives to argue himself into the conventional soldier's bravery; he runs ingloriously away; he excuses, defends, and abhors himself in turn; he tremblingly yields to the sinister fascination of creeping near the battle; he basely allows his comrades to ascribe to heroism the wound he received in the frenzied 'sauve qui peut' [stampede] of the fight, he gets at last the fire of combat in his veins, and blindly rushing in deports himself with such hardy and temerarious valor that even the Colonel notes him, and admits that he is a 'jimickey.' These sequent processes, observed with relentless minutiae, are so powerfully and speakingly portrayed that they seem the veritable actions of our own minds. To produce the effect is a notable triumph, but it is commonplace by comparison with the other triumph of making us realize what Henry saw and heard as well as what he felt. The value of the former feat has the limitations of the individual. No two people are absolutely alike; any other young farm boy would have passed through the trial with something different somewhere. Where Henry fluttered, he might have been obtuse; neither the early panic nor the later irrational ferocity would necessarily have been just the same. But the picture of the trial itself seems to me never to have been painted as well before.

Oddly enough, [The Saturday Review](#) and some other of the commentators take it for granted that the writer of the *Red Badge* must have seen real warfare. 'The extremely vivid touches of detail convince us,' says *The Review*, 'that he has had personal experience of the scenes he depicts. Certainly, if his book were altogether a work of imagination, unbased on personal experience, his realism would be nothing short of a miracle.'] This may strike the reader who has not thought much about it as reasonable, but I believe it to be wholly fallacious. Some years ago I had before me the task of writing some battle chapters in a book I was at work upon. The novel naturally led up to the climax of a battle, and I was excusably anxious that when I finally got to this battle, I should be as fit to handle it as it was possible to make myself. A very considerable literature existed about the actual struggle, which was the Revolutionary battle of Oriskany, fought only a few miles from where I was born. This literature was in part the narratives of survivors of the fight, in part imaginative accounts based on these by later writers. I found to my surprise that the people who were really in the fight gave one much less of an idea of a desperate forest combat than did those who pictured it in fancy. Of course, here it might be that the veterans were inferior in powers of narration to the professional writer. Then I extended the test to writers themselves. I compared the best accounts of Franco-German battles, written for the London newspapers by trained correspondents of distinction who were on the spot, with the choicest imaginative work of novelists, some of them mentioned above, who had never seen a gun fired in anger.

There was literally no comparison between the two. The line between journalism and literature obtruded itself steadily. Nor were cases lacking in which some of these war correspondents had in other departments of work showed themselves capable of true

literature. I have the instance of David Christle Murray in mind. He saw some of the stiffest fighting that was done in his time, and that, too, at an early stage of his career, but he never tried to put a great battle chapter into one of his subsequent novels, and if he had I don't believe it would have been great.

Our own writers of the elder generation illustrate this same truth. Gen. Lew Wallace, Judge Tourgee, Dr. Weir Mitchell, and numbers of others saw tremendous struggles on the battlefield, but to put the reality into type baffles them. The four huge volumes of *The Century's Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* are written almost exclusively by men who took an active part in the war, and many of them were in addition men of high education and considerable literary talent, but there is not a really moving story of a fight in the whole work. When Warren Lee Goss began his *Personal Recollections of a Private*, his study of the enlistment, the early marching and drilling, and the new experiences of camp life was so piquant and fresh that I grew quite excited in anticipation. But when he came to the fighting, he fell flat. The same may be said, with more reservations, about the first parts of Judge Tourgee's more recent *Story of a Thousand*. It seems as if the actual sight of a battle has some dynamic quality in it which overwhelms and crushes the literary faculty in the observer. At best, he gives us a conventional account of what happened; but on analysis you find that this is not what he really saw, but what all his reading has taught him that he must have seen. In the same way battle painters depict horses in motion, not as they actually move, but as it has been agreed by numberless generations of draughtsmen to say that they move. At last, along comes a Muybridge [Eadward Muybridge (1830-1904), English-born American photographer who proved with his photography that all four of a horse's feet leave the ground at one time], with his instantaneous camera, and shows that the real motion is entirely different. It is this effect of a [photographic revelation](#) which startles and fascinates one in *The Red Badge of Courage*. The product is breathlessly interesting, but still more so is the suggestion behind it that a novel force has been disclosed, which may do all sorts of other remarkable things. Prophecy is known of old as a tricky and thankless hag, but all the same I cannot close my ears to her hint that a young man who can write such a first book as that will make us all sit up in good time.