War Is Kind

by Stephen Crane

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK WAR IS KIND ***

"War is Kind" by Stephen Crane

WAR IS KIND by Stephen Crane Drawings by Will Bradley

(illustration--stylized corn)

(illustration--maiden with sword, arrows, and doves)

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind. Because your lover threw wild hands toward

the sky And the affrighted steed ran on alone, Do not weep. War is kind. Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment, Little souls who thirst for fight, These men were born to drill and die. The unexplained glory files above them, Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom—; A field where a thousand corpses lie. Do not weep, babe, for war is kind. Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches, Raged at his breast, gulped and died, Do not weep. War is kind. Swift blazing flag of the regiment, Eagle with crest of red and gold, These men were born to drill and die. Point for them the virtue of the slaughter, Make plain to them the excellence of killing And a field where a thousand corpses lie. Mother whose heart hung humble as a button On the bright splendid shroud of your son, Do not weep. War is kind.

What says the sea, little shell? “What says the sea? “Long has our brother been silent to us, “Kept his message for the ships, “Awkward ships, stupid ships.” “The sea bids you mourn, O 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.”

(illustration--sea and wind)

(illustration--tall vase)

“What says the sea, little shell? “What says the sea? “Long has our brother been silent to us, “Kept is message for the ships, “Puny ships, silly ships.” “The sea bids you teach, O 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, O 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.”

(illustration--birds)

“No word says the sea, O Pines, “No word says the sea. “Long will your brother be silent to you, “Keep his message for the ships, “O puny ships, 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.

(illustration--lyre)

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 numskulls? And a fanfare of lights? Or even upon the measured pulpitings Of the familiar false and true? Is this God? Where, then is hell? Show me some bastard mushrooms 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.”

I explain the silvered passing of a ship at night, The sweep of each sad lost wave, The dwindling boom of the steel thing's striving, The little cry of a man to a man, A shadow falling across the greyer night, And the sinking of the small star; Then the waste, the far waste of waters, And the soft lashing of black waves For long and in loneliness. Remember, thou, O ship of love, Thou leavest a far waste of waters, And the soft lashing of black waves For long and in loneliness.

“I have heard the sunset song of the birches, “A white melody in the silence, “I have seen a quarrel of the pines. “At nightfall “The little grasses have rushed by me “With the wind men. “These things have I lived,” quoth the maniac, “Possessing only eyes and ears. “But you— “You don green spectacles before you look at roses.”

Fast rode the knight With spurs, hot and reeking, Ever waving an eager sword, “To save my lady!” Fast rode the knight, And leaped from saddle to war. Men of steel flickered and gleamed Like riot of silver lights, And the gold of the knight's good banner Still waved on a castle wall. . . . . A horse, Blowing, staggering, bloody

thing, Forgotten at foot of castle wall. A horse Dead at foot of castle wall.

(illustration--dead horse at foot of castle wall)

(illustration--sylized leaf

Forth went the candid man And spoke freely to the wind— When he looked about him he was in a far strange country. Forth went the candid man And spoke freely to the stars— Yellow light tore sight from his eye. “My good fool,” said a learned bystander, “Your operations are mad.” “You are too candid,” cried the candid man. And when his stick left the head of the learned bystander It was two sticks.

You tell me this is God? I tell you this is a printed list, A burning candle and an ass.

illustration--a candle

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 mystic 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.

(illustration--a woman)

(illustration--stylized leaf)

Bands of moving bronze, emerald, yellow, Circle the throat and 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 accursed; 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 chronical, A collection of loud tales Concentrating eternal stupidities, That in remote ages lived unhaltered, 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. Toward God a mighty hymn, A song of collisions and cries, Rumbling wheels, hoof-beats, bells, Welcomes, farewells, love-calls, final moans, Voices of joy, idiocy, warning, despair, The unknown appeals of brutes, The chanting of flowers, The screams of cut trees, The senseless babble of hens and wise men— A cluttered incoherency that says at the stars; “O God, save us!”

Once a man clambering to the housetops Appealed to the heavens. With a strong voice he called to the deaf spheres; A warrior's shout he raised to the suns. Lo, at last, there was a dot on the clouds, And—at last and at last— —God—the sky was filled with armies.

There was a man with tongue of wood Who essayed to sing, And in truth it was lamentable. But there was one who heard The clip-clapper of this tongue of wood And knew what the man Wished to sing, And with that the singer was content.

The successful man has thrust himself Through the water of the years, Reeking wet

with mistakes,— Bloody mistakes; Slimed with victories over the lesser, A figure thankful on the shore of money. Then, with the bones of fools He buys silken banners Limned with his triumphant face; With the skins of wise men He buys the trivial bows of all. Flesh painted with marrow Contributes a coverlet, A coverlet for his contented slumber. In guiltless ignorance, in ignorant guilt, He delivered his secrets to the riven multitude. “Thus I defended: Thus I wrought.” Complacent, smiling, He stands heavily on the dead. Erect on a pillar of skulls He declaims his trampling of babes; Smirking, fat, dripping, He makes speech in guiltless ignorance, Innocence.

In the night Grey heavy clouds muffled the valleys, And the peaks looked toward God alone. “O Master that movest the wind with a finger, “Humble, idle, futile peaks are we. “Grant that we may run swiftly across the world “To huddle in worship at Thy feet.” In the morning A noise of men at work came the clear blue miles, And the little black cities were apparent. “O Master that knowest the meaning of raindrops, “Humble, idle, futile peaks are we. “Give voice to us, we pray, O Lord, “That we may sing Thy goodness to the sun.” In the evening The far valleys were sprinkled with tiny lights. “O Master, “Thou that knowest the value of kings and birds, “Thou hast made us humble, idle, futile peaks. “Thous only needest eternal patience; “We bow to Thy wisdom, O Lord— “Humble, idle, futile peaks.” In the night Grey heavy clouds muffles the valleys, And the peaks looked toward God alone.

(illustration--candles)

The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top. Blood—blood and torn grass— Had marked the rise of his agony— This lone hunter. The grey-green woods impassive Had watched the threshing of his limbs. A canoe with flashing paddle, A girl with soft searching eyes, A call: “John!” . . . . . Come, arise, hunter! Can you not hear? The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top.

(illustration--burning sticks)

The impact of a dollar upon the heart Smiles warm red light, Sweeping from the hearth rosily upon the white table, With the hanging cool velvet shadows Moving softly upon the door. The impact of a million dollars Is a crash of flunkys, And yawning emblems of Persia Cheeked against oak, France and a sabre, The outcry of old beauty Whored by pimping merchants To submission before wine and chatter. Silly rich peasants stamp the carpets of men, Dead men who dreamed fragrance and light Into their woof, their lives; The rug of an honest bear Under the feet of a cryptic slave Who speaks always of baubles, Forgetting state, multitude, work, and state, Champing and mouthing of hats, Making ratful squeak of hats, Hats.

A man said to the universe: “Sir, I exist!” “However,” replied the universe, “The fact has not created in me “A sense of obligation.”

When the prophet, a complacent fat man, Arrived at the mountain-top, He cried: “Woe to my knowledge! “I intended to see good white lands “And bad black lands, “But the scene is grey.”

There was a land where lived no violets. A traveller at once demanded: “Why?” The people told him: “Once the violets of this place spoke thus: “’Until some woman freely give her lover “’To another woman “’We will fight in bloody scuffle.’” Sadly the people added: “There are no violets here.”

There was one I met upon the road Who looked at me with kind eyes. He said: “Show me of your wares.” And I did, Holding forth one, He said: “It is a sin.” Then I held forth another. He said: “It is a sin.” Then I held forth another. He said: “It is a sin.” And so to the end. Always He said: “It is a sin.” At last, I cried out: “But I have non other.” He looked at me With kinder eyes. “Poor soul,” he said.

Aye, workman, make me a dream, A dream for my love. Cunningly weave sunlight, Breezes, and flowers. Let it be of the cloth of meadows. And—good workman—And let there be a man walking thereon.

(illustration--man walking)

(illustration--stylized leaf)

Each small gleam was a voice, A lantern voice— In little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold. A chorus of colors came over the water; The wondrous leaf-shadow no longer wavered, No pines crooned on the hills, The blue night was elsewhere a silence, When the chorus of colors came over the water, Little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold. Small glowing pebbles Thrown on the dark plane of evening Sing good ballads of God And eternity, with soul's rest. Little priests, little holy fathers, None can doubt the truth of hour hymning. When the marvellous chorus comes over the water, Songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.

The trees in the garden rained flowers. Children ran there joyously. They gathered the flowers Each to himself. Now there were some Who gathered great heaps— Having opportunity and skill— Until, behold, only chance blossoms Remained for the feeble. Then a little spindling tutor Ran importantly to the father, crying: “Pray, come hither! “See this unjust thing in your garden!” But when the father had surveyed, He admonished the tutor: “Not so, small sage! “This thing is just. “For, look you, “Are not they who possess the flowers “Stronger, bolder, shrewder “Than they who have none? “Why should the strong— “The beautiful strong— “Why should they not have the flowers? Upon reflection, the tutor bowed to the ground. “My lord,” he said, “The stars are displaced “By this towering wisdom.”

illustration--vase of flowers

INTRIGUE

Thou art my love, And thou art the peace of sundown When the blue shadows soothe, And the grasses and the leaves sleep To the song of the little brooks, Woe is me. Thou art my love, And thou art a strorm That breaks black in the sky, And, sweeping headlong, Drenches and cowers each tree, And at the panting end There is no sound Save the melancholy cry of a single owl— Woe is me! Thou are my love,

And thou art a tinsel thing, And I in my play Broke thee easily, And from the little fragments Arose my long sorrow— Woe is me. Thou art my love, And thou art a wary violet, Drooping from sun-caresses, Answering mine carelessly— Woe is me.

(illustration--stylized flower)

Thou art my love, And thou art the ashes of other men's love, And I bury my face in these ashes, And I love them— Woe is me. Thou art my love, And thou art the beard On another man's face— Woe is me. Thou art my love, And thou art a temple, And in this temple is an altar, And on this altar is my heart— Woe is me. Thou art my love, And thou art a wretch. Let these sacred love-lies choke thee, From I am come to where I know your lies as truth And you truth as lies— Woe is me.

(illustration--cruel woman)

(illustration--column)

Thou art my love, And thou art a priestess, And in they hand is a bloody dagger, And my doom comes to me surely— Woe is me. Thou art my love, And thou art a skull with ruby eyes, And I love thee— Woe is me. Thou art my love, And I doubt thee. And if peace came with thy murder Then would I murder— Woe is me.

illustration--happy and sad masks

Thou art my love, And thou art death, Aye, thou art death Black and yet black, But I love thee, I love thee— Woe, welcome woe, to me.

Love, forgive me if I wish you grief, For in your grief You huddle to my breast, And for it Would I pay the price of your grief. You walk among men And all men do not surrender, And thus I understand That love reaches his hand In mercy to me. He had your picture in his room, A scurvy traitor picture, And he smiled —Merely a fat complacence of men who know fine women— And thus I divided with him A part of my love. Fool, not to know that thy little shoe Can make men weep! —Some men weep. I weep and I gnash, And I love the little shoe, The little, little shoe. God give me medals, God give me loud honors, That I may strut before you, sweetheart, And

be worthy of— The love I bear you.

(illustration--sword

Now let me crunch you With full weight of affrighted love. I doubted you —I doubted you— And in this short doubting My love grew like a genie For my further undoing. Beware of my friends, Be not in speech too civil, For in all courtesy My weak heart sees spectres, Mists of desire Arising from the lips of my chosen; Be not civil. The flower I gave thee once Was incident to a stride, A detail of a gesture, But search those pale petals And see engraven thereon A record of my intention.

(illustration--vase of flowers)

Ah, God, the way your little finger moved, As you thrust a bare arm backward And made play with your hair And a comb, a silly gilt comb —Ah, God—that I should suffer Because of the way a little finger moved.

Once I saw thee idly rocking —Idly rocking— And chattering girlishly to other girls, Bell-voiced, happy, Careless with the stout heart of unscarred womanhood, And life to thee was all light melody. I thought of the great storms of love as I knew it, Torn, miserable, and ashamed of my open sorrow, I thought of the thunders that lived in my head, And I wish to be an ogre, And hale and haul my beloved to a castle, And make her mourn with my mourning.

Tell me why, behind thee, I see always the shadow of another lover? Is it real, Or is this the thrice damned memory of a better happiness? Plague on him if he be dead, Plague on him if he be alive— A swinish numskull To intrude his shade Always between me and my peace!

And yet I have seen thee happy with me. I am no fool To poll stupidly into iron. I have heard your quick breaths And seen your arms writhe toward me; At those times —God help us— I was impelled to be a grand knight, And swagger and snap my fingers, And explain my mind finely. Oh, lost sweetheart, I would that I had not been a grand knight. I said: “Sweetheart.” Thou said'st: “Sweetheart.” And we

preserved an admirable mimicry Without heeding the drip of the blood From my heart.

I heard thee laugh, And in this merriment I defined the measure of my pain; I knew that I was alone, Alone with love, Poor shivering love, And he, little sprite, Came to watch with me, And at midnight, We were like two creatures by a dead camp- fire.

I wonder if sometimes in the dusk, When the brave lights that gild thy evenings Have not yet been touched with flame, I wonder if sometimes in the dusk Thou rememberest a time, A time when thou loved me And our love was to thee thy all? Is the memory rubbish now? An old gown Worn in an age of other fashions? Woe is me, oh, lost one, For that love is now to me A supernal dream, White, white, white with many suns.

Love met me at noonday, —Reckless imp, To leave his shaded nights And brave the glare,— And I saw him then plainly For a bungler, A stupid, simpering, eyeless bungler, Breaking the hearts of brave people As the snivelling idiot-boy cracks his bowl, And I cursed him, Cursed him to and fro, back and forth, Into all the silly mazes of his mind, But in the end He laughed and pointed to my breast, Where a heart still beat for thee, beloved.

I have seen thy face aflame For love of me, Thy fair arms go mad, Thy lips tremble and mutter and rave. And—surely— This should leave a man content? Thou lovest not me now, But thou didst love me, And in loving me once Thou gavest me an eternal privilege, For I can think of thee.

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