

# AN ARTIST'S REMINISCENCES

## CHAPTER I

### OF EARLY LIFE AND ASSOCIATIONS, TORQUAY, 1845-57

WHAT a curious thing is memory! It is as if the stream of life, flowing through the mind, reflects upon its surface, often but dimly and partially, notable scenes and personages as they pass, soon to be effaced by others as shadowy, while it bears along upon its surface, in all the crispness of clear reality, trifles, like the image of some fallen leaf or toy boat, which ever come in front of the dimly outlined shapes of more important incidents in a life's story.

Thus it is often that the impressions of childhood are borne along with the course of one's life, retaining all their freshness and distinctness when many later ones have faded or passed out of view, like mountains or castles in the distant landscape of a river's banks.

How far back one's memory remains distinct, or rather, at what period it consciously begins, it is very difficult to be certain of, and the memory varies in retentiveness in different individuals. It may be, too, that hearsay may have something to do with it—I mean the hearing of the talk of older people recalling events and incidents which happened in one's early life long before the period when a child is supposed to be in possession of a memory at all.

My father (of whom I give a reproduction of a miniature painted by himself about 1839 or 40) and my mother both belonged to Chester families. The picture of my mother

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given here is from a water-colour drawing of her by my father, signed and dated 1840.

The Cranes of Chester date back to the time of Elizabeth. Mr. T. Cann Hughes, M.A., F.S.A., of Lancaster, to whose researches I am indebted, has discovered a long list of Cranes who were freemen of Chester city from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries; craftsmen and traders, chiefly, of various kinds, beginning with Ralph Crane (stringer), 8th Eliz.; and ending with William Francis Crane (painter), 1847.

In this list appears the name of Thomas Crane (bookseller), 1812, sworn freeman of the city in that year—this was my grandfather. He was not only bookseller but editor of the *Chester Courant* at that time, and also captain of the Chester volunteers or “trained bands” of that period, and his children remembered playing with his cocked hat, sash, and sword. He lived in Crane Street and afterwards in Bridge Street, and from there moved to Newgate Street in the parish of St. Werburgh. He had six daughters and three sons. My paternal grandmother's maiden name was Swinchatte. Both these grandparents died in the Newgate Street house in 1836. Two of the daughters (my aunts Bessie and Catherine) kept a school at Whitchurch in 1834, and after the death of their parents this school was carried on in the old house in Newgate Street, which belonged to the family, having been left to my grandfather by a cousin—one Parson Crane, of St. Oswalds, Chester;<sup>1</sup> he was a learned man and an antiquary, who left his collections of coins and seals to Sir John Gerard—a connection on my grandmother's side—the Gerard Swinchatte family.

My great-grandfather was in the Royal Navy—a lieutenant on board the *Monarch* of 60 guns. He was in the Napoleonic wars, and wrote in the *Chester Courant* an account of a fight with the French in which his ship “ran the gauntlet of the whole French fleet.” This officer died at sea.

My great-great-grandfather was appointed house-surgeon to the Chester Infirmary when that institution was built about

<sup>1</sup> There was a local saying about Parson Crane, he being as remarkable for his height as his sister was for her shortness of stature: the long and short of it was that when folks saw a long and a short candle on the table they said, “There's Parson Crane and his sister.”

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-07571-8 - An Artist's Reminiscences  
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THOMAS CRANE  
PAINTED BY HIMSELF, ABOUT 1840

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the middle of the eighteenth century. I possess a Bible, a 12mo in three volumes, printed at Oxford by Thomas Basket, and dated 1756. It is in contemporary binding, and is inscribed "È Libris Thomæ Crane, 1756"; on the fly-leaf at the end of two of the volumes is written: "Thomas Crane, Apothecary and Secretary to the General Infirmary in Chester, 1756," and in the same careful script some missing verses from the Book of Kings are supplied upon the fly-leaves. There are other notes and references, including a Latin quotation from Erasmus, and preceding the New Testament a comment as follows: "In this collection you will find the Book of God written by the Evangelists and Apostles comprised in a most admirable and comprehensive Epitome. A true Critic will discover numerous Instances of Speech more Chaste and Beautifull than the most admired and shining passages of the Secular writers."

My father had three brothers—William, John, and Philip. With these he was associated in a lithographic press in Chester. This was at the old house in Newgate Street, where they worked in a separate building in the garden. By this means my father reproduced many of his portraits and other works at this time (in the late "twenties" and early "thirties"). Among the works issued, bearing the imprint "Drawn and lithographed by T. and W. Crane, Chester," were Mr. Rowland Warburton's "Hunting Songs," 1836, and *The History of Mr. Pig and Miss Crane*. The verses accompanying the latter were written by Lady Delamere of Vale Royal, and the book was produced by the brothers for a bazaar at Chester. I have a copy, and am able to give a reproduction of one of the plates designed by my father.<sup>1</sup> Among his early portraits were those of Lady Louisa Grey with her child; the Earl of Stamford and Warrington and his sister, with a parrot in a cage; members of the Stanley of Alderley family; the Greys of Groby; the Wilbrahams; and the late Duke of Westminster.

His facility in and taste for drawing came out at a very early age, and he made clever portraits when quite a boy it was

<sup>1</sup> Other works from the press were a portrait of the violinist Paganini, and "A Ballad by the Rev. Reginald Heber, late Bishop of Calcutta—a grotesque and humorous set of verses with eight illustrations." This latter I have never seen a copy of. There was also a series of cards designed for the Chester Musical Festival of 1829.

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said. He went to London, and entered as a student in the Royal Academy schools. I have his circular ivory student's ticket, inscribed on one side: "T. Crane, March 31, 1825;" and on the other: "Royal Academy Antique School, 1768."

My father having been born in 1808, could only have been then sixteen or seventeen years old.

William Crane died in 1843, but I think the partnership and the press must have been given up on my father's marriage in 1839-40, as William Crane seems to have gone out to Australia (Melbourne), where he died. Philip Crane also went out to Melbourne, where he opened an hotel with a friend named Bird, but he was afterwards thrown from his horse and killed. Of the other brother, John, less is recorded, but he appears to have worked with the others at the lithographic press, and also to have been an oarsman. All the brothers were fond of rowing, and they built a boat for themselves, too. There are records of exciting races on the river Dee, in one of which William Crane's boat was swamped as it reached the winning post. I have a relic of this in the shape of a piece of one of the timbers with a silver plate inscribed: "A piece of the *Deva*, swamped September 16, 1839, presented to William Crane the Coxswain." I have also a curious old bill of the Chester Regatta, September 13, 1839, with a woodcut at the head showing four-oared boats racing on the Dee, with the tower of St. John's Church in the background, and "Row, Boys, Row!" printed across the sky. In the list of competitors below appear the names of both William and John Crane, the former in the *Deva*, a four-oared gig, and the latter as a "gentleman amateur sculler."

My father and mother went to live in Liverpool in the early "forties," and my father became Secretary and Treasurer of the Liverpool Academy of Art, a post which he resigned on being ordered to Torquay on account of his health, as consumption was feared.

One of his artist friends at Liverpool at that time, also, I believe, a member of the local Academy, was the late Alfred W. Hunt, R.W.S., the distinguished landscape painter, who afterwards lived in Durham for some years, before he established himself in London, where Mrs. Alfred Hunt, and later her

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MARIE CRANE

FROM A WATER-COLOUR DRAWING BY THOMAS CRANE, 1840

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ANSTEY'S COVE  
FROM A CHARCOAL DRAWING BY THOMAS CRANE



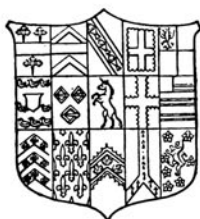
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daughter Violet, became well known for their literary work.

Of my mother's family I have very little information. She had remarkable energy and sense, and devoted herself in the most self-sacrificing way to her family. Her maiden name was Kearsley. Her father was a "maltster," a prosperous man in a good position in Chester. Her mother seems to have died early, and her father married a second time. I had an aunt and an uncle on my mother's side. The former, Aunt Emma, I remember well staying with us in Torquay—a very attractive personality, but unfortunately she did not enjoy good health, and died young. She married a Mr. John Coglan, who was on the Liverpool Stock Exchange. The uncle was my uncle Edward Kearsley, whom I speak of later. There was another uncle, "Tom," whom I never saw, who went to Australia and was not again heard of.

It has been generally supposed that Sir Francis Crane, of Mortlake Tapestry fame in the reign of James I., was an ancestor of ours, which certainly brings in a pleasant association with decorative art. Sir Francis belonged to the East Anglian branch of the Crane family. Sir Francis Crane, from his brass in Wood Rising Church, appears to have died in Paris about the age of 57 on June 26, 1636, his body being brought to Wood Rising and buried "the 10th daye of July following." Another East Anglian Crane—Sir Richard—from a brass in Wood Rising Church, appears to have been buried at Cardiff, so that there may have been a branch of the family in Wales in the seventeenth century, and so from Wales they may have come to Chester. The arms which my father used shows the same coat as that of the East Anglian branch, and occurs as the first quarter on a much-quartered shield of a Crane monument of Elizabethan date at Chilton Church, near Sudbury, and also on the tabard of Sir Robert Crane (1480), a kneeling knight in the east window of Long Melford Church, Suffolk, as well as on the brass of Francis and William Crane at Wood Rising, 1655, the coat of Sir Francis Crane being the bearings of the second and third quarters sinister of the dame's arms, which are impaled with her husband's. A precedent for my own rebus, curiously enough, occurs on a seal of a charter by one William Crane

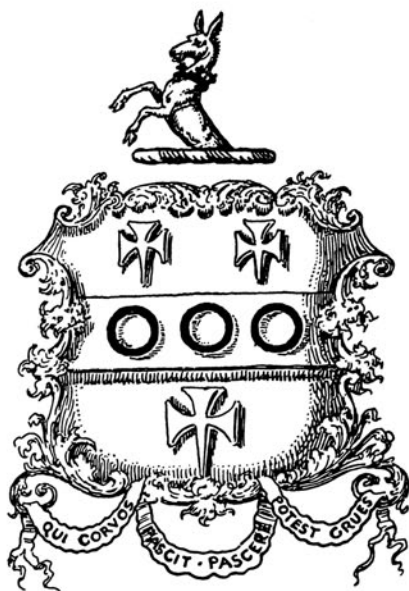
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SHIELD ON CRANE MONUMENT, CHILTON CHURCH, SUFFOLK



CRANE SHIELD IMPAIRED, WOOD RISING CHURCH



CRANE ARMS AS USED BY THOMAS CRANE (MY FATHER). FROM A HERALDS' COLLEGE DRAWING, EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY



S<sup>r</sup> FRANCIS CRANE K<sup>t</sup> CHANCELLOR OF  
 THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER<sup>r</sup>  
 (AGED ABOUT 57 YEARS) DYED THE 26  
 DAYE OF IUNE AT PARIS IN FRANCE FRO  
 WHENCE HIS BODY WAS BROUGHT AND  
 BVRIED IN THIS PLACE THE 10<sup>th</sup> DAYE OF IV  
 LY FOLLOWING ANO DNI 1636

BRASS OF SIR FRANCIS CRANE IN WOOD RISING CHURCH



SEAL OF WILLIAM CRANE, SOUTH CREKE, TEMP. EDWARD IV.



SIR ROBERT CRANE (1480), EAST WINDOW, LONG MELFORD CHURCH, SUFFOLK