

Thomas Frederick Crane

Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures

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Dean Crane is gone. No other held among us so unique a place. Not only at eighty-three was he the last survivor of the notable group of teachers who nearly sixty years ago formed the original Faculty of Cornell, but as had none of his colleagues he had personally known the Founder and his advisers and shared their plans. A student of law in the office of Ezra Cornell's closest friend and legal adviser, he had been at hand for help in the new institution's emergencies. Thus there fell to him large part in its first entrance examinations; and when its professor of German was delayed in Europe he found himself drafted into his place. But his tastes and ambitions were always those of the scholar, and except for the period spent abroad in the completion of his studies he never turned from the career thus thrust upon him.

The chair of which he dreamed, devoted wholly to Spanish, was indeed never his, but as Professor of Spanish and Italian, as head of the department of the Romance Languages, as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (1896-1902), as Dean of the University Faculty (1902-1909) he passed through all ranks of academic preferment, and twice (1899-1900 and 1912-13) he for a year as President of the University. But his activity was never exhausted by class room or administrative office. Gifted with a pen of singular grace and charm, he was a frequent and welcomed writer for both the learned and the general magazines, and volume after volume he gave to the press. From the first his interest was less in language than in literature and in the living sources from which literature flows. Even before, in 1885, he published his first book, his *Italian Popular Tales* had given to the world the study which pointed out the importance for the beginnings of modern literature of the *exempla*, or illustrative stories used by the medieval preachers; and when in 1890 he followed this with his edition of those of the great crusading orator Jacques de Vitry, his reputation as a folklorist was established on both sides of the sea. Already his work had lost all touch of the dilettante. His narrow income was strained for the building up of his remarkable private library, and his slip catalogue of folk-tales became a resource for scholars the world around. In later volumes he exploited the mine thus opened; but these by no means checked the breadth of his reading or set a limit for his exuberant pen. This still found tireless vent in essay and review, edition and textbook, even now and then in a venture into fiction and it is matter for lasting gratitude that his latest volume (1925) could include, from his own hand, a bibliography of his rich output.

But this career of bookworm and writer meant never for him neglect of social gifts. Of society he was always a lover as well as a student, and from his early manhood he shone both in conversation and as an after-dinner speaker. Yet few who knew him, sensitive and of delicate health, in his earlier years as a teacher, could have guessed how as Dean he was to become the very centre of student life, accessible and beloved, interested in every student activity and a speaker at all student gatherings. The university, too, now found him its happiest mouthpiece for all public occasions, its most attractive deputy for errands abroad. His addresses on memorial occasions will remain to it an especial treasure. Nor is its debt to him small for material gifts. Again and again he enriched the university library with precious collections and his last act among us was to bestow on it the note-books and memoranda of his lifetime's study

Nor were his interests ever narrowly academic. Though not a native of Ithaca, much of his childhood was spent here, here he fitted himself for college, and his love for the town and its people was deep and sincere. To church and school, to charities and hospital, he gave almost too generously of his means and of himself; and to the wider claims of country and mankind his ear was never deaf. Beneath all this wealth of service, this exuberance of self-expression, there lay, too, a character deep and earnest. The lightness of his touch was never permitted to belie his reverent convictions or his high sense of what became the gentleman. We shall miss the scholar and the courtly wit; but our deepest sorrow is to lose the man.

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