

“Thou Scorner of the Ground”

Robert Petty

Many people seem to go about their lives in a shell of cold, insensitive hardness. They would believe that such hardness is a necessary part of being mature.

The phrase by Shelley, “thou scorner of the ground,” brings to mind an incident which shattered the shell of hardness of one person. It was a bleak, cold day in late December. A boy, somewhere in his teens, stood on a hilltop, ankle-deep in week-old snow. In his hands was a new .22-caliber rifle. He stood a few moments, looked about him, took several steps, then stopped abruptly. He gazed far out and down across a cornfield which had been reduced to a withered brown stubble by the cold December wind. He saw three crows scratching through the snow, searching for overlooked corn. Suddenly there was a sharp crack and whine, as an ounce of lead whistled down riflins, and sped on its deadly errand. Simultaneously, angry caws and defiant cries echoed back. Down amidst the corn stubbles an old crow hobbled along dragging a badly crippled wing, while a few feet above him two other crows cawed and cawed, trying their best to help him fly. He managed to reach a small tree at the edge of the field, and climbed to the highest branch. As the boy came toward him, he saw the other crows fly away, leaving the injured one to the mercy of the stranger. The boy stopped and watched the frightened bird make one last bid for freedom. As he saw the crow wheel and clamor to

the ground, fruitlessly flapping the broken wing, trying pathetically to fly, it was as if the boy heard a voice whispering from afar; "Even as ye do it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye do it unto me." A sharp pang of remorse sprang from what tenderness and sympathy lay within him, and all false sense of hardness and coldness vanished. Should that boy outlive Methusaleh, he will not forget what he saw.