

**CROW [*Cornix cinerea*].<sup>1</sup> by E. C. K.<sup>2</sup>**

"Carrion birds or fowls." — *Town Ordinance*.  
"A stately **raven** of the saintly days of yore." — *Poe*.<sup>3</sup>

Late within my office lowly, sat I singly, sat I solely,  
Echoing rain-drops beating slowly on the shingled roof me o'er  
Strangely sad and half provoking dismal thoughts, when lo! a croaking,  
Hoarse, unearthly, ill-invoking, stole my shud'ring senses o'er —  
Seeming thrice to boom forth as the heavens withheld the shower,  
And by this unheard before.

If detail I may arightly, though of visitations nightly,  
Sullen skeptics humor slightly, not of this have I in store;  
Faint the low'ring light of heaven glimmer'd into quiet even,  
And a joyful seeming *seven* rang above my office door —  
Rang from out an imported *wooden time-racer* from Yankee shore,  
*Just ahead an hour or more!*

As in gloom wrapped silence sitting, aerial visions o'er me flitting.  
To the craven mind committing sad unbidden thoughts of yore;  
Feign'd I to peruse "proceedings," chronicled of "Council meetings,"  
When all sudden, unreceding, sinking to my still heart's core,  
Swelling in hateful silence, heard I that dread warning o'er!  
Thrice the croaking as before!

Then methought it some quaint fellow, getting fashionably *mellow*,  
By our "grave and reverend seignors" licensed to a drunken snore;  
Fain with this would I be seated, but that ominous croak repeated,  
Hopes of quietude defeated — roused me nerveless to the door,  
Faint and fluttering, I flung it open, "just about a feet" or more,  
Mire and mist there— nothing more!

Doubly *mistified*, and sharing mood pacific, mood upflaring,  
Into vacancy still staring, thus my soul did I out-pour;  
'Being hidden, brute or human, whether tempest-born or woman,  
Crave ye but a welcome, come in, I command ye — nay, implore!  
But really that infernal humming' — here I opened wide the door —  
'Is decidedly a bore!'

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<sup>1</sup> Published by the *California Star*, Volume 1, Number 46, 20 November 1847. Transcribed August 2018 by Duncan Campbell <dsc@donduncan.org>.

<sup>2</sup> E.C.K. — Edward Cleveland Kemble (1828-1886), printer/editor of the *Star*. See [donduncan.org/kemble/](http://donduncan.org/kemble/).

<sup>3</sup> "The Raven" — The famous poem by Edgar Allan Poe, published two years earlier (Jan. 1845), was the inspiration for Kemble's spoof. The crow's unexpected utterance in Spanish, "No Señor", artfully maintains Poe's recurring rhymes of "Lenore" and "nevermore". Kemble's reference to a city ordinance may coincide with his tenure as Secretary/Clerk of the city council.

Ling'ring, dubiously peering, through the flick'ring fitful clearing  
Of the blinding haze, earth-binding, anon sweeping, dense and hoar —  
When from off a shadow'd 'dobe, leaped, and stepped, and onward strode a  
**Crow!** and no obeisance show'd he — crossed the threshold of my door,  
Crossed, and crouched, then flut'ring glew upon a *bacon* kept in store —  
Perched, and *pecked*, and nothing more!

Blank I viewed him, vaguely wond'ring, and could this systematic plund'ring  
Have been taught an uncouth "carrion" whom I knew naught of before,  
Quoth I, 'Crow, I may solicit but the 'wherefore' of this visit,  
And you make a speedy exit, to return ah! nevermore' —  
And I reached me down my gun, charged with slugs a half a score —  
Croaked he hoarsely 'No Senor.'

Starting at the stillness broken, by such pure Castilian spoken  
By a fowl whose foul carnivorous nature we abhor,  
Quoth I, 'Surely, thou art creature of ungainly form and feature,  
(Then addressing him in Spanish) may I but this mystery explore?  
Tell, ah! tell me, may I know thee, else than semblance I implore' —  
Croaked he hoarsely, 'No Senor.'

'Canting wretch! thou thing of evil! not to thy unmeaning cavil  
Yield I, feeling faint-hearted,' — then I elevated the "smooth bore,"  
Scarce the deadly *click* had sounded, horrified, my soul astounded!  
Vanished bacon, vanished being! reeled my vision to the floor,  
Lo! a sternly staring **Ordinance**\* stamped the paper held before, —  
*Thou mayest harm him nevermore!*

Then the thrilling, sad revealing of that crow still 'neath my ceiling —  
Perching, pecking, on that bacon, which he never may devour!  
And that paper, open spreading, and the flaring *Pica*<sup>4</sup> heading  
Of that Ordinance, forbidding, ah! I ever must deplore.  
And my eyes from off that Ordinance, frowning, resting on the floor,  
Shall be lifted, nevermore!

\* "Any person killing or maiming the carrion fowls or birds within the limits of this town,  
shall be fined one dollar for each offence, upon conviction thereof." *Passed Nov. 8.*

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<sup>4</sup> Pica — Unit of size in typesetting; Kemble refers jokingly to his profession.