

Lynch Law in the South.

BY G. H. ANDRESS, DUANE COLLEGE.

For more than a quarter of a century our country has been free from serious danger. Questions have arisen, it is true, which have claimed the attention of the most thoughtful statesman, questions involving the moral as well as the financial interests of our people. Some of these questions still await the coming of a clearer brain to envelope their solution, but none of them have seriously endangered our nation's peace.

There is, however, a dark cloud appearing in our southern sky which can hardly escape the notice of the most careless observer. Freighted with retribution for a down-trodden race, it rises higher and higher, threatening to hide from us the sunshine of peace and to break over our heads in a fearful storm of internal strife. I refer to the system of lynching so prevalent in our southern states today. That a body of American citizens, enjoying the refining influences of Christian civilization, could be transformed into a frenzied mob, looking with a fiendish satisfaction upon the mortal agony of a fellow being, seems impossible. Yet that our people are capable of entertaining such emotions has been proven so often and so conclusively, we can no longer remain incredulous.

The hour is midnight and the usual quiet of a southern city is broken by strange excitement. The inky blackness of the sky is lighted up with lurid flames, and human faces are revealed, dark with angry passion. What is the cause of such strange commotion? What deed of infamy is contemplated begging the darkness of midnight to cover its shame? Do you see that negro crouching in terror at the feet of his captors. For him have the fagots been lighted. Upon him are to be poured vials of wrath and indignation almost inhuman. A crime has been committed, a crime of a nature so heinous as to deserve the severest punishment at the hands of the law. Suspicion has centered upon him as the perpetrator of the deed. Conviction of guilt has not been secured. He has been consigned to the city jail for safe keeping. But bolted doors and bars of iron are not strong enough to withstand the madness of a frenzied mob. In ruthless haste he is taken from his cell and dragged to the place of death. In vain he protests his innocence. In vain he pleads for justice. The mob in its blind passion seeks not justice but vengeance, and his pleading falls on unheeding ears. Merciless hands bind him to the stake, and heap the fire brand around him, and as his life goes out in mortal agony, the dark pall of lawlessness, which is settling like the shades of night over our land, seems lower and blacker than before, and the mutterings of the approaching storm grow fiercer and more ominous.

A body of men have been guilty of a crime more dangerous and far-reaching in its results than was the one which they sought to punish. They have set aside all the principles upon which safe government is based. The constitution of the United States provides that a man shall be confronted in open court by his accusers. They have chosen the midnight hour and the burning stake. Justice presumes innocence until guilt is proven. They have required their victim to prove his innocence, yet have given him no opportunity for so doing. Setting aside all principles of law and order, usurping the prerogatives of government, they have constituted themselves judge, jury and executor, and have entered upon their work in a spirit which allowed no word of entreaty or explanation. They may style themselves the preservers of society, the avengers of outraged innocence, but in the eyes of the law they are outlaws and in the sight of God murderers. Their hearts have been hardened, their valuation of human life depreciated to a degree not easily estimated, and public opinion, by its silence, lowers its standard of morality and becomes a participant in the crime.

The advocates of lynch law, in defense of their position, urge the extreme provocation which goads them to deperation. They say, "Whatever characteristics may be ours as a people, we cherish the safety and honor of our women. The lives of our mothers and sisters are dearer to us than our own, and any attempt to shroud them in dishonor calls forth our indignation as can no other crime or combination of crimes." Granting the truth of their statement, this fact instead of excusing mob violence but affords another argument against it. With such a public sentiment as exists at the south, the plea that the criminal

may escape conviction is untenable. A jury could not be found who would not convict on the slightest evidence a negro charged with such a crime. With wealth, race prejudice and an enraged populace arrayed against him, there is more danger that the innocent be "found guilty" than that the criminal go unpunished. Why then deny him a trial? Why imperil the sacred interests of society under such circumstances?

The negro feels keenly the injustice of mob law. He realizes that a white man charged with a similar crime against one of his race, if punished at all, would at least be given a fair trial. Although submissive under great persecution the negro is not a coward. Do we forget the assault on Fort Wagner? Yonder, advancing beneath the storm that burst in fury from the clouds, moves one solitary brigade against the fort, now grim and silent but soon to blaze with the fires of hell. Look! revealed by the play of the lightning see that regiment that leads the column moving on to death. Behold the gleam of awarthy faces lit by the fire of manhood's courage. "Let my men lead the charge" was the request of the gallant colonel. For to that regiment of slaves this battle meant more than to face the storm of iron, more than to pour out their life-blood on the field of carnage. It meant the vindication of their manhood. Behind them two hundred years of slavery. Before them the shining dreams of glorious liberty for their people. And under the storm of Sumpter's guns and Wagner's shot and shell, beneath the roll of the thunder and the gleam of the lightning, in the sights of the nation and of omnipotent God, they wrote the vindication of their manhood in deeds whose memory shall never die. Shall we find their courage less when with the God-born love of justice stirred within them, they shall fight again; not for the white man but against him, not to bear aloft the sky-born flag we honor as the emblem of freedom, equality, fraternity, but to trample it in the dust as the symbol to them of slavery, OUTRAGE, MURDER?

But injustice is not the only evil arising out of this system of mob law. The breach between the two races is constantly widening. Each administration of lynch law renders race prejudice more bitter. Both races are becoming so pervaded with the spirit of vengeance that civilization is in a measure yielding to barbarism. It is our duty and privilege as a race to teach the negro obedience to law, but can this be done by deeds of outlawry? He should be taught a higher valuation of human life, but can this be done by the atrocities of mob violence? The answer is obvious. The white man and the negro must learn the divine lesson that they are alike, the handiwork of God, that their difference in color is in accordance with His will, and that they owe to each other that love which the Son of Man sought to inculcate. The one maddened by outrages perpetrated against the helpless—the other enraged, yea brutalized by the red-handed injustice administered in retaliation—the smoldering, muttering Vesuvius of unrighted wrongs will one day burst forth in an eruption whose horrors no words can describe and whose shock will imperil the foundations of all government. Where, then, lies the satisfactory solution of this problem? By what treatment of the negro shall past crime be punished and future crime be lessened? Shall there be further resort to processes as barbarous as those of savage tribes? Rather let every criminal feel the strong arm of the law. Let him be made to realize that his is a crime against the government as well as against society, and that to government as the protector of society must he pay the penalty. Let the punishment be made as severe as you will, only let it be legal and inflicted after legal conviction of guilt.

No one can doubt the uplifting influence of intellectual and moral teaching. They are silent but resistless forces that move on to victory, when bayonets and cannon are powerless to achieve it. They have set in motion those mighty passions and ideals without which Homer had never sung and Shakespeare's voice been silent as the tomb, Greece had been by name and England only an island in the sea. These forces can reform the negro. Wherever the schoolhouse stands by the roadside, there is a present safeguard of society and a prophecy of higher life for the future. Wherever the church spires rise heavenward and the Sabbath bells ring with solemn melody the call to worship, there is the promise of larger, sweeter life for the nation and the world. The march of

mind is ever onward and upward and the still small voice of conscience ever whispers to the soul of its Divine Creator. When those conditions prevail, that crime which moves an indignant people to deeds of violence will become a thing of the past. The negro and the white will look with equal horror at the deeds which today are of such common occurrence. But the abolition of lynching need not await the removal of provocation. Both facts must be weighed in the golden balance of justice. Both are evils and as such must be eliminated, but the lynching must go, though the provocation remain, for by its use the removal of provocation is rendered more and more difficult of consummation.

Lynching is in itself a violation of all law and a menace to all government. Though its victim be guilty beyond question, it can but bring about evil results. It tears down all respect for authority, tramples upon all rights of the individual, and sets up as its motto, "Let crime punish crime." Such a principle is opposed to all organized society, and leads to anarchy. The negro cries for justice in dealing with social crime. He asks not that the guilty go unpunished but that the supposed criminal be given an opportunity to prove his innocence before a court of justice. If his cry be heard, reason will have conquered passion, and thirst for vengeance will cease to transform human beings into murderous fiends. If his request be denied, this nation must suffer the penalty of its wrong doing. Shall it be by the slow and deadly decay of moral fibre long abused, or torn with contending factions will it sink into insignificance while Freedom spreads her wings and flies to some fairer land, and the names of Plymouth Rock and Faneuil Hall fade into the land of dreams and shadows? Or shall we wake some day and start to hear again the roar of Sumpter's guns and see the black columns, not slaves but men, moving against a nation at whose hands they have suffered unutterable wrong? There is one who knows. To-night He sits upon the throne of His power. "With Him is no variableness neither shadow of turning." "He shall not fall nor be discouraged till He hath set judgment." What to Him were the blotting out of a nation to the establishment of the everlasting Justice!

The plumber came down like a wolf on the fold,
His pocket's well crammed full of solder and gold,
Five hours and a half he made love to the cook,
And sixty five dollars he charged in his book.

The car-horse old and weary, went toiling up the hill,
He saw the motor broken and the cable standing still,
He murmured as he braced his feet and gave a tired out yawn,
"My name may not be lightning, but I'll get there before dawn."

The Delian New Members' program is arranged for Friday evening, March 30.

The young women of the University Y. W. C. A. will give an entertainment in chapel on Saturday evening, March 24. They will render in pantomimic burlesque "Old Maids Made Over to Order," "Girls' Gymnasium," "The Old Time Spelling Class," and other scenes from real and unreal life. Excellent vocal and instrumental music has been provided. The Y. W. C. A. "Belle Chorus" will take a prominent part and Miss Blair will also assist with a vocal selection. An admission of 15c will be charged for the purpose of raising funds to provide for the expenses of their delegate to the Lake Geneva Bible school next summer.

Miss Gardener '97 has been confined to her room on account of illness this week. Her many friends will be glad to hear of her improved condition. She will be able to attend classes again in a few days.

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