

THE LITERARY DIGEST

NEW YORK, JUNE 19, 1897.

LYNCH-LAW IN OHIO—AND ELSEWHERE.

IMPASSIONED citizens of Urbana, Ohio, a city with a population of about 9,000, near the capital of the State, lynched a negro two weeks ago under circumstances that have called forth unsparing condemnation from the press of the country. A negro ravisher of a widowed woman had been brought to trial without delay and sentenced, on his plea of guilty, to imprisonment for twenty years—the extreme penalty fixed by the law. Removal of the prisoner to the penitentiary being delayed over night, local militiamen were added to the sheriff's posse on guard at the county jail. The militia fired upon a mob which attacked the jail, and killed and wounded several members of the mob. Appeal was made to the governor for more troops to preserve order. Governor Bushnell states that the captain of the militia, instead of the sheriff, the proper authority, made this first appeal, hence misunderstanding of the situation and delay resulted. One company, however, was ordered out, in response to a second appeal from the sheriff, and appeared on the scene early the following morning, only to leave it on representations (whether made by the mayor or the sheriff, or both, is a disputed point) that their presence was not needed. Then the mob broke into the jail and executed vengeance in short order. The feeling engendered by the resistance first made by the local militia ran so high that the sheriff, the captain, and other members of the local militia which fired on the mob, fled from the town. Later on a women's mass-meeting was held which demanded a change of law imposing capital punishment instead of imprisonment for the crime of rape.

Newspaper comment on this occurrence is intensified further by the fact that a mob of citizens of Princess Anne county, Md., a few days later, took from the court-house a negro ravisher who had been sentenced to death, and strung him up. A number of other cases of lynching have been reported since the case in Urbana.

Distrust of Courts and Laws.—"The people of Ohio have seen murderers tried and convicted of murder in the first degree two or three times over and finally set free. They have known many desperate and dangerous criminals to be sent to the penitentiary for long terms and released soon enough to make the whole costly process of the courts seem little better than a farce. It is notorious that the machinery provided for the punishment and, therefore, the prevention of crime is slow, cumbersome, costly, and, in the end, very uncertain.

"That is the real reason why, once in a while, the passion and indignation of the masses break through all restraints and some particularly wicked crime is avenged, roughly, brutally, and without regard to legal forms, by a frenzied mob, itself criminal and more dangerous than its victim. It is the bursting forth of a fire of impatient sense of wrong which is always smoldering.

"The manifestations of this discontent with the operation of the courts and the laws are very terrible when they take the form of such tragedies as that which has just been witnessed at Urbana, so frightful and so perilous that they must be made impossible, if punishment can accomplish that result. But the reform should not stop there. It ought to be made wide and deep, and the procedure of the courts of this State should be so changed, if it lies in human ingenuity to accomplish the result, that justice would be swifter, surer, and less expensive. Let that be done, and we shall see no more of lynch law and the awful tragedies to which it leads."—*The Leader, Cleveland, Ohio.*

A Martyr to Law and Order Needed.—"The one glimmering episode which challenges admiration was the firing of the local militia on the mob. The fatal mistake was made in not holding the soldiery to the grim, but wholesome work. The mayor of the city, who ordered the second company away, was a traitor to his trust, or panderer to the mob, and he must be held directly responsible for the subsequent events. It is time that

LYNCH-LAWS

somebody in authority fought one of these mobs to the death, either of himself or the mob. Give us a martyr, if need be, to law and order, and build his monument high. This affair is true anarchy—the mob spirit. And it is growing more unrestrained. There have been other lynchings in Ohio within recent years, and what happens in Ohio may easily happen in New England. Respect the law, or we shall need a Bonaparte to teach us to obey.”—*The Republican, Springfield, Mass.*

“A Praiseworthy Lynching.”—“The negro was killed irregularly, but justifiably. He committed an offense far more heinous than simple murder. . . . The community at Urbana would be less than human, indeed it would be lily-livered and lacking in gall, were it to allow this ravisher to live. . . .

“The State can do nothing to those persons who informally executed the negro at Urbana. It has not the power: it derives such power as it has from the people, and the people determined in other tribunal than that which the law creates that for his heinous offense the negro should suffer. Sympathy with the negro, condemnation of what may be called a mob will be lost. There can be no punishment of those people. The thing is impossible. Their sole offense consists in having done the right thing in the wrong way. Any brute, negro or other, who violates a woman ought to be shot down or hanged up, as may be most convenient. When there was like occurrence in Illinois the state authorities were powerless to bring a whole community to punishment. There will be like failure in Ohio; there ought to be like failure anywhere. The man who would be guilty of such an offense is not fit to live.”—*The Chronicle, Chicago.*

No Arrests and No Trial.—“The ease with which they [the state troops] allowed themselves to be persuaded to retire from the vicinity of the jail after they had arrived there and taken in the situation was superb. They had no thought to go shooting down their fellow citizens to protect a black brute like that. . . . There will be no arrests and no trial. Human nature is pretty much alike both in North and South, when crimes like the one of which ‘Click’ Mitchell was guilty are in question; and it is questionable whether the very strictest administration of justice will ever be able to dispense with the rough-and-ready services of Justice Lynch in cases in which Caucasian women are assaulted by ruffian Senegambians. The Ohioans of Urbana are not law-abiding enough to allow a brute like ‘Click’ Mitchell to escape the noose, court or no court.”—*The Times-Democrat, New Orleans.*

A Discouraging Sequel.—“What has followed is even worse, because it is more deliberate. The commander of the militia, who had done merely his duty in protecting the prisoner and in firing upon the mob, was compelled to leave the place by threats of violence, and it is said that it will be impossible for him to get his living in Urbana hereafter, so much ‘public opinion’ resents his discharge of his duty. The women of Urbana have held a meeting, not to condemn or deplore the murder committed by a mob, but to demand that the penalty of death shall be affixed by law to the offense for which the extreme penalty of the law had already been awarded. The whole story would be disgraceful if it were told of a mining-camp. But it is told of an old and settled town, fully equipped with schools and churches, which fairly represents the civilization of the Middle West of the United States. In that point of view it is extremely discouraging.”—*The Times, New York.*

The Governor's Present Duty.—“If Governor Bushnell has really any desire to take exemplary action in this emergency, there is no obstacle in his path. Let him send for the fugitive sheriff and militia officers. From them he can learn who were the ringleaders in the riot and whose threats led them to run, like whipped curs, to a place of concealment. Then, under directions from the chief executive, the law can readily take its course, and in the face of the lesson so administered it is by no means likely that Champaign county would again be troubled with lynch law and the terrorization of the guardians of the public peace. It is not because of a shortage of means of enforcing the law that Urbana has been made a headquarters of anarchy, but because the lawless element in the town believes that it has the secret sympathy of the local and state officials, who will, therefore, wink at lawlessness and dodge the necessity of punishing it.”—*The Leader, Pittsburg.*

LYNCH-LAWS

Charity for Human Nature.—"The disgrace of the outbreak in a measure is shared by the whole country because it represents so complete a breakdown of civilization, but it is better that it should have happened at Urbana than in some community where past slavery would have given a color of truth to the charge that a negro can not get justice. It is well that it should have happened within the zone of the influence of New England. If no other lesson can be extracted from the Urbana disgrace, there is at least the lesson of charity. It teaches that human nature is the same all over the country, and that one community is no more secure than another from the temptation of the gust of passion aroused by brutal crimes."—*The Republic, St. Louis.*

Self-Control and Respect for Law.—"What is of importance, and of tremendous importance, is whether in a long-settled and presumably civilized community there dwell that self-control and respect for law without which a republic can not endure. This is not fine-spun theorizing, but simple fact. An alarming growth of the lawless spirit is to be observed among people who commonly pass for good citizens. The poison is working at the vitals of the American state. If we are going to make liquor laws and then abuse our officials for enforcing them; if we are going to prescribe penalties for crime and then in outbursts of fury to attack our own jails and behave like Zulu warriors; if we are going to weep over the corruption of politics and refuse as jurors to punish bribery at elections, we shall fast pave the way for the Man on Horseback who will make orderly existence possible, or relapse into the barbarism of personal vengeance and family feud. Some lessons in obedience are imperatively needed in this country, and Captain Leonard's bullets were arguments in the right direction. The only pity is that he did not use more of them. . . . Blank cartridges for such untamed rebels? Are our governors and mayors to apologize for the laws they are set to enforce, and play with the disorder they are sworn to suppress? Better cut down with grape and canister a whole city than enthroned the mob to govern the republic."—*The Tribune, New York.*

Strength of Race Prejudice.—"There is a feeling in the white man's mind that whoever of the race not his own who attempts to defy this race instinct, and violently upset the physical law which nature has established, does by that act take his life in his hand. Death must be his portion, whether legally or illegally matters not; and from that decree there is no appeal. Laws may be passed, officers may be sworn to execute the same, and such officers may attempt to do their duty, but the instances are rare indeed where the condemned has on this account escaped his fate. So strong is the feeling that the sense of civic obligation falls before it. Men who proclaim their thorough fidelity to their country and its laws, and who know that the safety of the body politic depends upon the observance of law, draw the line at this point, and while they will applaud a public officer who does his whole duty in upholding the law in any other emergency, they condemn him unsparingly if the object of his services is the man who has overstepped the racial bound, more especially if, in defense of his prisoner, the lives of men of their own race are sacrificed."—*The Register, Mobile, Ala.*

Protests Insufficient.—"Mustapha Bey, the Turkish Minister at Washington, will have another chance to score off American sympathizers with the victims of the Sultan. He referred the other day to the Urbana lynching, when asked about Turkish outrages, and now an even more brutal and shocking affair occurs in Maryland. A negro actually under sentence of death is torn from the officers of the law and kicked and strangled to death in broad daylight by an infuriated mob, not one man of whom even deigned to disguise himself. The judge who had just sentenced the criminal to death rushes out to implore the mob to let the law take its course, but he is lucky to get off himself without lynching. Things are getting worse in the North than in the South; in Virginia they at least let convicted negroes be hanged by due process of law; in Maryland the raging mob must slake its thirst for blood without a moment's delay. These occurrences certainly give a queer look to our horror at Armenian massacres. If we content ourselves with protesting against our own lynchings and disowning them, we are no better than the Sultan; he always protests against his own murderous exploits. If some of that Princess Anne mob can not be brought to justice, why should any sentence of any court, or any law on the statute-book, be any longer respected or heeded in Maryland?"—*The Evening Post, New York.*