

NEGRO OUTRAGE NO EXCUSE FOR LYNCHING.

I HAVE been requested by the Editor of THE FORUM to prepare a plain and candid paper, written from the standpoint of a Southern thinker and observer, touching the lynching of negroes and the outrages which have occasioned it.

A fundamental truth which certainly exists, and which ought to be recognized by all men everywhere, is that, according to right reason and just views of civilization, government and morals, provocation has nothing whatever to do with the right or wrong of lynching negroes. No kind or degree of provocation will justify or even mitigate it. Lynching is barbaric, anarchic and wrong *per se*. It belongs to the darker and deeper of the two classes of criminal conduct into which human wickedness has been divided; it is not merely *malum prohibitum*, it is *malum in se*. In this respect it is precisely on a level with rape and murder, the two crimes which have been and still are the most apt to provoke it.

The brief and bloody code of lynch-law, translated into plain language, reads thus: "Let past crime be met with present crime in order that future crime may be prevented." Its principle is to check crime by the commission of crime. Can any civilization stand this? Can any organized society tolerate it and live? Can any enlightened moralist approve it? The true cause of lynching is not the provocation itself, but the failure to discern clearly and realize vividly the fundamental truth which I am now urging, namely, that provocation is utterly irrelevant, either as justification or as mitigation. Were this great truth generally accepted, there would be no public opinion behind the lynchers to afford them moral support or encourage them with the hope of impunity. Indeed, there would be no lynchers, for bad men do not lynch others on account of their crimes, and good men will not knowingly render themselves morally criminal as a means of putting down or keeping down other criminals. When a thing is gravely wrong in itself, good men will not engage in it if they see it in its true light. They will shun and avoid it, irrespective of whether it would prove effectual or not. Were it abso-

lutely certain that rape might be stopped by a system of retaliation between the races, retorting rape for rape, the use of such means would be abhorrent. Why is it not also abhorrent to retaliate with murder? Chiefly for the reason that by a misconception of the part played by provocation, the killing of the ravisher is regarded by many as only a technical legal murder, and not as a moral murder at all. There is a widespread opinion among good and fairly sensible people that no guilt whatever is involved in such a killing, except an artificial guilt manufactured by the law. In some communities a popular vote would doubtless determine the law to be wrong and the lynching conscientiously right. The prevalence of this opinion is the mainstay and support of mob massacre. There is every reason to believe that mobs are generally actuated by a most intense feeling of right and justice, and it is sympathy with and participation in this feeling by the neighboring population which screens the lynchers not only from punishment but in most cases from accusation and trial.

If we are to have law at all and maintain it, we must recognize the ethical as well as the legal duty of keeping on the inside of it at all times and under all circumstances, absolutely and without exception. Those who commit rape or murder put themselves outside of law, and follow their own will instead of abiding by the will of society as expressed in the ordinances of government. Those who lynch these criminals do precisely the same thing; they put themselves outside of law, and follow their own will instead of abiding by the will of society as expressed in the ordinances of government. Breaches of law are to be dealt with on the inside of law and not on the outside. To punish anyone wrongfully for acting wrong is contradictory and absurd. No human being who is under organized government has any right, nor can he have any, to overstep the law for any purpose whatsoever. He cannot do it for the defence of his own life or honor, or for the defence of those who are nearest and dearest to him, whatever may be their age, sex or condition. That which the law permits to be done in self-defence or in defence of others, may be done, and that only. What the law forbids to be done for defensive objects can no more be done for those objects than for any other. As justification of unlawful actions, an aggressive object counts for as much as a defensive one. For members of society to set up and act upon rules of so-called right in opposition to the binding laws of society, is wrong, always has been wrong, and always will be. This is the true and only sound doctrine concerning lynch-

ing or anything else. He who fails to discern this with a clear vision, does not behold the majesty and the divinity of law.

Lynching and provocation stand each upon its own footing. The second is no excuse for the first, and the first is no allowable remedy for the second. Provocation ought to cease whether lynching ceases or not; and lynching ought to cease whether provocation ceases or not. Both races should understand this, see it, feel it, teach it and practise it. For the races to criminate and recriminate, in the spirit of childish wrangle and controversy, the one recouping with the grievance of provocation when the other complains of lynching, and the latter recouping with the grievance of lynching when the former complains of provocation, is not only unprofitable but gravely pernicious. It confuses thought, withdraws attention from relevant matter and wastes it on the irrelevant, inflames passion and augments race antagonism and aversion. To be wise, politic and patriotic, both races should, on this momentous subject, think, feel and cooperate from the standpoint of one and the same indivisible political society, responsible as such to God and to the civilized world for an abnormal prevalence of both evils, and charged with the absolute and unshunnable duty of uprooting each of them as far as possible and as soon as possible.

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THE LAST HOLD OF THE SOUTHERN BULLY.

I.

COMPETENT observers in almost every part of the South agree that crimes against white women by Negroes are becoming very much more frequent, that more frequent becomes the lynching of Negroes, and that this method of dealing with crime is tolerated and hence approved in an increasing number of communities. The race-clash, therefore, takes a somewhat new turn, and in this succession of crimes there is a singular conjunction of dangerous forces.

Most of the men who were masters and most who were slaves are dead. The men of each race that are now in active life have not the attitude to each other that their fathers had. There could be no more conclusive or startling evidence of such a change than the frequency of a social crime that was unknown and impossible in slavery, and that was very infrequent as long as the manners and traditions of slavery survived. This somewhat new race-clash which is different from the old political race-clash, brings for the first time a grave social danger. Whatever race-conflicts might come, it had generally been taken for granted that we should be spared this one. For this kind of a crime may light all the inflammable material in the race-relation. To begin with, it is a social crime; and, if so ludicrously slight a social jar as whites and blacks riding in the same railway coach has in the past stirred anger, what shall be expected of this? Nothing else could so arouse all the white man's race-feeling, no other crime or combination of other crimes—not even murder and arson and massacre all together.

Moreover all round about such a point of race-contact, the social structure is exceedingly sensitive. In addition to the defensive attitude that any other civilized society has toward its women there is in the South the tradition of a "knightly" attitude toward them. Whatever part this old-fashioned gallantry may play or may ever have played between individual men and women, the tradition of it is indomitable. The veriest bully feels a sort of sanctity gather about him when he goes forth to defend or to avenge a woman: the race tiger and the romantic tiger both leap to life.