

Mob Law in the South.

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WHEN Miss Ida B. Wells went to England, a few winters ago, she horrified the British public by a plain, straightforward story of the prevalence of mob law in the United States, and especially in the Southern States. She had herself been a victim of the mob spirit. Her newspaper property at Memphis, Tenn., which it had taken her years of hard labor and self-denial to build up, was destroyed in an hour, and she was warned to remain away from Memphis or take the consequences. Why? Because she had the courage to denounce, in her newspaper, the lynching of three of her acquaintances, reputable young men, one of them a letter mail carrier, who were lodged in jail at Memphis for defending their grocery store from the assaults of what they believed to be white ruffians, instigated by a rival white concern, but who turned out to be special constables, deputed to arrest the three young men on a trumped-up charge, and for the special purpose of breaking up their business.

The recital of this simple story, and of hundreds of others like it, by Miss Wells, so excited the public mind of Great Britain that public meetings were held all over England and Scotland, which eventuated in the organization of an Anti-Lynching Society, in which such men were interested as the Duke of Argyle, Henry Labouchère, Justin McCarthy, the Rev. Charles F. Aked, Earl Russell, of the *Chronicle*, and many others. The interest manifested by the British people in the agitation was felt in this country; but instead of arousing a responsive sympathy and co-operation on the part of press and people here, it aroused, with reasonable exceptions, a spirit of bitter resentment that the people of Great Britain should interest themselves in our domestic affairs, as if the interests of humanity can be circumscribed by race or nationality.

The public opinion and the newspapers of the Southern States were particularly outspoken and malignant against Miss Wells and the people of Great Britain. The chivalry of Memphis, which had not scrupled to hound a weak woman out of their community, and to destroy her property, because she had fearlessly denounced wrong and outrage, and because God had endowed her with "a skin not colored as their own," pursued her beyond the ocean. The British newspaper offices were flooded with Southern newspaper articles intended not to disprove the story that Miss Wells told, but to prove that she was a moral leper and unworthy of credence. In this infamous business of seeking to deny the truth and to blast the woman's character who told it, the Memphis *Daily Commercial* was easily foremost. The vulgarity and mendaciousness of its utterances upon the subject were such as should not enter any Christian home; but as they were intended to justify the bloody work of the mob and to vindicate Southern honor, whatever that may now mean in the South, and as the woman assailed was of the black and not of the white race, the publications were considered to be in good taste by the people of Memphis, for whom it spoke. As an evidence of the esteem and affection in which it is held its editor was elected to Congress at the November election by the people of Memphis. When shall we have an end of mob law, if the vile champions of it are selected by their fellow citizens to represent them in the highest legislative body in the Republic?

The agitation started in Great Britain three years ago, and which gave promise of effecting some permanent good, has, to all intents and purposes, subsided. The reception which the American people gave the agitation dampened the enthusiasm of the

British people, and very naturally. It is in the first place our business, as Christian individuals and as a Christian nation, to see to it that all our people enjoy the protection of the laws, as guaranteed by the Federal Constitution and made obligatory upon the several States by that fundamental charter of our republican form of government. It is for us to see to it that no one of the many races that make up our population is made the object of systematic persecution and spoliation of life and property, as the Jews are in Russia and the Armenians are in Turkey and the Cubans are by the Spaniards in Cuba; and when we fail to do it the rest of the world has a justifiable right to cry aloud and spare not, even as we have done and are doing against Russia and Turkey and Spain. As no man can live to himself alone, so can no nation. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin," and the telegraph wire and the printing-press register the heart-throbs of universal mankind every second in a minute and every minute in an hour and every hour in a day. "Am I my brother's keeper?" can be asked now, as when asked by Cain when the world was young, only to shirk responsibility for wrong-doing of one sort or another.

We have been robbing and murdering the Indians and the Africans from the foundation of the Government, doing it as individuals and as a nation; and we are still doing it. The Southern States at least, by failing to punish the miscreants, think it consistent and proper to shoot an Afro-American, without as well as with provocation. Judge Albion W. Tourgée, and other friends of justice and humanity, have utterly failed to touch the national conscience, so that by their silent acquiescence the whole people become a party to the slaughter of Afro-Americans, for one cause or another, from the day that Robert E. Lee surrendered his sword to Ulysses S. Grant to the present day. We cannot shirk the responsibility nor the exceeding odium of our silent toleration of "every day's report of wrong and outrage," which has gone up from the South for thirty years. We may plead as Cain pleaded, but the blood of our brother will remain upon our hands.

From 1865 to 1876, Afro-Americans were slaughtered in all the Southern States by organized bands of murderers, styling themselves the Ku-Klux Klan, Knights of the White Camellia, and the like, for political reasons, ostensibly; and there are men in the Federal Senate and House of Representatives to-day, honored by their fellow members and looked upon and trusted by the nation, who have led those bands on their missions of murder and incendiarism, and who, in any normal condition of society, would have been hanged dead by the neck ten or twenty years ago. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." The crimes of the Ku-Klux Conspiracy have been preserved to posterity in thirteen bulky volumes of "Congressional Reports," and when the historian of the future reaches that epoch of our national chronicles, he will shudder at the black depravity of it.

Under the specious plea of Home Rule the Ku-Klux mob carried death, destruction and terror everywhere. Like the Spaniards in Cuba to-day, they spared neither male nor female, old nor young; all alike were butchered, all alike despoiled. The absolute destruction of the Afro-American's right of the elective franchise, which had been conferred upon him by the whole American people, was the object of the conspiracy. The nation put the seal of its approval upon the object achieved in so cowardly and bloody a manner, in 1876, when it withdrew the Federal troops from the South and recognized the legality of the usurped governments of South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana.

When all the State governments of the South had been violently wrested from the control of the enfranchised Afro-Americans and their Northern allies, the "Carpetbaggers"; when the white men of the South had recovered control of all the machinery of municipal, county and State government, the general belief was that mob law would cease and that the Afro-American, despoiled of political rights and power, would be allowed to live in peace under his vine and fig-tree. But the belief was not realized. The mob spirit was not cast out. The average number of Afro-American men, women and children lynched in the Southern States in the past twenty years, from 1876, is one hundred; two thousand people murdered in two decades by the inhabitants of Christian States of a Christian nation. Hundreds have been murdered of whose taking off no record was made in the public press, while thousands have been starved and tortured to death in the stockades and the chain-gangs

of the penal system, Siberian in its rigors and fatality. Thus to the slaughter of the mob is added, judicial murder. How great this latter is can be ascertained by reading the report of the commission appointed to investigate the convict lease system of Georgia, recently submitted.

The Northern newspapers do not keep track of the doings of the mob in the Southern States. They sometimes make brief mention of them. They only give extensive space to them when some unusually atrocious act is perpetrated, like the burning and flaying of a man at Paris, Tex., three years ago, or the storming of the jail and the lynching of eleven Italians four years ago at New Orleans, or the lynching of two men at Columbus, Ga., last summer, and the like; but those who spend much time in the Southern States, as I do, know that the newspapers make report nearly every day of some execution by the bloody mob. But a few weeks ago the whole population of Mayfield, Ky., was under arms to repel a threatened uprising of Afro-Americans, who had been infuriated by the lynching of one of their number for an alleged crime, and for the malicious shooting of several others as an outgrowth of the same affair, charged with no crime whatever.

The charge that these lynchings, which increase instead of decrease from month to month, are provoked by the perpetration of criminal assault, will not bear the test of analysis. A man was lynched in Florida, a little while ago, because he was suspected of burning a house; and not long since a preacher was taken from his pulpit, in the same State and lynched for no assignable reason whatever. A black man will be lynched in the Southern States whenever a few white men decide that they want some excitement out of the ordinary. The black man charged with any sort of crime or who has incurred the enmity of some white man, is hit upon as the victim.

Only two Governors of Southern States have set their faces resolutely against that law; they are Governor Charles T. O'Ferrall, of Virginia, and Governor William Y. Atkinson, of Georgia. These men have rendered splendid service to the South by their resolute opposition to the mob spirit. Their example is worth a ton of precept. South Carolina has an Anti-Lynching law, and Governor John Gary Evans is trying to enforce its provisions.

The mob spirit grows upon what it feeds. It is rapidly demoralizing Southern society; it long ago demoralized and discouraged the Afro-American portion of it, who feel that they are deserted by the nation and by the State, and especially by the State which makes haste to mass armed troops at any given point to protect the white mob from the threatened vengeance of black men goaded to desperation.

Is there no appeal from Cæsar drunk to Cæsar sober? Is it as true to-day as it was in 1856, as proclaimed by Chief-Justice Roger B. Taney, that "the black man has no rights that a man is bound to respect"?

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