

Atlanta Outdone

WORSE, if possible, than the horrible Atlanta riot is that which has forever disgraced Springfield, Ill. In the capital of the State, under the very eyes of the Governor, a mob of passionate, drunken, crazed white men made war on black men. It was a race riot. Cheated of their desire first to lynch a brutal black criminal, they turned their rage on the whole race, burning, killing where they could. Unable to kill the guilty they tried to kill the innocent, to kill those who detested the crime quite as much as did they—but they were black. Because they were black they were hated; those they could catch they strung up and hanged; the property of those they could not catch they wrecked and burned.

To be sure there was a fearful crime made the excuse for this outbreak. But it was the excuse, not the reason. The reason lay in the mean racial malice of those who took part in it. They were ruffians. They were as low and contemptible as the lowest in the quarter which they sacked. They knew the criminal guilty of the assault on a woman had been caught and would get swift justice; but that was not enough. They wanted the chance to vent their hatred on other people who were not criminals, but who were black. It was not crime they hated, for they were criminals themselves. They were that lower and lowest level of a city's population that have no respect for law, who are kept down by force from open crime, but who sometimes break out and over all restraint of law and show their temporary power. There were just such people in the black quarter of the city; but black men are not all criminals any more than all white men are criminals.

It is a fearful thing to think of, that such a stratum of society can exist in a city, thousands who can thus create a mob to overturn law. It shows how much yet remains to be done to civilize our people. Laws and courts have not yet done it; schools and churches have not done it. After the Atlanta riot those who excused it said that were there similar provocation there would be just such riots in the cities of the North. It has now been proved true of one city in

Illinois; and Springfield will have to carry a heavier burden of shame than does Atlanta, for Illinois was never a slave State. The citizens of Springfield will date events as occurring so many years before or after the riot. We do not forget the draft riot in this city during the Civil War, when maddened mobs pursued black men thru the streets. The possibility that such a riot may occur in other cities oppresses us with fear and horror.

It is some satisfaction that the Governor of Illinois tried to do something to quell the mob. It is a further satisfaction that if men must be killed, those killed were not all black. There was a Gatling gun called out, but we do not learn that it was used. The way to end mobs is to disperse them relentlessly. If warnings are not heeded, if firing once over their heads does no good, then fire low; those will run then that do not fall. A man who joins a mob invites death. When a mob resists the officers of law, then is the time to shoot. When a mob tried to stop the Massachusetts Sixth Regiment as it was passing thru Baltimore the officer in charge bade the soldiers not to fire so long as no one of them was hurt by the shots that were fired from the crowd at the cars in which they were being drawn thru the city. At last one soldier held up his hand and showed that a bullet had struck his thumb, and the officer bade them shoot—and the regiment past thru safely. It would seem that the military at Springfield were afraid to awe the mob lest they might hurt somebody—but that is what the military are for.

The negroes have been fleeing from Springfield—what else was to be expected? The women and children ought to flee in such a case—perhaps the men. But when violent men, white or black, lawlessly attack other men, black or white, attempting to kill them or destroy their property, what should the attacked party do? Get protection from the police and the laws if possible; if that is not possible, defend, resist to the utmost of human power. That is good law and good morals. When a mob attacks a house or a quarter, those who are in it should make the invaders sorry they came, make them slow to come again. We are not followers of Tolstoy. We

accept the direction, in case of danger: "He that hath no sword let him sell his cloak and buy one."

Yet, after all, the chief, solemn lesson from such a fearful tragedy is that of the obligation which rests on the better, the law-abiding, the decent elements of society somehow to reform, to civilize and Christianize the pagans in their own midst. It is not enough for the negroes to rail at the failure of law to protect them, nor for white men to rail at the crimes which provoke reprisal, or at the inefficiency of police and military. What is needed is that the well-behaved black men and white men should each invade their own slums with all the possible appliances of persuasion and enforcement to make them decent. After all, as Judge Lindsey says in this week's issue of THE INDEPENDENT, it is society, it is we of the people, who are to blame for the evil conditions which we do not correct.