

THE LYNCHERS.

Whilst clearly defining in our last issue, our position in condemnation of the lawlessness evinced in the lynching which occurred in our county on Thursday night, the 16th inst, and whilst entertaining the greatest sympathy for the young lady and her relatives, and no sympathy for the fiend, Hance, and while our numerous female relatives induces us to carefully consider the nature of the offence for which Hance forfeited his life, the public expressions of the defiance of the law and the authorities that have since come to our ears, call for a more extended notice, not because we think the authorities will, in the least, deviate from a full discharge of their duties, but to correct an erroneous public sentiment that seems to be studiously spread by a certain class of individuals who are actuated more by a desire to shield those who are implicated in the unfortunate occurrence, than they are by their approval of the act. Expressions such as these, made by men of standing and influence,—men who are office-holders and servants of the people, "You dare not touch one of our crowd; if you imprison one of our men, your jail will not remain standing," "a meeting to ~~be held~~ will be held; you dare not express thro' the paper an opinion opposed to the lynching," call for immediate suppression or the arrest of the parties for inciting mob sentiment. If such disturbers of the peace are allowed to do as they please, there is no safety for any one in the community. The most innocent and, unoffending citizen, incurring the enmity of such

reckless men, might be subject to perpetual harrase, if not the forfeiture of their lives, for no reason beyond the mere expression of an opinion, or an effort, as a law-abiding citizen, to bring the perpetrators of the recent crime to the bar of justice.

It is generally believed that few, if any, of the lynchers were actuated as much by a sense of outraged innocence, as they were by a desire for notoriety. To be regarded as the defender of innocence,—as the avenger of outrages, is all very commendable in itself, but when one becomes so at the sacrifice of law, order and religion, he forfeits the respect of his fellow-man, and becomes in the eyes of all just and law-abiding citizens, a murderer of the basest kind, and should be prosecuted to the utmost extent of the law. Had the lynchers known that the outrage had actually been accomplished, and proceeded immediately to the jail, whilst burning under the heat of passion, and hung the unfortunate wretch, there would have been some palliation of the offence, but committed as it was, after the expiration of several weeks from the date of the attempted outrage, there can be no excuse offered that will in any way, mitigate the guilt of those engaged in the lynching. The fact remains that Hance was safely held in the custody of the law for an attempted outrage. For this offence the law provides imprisonment; our courts have never failed to mete out just punishment for similar offences; but a few men, no better in many respects, than the criminal, himself, presumed to constitute themselves law-givers, judges, jury, and executioners, which is against law, order, common justice and the feelings of humanity, and should, we think, be properly investigated and just punishment visited upon these disturbers of the peace.

The Baltimore *American*, of the 18th inst., speaks editorially in unmistakable language of the affair:

“St. Mary's county never had her history marred by a lynching until this week. It is unfortunate for her fair name that such a good record has

been broken. The case was a murder without just cause, and the people engaged in it are guilty of one of the greatest of crimes. Lynching has been altogether too frequent in this state within the past five years. It ought to be stopped, and the way to stop it is to apply the law to the lynchers."

The *Sun*, of a later date says :

"The hanging of Benjamin Hance, colored, by a mob in St. Mary's county for feloniously assaulting a young lady in that county is greatly to be regretted, as are all such acts of violence, which tend to lower the majesty of the law and to encourage infractions of the peace and good order of the community. The lynching is the first that has ever taken place in St. Mary's county, and it is to be hoped that it will be the last. From the admission said to have been made by the prisoner just before death his crime would seem to have been of a more heinous character than the attempted assault with which he was formally charged: but even if this were the case, his guilt might have been proven and the proper punishment meted out to him by legal methods. On the other hand, the lynching may be regarded, as in part, at least, the fruit of the prolonged delays in the case of Biscoe, twice convicted in the Charles County Court of a murder committed a year ago within the jurisdiction of St. Mary's county, but not yet punished for his crime. In his case the delay, although perhaps justifiable from a technical standpoint, has had a most irritating effect upon the public mind both in Charles and St. Mary's counties, owing to the horrible nature of the crime, the overwhelming evidence against the prisoner and the great cost of the trials. The case of Biscoe and also the desire to save the young lady assaulted by Hance from the mortification of appearing in the witness box seem to have been the chief considerations which prompted the lynching at Leonardtown. But, however great the aggravating causes for interference, the act cannot be justified, and those who took part in it have no occasion to congratulate themselves on having wreaked vengeance on a criminal who was already within the grasp of the law, and would have received due punishment."