

Responsibility for Lynchings.

In what it has to say with respect to such lynchings as the recent affair at Duluth, the Pioneer Press does not wish to be misunderstood. Lynch law is the purest anarchy. It is the substitution of mob violence for legal processes. It is absolutely inexcusable under any circumstances, and those who take part in it ought to be punished as severely as possible. In the Duluth episode it was especially wanton because the mob was not sure, and could not be sure, that it was executing the guilty men.

And having said this as plainly as it knows how the Pioneer Press invites the attention of the Minnesota legislature to two matters which undoubtedly have a share of responsibility for the occurrence that has disgraced our state. The first of these is the absence from our statute books of any adequate punishment for the crime against women. We have abolished the death penalty. Imprisonment neither measures up to society's demand for the punishment of this crime nor does it provide a sufficient deterrent. The second matter is that of our present method of dealing with the crime by law. The unfortunate victim of each such assault, if she survives, must undergo intolerably humiliating examinations before court and jury, and must endure legal bickering among attorneys over the most abhorrent details. In many previous instances of lynch law it has been made perfectly clear that a desire to shield the victim from a legal inquisition little worse than the crime itself has been partly responsible for mob vengeance. The constitutional safeguards to which every man accused of crime is entitled cannot, of course, be suspended. But some change might be made in the legal status of the crime which would eliminate the necessity for the present character of proof.

These, of course, are not the principal considerations in connection with outbreaks of lynch law. Neither capital punishment nor a more tolerable legal investigation will prevent such manifestations of mob violence. But they will, in our judgment, add something to public confidence in the processes of law, and are worthy of careful consideration by the next legislature.