

THE LAW OR THE MOB?

There is nothing America needs to guard itself against more zealously than the spirit that prompted the average citizen of Duluth to say "it served them right" when he heard that a mob last night had lynched three of the negroes who are charged with a terrible crime.

For the spirit that prompts that reaction is simply the vengeful brute against the lingering influence of which civilization with difficulty maintains itself.

And the mob, such as that which last night defied the law, wrecked the police station, overcame—all too easily, it would seem—the entire police force and lynched three men, is simply the brute burst forth, stripped of all its thin veneer.

It is a shallow view, which cannot be rebuked too vigorously, that the villainy of the crime justifies the crime of the mob. It does not justify it, and in a nation, a state and a community where the law rules and will take its course and do its duty, NOTHING justifies the crime of the mob.

For the chief victim of last night's tragedy was the Law, and not those miserable, trembling, perhaps guilty wretches whose lives the mob took. Great as their crime was IF they were guilty, and there are no individual crimes worse, the crime of the mob was vastly greater.

You who say "It served them right," think upon this: The only security on earth there is for your home, your property, your person and the persons and lives of the members of your family, is the Law—no, not the law, but public RESPECT FOR LAW, which is all that upholds the Law.

Is it good for a mob, in times like these, to learn, whatever its pretext or occasion, that it can make a plaything of an entire police force, wreck a police station, the visible embodiment of the law, and murder men who may or may not be guilty but who, if they are guilty, it is the law's business, not the mob's, to punish?

The first reaction of the civil authorities, taking effect in the announcement that the leaders of last night's mob will be apprehended and punished, is emphatically the right one. The Law was wrecked and trampled under the feet of a brute mob last night, while so-called good citizens looked on or passed by. The need of vindication of the law, that Law upon which—and upon public respect for which—every citizen must rely as the sole protection on this earth for his life, his person and his property and the life, persons and property of his family, calls for such action, and requires that it be prompt, vigorous and thorough-going.