

DISGRACE

The Eastern Shore has reaped its reward. For four weeks its reckless elements have proclaimed mob law. For four weeks its officials and its responsible citizens have yielded ground. They started with their minds fixed upon law as the means of dealing with crime, however atrocious. But they have increasingly wavered. In the Yuel Lee case the court could find last Monday no conditions which would prevent a fair and orderly trial at Cambridge, although no more than two weeks ago the same court and the State's Attorney had petitioned the Governor for troops and for police "armed for any emergency." That judicial finding, so strangely in accord with popular clamor, so hazardous in the view of observers, was hailed on the Eastern Shore as a vindication of the dignity of the people! And, as if in logical sequence, last night a mob in Salisbury heeded the law not at all, but instantly wreaked barbarous vengeance upon a Negro murderer.

We say the Eastern Shore has its reward. Whether the reward takes the form this morning of satisfaction or of shame we have no means of knowing. We do know that the Eastern Shore's reward is shame for the State of Maryland. It is twenty years since Maryland has been disgraced by this savagery. We had supposed the freedom from disgrace was permanent. It is not necessary to demonstrate to intelligent men and women that lynching is an assault upon the State, upon the law and upon civilization—or that in unloosing the violent, murderous impulses of many men its reflex upon the community ranks it as the gravest of crimes. Our decent people know that. And it had not been supposed that in any old and seasoned community of this State, decent and intelligent people would throw wide the gates to the mad and unreasoning and bid them take command. It was a false pride and a false security. The lowest and least civilized elements did take command, and that remains true whether or not men of position participated in the Salisbury lynching or tacitly approved it.

There will be hope that this upsurge of barbarity will bring intelligent men on the Eastern Shore to their senses, and that they will take whatever steps need to be taken to assure respect for the law in the cases of the two Negroes yet to be tried for serious crimes. But there is a duty beyond that. There is a duty upon the officials of Wicomico county and upon Governor Ritchie to seek out the members of the Salisbury mob and to punish them. It must be admitted that there is no great hope that the county officials will do so. The size of the mob and the manner in which the lynching was carried out point to official indifference and complacency. That, however, only makes it the more imperative that the Governor use the full power of his office and that he permit no technicalities to stand in the way of ruthless prosecution.