

Eastern Shore, The Beautiful, Ably Defended

In a letter to the press former United States Senator William Cabell Bruce adds his voice in reply to the many columns of criticism directed at the Eastern Shore recently.

Senator Bruce's comments are directed pointedly at the report of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America issued last Monday and based upon a two day visit to Salisbury of Prof. Broadus Mitchell, a member of the Civil Liberties Union in Baltimore.

If the Eastern Shore is isolated from Baltimore, we are highly benefited thereby, Senator Bruce broadly hints. He makes an emphatic denial that Eastern Shoremen are in the least backward intellectually, morally or economically.

In his letter, former Senator Bruce said:

"I am sure that no one who knows me would impute to me the least approval of lynching, under any circumstances, however, exasperating, and my defeat, when I was a candidate for re-election to the United States Senate in 1928 was, of course, largely to the rejection by thousands of Democratic voters on the Eastern Shore, of my outspoken convictions relating the prohibition and sectarian intolerance.

"But, having thrice canvassed every part of the Eastern Shore, as a candidate for a seat in the United States Senate, and having been brought into intimate contact with its people, I wish to deny, if my personal testimony is worth anything, that the Eastern Shore is, as Prof. Broadus Mitchell affirms, 'backward' in its mental and spiritual development."

"From the recent attack on the character of our Eastern Shore brothers one might suppose that lynching is peculiar to the Eastern Shore. The fact is, that it has occurred over and over again in many states of the Union whenever the incitement to it has been sufficiently intense and wide spread to provoke it.

"Some years ago a brute who had outraged a woman near my home at Ruxton, in Baltimore county, was lynched by her infuriated neighbors. My recollection is that this brute was dragged from the Towson jail by the lynchers and that no legal punishment was ever inflicted upon any one of them.

"This is but a single illustration that I might employ for the purpose of reminding the people of the Western Shore of Maryland that there has been lynching on both sides of

the Chesapeake. Indeed, I might go further north than Maryland and recall another brute who some years ago was lynched at Port Jarvis, on the Hudson river, in the full sight of a large concourse of human beings, not one of whom apparently witnessed the lynching.

"God forbids that even such crimes as those which wrought frenzy in the brain of that Salisbury uprising—the crime of the wild beast, Eucl Lee, who wiped out, at one fell stroke, the lives of a worthy wedded pair and their two innocent young daughters, because of a disagreement over a dollar—the crime of the other wild beast who butchered his employer, a prominent and useful citizen of Salisbury, because he thought he should receive for his services more than fifteen cents an hour—should hurry me into an attempt to justify the killing, much less the burning, of the criminal last mentioned, Matthew Williams.

"Close as every group of American citizens are to the representative agencies of their government, and passionately impelled as they may be, at times to reclaim the authority that they have delegated to courts of justice, they have no right, when they lynch, to expect anything but stern retribution at the hands of the law.

"It is easy to see where lynching begins, but not so easy to see where, indefensibility of lynching furnishes if unchecked, it would stop; but the no just reason why, when a lynching occurs in a single community on the Eastern Shore, the entire population of that extensive region should be defamed as mentally and spiritually backward. Edmund Burke did not know how to frame an indictment against an entire people; apparently Dr. Mitchell does, though our own flesh and blood.

"The mental and spiritual backwardness of the Eastern Shore is supposed by him to be attributable to geographical isolation, due to the interposition of the Chesapeake Bay between the Eastern and Western Shores of Maryland, but, when it is remembered how close the Eastern Shore is to the doors of two of the greatest cities in the world, Philadelphia and New York, it is hard to believe that the loss of mental stimulus and spiritual exaltation, which the Eastern Shore suffers from not being nearer to such an abode of intellectual power and seraphic sinlessness as Baltimore, can be quite so pronounced as Dr. Mitchell seems to think.

"At any rate, the situation is certainly not likely to be mitigated, in a social, political or economic sense, by assailing the mental and spiritual character of the whole people of the Eastern Shore, converting the Eastern and Western Shores of Maryland into warring camps, and making the Chesapeake Bay even wider than it now is.

"I do not agree with the convictions of the Eastern Shore about prohibition, but of these convictions, inspired by the grave abuses which undeniably attend excess in strong drink, it can at least be said that, unlike most political convictions, they are entirely disinterested. I think, besides, that too much sectarian prejudice exists on the Eastern Shore as well as in other kindred communities, but I do not forget that its people are of pure, almost unmixed, English descent, and that a certain amount of sectarian prejudice is inseparable from that descent.

"Nor if sectarian extravagance, which I condemn, no matter from what source it emanates, is to be charged to the people of the Eastern Shore, can it be rationally asserted that it is limited solely to the religious sects predominant on the Eastern Shore.

"I do not know whether Dr. Mitchell deems the Eastern Shore to be backward in an economic sense or not. He must; for thrift and mental backwardness are rarely found associated. Suffice it to say that the idea is laughable.

"Some years ago, I took occasion to say, in a public address at Salisbury, that I believed that Salisbury was the biggest town of 10,000 inhabitants in the world. It has a hotel that would be creditable to a population of 100,000 souls. It has a fire department worthy to be part of a metropolitan fire department. Its main streets, at times, is so crowded with vehicles that one has to pick his way cautiously across it.

"Few more attractive little towns than Snow Hill, Princess Anne, Cambridge, Easton, Centreville, Chestertown and Denton are to be found anywhere. The fields that surround them bear evidence of studious and intelligent tilth. Their hotels hold out every measure of comfort that the wayfarer can reasonably expect in centers of their restricted scope. One cannot move along the roads that lead up to them without being struck with the heavy burden of transportation that trucks are unceasingly carrying over these

roads; and their well-stocked stores, and the numerous motor cars parked or in motion, on their streets, are unmistakably indicative of brisk activity."

Under date of January 28, 1932, Rev. G. A. Morris, of Centreville, writes the Wilmington Journal the following letter:

Sir: I, Rev. George A. Morris, being a conservative, living in the midst of a conservative people, "on the Eastern Shore of Maryland," of sound mind, memory and understanding, do make this my first testament in the manner following, that is to say:

Item First: All articles written by whomsoever "and published," concerning the Salisbury lynching, criticizing and reflecting upon the intelligence, morality and spirituality of the Salisbury and Eastern Shore people, have done no good. They have engendered strife and caused a breach that will not be easily mended. I read all the articles, judged them for what they were worth and consigned them to the trash pile. Results of an investigation of the "lynching at Salisbury," have been made public by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, hence I refer to the whole matter. We do not know all the findings, but suffice it to say, in our opinion, the Federal Council might have employed its time and talent to a better advantage than creating more strife.

Item Second: When a seeming intellectual, (would that Johns Hopkins had kept him at home) Prof. Broadus Mitchell, was resurrected (I use the word in slang sense), and acts in behalf of the Federal Council's Commission on Race Relations, it is time to speak in no uncertain words. Prof. Mitchell said that he visited Salisbury from Friday to Sunday and talked to a dozen persons. Hence his conclusions. What a wonderful mind he must have. Mark you, in forty-eight hours, this youngling did grasp the whole situation, weighed it in the balance and found Salisbury and the Eastern Shore people wanting, isolated, and backward in mental and spiritual development. Isolated! What did he mean? Did he mean that we were isolated from such mental and spiritual intelligence as he proclaims?

We thank God for the isolation. We have no quarrel with Baltimore, and do not charge that city and the Western Shore with the outburst of vehement vituperation, from the pens of various writers. They represent a class who are not the brightest and best in the state in any wise. If we only knew as much as they think they know, how this old globe would whirl. If Mr. Mitchell's knowledge of political economy is as limited as is his knowledge of the people of Salisbury and the Eastern Shore, then his state or condition is worse than ours. It is zero. Yea! It is less than zero. He is a minus quantity. O, what fools we mortals be! May I insist upon what has been suggested in sarcasm by one of our critics? Well, I return it unto you. You men come over as missionaries, start a revival, have the mourners bench, and stop firing statements at us from long range. Elect your officers as follows: Mitchell as chairman of our local Interracial Committee; Mencken, to preach; Ainsley to pray and hang crep on our doors; Ades to take up the collection, and The Evening Sun Editor act as janitor. Stay in our midst as long as you please. You decide that, then, go to your respective places, ascertain the number of penitents, and how many converts you have made. If we be dead, leave us alone, and the dead will bury their dead. However, I warn you tenderly, be cautious. O far away, far astray men! Inflated and deluded by your own little selves, beware! Mind your own business. We have no respect for any of you. You have made matters worse by your nasty and untrue

ing, as prepared and submitted by Prof. Broadus Mitchell, which appeared so conspicuously in your paper this morning. I think it is high time for the fair-minded citizens of this state, and especially of Baltimore city, to call a halt on the unwarranted insults which have been heaped on the good people of the Eastern Shore since the lynching of the murderer Williams.

The lynching itself is to be deplored, of course, but the circumstances which it brought about are to be deplored even more. And the stirring up of intersectional bitterness by Baltimore ministers and newspaper writers, after it occurred is to be deplored most of all. We expect no better of Mencken, of course, and I suppose we should expect no better of The Sun, which has it in for any section that does not fall in with its wet, open-Sunday, race track gambling policy. But when ministers of the Gospel, who eloquently preach of "tolerance" and "brotherhood" the year around, go out of their way to cast aspersions on the Christian churches and ministers of Salisbury, because of something for which they were in no way responsible, one is led to wonder just what they understand by such terms. If that is their idea of "tolerance" and "brotherhood" I want none of it.

I appreciate the efforts of the Federal Council of Churches to stamp out lynchings in this country. But I resent the sending out as an official pronouncement this report of Prof. Mitchell, with its reflections on one of the finest sections of our country. I resent his statement that "the churches (in Salisbury) have neglected the application of religion to life." I know something of the churches in Salisbury and I know something of at least some of the ministers of Salisbury, and I challenge him to prove this assertion. And while I am on the subject I challenge the Baltimore minister who made a similar statement from his pulpit, to prove it, or else apologize to his brother ministers in Salisbury. If a lynching in Salisbury prove that "the churches have neglected the application of religion to life," then what do the crimes committed every day of the year in Baltimore prove concerning the churches and ministers of that city?

I resent also Professor Mitchell's statement that "the Eastern Shore is isolated geographically, and has become backward in its mental and spiritual development." To those who really know the Eastern Shore, who are acquainted with its innate charm and culture and are familiar with its marvelous development in the last 25 years, such statements at this would be utterly absurd if they were not so manifestly malicious. If the Eastern Shore, with its wonderful roads and the finest inland waterways in the world, is isolated, then it is a glorious isolation, which any community on earth might covet. And if the fine-spirited, friendly, hospitable open hearted folks of the Eastern Shore are "backward in their mental and spiritual development," then may we all be set back to the place where a proper adjustment of relative values may be made.

To speak of the thriving little city of Salisbury, in particular, with its two railroads, beautiful navigable river and net work of fine roads running in every direction, and its industries, together with the spirit of its citizens back of it all; to speak of such a town in such a location as "isolated" and "backward" is silly. Some day Salisbury may be the capital of a fine new state.

But let us remember this: That such reckless and unwarranted statements as Prof. Mitchell, Mencken, Dr. Ainslie and The Sun have been making about the Eastern Shore in the last few weeks are creating a spiritual gulf between these two sections of this great state, far wider and deeper than that which is created by the sparkling waters of the lovely Chesapeake.