

An Opportunity For Mencken

HIDDEN AWAY at the foot of an inside column of this Tuesday's SUN is the following five line despatch:

NEGRESS CHOKED TO DEATH

Easton, Md., Jan. 4.—Pearl Waters, Negress, was attacked and choked to death in the rear yard of the Queen Anne Hotel here tonight.

A woman, of whom people speak nought but good, was mysteriously killed, with no clue to the murderer's identity. This is not the end of troubles, merely the beginning. No culprit yet arrested, to be the object of a lot of mandlin sympathy while its victim is hurriedly shovelled under ground, none of the self-invited "defenders of liberty", to shackle the operations of the law by fair means, or foul. Just the stark fact of brutal and hideous murder, in those surroundings of decadence and ignorance which MR. MENCKEN has so clearly portrayed as typical of Eastern Shore degeneracy, "where clowns are the preachers and harlequins, the jurists."

But what a chance for MR. MENCKEN to break his rule and do something constructive, instead of destructive. Anyone can throw rocks: to build with them is an art. Step forth in a new role, MR. MENCKEN, and do something. Never mind saying anything, there is no novelty in that, and no one doubts your adjectiferous power (words formed for just such a mouth). But give the darkling Shore the advantage of your intellect, sense of values, and sterling justice. Show just what should be done at this stage of such a case. Lead thought and action in such paths that justice need not be perverted, that the sanctity of innocent life may be safeguarded and that the retrospect may give no cause for shame. For these degraded people of the Eastern Shore really have no special blood lust, no particular aversion to ways that are established and right, not even a chafing against the ordinary conventions (though this last may make no appeal to you). To be sure some of their ideas may be obsolete. They still feel that the victim of a theft deserves more attention than the thief, that the family driven into the shadow of death should be given sympathy above the red-handed murder, and that decency of life is a worthy heritage. As a matter of fact they even have tremendous convictions in favor of law, order and justice, and the menace of a breakdown in their civilization, becomes imminent only when they behold law throttled, order flaunted, and justice with the band meant for her eyes bound with deadly repression upon her hands.

Here is an opportunity and a challenge. You might be able to give a genuine contribution in an hour of need. Better, you might even be able to uplift a community sunk so far beneath your contempt. And the only risk involved would be quite slight as the ducking stool has been out of style on the Eastern Shore for over a century, and the common scold goes unpunished.