

He Gets A New View Of Mencken
TO THE EDITOR OF THE EVENING SUN—Sir:

Mencken to me has always been more of a myth than a man. Because of the many contradictions in his writings, I have never been able to put my finger on him.

What has always puzzled me most is how he could possess so great a tolerance and sense of humor and at the same time be capable of such heights of indignation. I have contented myself by believing that his indignation was always something less than his sense of humor and a certain insensibility that went with it.

But this Salisbury affair has, I think, given me a better insight into his character. The wonder to me now is that he has any sense of humor at all. For no one whose sensibilities are not of the finest and most acute could ever write as he does of the Salisbury atrocity. He seems to me to be close to despair.

Myself, I have never been able to get very indignant over anything. It is probably because I have never been brought face to face with such an unspeakable horror as the Salisbury lynching, and the kind of people who made it possible.

But there is one incident of the kind that happened when I was at college and that I'll never forget. It was following a gala day set aside for whitewashing the huge college letter on a mountain. There was one fellow who, for some reason, did not take part. A mob of students ran him down, covered his head and face with bicycle tape and then paraded him around the campus. He had to have his head shaved, and for weeks after the tape was removed his face looked like a beet.

The fellow's humiliation was appalling. But more appalling still was the earnest, almost solemn frenzy with which the mob and its ringleaders worked on their victim, and the howls of savage joy that followed the completion of their handiwork.

The thing dumbfounded me, for I knew well all of the actors in the drama, and I simply couldn't imagine them capable of such an outrage against one of their fellows. It did violence to every ideal we were being taught in the classroom. And, after all, I myself might just as well have been the victim. I have been suspicious of crowds ever since.

Life may be absurd for the most part, but there is a point beyond which it becomes something decidedly otherwise. There is nothing amusing in the spectacle of a reversion to savagery; it is tragic.

ROSCOE ASHWORTH.

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