

THE ARGUMENT GOES ON

THE LYNCHING of Matthew Williams at Salisbury last Friday made a monkey of the column which appeared here that day. It was a column about Eastern Shoremen.

A friend of mine—an Eastern Shoreman—had been talking about the trial of Orphan Jones, who is accused of murdering four persons in a Worcester County village. There is, as you know, much hubbub about removing his trial from the 'Shore on the theory that the local sentiment will prevent a fair trial. And this Eastern Shore friend of mine was arguing that the trial should not be removed. It is not, he said, that Jones is sure of a fair trial on the 'Shore.



But his argument was that there is little enough excitement in an Eastern Shoreman's life and that the people should not be deprived of the excitement such a murder trial would bring. If Jones gets a fair trial, well and good, he argued. And if he doesn't, the Court of Appeals can reverse it.

And, using this as a basis for a discourse, I pooh-poohed the idea as ridiculous. But I went on to admit that the Eastern Shoreman is panting for excitement, and I ventured the belief that most of the rioting the Eastern Shore had seen in the last month or so was not based on blood-lust but was just good, dirty fun. Most of the rioters, I argued, were just getting some excitement. They really didn't mean any harm.

Papers containing that article were still being delivered when a group of Eastern Shoremen lynched Matthew Williams and put on an exhibition of ghoulishness which has never been surpassed in this section of the country.

Best of the Pooh-Poohs

NATURALLY, many a reader and writer has been pooh-poohing me—and with much justice, although I still think there is a kernel of truth to my diagnosis. The following one stated the case more forcefully than any of the others:

"Friday you referred in your column to the opinion of a friend of yours from the Eastern Shore that the strong sentiment on the Eastern Shore in favor of holding the trial of Orphan Jones at Cambridge was based on a desire for excitement. Now that Matthew Williams has been dragged from a hospital, where he was lying wounded, and hanged and burned, has the desire of Eastern Shoremen for excitement been satisfied?"

"It was difficult to believe the professions of deep thinking on the part of your friend from the Eastern Shore, who said that he had no feeling of responsibility in the matter for, if the trial were wrongly held on the Eastern Shore, the Court of Appeals would reverse it. Can the Court of Appeals reverse the hanging and burning of Matthew Williams?"

"State's Attorney Godfrey Child, of Snow Hill, is quoted as having said: 'The lynching indicates that if the International Labor Defense League doesn't stop meddling on the Eastern Shore we are going to have serious trouble.' Are the embattled Eastern Shoremen going to march on Baltimore and drag Lee and Davis from the Baltimore City Jail to meet the fate of Williams?"

"Is this a threat on the part of the state's attorney to turn loose the forces of mob violence if a defendant happens to choose counsel and backing of which the Eastern Shore authorities disapprove?"

"A Friend of Yours From Baltimore."

They Don't Back Down

NOW, I WAS curious to see what that Eastern Shore friend, who is a fair, intelligent fellow except on the subject of his native birthplace and a few other things, has to say, in the light of the lynching. Has it changed his point of view? So I showed him the letter printed above, and he wrote his comment. With the combination of long-headedness and bull-headedness which is typical of many Eastern Shoremen, he sees the lynching as a corroboration, rather than a refutation, of his views. Here is what he said:

"I suggest that the lynching at Salisbury has clinched my argument that the Eastern Shoremen look for diversion and excitement to the train of events which customarily follow a major crime in their vicinity. Deprive them of the privilege of conducting the trial in their own manner and in their own courts, and you pave the way for a lynching. Let the Eastern Shoreman know that he will not be molested by changes of venue or imported attorneys depriving him of his inalienable right to handle his own affairs, and you will have no more lynchings.

"Suppose a great clamor had arisen on the 'Shore, asking that the trial of Duker be brought down there because of the prevailing excitement in Baltimore? The Baltimore courts would have laughed at the idea.

"I do not mean to condone the lynching. It was so barbarous that it could only have been done by prehensile simians, of which a few may be found in every community.

"But that the lynching is the direct result of the interference with the Eastern Shoremen in conducting their own criminal trials in their own courts there can be little doubt. Baltimore should adopt a Monroe Doctrine.

"The 'Shoremen are far from representing the flower of civilization. But in the main, they are substantial family men, with a sense of justice which perhaps comes closer to the real thing than its legal substitute. Which is preferable: To hang a guilty Negro after a trial in an inflamed neighborhood, or to permit him possibly to go free after a legal trial before an impartial jury. I wager there are more innocent men sent to prison from Baltimore courts, and more guilty ones acquitted, than is the case in the more practical, if less strictly legal, tribunals of the Eastern Shore."

Now, what can you do with fellows like that?