

# The Race War in the North

BY WILLIAM ENGLISH WALLING

“LINCOLN freed you, we'll show you where you belong,” was one of the cries with which the Springfield mob set about to drive the negroes from town. The mob was composed of several thousand of Springfield's white citizens, while other thousands, including many women and chil-

innocent negroes should be driven by the fear of their lives from a town where some of them have lived honorably for half a hundred years. We have been assured by more cautious and indirect defenders of Springfield's populace that there *was* an exceptionally criminal element among the negroes encouraged by



LINCOLN'S HOME.

It is very unpopular in Springfield just now and the house was attacked.

dren, and even prosperous business men in automobiles, calmly looked on, and the rioters proceeded hour after hour and on two days in succession to make deadly assaults on every negro they could lay their hands on, to sack and plunder their houses and stores, and to burn and murder on favorable occasion.

The American people have been fairly well informed by their newspapers of the action of that mob; they have also been told of certain alleged political and criminal conditions in Springfield and of the two crimes in particular which are offered by the mob itself as sufficient explanation why six thousand peaceful and

the bosses of both political parties. And now, after a few days of discussion, we are satisfied with these explanations, and demand only the punishment of those who took the most active part in the destruction of life and property. Assuming that there were exceptionally provocative causes for complaint against the negroes, we have closed our eyes to the whole awful and menacing truth—that a large part of the white population of Lincoln's home, supported largely by the farmers and miners of the neighboring towns, have initiated a permanent warfare with the negro race.

We do not need to be informed at

great length of the character of this warfare. It is in all respects like that of the South, on which it is modeled. Its significance is threefold. First, that it has occurred in an important and historical Northern town; then, that the negroes, constituting scarcely more than a tenth of the population, in this case could not possibly endanger the "supremacy" of the whites, and, finally, that the public opinion of the North, notwithstanding the fanatical, blind and almost insane hatred of the negro so clearly shown by the mob, is satisfied that there were "mitigating circumstances," not for the mob violence, which, it is agreed, should be punished to the full extent of the law, but for the race hatred, which is really the cause of it all. If these outrages had

ful of criminals, and to force it to an inferior place on the social scale?

For the underlying motive of the mob and of that large portion of Springfield's population that has long said that "something was bound to happen," and now approves of the riot and proposes to complete its purpose by using other means to drive as many as possible of the remaining two-thirds of the negroes out of town, was confessedly to teach the negroes their place and to warn them that too many could not obtain shelter under the favorable traditions of Lincoln's home town. I talked to many of them the day after the massacre and found no difference of opinion on the question. "Why, the niggers came to think they were as good as we are!" was the final



NEGRO HOMES.

The three to the right were looted, the three to the left were burned.

happened thirty years ago, when the memories of Lincoln, Garrison and Wendell Phillips were still fresh, what would not have happened in the North? Is there any doubt that the whole country would have been aflame, that all flimsy explanations and "mitigating circumstances" would have been thrown aside, and that the people of Springfield would have had to prove to the nation why they proposed to drive the negroes out, to hold a whole race responsible for a hand-

justification offered, not once, but a dozen times.

On the morning after the first riot I was in Chicago and took the night train for Springfield, where I have often visited and am almost at home. On arriving in the town I found that the rioting had been continued thruout the night, and was even feared for the coming evening, in spite of the presence of nearly the whole militia of the State. Altho we visited the Mayor, military head-

quarters, the leading newspaper, and some prominent citizens, my wife and I gave most of our attention to the hospital, the negro quarters and the jail.

We at once discovered, to our amazement, that Springfield had no shame. She stood for the action of the mob. She hoped the rest of the negroes might flee. She threatened that the movement to drive them out would continue. I do not

citizens could find no other remedy than that applied by the mob. It was not the fact of the whites' hatred toward the negroes, but of the negroes' own misconduct, general inferiority or unfitnes for free institutions that were at fault."

On Sunday, August 16th, the day after the second lynching, a leading white minister recommended the Southern disfranchisement scheme as a remedy for negro (!) lawlessness, while all four



MARKED HOUSES.

A white handkerchief nailed to the house indicated white people. The device of a white cross, it will be remembered, was used in the St. Bartholomew Massacre. The houses around this one were all sacked or burned and many inmates were injured.

speak of the leading citizens, but of the masses of the people, of workingmen in the shops, the storekeepers in the stores, the drivers, the men on the street, the wounded in the hospitals and even the notorious "Joan of Arc" of the mob, Kate Howard, who had just been released from arrest on \$4,000 bail. [She has since committed suicide.—*Editor.*] The *Illinois State Journal* of Springfield express the prevailing feeling even on its editorial page:

"While all good citizens deplore the consequences of this outburst of the mob spirit, many even of these consider the outburst was inevitable, at some time, from existing conditions, needing only an overt act, such as that of Thursday night, to bring it from latent existence into active operation. The implication is clear that conditions, not the populace, were to blame and that many good

ministers who were quoted in the press proposed swift "justice" for *the negroes*, rather than recommending true Christianity, democracy and brotherhood to the whites. Even the Governor's statement of the situation, strong as it was on the whole, was tainted in one place with a concession to Springfield opinion. He said that Burton, the first negro lynched, was killed after he had incensed the crowd by firing into it to protect his home from incendiaries. But when Burton's home was attacked there had already been considerable shooting between the blacks and the whites. Moreover, according to his daughters, men had entered the house and threatened him with an axe and other weapons, while his firing of buckshot at random

into a mob is by no means necessarily a murderous procedure. The Governor made, then, an understatement of the character of the mob, suggesting that the negroes had lost their heads and were accepting the mob's challenge to war. It is probable that Burton was defending not his home, but his life.

Besides suggestions in high places of the negro's brutality, criminality and unfitness for the ballot we heard in lower ranks all the opinions that pervade the South—that the negro does not need much education, that his present education even has been a mistake, that whites cannot live in the same community with negroes except where the latter have been taught their inferiority, that lynching is the only way to teach them, etc. In fact, this went so far that we were led to suspect the existence of a Southern element in the town, and this is indeed the case. Many of the older citizens are from Kentucky or the southern part of Illinois. Moreover, many of the street railway employees are from the South. It was a street railway man's wife that was assaulted the night before the riots, and they were street railway employees, among others, that led the mob to the jail. Even the famous Kate Howard had received her inspiration, she told us, from the South. While traveling with her brother in Texas and Arkansas she had observed enviously that enforced separation of the races in cars and public places helped to teach the negro where he belonged. Returning home she had noticed the growing boycott of negroes in Springfield stores and restaurants, participated in the alarm that "no white woman was safe," etc., and in the demand for negro blood. A woman of evident physical courage, she held that it was time for the population to act up to their professions, and by the cry of "cowards" is said to have goaded the mob into some of the worst of its deeds. She exhibited to us proudly the buckshot wounds in her fleshy arms (probably Burton's), and said she relied confidently on her fellow citizens to keep her from punishment.

This was the feeling also of the half hundred whites in the hospital. It was, in fact, only three days after the first dis-

turbance when they fully realized that the lenient public opinion of Springfield was not the public opinion of Illinois or the North, that the rioters began to tremble. Still this did not prevent them later from insulting the militia, repeatedly firing at their outposts and almost openly organizing a political and business boycott to drive the remaining negroes out. Negro employers continue to receive threatening letters and are dismissing employees every day, while the stores, even the groceries, so fear to sell the negroes goods that the State has been compelled to intervene and purchase \$10,000 worth in their behalf.

The menace is that if this thing continues it will offer *automatic rewards* to the riotous elements and negro haters in Springfield, make the reign of terror permanent there, and offer every temptation to similar white elements in other towns to imitate Springfield's example.

If the new Political League succeeds in permanently driving every negro from office; if the white laborers get the negro laborers' jobs; if masters of negro servants are able to keep them under the discipline of terror as I saw them doing at Springfield; if white shopkeepers and saloonkeepers get their colored rivals' trade; if the farmers of neighboring towns establish permanently their right to drive poor people out of their community, instead of offering them reasonable alms; if white miners can force their negro fellow-workers out and get their positions by closing the mines, then every community indulging in an outburst of race hatred will be assured of a great and certain financial reward, and all the lies, ignorance and brutality on which race hatred is based will spread over the land. For the action of these dozen farming and four coal mining communities near Springfield shows how rapidly the thing can spread. In the little town of Buffalo, fifteen miles away, for instance, they have just posted this sign in front of the interurban station:

"All niggers are warned out of town by Monday, 12 m. sharp.

"BUFFALO SHARP SHOOTERS."

Part of the Springfield press, far from discouraging this new effort to drive the negroes out, a far more serious attack on

our colored brothers than the mob violence, either fails to condemn it in the only possible way, a complete denial of the whole hypocritical case against the negro, or indirectly approves it. An evening paper printed this on the third day after the outbreak:

"NEGRO FAMILY

LEAVES CITY

WHEN ORDERED.

"The first negro family routed from Springfield by a mob was the Harvey family, residing at 1144 North Seventh street, who were told Sunday morning to 'hike,' and carried out the orders yesterday afternoon. The family



A LOOTED NEGRO SALOON.  
Soldiers searching for dead bodies.

proved themselves obnoxious in many ways. They were the one negro family in the block and their presence was distasteful to all other citizens in that vicinity."

The tone of this notice is that of a jubilant threat. As the family left town only the day after, not on account of the mob, but the standing menace, the use of the word "first" is significant.

We have not mentioned the negro

crimes which are alleged to have caused the disorders, as we are of the opinion that they could scarcely in any case have had much real connection either with the mob violence or the far more important race conflict that is still spreading geographically and growing in intensity from day to day.

The first crime is called a murder, resulting from an assault on a woman. An unknown negro was discovered at night in the room of two young white girls. The father and mother and two sons were also at home, however, and there is every probability that it was no assault but a common burglary. The father attacked the negro, was terribly cut up, and died. A few hours later a negro was found sleeping not very far away, and the press claimed that there was every evidence that he was the criminal. However, Judge Creighton, a man respected by the whole community, saw cause to postpone the case, and it was this short delay of six weeks that was used by the enemies of the negro in Springfield to suggest that the negroes' political influence was thwarting the "swift justice" of the law.

The *State Journal*, ignoring the common sense of the situation, stated editorially that Ballard, the victim, "had given his life in defense of his child," and added significantly: "This tragedy was not enacted in the black belt of Mississippi or of Georgia," and further, twelve lines below,

"Concerning him (the negro) and the questions which arise from his presence in the community, it is well to preserve silence at the present time. The state of the public mind is such that comment can only add fuel to the feeling that has burst forth with general knowledge of the crime."

The writer has been rather cautious, but has he not succeeded in suggesting clearly enough to readers of the character we have mentioned (1) that the deed was to be connected in some way with the race question; (2) that the public mind as it was, and events have since shown the world clearly what the writer must have known at that time, was justified; and (3) in directing their attention to the South as a basis of comparison?

Then what was the second crime, which occurred six weeks later, early in the morning of August 15th? This was

an assault by a negro on a white woman in her home. There is little doubt of the nature of the crime intended. But in this case there was far more doubt of the identity of the negro arrested for the crime, who was of a relatively good character. However, the victim's portrait was printed and circulated among the crowd, first as an incentive to lynch the suspected negro, then as a pretext for driving the negroes out.

As we do not lay much emphasis on these or the previous crimes of Springfield negroes, which were in no way in excess of those of the corresponding social elements of the white population, so we do not lay much stress on the frenzied, morbid violence of the mob. Mob psychology is the same everywhere. It can begin on a little thing. But Springfield had many mobs; they lasted two days and they initiated a state of affairs far worse than any of the immediate effects of their violence.

Either the spirit of the abolitionists, of Lincoln and of Lovejoy must be revived and we must come to treat the negro on

a plane of absolute political and social equality, or Vardaman and Tillman will soon have transferred the race war to the North.

Already Vardaman boasts "that such sad experiences as Springfield is undergoing will doubtless cause the people of the North to look with more toleration upon the methods employed by the Southern people."

The day these methods become general in the North every hope of political democracy will be dead, other weaker race and classes will be persecuted in the North as in the South, public education will undergo an eclipse, and American civilization will await either a rapid degeneration or another profounder and more revolutionary civil war, which shall obliterate not only the remains of slavery but all the other obstacles to a free democratic evolution that have grown up in its wake.

Yet who realizes the seriousness of the situation, and what large and powerful body of citizens is ready to come to their aid?

NEW YORK CITY.