

boy, judiciously. sir john pinked a little, nevertheless, i'd like to hear, he said, with an air of generous restraint that was wasted. it wouldn't be any use, the boy told him, he spoke simply, and without innuendo, as one stating a fact. the chief constable's face became a deeper pink. dr torrance put in hurriedly: this is an extremely abstruse matter, sir john, and one which all of us here have been trying to understand, with very little headway, for some years now. one can really get little nearer to it than to say that the children "willed" the people in the crowd to attack one another. sir john looked at him and then at the boy. he muttered, but held himself in check. presently, after two or three deep breaths, he spoke to the boy again, but now with his tone a little uglier. however it was done - and we'll have to go into that later - you are admitting that you were responsible for what happened? we are responsible for defending ourselves, the boy said, to the extent of four lives and thirteen serious injuries - when you could, you say, have simply sent them away. they wanted to kill us, the boy told him, indifferently. the chief constable looked lengthily at him. i don't understand how you can have done it, but i take your word for it that you did, for the present; also your word that it was unnecessary. they would have come again. it would have been necessary then, replied the boy, you can't be sure of that. your whole attitude is monstrous. don't you feel the least compunction for these unfortunate people? no, the boy told him, why should we? yesterday afternoon one of them shot one of us. now we must protect ourselves, but not by private vengeance. the law is for your protection, and for everyone's. the law did not protect wilfred from being shot; it would not have protected us last night. the law punishes the criminal after he has been successful; it is no use to us. we intend to stay alive, but you don't mind being responsible - so you tell me - for the deaths of other people. do we have to go round in circles? asked the boy. i have answered your questions because we thought it better that you should understand the situation. as you apparently have not grasped it, i will put it more plainly. it is that if there is any attempt to interfere with us or molest us, by anybody, we shall defend ourselves. we have shown that we can, and we hope that that will be warning enough to prevent further trouble. sir john stared at the boy speechlessly while his knuckles whitened and his face empurpled. he half rose from his chair as if he meant to attack the boy, and then sank back, thinking better of it. some seconds passed before he could trust himself to speak. presently, in a half-choked voice he addressed the boy who was watching him with a kind of critically detached interest. you damned young blackguard! you insufferable little pig! how dare you speak to me like that! do you understand that i represent the police force of this county? if you don't, it's time you learnt it, and i'll see that you do, b' god. talking to your elders like that, you swollen-headed little upstart! so you're not to be "molested"; you'll defend yourselves, will you! where do you think you are? you've got a lot to learn, m'lad, a whole he broke off suddenly, and sat staring at the boy. dr torrance leant forward over his desk. eric - he began in protest, but made no move to interfere. bernard westcott remained carefully still in his chair, watching. the chief constable's mouth went slack, his jaws fell a little, his eyes widened, and seemed to go on widening. his hair rose slightly, sweat burst out on his forehead, at his temples, and came trickling down his face. inarticulate gobblings came from his mouth. tears ran down the sides of his nose. he began to tremble, but seemed unable to move. then, after long rigid seconds, he did move. he lifted hands that fluttered, and fumbled them to his face. behind them, he gave queer thin screams. he slid out of the chair to his knees on the floor, and fell forward. he lay there grovelling, and trembling, making high whinnying sounds as he clawed at the carpet, trying to dig himself into it. suddenly he vomited. the boy looked up. to dr torrance he said, as if answering a question: he is not hurt. he wanted to frighten us, so we have shown him what it means to be frightened. he'll understand better now. he will be all right when his glands are in balance again. then he turned away and went out of the room, leaving the two men looking at one another. bernard pulled out a handkerchief, and dabbed at the sweat that stood in drops on his own forehead. dr torrance sat motionless, his face a sickly grey. they turned to look at the chief constable. sir john was lying slackly now, seemingly unconscious, drawing long, greedy breaths, shaken occasionally by a violent tremor. my god! exclaimed bernard. he looked at torrance again, and you have been here three years! there's never been anything remotely like this, the doctor said. we've suspected many possibilities, but there's never been any enmity - and, after this, thank god for that! yes, you could well do worse than that, bernard told him. he looked at sir john again. this chap ought to be got away before he pulls round. we'd be better out of the way, too - it's the sort of situation where a man can't forgive witnesses. send in a couple of his men to collect him. tell them