

A BIRMINGHAM MURDER

Some time ago, a young Birmingham desperado, of the name of Fenton, shot a female companion in a public-house. He was arrested, tried, and condemned. During the imprisonment that preceded his execution, he was subjected to the usual chaplainary attention, with the effect of causing him to think himself “converted,” and to write to his mother that he was going to meet his Saviour in heaven, &c. Whereupon a puzzled “Thinker” wrote to the papers. He wanted to know how it was that a condemned murderer got saved, while the victim of his lawlessness (cut down without notice) got presumably sent to hell for want of preparedness. Sister Brabyn, on the suggestion of brother Walker (not C. C.), answered his enquiry as follows:—

To the Editor of the *Birmingham Daily Mail*.

SIR,—I see in your issue of Saturday last a letter from a writer signing himself “Thinker,” who asks pertinently enough some solution of the difficulty which surrounds the question of a future life for murderers and their victims. It appears that Fenton, in consequence of the consolations of religion received at the hands of a servant of “holy orders,” expressed satisfaction at his approaching translation to his Heavenly Father’s Home, where he would meet his dear Saviour face to face. “Thinker” asks what about the future of Fenton’s victim, who had no time to prepare to meet her Saviour? This seems to be a question suggested by common sense. If Fenton’s expectation were to be realised, few would care to be religious, and the most benevolent-minded person must shrink from the contemplation of a divine appointment so lacking in that justice, beauty, and harmony which pervade all the divine works of Nature.

The sentimental aberrations of a murderer are of small importance, except as they reflect the principles of a religious system, whose doctrines, when carried to their logical issue, must send Fenton to heaven, and, perhaps, his victim to hell. That such doctrine outrages reason goes without saying. Now, it is a fundamental law of our mental being to seek knowledge as to the destiny of our race. Every man is intensely personal to himself, and while moving along with his fellows in one long human funeral procession, he becomes increasingly anxious to settle that moot point concerning a hereafter. This is not a desire of modern origin. It is an inherent faculty of man, a part of his nature, and can be traced back through all races to the borders of pre-historic times.

If, then, this instinctive eagerness is a part of the human intellect, it can only be satisfied with an answer in harmony with its own powers of reason. The human mind is not constituted to excuse and believe doctrines of religion inconsistent with each other and mutually destructive, any more than it is constituted to believe that two and two make five. That doctrines mutually destructive are widely held is no proof of their truth or reason, but only that the accumulated tradition of ages beclouds the eyes of common sense, and that credulity usurps the place of reason. The teaching of the Bible and the teaching of the Church are supposed to be identical, and so it comes that the Scriptures are credited with the doctrine of a never-dying soul. This gives rise to endless variation of thought in regard to its nature, capability and destiny. Confusion mounts the throne and reigns supreme.

I may ask, Is it likely that a Divine Being capable of creating a universe and of imparting to it mechanical laws of perfect harmony, would give a revelation which would stultify at every step that power of reason in man which is God's top stone of creative skill? It is God's own declaration of Scripture that it is perfect. It nowhere teaches that man has an immortal soul to go to heaven or hell, but that man is a creature of the dust, who dies and returns to dust on account of sin. That Jesus Christ, who is "the resurrection and the life," will at his coming bring the just and the unjust from their graves to appear at his judgment-seat to receive their just reward, when the righteous will have eternal life and the wicked will suffer a punishment which will end in "the second death."

If "Thinker" would follow the system of righteousness laid down in the Bible, he would see that none of the Fenton type will be found worthy of an endless life of joy, nor, indeed, of an endless life of torment, but that such will "remain in the congregation of the dead." The Bible from beginning to end concerns itself in perfect harmony with the two principles of sin and righteousness, their respective workings and their destiny.—Yours truly,

April 1st.

BIBLE READER.