

Constance Kent's Confession.

We publish elsewhere the letter in which Dr. Bucknill has given to the world the last, and, we suppose, the final confession of Miss Constance Kent. Marvellous as the story is, it is not impossible; and as there can now be no motive for deception, we do not know why it should not be accepted. It is perfectly possible that she may have asphyxiated the child wholly or partially with the flannel before she inflicted the wound which almost severed its head from the body. The division of the trachea would account for no scream being uttered. Her account of the manner in which she planned and executed her crime, her cool and circumspect depravity, and the marvellous way in which she escaped detection, form a history which is scarcely to be surpassed in horror and in wonder.

The passions which led to the commission of the murder were aroused by the most ordinary cause. Fancied slights and jealousy of a mother-in-law and her children are amongst the most common sources of domestic broils. In this case, however, they proved sufficient to arouse a tiger-like instinct, which, under no restraints, moral or religious, dominated the girl's whole being. A curious psychological study, some will say. We see in it nothing more than a nineteenth century reproduction of the old, old story of the first murder, which, be it myth or history, parable or fact, receives fresh witnesses to its intrinsic truth from every calendar of crime.

This Road murder has been paraded before the public as a matter of scientific interest. Since the first confession of the culprit we have been favoured from various quarters with theories of "impulsive insanity," of the "destruction of moral balance by physical causes," of the "peculiar condition of the female mental organisation at the time of puberty," and a great deal more of the like verbiage, which is only to be excused as an expression of natural reluctance to admit that a young girl of fifteen, moving in respectable society, could be so utterly depraved and completely abandoned to the dictates of evil. This last confession must at once and for ever silence such mistaken twaddle. Murder is a crime, not a disease. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, "the impulse to kill" is the expression of an evil moral nature, and not of diseased brain or of ovarian irritation; and if the medical profession give their sanction to theories of the latter kind they inflict a great wrong on society. However deeply rooted in the nature of man is the conviction of moral responsibility, there is no conviction of which cruel and brutal natures

would sooner divest themselves; and the best way to encourage crime of the worst character in the reading ranks of life is to promulgate the "couldn't help it" doctrine, taking care to invest it with the authority of science. Constance Kent's confession completely brushes away all the fine-spun cobwebs which pseudo-philanthropists and philosophers have been spinning about her case. The culprit owns her motive—the old-fashioned one of jealousy and revenge—and describes the consummate craft, subtlety, and cruelty with which she accomplished her purpose—a purpose which she had nursed for a long period, and which she would never have confessed had not her dormant better nature—of which no human being is utterly destitute—been awakened by the teachings of religion.

Dr. Bucknill, whilst he throws any suspicion of insanity in the case to the winds, yet thinks, "that, owing to the peculiarities of her constitution, it is probable that under prolonged solitary confinement she would become insane." He goes on to say that "the validity of this opinion is of importance now that the sentence of death has been commuted to penal servitude for life; for no one could desire that the punishment of the criminal should be so carried out as to cause danger of a further and greater punishment not contemplated by law." We are quite ready to concede to Dr. Bucknill that Miss Constance Kent's history shows that she has "a peculiarity of disposition" which seems to us, however, to be peculiar only in strength of will and depravity; but that, because her early girlhood was blackened by a great crime, conspicuous for the coolness, determination, and circumspection with which it was executed, she is more likely to go mad than other criminals, we do not see. We sincerely hope that the accounts we have heard of Constance Kent's penitence may be true, but we should be sorry to see her let loose on society on the ground that insanity might be produced by prolonged confinement. There is really but one party to be considered in the matter. Public safety and public justice require that such criminals as Miss Kent should not only be punished, but restrained from committing further crimes. Although in the course of their punishment insanity should arise, the infliction of a just sentence is not to be suspended or relaxed on such a possibility. We may also remind Dr. Bucknill that penal servitude and solitary confinement for life are by no means one and the same thing.—*Medical Times and Gazette*, Sept. 2nd.

Justice to Criminal Lunatics.

On the 29th July, we commented on the case of George Broomfield, who had been tried for murder and left for execution—the