

For the Torch of Reason.

The Modern Heaven.

BY CHARLES KENT TENNEY.

Heaven is said by the higher criticism to be the perfection of all happiness, the climax of all bliss, the great crowning glory of the universe. This abiding place is the home of God, who rules there, as well as everywhere, with the object of shaping all things for the betterment of the human race and its ultimate admission into this crowning glory spot, if it will but follow the simple paths of duty and right.

This word picture, with the golden settings sometimes thrown about it by the gifted, silver-tongued, pulpit orator, is very beautiful to contemplate, and the reunion of families and the meeting of dearly beloved friends in this happy, joyous abode, as painted by him, cannot help but animate the listener with a desire for such an abiding place. Who is there among us who will not bow his head in silent contemplation of such a picture, as painted by the voice of the gifted orator, and sigh for such a retreat? But now that the voice of the eloquent speaker has died away and no longer thrills us with emotion, let us more critically examine the picture and analyze its details without the halo of the magnetic voice, but in the cool, quiet realms of thought and reason.

There are few of the present generation who believe in the hell of the Bible; there are also few who believe in its heaven. The higher criticism has long since abolished the former, and but few congregations are now held over its fiery abyss. The same criticism has also abolished the city of jasper walls, precious stones and golden streets, with its white throne, harps and angels, and given us in its place perfection of perfection, bliss of bliss, glory of glories.

Air castles, to the vivid imagination, are easy of construction, but most difficult to maintain. The old, orthodox heaven, at least, has the authority of the Bible to support it; the modern one, nothing but individual imagination. It has not even the substance of the beautiful sunset, which, for the time being, thrills and animates us with joy, and is, for the moment, at least, a reality—not an empty dream.

In the analysis of the modern heaven, let us inquire what can be the perfection of all happiness, the climax of all bliss, the glory of all glories? To each individual there are many and varied things which make us happy, and in different degrees, depending upon our frame of mind at the time. The poor man contemplates with great joy the possession of some article which has taken years of time and toil

for him to afford, and in the possession of which his more wealthy neighbor would not give even a passing thought. The student loves his books, but the jockey sees only supreme happiness in the winning of the race. The colored man, in his religious exercises, is filled with transports of joy from the top of his head to the soles of his feet, while his less demonstrative white Christian neighbor smiles at his outward demonstrations, and the "wicked" Infidel looks on with mingled feelings of pity and mirth. The boy with his bag of marbles, or the girl with her new doll, contemplates their possession with as deep feelings of joy and contentment as the statesman the adoption of his pet measure, or the general the defeat of an enemy. The success of the statesman or general, however, does not bring joy to the opposer. Can there be such a thing as the aggregation of all happiness, bliss and glory? Can there be such a thing as the participation by the vanquished in the joys of the victor? Can the deep love of the young mother for her child be understood and appreciated by the crabbed old maid or bachelor, who hate children? Happiness and its enjoyment is a matter of individual feeling, and affects no two alike. It would, indeed, be a strange mixture if all things which make men happy, according to their wishes and desires, could be mixed together in one common lot. Such a production the higher criticism calls the glory of glories, and this mixture is to be forever fed to those who enter this heaven. Happiness only brings joy by contrast. It is but transitory, and cannot be permanent. If it were, we would lose interest, as it would become tiresome and we would long for a change. We love our baby, but would be wretched if it were to remain such. Our joy and happiness is in its growth and development. A permanent condition of any kind is irksome, and will in time yield the reverse of happiness. The new heaven has too much sameness to satisfy the human craving for constant change.

The reunion of families and the meeting of old friends is perhaps a very pretty picture, until we look behind it and see its utter folly. Our parents have been dead many years, and were mentally and physically infirm at death. Are we to meet them again in the condition in which they left us? The very thought makes us shudder. Or are we to meet them as we met them, and they us, in our childhood? This is, perhaps, to all, the happiest recollection. But in the meantime we have changed and have our own children. We cannot at the same time be children to our parents and parents to our children. Either we must lower ourselves to the condition of children

to our parents, or raise ourselves to that of parents to our children. In either case, either the children or the parents would be disappointed, and disappointment is not the perfection of happiness, the bliss of bliss or glory of glories.

Notwithstanding, these rainbow pictures of the hereafter, so vividly dealt in by our eloquent friends, are mere fancies, without shadow or substance, there may be, and is, a heaven here on earth, and which every one of us can make unto himself. Few of us are happy in the same things, and all have their special objects of joy. It is in the knowledge of doing right, according to our means and understanding, that we reach this perfection, and any deviation from this simple duty wounds our conscience and brings us misery. We are certain of our duty, however, and the rewards for doing it. Let us not neglect it for the uncertainty of a visionary glory of glories. The Infidel heaven is a living reality, and brings peace, contentment and joy to ourselves and homes. The other is without substance and but the idle fancy of a vivid imagination. Which is preferable, the present reality or the higher criticism's dream?

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The Historic Jesus.

BY CHARLES CLARK MILLARD.

From A. D. 62, and for 150 years afterwards, a census of the Roman Empire was taken every fourteen years. It is also well known that a census was taken in A. D. 6-7, when Cyrenius (or Quirinius) was governor of Syria, and at the time of this census (enrolling or taxing) Jesus was born at Bethlehem. (Luke's Gospel, chap. 2.) But in Matthew's Gospel this event is said to have occurred "in the days of Herod the king," and great have been the tribulations of theologians on account of this disagreement.

Dionysius Exiguus, when he fixed the beginning of our era, "reconciled" the matter by supposing that Christ was born about half way between B. C. 5 or 6, according to Matthew, and A. D. 6-7, according to Luke, and so it would have remained without question "unto this day" had it not been for the "higher criticism." Now Grenfel and Hunt have recently discovered that there was a census taken in A. D. 20, and think they can prove that a census was taken in B. C. 9-10, and this they claim as the date of the birth of Jesus. Thus we have four dates for the birth of Jesus, two of them inspired and all equally reliable—B. C. 9-10, B. C. 5, A. D. 0 and A. D. 6-7. Christians pay their money and take their choice.

Theologians have supposed that

there must have been a "Cyrenius, governor of Syria" while Herod was "king of Judea," and Dean Farrar says this supposition has "never been refuted," all of which is as convincing as Mark Twain's reasoning over the grave of Adam—he knew it was the grave of Adam, "because no one could ever prove that it was not." The only history we have of the Roman Empire in the days of Cæsar Augustus informs us that after the death of King Herod, B. C. 4, Quirinius was made governor of Syria.

The fixers of the Sunday school lessons assume that the enrolling was done at one time and the taxing at another, making the one precede the other about nine years, but this does not agree with Grenfel and Hunt or with any other authority; and a theologian ends an article on this subject by saying: "The time of Christ's birth is still a subject of acute controversy." No other event in the life of Jesus is more certain than the time of his birth; hence the tendency of liberal theologians to rely on the "living Christ" instead of the "Historic Jesus."

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Ministers and Agnostics Criticised and Defined.

BY C. S. SPARKS.

A man in the ministry must practice hypocrisy and must overlook a great deal of hypocrisy in others. He must at all times be unnatural, and most of the desires of his nature must be satisfied clandestinely or not at all.

A man associating with hypocrites naturally becomes one himself. A man who publicly denies himself of the joys and pleasures of this world is liable to indulge in excesses in private or in the company of those situated like himself.

A minister must steel himself against investigating higher criticisms, and must entirely ignore the great discoveries of science. If he does not, he either resigns his "call" or becomes a hypocrite within himself and to his better nature and judgment, and must struggle against self-antagonism during his ministerial career. I speak of the intelligent ministers.

A minister is one of a social circle of hypocrites or pious ignoramuses who depend upon charity.

Agnostics are a benefit to society, and are charitable and give alms.

Ministers say that it is more blessed to give than to receive. They have learned to nearly think so because they do the receiving.

Agnostics say, Do the best you can and try to make others happy, be they Christian or Agnostic.

Ministers are parasites, depending upon the labor of others for support. Agnostics are self-supporting.