

they are taken is very scarce, and quite beyond the reach of the reading public, so that this popular issue of them claims attention.

In the United States the late census shows that there are 143 separate religious denominations, and, in addition, 150 separate and independent congregations which have no denomination, name, creed, or connection. Out of a total population of 62,622,250, there is accommodation in existing churches and chapels for 43,000,000. This does not include "halls" used for religious purposes, of which there are a great number.

The late Mrs. Martha Howell Bennett Combe, of the Clarendon Press, Oxford (widow of Mr. Thomas Combe, formerly of Leicester, and for many years of the Clarendon Press), has bequeathed £1,500 to the British and Foreign Bible Society, and £3,500 to the S. P. C. K.; but that her sympathies are with the High Church movement are shown by her other bequests: The Pusey Library, £2,000; the S. P. G., £3,500; the Central African Mission, £3,000; the Oxford Mission to Calcutta, £2,000; Keble College, for the endowment of the College, £3,000; and for the endowment of St. Barnabas', Oxford, £5,000; the Clewer House of Mercy, £300; and the Oxford Penitentiary, £500.

In a small way a society has been started in New York which may accomplish a great revolution in social economics. Many young women in these hard times have lost their situations as readers, companions, amanuenses, owing to the cutting-off of luxuries, and many have lost their employment in factories and shops. The number of these young women may be reckoned by many thousands. The new society is known as "The Kind Word"; its object is the promotion of domestic felicity. It brings together two classes of helpless women—women in small centres who are unable to obtain servants and who are hampered by domestic cares, and women whose occupations (now gone) have unfitted them for domestic service or whose pride has hitherto stood in the way of their entering the home of another to render household service.

The island of Malta, it will be remembered, is under the dominion of England. It is curious to read that the Maltese legislature proposes, in response to the demand of the Roman clergy, to declare all marriages invalid which are not performed according to the decrees of the Council of Trent. This would affect very seriously the rights and property of English subjects in that island, who are not of the Roman Catholic Church. More than a year ago the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the House of Lords, drew attention to this condition of things. It is announced that a test case is now under consideration by the Privy Council to decide upon the operation of the marriage laws in Maltese territory.

The Anglican Church at last seems to have accepted unreservedly the principle that the first requisite for missionary work in a heathen country is a Bishop. The Missionary Bishop of Corea, Dr. Corfe, consecrated in 1890, had to gather a body of clergy and other workers to go out with him. The newly consecrated Bishop of Honduras has three priests. The Bishop who has been recently appointed for Lebombo, a new missionary see in South Africa, cannot as yet boast of even one. He has had considerable experience as a missionary in Zululand. He is now in England seeking volunteers and *The Church Times* remarks that if personal devotion in a noble cause can effect its object, his appeal cannot fail of success.

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Family Reading.

Love's Mastery: Or the Gower Family.

The aspect of the church was bright and cheering, with its wreaths and symbols; but Stella's thoughts were too much engrossed with the joyous service to take much heed of the effect of the previous afternoon's occupation. Dr. Lyon preached from the words, "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet unto the way of peace"—the well-known, often-repeated words, but which seemed to come with new force and depth of meaning to Stella's heart that morning. There was no opportunity of giving a Christmas greeting to Mary or her father. Lora had expressed her wish that Stella should not absent herself from home on Christmas-day, and the rectory party were always the last to leave the church; so that one glance of love directed towards her friend was all that the young girl could venture in the morning. But she left the luncheon-table early, and, protecting herself well from the cold, set off with Alice across the park to the afternoon worship.

Notwithstanding all her speed, the bell had ceased for some moments when she reached the churchyard, and the service was just commencing. To her surprise, Stella found an occupant already in the great pew. Mr. Luxmoor, whom she had not seen before during the day, and whom she had fancied ill, was standing there, gazing abstractedly about him at the wreaths, the drooping festoons falling upon the windows, and the text above the chancel-arch-way. A look of much surprise passed over his countenance as he opened the pew door for Stella's entrance; and then the wandering gaze returned and settled itself upon his prayer book. Service ended, they left the church together. On reaching the porch,

"This is a pleasurable disappointment," he said; "I had looked for a solitary walk. I need not ask whether you are well to-day, Stella; your facing the united attractions of frost and this charming east wind having given the answer."

"May we wait a minute or two? I should like to speak to Dr. and Miss Lyon," Stella asked, feeling she could not a second time refuse his escort. "Alice, you can, please, walk on."

"I shall be only too happy to await your pleasure, and to receive an introduction, if you will give it," Mr. Luxmoor answered politely; and the next moment the rector and his daughter came out into the churchyard.

With almost childish diffidence Stella complied with her companion's request; and then she walked on with Mary, leaving the two gentlemen to follow and converse together for the few moments that their paths lay in the same direction.

"Dear Mary, I have been wanting to see you, and give you this," she said, eagerly, taking a little sealed box from the pocket of her velvet jacket. "It is a tiny Christmas remembrance, which you must wear very often, please, and think of me. You need not open it till to-morrow; but I am not sure whether I shall be able to come and see you then, and I would not put off longer. Tell Dr. Lyon that I have had a happy Christmas-day; though I should have liked to come to you for the evening," she continued, thinking of her pleasant last Sunday, spent at the rectory.

"Dear little Stella, you are not half so disappointed as I am, I had so looked forward to it. Come to-morrow if you possibly can; even if it is only for a little while."

"Indeed I will. And oh, Mary, I have heard from my little darling again, and I will lend you his note till I see you next time. It is so sweet and loving, and so just like himself."

Mary fully appreciated Stella's confidence in lending her, even for a short time, so precious a document; and, the turn from the village to the park being just reached, the party separated. "I hope your arm is better to-day, Mr. Luxmoor," Stella said, after they had walked a little way in silence. "And I have been thinking about last night: if I appeared the least indifferent or ungrateful about your present, I am very sorry."

She was a child that could not endure the thought of wounding the feelings even of a stranger in the smallest measure; and she had fancied

him a little vexed the night before. "I think it very beautiful; and I am going to wear it this evening," she added simply.

"I did not observe that you were indifferent to my gift; so pray do not disturb yourself, Stella," Mr. Luxmoor replied, with a smile. "Only I suppose it is pleasant in offering a trifle to a friend to feel that you have exactly suited their taste and fancy. And now may I ask in which of the church-decorations you took so active and skilful a part?"

"How did you know I helped?" asked Stella, smiling.

"Why, I amused myself by going early this afternoon that I might look round, and a little bird told me."

"O, I can guess, though I think it was rather a large bird, Mr. Luxmoor. It was the text over the chancel that I helped in making."

"I thought as much. The decorations are very well for a country church. It is part of your creed going twice a day, I suppose?"

"It is very pleasant to me, the very pleasantest part of the week," Stella replied warmly.

"Little enthusiast! Do you not think, Stella, one might make an excellent *religieuse* of you?"

"Might I not be one even now, Mr. Luxmoor? Ought we not all to be so?"

"Explain yourself, please. Would you have us all retire without further ceremony beneath the sheltering and pious walls of some convent or monastery, as the case may be? That would scarcely suit the sociable tendencies of some, the Misses Raye, for example."

"No, not in that way, Mr. Luxmoor. Religion does not consist in going out of the world, does it?"

"It was I who asked for the definition. In what do you imagine the religious life, or religion, as you call it, to consist?"

"I cannot explain very well what I mean, in my own words; but I was reading what was said about it in the Bible the other day."

"Well, and what was that?"

"It says that pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is to visit orphans and widows when they are in trouble, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. And I think it is those people who have the love of God the Father and of Christ always present to them in everything, who are really religious; and they are very happy."

Mr. Luxmoor did not reply. The child's simple calm belief and mode of expression seemed very strange to him: he could not conceive where she had learned it. And presently he said so.

"I think God has taught it me Himself," she answered reverently, "by His word and in answer to my prayers and the prayers of others for me."

"Perhaps you will think differently when you grow older, and see a little more of the world," said her companion, while words came into his mind, sometimes heard at church, but to which he had attached but slight significance, about "receiving the kingdom of God as a little child."

"I hope not. I am sure not, Mr. Luxmoor; for every day, and the more I see of life, the happier these things make me."

"And you do not think it wrong to be happy, then?"

"No, indeed; oh no! Do I appear so very unhappy, Mr. Luxmoor?" she asked with a questioning smile.

"No: you are a calm and quiet little girl, that is all, Stella. And you have, although a little girl, taught me one or two lessons, for which I thank you."

Stella did not understand. She thought at first that Mr. Luxmoor must be speaking in ridicule, as he so often did, or that he must be trying to flatter her. But she was mistaken: for once, Mr. Luxmoor was in earnest. Floating complacently in the sunshine of universal admiration, and delighting to bask himself in its beams, he was not, as Mr. Gower had said, altogether insusceptible to good. Stella's evident distaste for insincerity under the most pleasing garb, her quiet consistent behaviour, and straightforward honest words, though at first they had piqued, yet in the end had altogether won him, and, as he truthfully confessed, had taught him a lesson which would not quickly be forgotten.

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