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THE NEW CURATE.

CHAPTER I.—THE SMALL ROOM IN LAURA PLACE.

"You are a lucky fellow, Selturue! A curate with more money than he knows how to spend, and a comfortable family living in store for him—a rare bird in our days."

"It's ill waiting for dead men's shoes," was the dry response. "The living of Repton is filled at present, and money is but means to an end."

"Don't preach before you are in the pulpit, Ralph, don't. If you are not a lucky fellow, shall I tell you what you are? A young bear with all his sorrows before him. You don't know what it is yet to do a curate's work in a hard parish."

"Don't I?"

"And the vicar away too. You look supercilious; well, we shall see; good-bye."

The Rev. Ralph Selturue nodded with a half smile, as he turned away from the speaker. He did know, he thought, pretty well, the kind of duties on which he was entering: the life was one he would have chosen before all others; and as he thought about it his heart swelled with the consciousness of individual power to trample under foot the thorns and brambles which might spring up in his way. If the work were hard was not he young and strong for it, a man of thews and sinews?

He had no fear—nothing but hope and anticipation.

And a week after that conversation he sat alone in his lodgings, a disappointed weary man. There on the table before him, in its black velvet cover lay the sermon, over the composition of which he had spent so much care, and built so many castles of future success. But in all his philosophy and vain imaginings had he ever dreamed of such a parish as this, to which he, the Rev. Ralph Selturue, had just been ordained? That was the unanswered question which worked in his mind bitterly at the close of his first Sunday amongst his new parishioners. A lucky fellow was he? Or a young bear with all his sorrows before