

# The Church Magazine.

Vol. 2.] ST. JOHN, N. B., OCTOBER, 1866. [No. 8

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## THE NEW CURATE.

### CHAPTER IV.—THE EARNEST LISTENER.

And still the Curate lived up in that brain-cloud of his, seeing nothing in the parish to call him down, except the abortions which his hand swept away remorselessly from the church or its services. The system of pew-looking was stopped effectually by removing the doors, and he could not help a feeling of grim amusement at the sight of some absent man searching in his pocket for a key, while the seat lay doorless before him.

It is possible that the very nature of the Curate's sermons kept the feeling against him in the parish down at the zero of passive dislike, since they were not fault-finding; in fact, they contained nothing that was in any way capable of individual application, so that he provoked no active enmity, only dislike.

By this time it had become a habit with him to turn towards that corner where the childlike face was generally to be seen. He had arrived at a feeling of positive disappointment at its occasional absence, and whereas he had formerly preached to himself alone, he had now a double individuality, and spoke also to that one in the crowd of hearers who seemed to listen and think.

There were, too, a few of his parishioners, less inimical than others, who had joined the newly-established choral class for practice, and whom he confused at the bi-weekly meetings with the ancient scales, who could never remember which were authentic and which plagal. They could manage to recollect that a true Gregorian should have but one recitation or dominant note; but what note the Doric Authentic D had for his plagal, or how, having D for a key-note, the scale should be without sharps or flats—all these things were puzzling. But the Curate persevered, and old men raised their eyes to the ceiling by way of listening, while the old women, far back in their old bonnets, looked as if no circle of sound could touch their ears, and the younger people confessed, admiringly, that “the pace was sharpened wonderful, and it was more spirity like.”

But attendant upon the composition of those sermons there was a new feature—the one listener. The Rev. Ralph did not acknowledge it to himself, did not argue about it, but there it was. They were not only preached to her as