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THE NEW CURATE.

CHAPTER VIII, (Continued).—POPULARITY OF ILLNESS.

And Hester Dudley, looking out upon the bare trees and the few early flowers, thought sorrowfully that he had gone without sword—without even an enquiry after her father in his illness. Did she blame him? Not she. But she did blame those whose hands, instead of helping, had been always against him; who had worried, and wronged, and driven him away.

"Take my advice, children," said Richard Dudley from his sofa; "never run after popular preachers."

"Popular!" repeated his eldest daughter. If you mean Mr. Selturue, he will never be that."

"Yes, he will. Didn't you say he had knocked up? Yes, he will be popular."

"People are too hard upon him," said Caroline. "His sermons may not be anything particular; I am no judge. Hester says they are clever, but if they are not, it is no reason why everybody should be so hard upon him. This is his first curacy."

A smile passed over Hester's face, but she did not move from her safe position at the window. The sublime absurdity of seeking excuses for Ralph Selturue! He was so great in her eyes, so clever, so far up above her, that she could hardly now believe in the friendship which belonged to the past. Was it past? It had been very pleasant to feel that he thought it no condescension to talk to her: that, poor as her music was, he yet liked to listen to it. Something had come between them; some trouble of his own. He had not forgotten, could not have forgotten, a little patience was all that he required of her, surely she might attain that.

"People have fallen into the common mistake of expecting an old head on young shoulders," said Richard Dudley. "And everybody likes to have his own way. I repeat, don't you run after popular preachers. They will see him better by the light of absence, and illness from over-work sounds well."

And Richard Dudley was right. A feeling of sympathy for the curate began to spread in the parish now that he was absent. They really did begin to think there might be fault on both sides. He had been hasty, domineering, arrogant, it was all true. But perhaps they had been so