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## THE NEW CURATE.

### CHAPTER VI. (continued).—THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

SOON he saw the first lamp shining like a star on the white earth; then it grew into a row of stars, and he was in the town. There stood the old church staring at him with its bleared windows, and there the large, handsome house of the rich churchwarden. He would have passed that hastily. He was in no mood to philosophize over the failure of certain resolutions and plans of his, or on the vexatious colic which lay heavily between himself and his parishioners. But he was not allowed to pass that gate. Of all nights in the year, this one was selected to invite him into Mr. Smith's library, that he might be worried and tormented with irksome business.

He listened to that gentleman's elaborate excuses and stiff assurances that he had been twice that evening to Laura Place, with a desperate patience, till the real business should be unfolded. Who was Mr. Smith, that the curate should stay at home for the chance of a call from him? It came at last.

"There was no real reason for troubling you," said Mr. Smith. "I simply thought that you would like to know the day, in case you had any friend who might wish for a seat."

Ralph read the paper placed before him, with an effort to collect his thoughts. He was dizzy and exhausted; he stood up and put his hand over his forehead, confusedly. He could not say to Mr. Smith, "I am worried by an evil spirit; let me alone." The man thought him half mad already; what would he think if he heard that?

"Am I really to understand," he said, at last, "that you propose holding an auction in the church, for letting seats which ought to be all free?"

"Ought to be, perhaps; unfortunately though, they are not."

"To make an auction room of the church!" exclaimed the curate.

"There is no need to look at the thing in that light. I don't approve of it myself; but still it is the way in which —"

"I really cannot argue the question," interrupted Ralph, in a tone that struck the churchwarden, and caused his stiffness and formality to vanish instantly.

"My dear Selturne, you are ill. You overwork yourself, you do, indeed. Take my advice and give up the hard reading. A curate in full work has no time for it. Let me give you something—a glass of wine."

"Nothing at all, thank you," responded Ralph, touched by the kindness, but freezing again under the advice. "I am only a little tired and