

# IN DEACON'S ORDERS

## *AND OTHER STORIES*

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

"ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN" "THE REBEL QUEEN"  
"BEYOND THE DREAMS OF AVARICE" ETC.



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## PREFACE

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It may be necessary,—it is at least advisable,—in order to avert the possibility of misunderstanding, to state that the disease of “Religiosity” which is treated in the first of the stories included in this volume must not be confounded with the profession, possession, gift of, or desire for, religious faith. Every one has observed with what singular ease certain natures assume the external signs and gestures which simulate the phases of the religious life. To attend services with pleasure; to sing hymns with unction; to hear exhortations with joy; to make exhortations with earnestness—may become as much a habit, may mean as little, as the taking of a cup of tea. Every one knows cases in which the outward forms of the religious life have been carried on with zeal and fidelity, while the inner life—the conduct of life—the daily conversation—seems wholly untouched. The world holds up accusing hands and cries out “Hypocrite!” The world is not always right. The man, not a conscious hypocrite, may find a certain happiness in his emotions; he may not connect them in the least with things practical; he may, in fact, be suffering from Religiosity.

Paul Leighan, in the story which follows, is a victim to Religiosity. He explains himself in his history: with a real love for things ecclesiastical, he has no religion at all, no principles, no morals, no honor. But he has Religiosity.

It has been my lot to know several victims of this strange disease. One such,—who is now dead,—in the intervals of the Church services, which he ardently loved,