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IN DEACON'S ORDERS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

WALTER BESANT

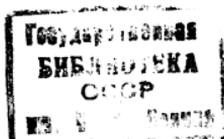
AUTHOR OF

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



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PREFACE

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,

found time to bring a fraudulent action against a company for damages on account of an alleged accident. He swore in open court that he was confined to his bed for a certain number of months, or weeks, in consequence of this accident. He won his case, with substantial damages. Another man, who knew that he was only in the most trifling manner injured by the accident, that his evidence was perjury, and that his claim was iniquity, refused afterward to speak to him. The good man, the perjured person, was deeply pained, and remembered this harshness in his prayers—quite earnestly. Another I knew to whom a certain amount of Religiosity was periodically necessary. He obtained his emotions by pulling a cassock down to his heels, and by carrying a banner at a Ritualist church. For the rest of the time he was an atheist—advanced and aggressive. “But,” he said, “I must have my Fetish.”

“In Deacon’s Orders” has appeared in the papers which support Tillotson’s Syndicate. The other stories in this volume have appeared in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, *Black and White*, *The Strand*, *The Illustrated London News*, *The Humanitarian*, and *The Idler*.

W. B.

UNITED UNIVERSITY CLUB,
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