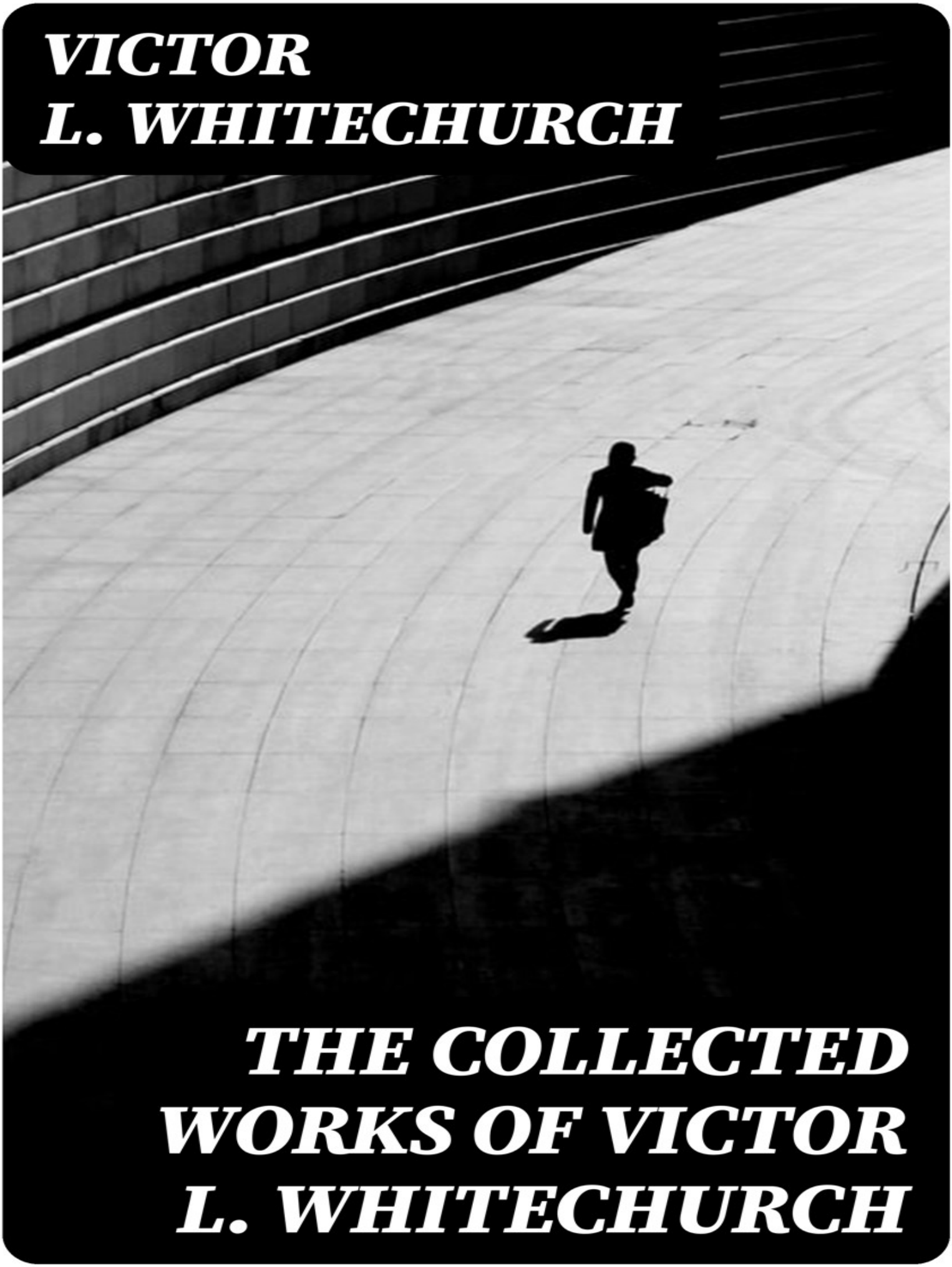
VICTOR
L. WHITECHURCH



THE COLLECTED WORKS OF VICTOR L. WHITECHURCH

Victor L. Whitechurch

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Chapter I

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The Reverend John Smith, Vicar of Market Shapborough, got out of the little narrow gauge train at Thusis, gave his Gladstone bag into the hands of a porter, and strolled up the steep ascent from the station to the " Hotel des Postes," pausing now and again to admire the ruby glow of the sunset on the snowy peaks of mountains that towered above the valley through which he had just been journeying.

There was nothing particularly striking about the Reverend John Smith, any more than his name. He was a middle-aged man of medium height, dressed very correctly as an English clergyman. His hair was just a little tinged with grey, as were also his short side-v/hiskers. The rest of his face was clean shaven and of rather an ecclesiastical cast, but there was that half-apparent upward turn in the corners of his mouth that told he was by no means devoid of humour, while his eyes were distinctly of a kindly type.

He was not unknown in the Clerical world. There are pages of "Smith" in *Crockford*, but this particular one, who was Vicar of Market Shap-borough, a small town on the outskirts of the Diocese of Frattenbury, had a list of books of which he was the author after his name, and by the titles of them, it was easy to see that Ecclesiastical History was his hobby. In fact, Smith's " Frankfort Controversies" was well known as a text-book, and his treatise on " Some Aspects of the Reformation in Switzerland " had been described by a certain learned bishop as being "the work of one who had a thorough grasp of the Continental ecclesiastical intrigues of the sixteenth century."

It was this literary hobby of his that had brought him to Switzerland. He had taken a few weeks' holiday in the slack

period between Epiphany and Lent, leaving his parish in charge of his curate, and had run over to Zurich for the purpose of consulting certain dry old tomes in the library of that city, to get information for the book he was now engaged in writing. Here he found, to his no small satisfaction, that his reputation had preceded him; and so courteous and kindly were the authorities, that his notebook was full of the information he required long before his time was up.

So, having about ten days to spare, he had determined to put in some of them at St Moritz, and having got as far on the road as Thusis, was looking forward to the wintry drive over the Julie? Pass the following day.

At this particular time of the year the hotels at Thusis can boast of but few guests, and those only passing travellers staying for just the night on their way. There were one or two other passengers besides Mr Smith, but they evidently were not bound for the " Hotel des Postes," and when he walked up the steps he saw that he was the only arrival.

There was a solitary individual seated in the hall smoking a cigar, with a cup of coffee by his side. He was a man of about the same build and height as the clergyman, but of a very different type. He was dressed in a suit of a loud check pattern, he had brilliant, turnover stockings beneath his knickerbockers, and a large gold pin flashed out from a gaudy-coloured tie. He wore a heavy, dark moustache, and was, in all respects, the sort of man that at a glance one would have put down as a typical British tourist of a class to be met with all over the Continent. One cannot go up the Rhine on a summer's day, one cannot take a trip on the Italian Lakes in spring, one cannot go inside a cathedral without meeting such men, similarly dressed. The foreign hotel keeper knows them well, and invariably charges them a couple of francs or so per day above his usual *pension* price, because he knows he will get it—these men being Britishers abroad with purses.

He looked up quickly at the entry of the clergy-man, taking stock of him with eyes that were sharp and alert. He surveyed him narrowly from head to foot, with a restless, apprehensive expression, which only passed from his face when Mr Smith addressed the proprietor, who bustled up to him, welcoming him in very fair English.

Mr Smith said: " Er—can I have a bed?"

He said it in the tone of voice of an English clergyman, a tone that no other profession ever adopts. An expert in human nature can sit with his back to an hotel entrance when a host of tourists comes rushing for rooms from an incoming train, and he will pick out the English parson abroad nine times out of ten by the simple intonation of his voice as he asks for a bed.

Perhaps it reminds one of the Litany monotoned.

Anyhow the stranger smiled slightly as he heard the question put, and went on sipping his coffee tranquilly. The Reverend John Smith was immediately taken upstairs by mine host, and shown room Number 9, which he was assured was the best in the house.

It was not; but room Number 10 had already been ascribed to the individual in the hall. Both rooms were warmed by the same stove, and mine host charged each guest for warming.

They are hotel keepers by instinct in Switzerland.

The Reverend John Smith made up his mind not to dress for dinner. Enough that he was in black. He turned on the electric light, undid his bag—which the hotel porter brought up—and took out a few requisites. After a leisurely toilet he produced a large manuscript book from the bag and perused it with much satisfaction until the bell rang for dinner. It was his book of Zurich notes.

At table he met the other man. He, too, had not troubled to dress. The two sat face to face; they were the only guests. Being English, they ate in silence half through the meal. Then Mr Smith had to ask the other to pass the salt.

He hesitated, but the waiter had left the room for something —and he wanted salt. Having asked for it, and thanked his companion for passing it, he felt the silence ought no longer to be maintained. Etiquette had been satisfied without formal introduction. Of course, for the next ten minutes the conversation was confined strictly to the weather— its present state, its biography in past years and seasons, and its probabilities on the morrow. Then Mr Smith grumbled at Swiss railways, and the stranger abused the hotel wine. This put them on a more friendly footing, and the conversation became general.

They went into the hall together, lit cigars—for Mr Smith was fond of a smoke—and chatted quite familiarly. The stranger was a well-informed man, and was able to tell his companion much about St Moritz and the winter season there. Then the conversation took a slightly ecclesiastical turn. Something was said about the clergy, and the stranger made the remark;

" It's a pity so many of them are not men of the world: excuse my saying so."

Mr Smith smiled.

" I don't think you laymen do us justice," he said. "There isn't a class of men with such opportunities of getting a knowledge of human nature as the clergy."

" And there isn't a class of men who use their opportunities less—at least I think so."

"Oh, come now. Just think a little. We are always mixing with all sorts and conditions of men, from the highest," and here he drew himself up a little when he thought of his yearly dinner with an Earl who lived in his parish, "down to the very lowest," and he blew the smoke complacently from his mouth as he pictured himself visiting the one " slummy " street of Market Shao-borough.

" I know, and I give you full credit for it Don't think I'm running the parsons down, though," and his eyes twinkled, " I can't say I see very much of them myself. But although you

may be mixing with all sorts and conditions of men, between you and the laity there is a great gulf fixed. I don't want to draw invidious distinctions from Scripture as to the different sides of the gulf."

" I don't quite follow you," replied Mr Smith with slight acerbity.

"No? Well, frankly, I mean this. By virtue ot your office and your uniform—that collar of yours, for instance—you create, shall we say, a halo around you. That's the gulf."

" Well, but it is only right that we should do this. Whatever we may be ourselves," and he dropped unconsciously into his sermon tones, "our office ought to be respected."

" But you can't fathom human nature unless you occasionally get outside that office. Let me put it to you. Suppose you go suddenly into a group of laymen who are talking, say, of perfectly innocent subjects. The feeling comes over them at once, ' Hullo, here's a parson—we must be careful what we say,' and their conversation changes from a natural one to a more or less forced one. You may think you're getting at their human nature by listening, but you're not. They are on their best behaviour. Best behaviour is not generally human nature; come now! "

Mr Smith was bound to laugh.

" Oh, there's something in what you say," he admitted; " but then, as I remarked, our office ought to be respected. Suppose 1 entered a railway carriage where half-a-dozen men were using bad language. You wouldn't have them go on swearing in my presence, would you?"

"It wouldn't do you any harm if they did. Of course they wouldn't swear—more's the pity!"

"More's the pity?"

"Certainly. They'd either be silent or make remarks calculated to deceive you. And you'd be impressed with the guilelessness of the working class, and sum up human nature accordingly, bringing it into your next Sunday

sermon. Whereas if they went on swearing you'd be able to form a better estimate of humanity, and preach them a better sermon on the spot—if you dared."

Mr Smith took it good-naturedly, but was on his defence.

" I still maintain," said he, " that my presence In the railway carriage would be a salutary check on those men."

"Yes—for half an hour. And then, when you were gone, there would be an exhibition of human nature—at your expense. That's what I complain of—a salutary check! My dear sir, it isn't simply a matter of half-a-dozen louts stopping their tongues. It's more than this. Your office, and the artificial resp>ect for it, prevent you from ever getting hold of thousands of opinions and thoughts, speculations and convictions. You churchmen are in a fool's paradise, and the hedge round it is the 'respect for your office.' Some day that hedge will be cut down—from outside. And then you'll see."

"You are candid—very candid," said the clergyman slowly. For a minute or two he smoked in silence and with contracted brows. He was not accustomed to have things thrust upon him thus. It was unlike the speeches of laymen at church conferences and opinions expressed in the correspondence of the *Guardian*. The other watched him with an amused smile, much enjoying the situation.

Presently Mr Smith remarked:

" Most people are able to pull down prevailing systems, but few can suggest remedies of any consequence. You say that we clergy do not sufficiently understand men. Perhaps you can tell me how to do it."

" Easily."

" How?"

The stranger leaned forward and touched the other's coat.

" Take off this," he said, " and that," he went on, pointing to Mr Smith's collar; "put on ordinary clothes and drop the parson. Then go and mix with men—ind you'll see I'm right."

Mr Smith coloured slightly.

"Really," he said, "you would not have me go about my parish of Market Shapborough dressed er—well, like yourself?"

And he smiled, in spite of himself, at such an idea as his eyes fell on the loud check suit The other laughed heartily.

" No, not even this," and he indicated his jacket " would disguise you in your own parish. But I didn't mean that. I referred to the times you are out of your parish. For instance, you are going to spend a week at St Moritz just at the height of the winter season. There would have been a glorious opportunity for you to become a layman for the time being. You'll meet all sorts there— snobs, scientists, opinions of the brainy and opinions of the brainless. It's a little world in itself You lose your chance of making the best of it by going there as a parson."

Mr Smith was silent, remembering the stern rebuke he had once administered to his curate when he had discovered that the latter had donned " mufti" for his Continental holiday. There was something in what the stranger said, after all. Deep down in Mr Smith's heart, almost smothered by years of ecclesiasticism and respectability, there still lurked a few grains of that spirit of adventurous enquiry that is the heritage of those of northern climes.

And, really, now he came to think of it, he could recall more than one instance of the truth of the stranger's words, instances when he had actually employed a layman to investigate certain parochial matters which he had felt that he could not quite grasp; simple things, but telling arguments at this moment.

How long he would have mused over the matter one cannot undertake to say, for at this moment the waiter appeared, bringing an English newspaper and requesting orders for the morrow.

" Get mc a seat in the *coupé* for St Moritz," said Mr Smith, "and call me in time to get some breakfast before starting. My room is Number 9."

" Yes, Monsieur," said the waiter, who spoke a jargon of many languages. " And Monsieur?" he questioned, turning to the other.

"All right, I'll give you my orders before I go to bed."

With a polite gesture, the stranger in check motioned his companion to make first use of the newspaper. It was two or three days old, but the first he had seen for a week, so occupied had he been at Ziirich. He opened it, half read the leading article, glanced through a column or two of general news, and then his eyes fell on the words,

"ECCLESIASTICAL INTELLIGENCE."

The very first paragraph under this heading was the following:—

> " We are authorised to state that the vacant Canonry of Frattenbury Cathedral has been offered to the Rev. John Smith, Vicar of Market Shap-borough, and author of ' Frankfort Controversies,' and other historical works. Mr Smith is at present on the Continent, and no reply has been received from him as yet, but there is no doubt that he will accept this recognition of his merits."

He read it slowly once, twice, and then he laid the paper down on the table, took a long draw at his cigar, and threw himself back in his chair with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Perhaps it was the most delicious moment of his life; the more delicious because the news came in the way that it did. The man had a pardonable sense of pride, and this "recognition of his merits" was sweet to his soul.

" Canon Smith!" For a few minutes he revelled in the thought, silently; and who would not forgive him? True, he

had had some hopes of it. He knew, just as he left England, of the vacancy; but he had scarcely dared to think of it. Though known by his books, he had never taken any important part in the affairs of the Diocese, and his living was not a very prominent one—and poor enough! The Canonry was worth five hundred a year — riches to him. The smoke which he puffed upward seemed to take the shape of a white-robed figure preceded by a solemn verger carrying a silver wand, marching to his stall in Frattenbury Cathedral. All thoughts of the stranger by his side and the suggestion he had made faded away from him. He was more ecclesiastical than ever. He had entered the hotel as the Reverend John Smith—he would leave it as the Reverend Canon-elect. It was a position of dignity; the " recognition of his merit."

Meanwhile the stranger had taken the newspaper from the table and was perusing it in his turn.

Presently his eyes assumed the intent look of a man who is deeply interested; there was a pause between the puffs of his cigar, and he put down the sheet, muttering in a half-abstracted tone:

" Heaven be praised for the newspapers! "

Mr Smith, in his reverie, caught the words and echoed them perfectly unconsciously.

" Heaven be praised for the newspapers!" he murmured.

There was a very long silence. Mr Smith became more and more wrapped up in his dreams of Frattenbury Cathedral and Frattenbury Close, and the other man became more and more alert in his thoughts. Mr Smith's cigar had gone out. The stranger was smoking his voluminously. Gradually an idea seemed to take possession of him, and a smile displaced his frown. His eyes looked the clergyman up and down narrowly; then, as if he had quite made up his mind, he drew out his cigar-case, carefully looked over the contents, swiftly transferred all but one

conspicuously dark one loose into his pocket, and then, bending forward, said:

"Your cigar has gone out, sir. Allow me to offer you another."

" Oh, thank you very much," said the clergyman, starting from his visions. " It's very good of you. Dear me, but it's your last," he added, as he drew it from the case.

" I've plenty more upstairs," replied the stranger. " I'll go and get some."

The next minute he was on the first-floor landing, Carefully looking round to see that he was not observed, he entered room Number 9, and turned on the electric light.

As is customary in Continental hotels there was a double door leading from Number 9 to Number 10, in case they were both taken by members of the same family. Each door had its own key, on the inside. In three seconds the stranger had taken out Mr Smith's key, first unlocking the door, and put it in his pocket. He could now enter the room from his own if he liked, In another two minutes he was down once more, smoking a cigar with the clergyman.

Presently the latter said:

" This is rather a strong cigar of yours."

"Eh? I'm sorry. I do smoke rather a strong brand, I suppose."

" Well, perhaps I'm a bit tired. I've got a long journey to-morrow, and I think I'll go to bed, if you'll excuse me. Shall I see you in the morning?"

" I'm afraid not."

"Ah I Many thanks for an interesting conversation. But I'm afraid I don't agree with you, you know. That idea of yours about lay clothes "

" Try it!"

Mr Smith laughed.

" It will have to be some other time if I ever do—which isn't likely," and he thought of the Canonry.

" I wish I could make you go to St Moritz dressed as I am. I should be doing you a service, really! "

" No doubt, no doubt—good-night to you!"

" Good-night, sir. A pleasant journey to-morrow."

Mr Smith went off to bed very tired, very sleepy, very satisfied, and very amused at the bantering stranger. He undressed quickly and yawningly, praised God sleepily for the Canonry, and was soon snoring.

The other man called for paper and ink, wrote a letter which seemed to amuse him vastly, and then interviewed the waiter.

" There's a train at five A.M., isn't there? "

"Yes, Monsieur."

" Call me at four; breakfast at twenty past. Tell the porter to carry my bag to the station, and to get me a first-class ticket to Paris."

" Bien, Monsieur,"

Chapter II

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The Reverend John Smith slept exceedingly soundly. It took three attacks at the door to wake him in the morning. Finally he got out of bed, drew up the blinds and shivered—for it was a Swiss winter morning.

As he prepared to dress his eyes wandered round the room. Suddenly they rested on a half-familiar object. Neatly folded, and hanging over the back of a chair, was a very loud check suit.

"Thought I'd locked my door," he muttered, "but I suppose I hadn't, and they took my clothes to brush. I never heard them."

He smiled at the mistake of the servants and made for the electric bell. But, as he did so, he caught sight of a note pinned on the awful coat.

"TO MY REVEREND TRAVELLING COMPANION."

In astonishment he tore it open and read:—

> "My Very Dear Sir, — The vagaries of the strange world in which we live are responsible for the vagaries of the individual. I put a course of action before you to-night, and the contrary argu ment has struck home to me. You have hitherto viewed the world as a parson—I as a layman. How intensely interesting to change places and learn from the experience! I am a creature of impulses, and, fortunately for the experiment, we arc about the same build! I not only maintain the truth of the old proverb that 'exchange is no robbery/ but I make no

apologies for conferring a benefit upon you. You asked me how you could judge the world from a different standpoint. I not only told you, but I give you, at once, the opportunity of doing so. I shall ever rejoice in having helped a fellow-creature, and I am sure you will learn to thank me as I deserve. Personally, I anticipate much pleasure in acting as becomes my new position; you have already given me more than one hint.

" P.S. —Under the circumstances a signature is superfluous. By the way, one of the coat buttons is rather loose, and should be sewn on as soon as possible."

To say that the man who read this extraordinary effusion was astonished, would fail to portray his feelings as he stood in his night attire realising the awful circumstances. Hastily throwing on some underclothing he rang the bell, and enquired angrily as to the whereabouts of this terrible individual.

" Monsieur left by the early train for Paris more than three hours since," said the man. " Is there anything wrong?"

" Yes-—no—never mind," fumed the other; " I will dress and see the proprietor."

" Monsieur will not forget to have his bag ready for the *diligence* There is not much time."

It was all very well to say he would dress, but the question was, what should he put on? He bethought him of his clerical dress suit with its high waistcoat, but even that had disappeared except the trousers—and a stylish lay dress coat and waist coat had been substituted. His very collars had gone, and some of a strange shape, together with some bright-coloured ties, were in their place. His pocket-book—no—that was all right, nothing missing from it.

The loose cash he had left in his pockets lay in a little heap on the table. At least the rascal was honest.

"Breakfast is ready!"

He made a compromise. He put on the black evening-dress trousers, struggled into the least gaudy of the ties, and then clothed himself with the terrible coat and waistcoat, cramming all the other things into his Gladstone. He could not descend to the knickerbockers.

In spite of his irritation a smile broke over his face as he caught sight of himself in the glass. Legs and head ecclesiastical; body and throat sporting. It was the man's saving side that he had a sense of humour which at times got the ascendency. It did now.

“ Canon of Frattenbury! " A verger would have thrown his silver staff on the ground and fled. The Dean When he thought of the Dean of Frattenbury, whom he had occasionally met, he laughed out loud.

The smile fled from his face. He had to confront the world below. Over all he put on the dark great-coat which had been left to him, and buttoned it up. His clerical hat had disappeared, but he had a travelling cap—besides a check one left with the suit.

He read the letter through again and crammed it into his pocket. A flush suffused his face.

How they would laugh at him down below! It was a joke, he supposed; the impertinent letter said as much, A wretched, miserable joke—an insulting joke, carried a great deal too far.

" But the world will look upon it as a joke, all the same," whispered his Pride, " and you will pose as a laughing-stock."

Rapidly he turned it over in his mind as he went downstairs. He took his seat wrapped up as he was, at the breakfast table, began his meal, and asked for the proprietor.

" Monsieur wants to see me?"

In fancy the man's face seemed even now broadening into a grin. He hesitated.

" The gentleman who was here last night — he has gone? "

" To Paris, Monsieur; he is already nearly four hours on the journey."

" Er—what is his name? "

" Monsieur shall see the Register."

The next minute it was before him.

" Henry Jones, London, England."

" We have had others of his family," remarked the proprietor, running his finger up the Register to find out Jones's of former visits. "Perhaps Monsieur knows his family in England, yes? But it is a large one."

" I know nothing about him at all!" snapped the other. " I only wish I could lay my hands upon him, that's all."

" So! But it is not possible to shake hands with him. But he left a message for Monsieur. He said to me to give his regards, and to say that the fine feather makes the bird fine, He said Monsieur would understand!"

Monsieur *did* understand, and grew redder in the face. At this moment the waiter rushed in to say that the *diligence* was at the door, and the bag safely perched therein. Hastily he paid the bill, and stood for a moment undecided. But he could not face the situation, and he kept his overcoat buttoned. Before he could see a way to escape from this terrible dilemma he had mechanically taken his seat in the *coupé* and the lumbering vehicle was off with a great whip-cracking, the proprietor bowing on the steps and shouting, "Adieu!"

The Reverend John Smith, Canon-elect of Fratten-bury, heeded not the magnificent scenery that broke around him as Thusis was left behind. He was grapph'ng earnestly with a problem, a problem that harassed his dignity in the extreme. Presently he lit his morning pipe, and felr better for it, as every man does. Once or twice the palpable

absurdity of the situation brought a twitching to his lips, to be followed by a frown of reflection.

At length he began to see a way through the trouble. He reasoned it out somewhat after this fashion. It would be foolish to attempt to trace this Henry Jones. It would only make him ridiculous if the story got out. A position of some prominence awaited him in England, and it would never do for the Press to publish the unfortunate incident, as it very likely might do — with embellishments, if the facts of the case ever got abroad. His wisest course, if he wished to avoid being a laughing-stock, was to get quickly back to England *incognito*, go straight home in his travelling coat, and hide those miserable garments for ever—unless he had an opportunity of returning them some day to Mr Henry Jones with a strong piece of his mind. Very well, then. He would make the best of an unfortunate position, go on now to St Moritz, leave the next day, perhaps, and travel home vid the Maloja, and the St Gothard. No one but himself need ever know.

His pipe began to taste more fragrant as his mind became somewhat at rest. The scenery began to grow upon him, and the keen, frosty mountain air began to exhilarate his whole being. His ridiculous position worried him less.

"I must make the best of it, that's all," he soliloquised; " and, above all, I mustn't forget that, for the time being, I'm only a layman."

Moreover, being an Englishman, and the circumstances having to be surmounted, the spirit of adventure rose up to grip him. Wherefore he found himself saying that perhaps, after all, he might spend a day or two in St Moritz, and not hurry away the next morning.

Then the spirit of adventure took a firmer grip.

" Well, well," he reasoned, " it may be an opportunity of learning something."

Whereupon the *diligence* drew up at Tiefenkastel, and he got out, went into the hotel to warm himself, and to make

up for rather a poor breakfast. Mechanically he unbuttoned his coat and stood revealed. A young man in a white Engadiner cap and a fur-lined coat was ensconced behind a large mug of beer. He nodded affably.

"Cold morning," he said. "If you're ordering anything let me give you a tip. The whisky's deuced bad here."

A sudden *harteur* assailed the good cleric. For a moment his face was a silent rebuke. Then he remembered himself and replied:

"Thanks. But I'm having coffee, and something to eat. I was rather hurried at Thusis this morning, and had no time to finish breakfast."

Thus John Smith praised the Rubicon, while the other said to himself, being one who thought himself worldly shrewd:

" Must have hurried up, too. Got his evening bags on! Been keeping it up a bit last night!"

Possibly it was the effect of that carefully selected cigar, coupled with what he was passing through, but his face did look a trifle " washed out."

" Going through to St Moritz, I suppose?" jerked out the stranger.

"Yes."

"Coupé?"

" Yes."

" So'm I. They'll put us in a sleigh at Muhlen. It'll be deuced cold over the Pass to-day."

" I suppose so."

" Not been there before, eh? "

" Not in the winter."

" Thought not. I'm an ' old resident,' as we call 'em. This is my fourth season."

They have a saying among the sporting set at St Moritz that the first year you lose your hair; the second, your manners; and the third, your character. This youth was an apparent proof. You also grow either patronising or snubby towards newcomers, the distinction being this: If you are

alone with them you are patronising; if other " old St Moritzers" are present you are snubby. This is correct form. In this case the youth was, of course, patronising.

" And do you come out for your health? " asked John Smith.

" Rather not. I'm not a ' lunger,' thank goodness. No; I come out for the fun of the thing. Tobogganing and all that, you know."

Presently they both got into the coupe, and went lumbering on. The young man was talkative. He told his companion all about the " Cresta Run " and the times of last year's winners; he expatiated on the pleasures of bob-sleighing, and he grew exceedingly slangy. John Smith listened with half-amused, half-surprised interest, as the garrulous youth ran on; and though several times he was on the point of uttering a checking word, he remembered his new *rolé*, and restrained himself. It was years since he had heard a man talk freely like this, and though it was mostly sporting drivel, and harmless enough in its way, John Smith found himself more than once reluctantly confessing that there wari some truth in the remarks of the stranger of the previous evening.

At Miihlen there was a halt for a hasty meal, and then the two men found themselves in a sleigh, the driver standing on the footboard behind, smoking his thin, long cigar.

" Going to make a long stay?" asked the youtK " No; only a day or two, I think."

"Ahl Pity you can't stop till the 'Grand National.' That's the big wind-up of the ' Cresta Run,' you know. It's worth seeing."

"Are you racing?"

" Rather! Don't stand much chance, though. I was fairly fit last season; sold for seven hundred francs."

"I—er—don't quite understand?"

" Sweepstakes, you know. Fellow that drew my name sold it for seven hundred at the auction, see? It was a girl who

bought it—jolly fine girl, too. I was a bit gone on her, and then, as luck would have it, I came a mucker over the bank on my third run. So she lost her seven hundred francs. By George, and she was mad about it, too. Wouldn't speak to me for the rest of the season. Look here, I'll give you a tip. If you do stay on for the ' Grand National,' you just plank your cash on a chap named Fraser. He's the winner this season, for a dead cert."

" I don't bet," said John Smith unguardedly.

" No? You look a sporting man, too. Some fellows don't, though. We had a parson staying at the hotel last season. Of course he didn't bet. Well, you know, we shouldn't have thought much of him if he had."

This was a strange revelation to John Smith, this judgment of the " cloth." The youth rattled on so.

" But this particular devil-dodger was so beastly sanctimonious about it. He didn't drink and he didn't smoke. Well, we'd have forgiven him that, but he paraded it about so much, with a kind of 'silent example' sort of manner. And he'd make pointed remarks at table—awfully rude, you know —remarks *at* people that you couldn't exactly lay hold of. The beggar! He knew very well that just because he was a parson you couldn't go for him and have the thing out as man to man. I do like a chap to be human, even if he wears a white choker, don't you? "

John Smith reflected for a moment, and was about to reply, when his companion went on without waiting for him:

" By George, he was a ranker! At the auction for the ' Grand National' sweep in the hotel hall he sat where every one could see him, reading an anti-betting tract with a title in big letters. Awful pity I A chap like that does a lot of harm to his own church. Of course there are decent parsons, don't you know?"

" I suppose you mean the sporting variety?" hazarded John Smith, whose curiosity was struggling with his clerical dignity.

" Oh, not exactly," answered the youth; " I know a fellow at home who's never been on a horse or handled a gfun or that sort of thing all his life. Works in the slums, and rather likes it. But he's a man all the time. That makes the difference. I'd stand a ragging from him, while I'd feel like punching the other beggar's head if he looked at me. Hullo, we're getting on—jolly near the Pass now. It's a good grind up."

Gradually the bare firs and larches had become thinner and thinner until now they had entirely disappeared, and there was nothing to relieve the dazzling white monotony of snow except the gigantic peaks towering in the foreground, and catching the last rays of the afternoon sun. The silence was intense, only broken by the everlasting tinkle of the horse's bells as the sleigh went on between the nigh banks of snow on either side. It was a toilsome pull-up to the top of the Pass, and John Smith was not sorry for the few minutes' rest inside the stuffy little hospice at the top, and the cup of hot coffee which made its appearance.

He was getting a little tired of his journey. His companion was beginning to bore him with his chatter, and he felt almost an aversion towards him. At the same time, he could not help confessing to himself that it was a novel experience to meet with this unrestrained familiarity. Once or twice he found himself wondering how this young man would have treated him had he known his position, and then he fell to comparing himself with this obnoxious cleric of whom he had heard. Well, perhaps he was a little less of a prig and more "human." At all events he liked his pipe, and a glass of wine in moderation. But he hated gambling. And yet this callow youth had said that it was noi the man's anti-betting proclivities which were disagreeable, but his manner of showing them. Thus John Smith found himself working out a problem. Where was the exact line of moral influence to be drawn? And the solution seemed to lie in the following:— "First probe the ground to be influenced." Yes— that was the

mistake this unknown cleric had made. He had not understood rightly the men around him: obviously he had not understood this youth, because, by the latter's confession, he was capable of being influenced.

And then, the argument of the previous evening flashed across him. This was exactly the charge which that detestable practical joker had brought against him! It was too absurd.

So he gave it up for the time, and began admiring the scenery. As they sped down the other side of the Pass, the Engadine mountains with the grand Bernina Range beyond opened out their wondrous vista. From delicate pink to rosy violet the peaks changed colour, ever varying as the twilight failed. He lost himself in the contemplation of Nature's marvellous greatness and beauty. He heeded not the talk of his companion.

The moon rose as they journeyed from Silva Plana along the valley, passing silent nnd deserted Campfer. And presently a turn in the road brought them to a glimpse of twinkling lights through the pines, and St Moritz itself, looking in the soft moonlight like a fairy village set in the midst of some enchanted transformation scene, stood before them.

A bustle and confusion as the post came in I A dismounting and a stamping of icy feet in the crisp, crackling snow! A few directions to a porter, and John Smith wended his way to an hotel, the young man following close at his heels.

There was just time to dress before dinner. After the exhilaration of the journey John Smith's heart began to sink when he reflected upon his situation. He had qualms about it. It was downright masquerading. He threw off the hateful check coat and waistcoat, and proceeded to put on the rest of the dress garments. Then he looked at himself in the glass and shook his head, half in sorrow, half in anger.

Suppose he were to meet any one he knew? Well, the dress suit was not so bad. Many clergymen wore open waistcoats and white shirt fronts. If he *did* see any one at the table, he could take his departure the next morning.

But, unfortunately, the youth had seen his other garments! What a fool he had been! He ought to have taken measures at once that morning.

What measures? The wretched man was three hours on his way to Paris before he found out the trick. He could never have caught him. The only thing he could have done would have been to tell the hotel proprietor everything, and then make his way back to England.

Well, he was making his way back to England *viâ* St Moritz. And he was doing no harm. It was a little undignified, but that was all.

And, he was learning something! In spite of himself he half admitted it. Anyhow, the spirit of adventure rose once more triumphant. He was in a fix, and, like the Englishman he was, he was determined to see it through—in spite—in spite of the fact that he was a Canon-elect of the Very Respectable Anglican Church.

Without thinking, he put his fingers into his waistcoat pockets. It was a habit of his. In one of them he felt paper. Perhaps it would give him a clue as to the owner's identity, so he pulled it out hastily.

It was crisp and thin. He unfolded it A Bank of England note for twenty pounds I Then the hotel bell rang for dinner.

Chapter III

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"I won't ask you the conventional question, ' What sort of a journey did you have over the Pass?' I'm tired of hearing it asked. But we must begin somehow, you know, for it seems we are to be companions at table. Have you been here before? "

John Smith laid down the soup spoon he had just taken up, and looked at the girl who was sitting next to him, looked at her in some surprise, for he was unaccustomed to be spoken to by strange women thus spasmodically, even at the same dinner-table.

" Never," he replied.

"Then I'm sure you'll be all the more interesting to talk with. It's my first visit, too, and I'm foolish enough to be enthusiastic about it. You know it's the fashion for the ' old St Moritzers,' as they call themselves, to snub anything like enthusiasm — except about sport It's such a pity, I think; don't you? "

" What kind of enthusiasm do you refer to? " he asked.

"Oh. lots of things. The freshness of it all, the scenery, and the climate — everything. Now, for instance, that drive over the Pass—by the way, I cm referring to it, you see—I don't think I ever enjoyed anything so much in my life, and I long to do it over again. And yet there are actually people here who can travel the whole way without noticing a thing, and who seem to think that because they've done it once they ought to be bored with it for ever afterwards. There are four men here who came over together, and boast that they played bridge the whole way. Can you imagine it? "

"No," said John Smith, "I can't. I enjoyed the journey immensely—that is, parts of it."