

THE SHADOW-SHOW

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The Shadow-Show by J. H. Curle

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BY
J. H. CURLE

*"For in and out, above, about, below,
'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-Show
Play'd in a Box, whose Candle is the Sun,
Round which the Phantom Figures come and go."*

RUBAIYAT

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BEQUEST OF
C. K. JOHNSTON
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FOREWORD

THIS world of ours is the Shadow-Show. We men and women are the silhouettes on the curtain. Adjusted to hidden wires by the finest mechanism, we are seen to be dancing furiously; and this we call life.

A Shadow-Show indeed! And the sense of our unreality at times overpowering. What are we? Whence do we come? What does it all mean? The stage is fantastic, and the players; the only real thing is that mechanism of wires which science calls the "reign of law."

"For man is man, and master of his fate," sings the poet, and Smiles, Lubbock, and other genial and wealthy persons chortle in the same strain. But old Omar knew better, and men of the calibre of Æschylus and Shakespeare and Ibsen have always known; free-will is very nearly an illusion.

We are puppets. We are the sum of all dead men, the sport of all past happenings. We are present links in the endless chain of cause and effect, and as our structure is, so does our life inexorably unfold.

Given the structure α a man will rush into the

world's arena and succeed; given β some weak link is indicated, and he will fail. An atom the more, and a man will enter the Church, marry, and breed an immense family; one the less, and he will find himself in prison for burglary. A Lord Shaftesbury and a Charles Peace, a Father Damien and a Ravachol—in how much do they differ? In a cerebral convolution the eye cannot measure, in a certain molecular instability, so inevitable, were it understood, as to chasten our judgments for evermore. "To understand all is to pardon all," said the wise Frenchman, giving voice to the profoundest of our maxims.

The reign of law is inexorable. The wires that hold us never break. Yet from that source whence all things flow, a source no man knoweth, come to us philosophy and humour—alleviatives; they are the anti-friction grease for the mechanism, and I commend them at all times to your use.

The stage setting of the Shadow-Show is extraordinarily beautiful. A dawn on the Karroo, the higher Alps outlined by moon-light, a spring morning in Kashmir, a drive over the uplands of Java, a bougainvillæa seen in the Dictator's garden at Carácas, are worth all the pains of our puppetdom. A favoured one, I have stood in the wings nearly all my life, and have seen the mounting of a thousand tableaux; I have, indeed,

viewed our beautiful, unreal world from end to end.

Here, then, I present myself—as Showman; whose moods pass, as the shadows themselves, whose assets are travel and reflection—knowledge of many lands and many peoples; whose qualities are a little philosophy, a little humour, some tolerance, a worship of Nature, and a love of his fellows; yet, such as these things are, they came to me slowly, apprenticeship to the Shadow-Show being a life's work.

J. H. C.

