

SHADOWS AND REALITIES

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Shadows and Realities by Albert Gehring

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ALBERT GEHRING

**SHADOWS
AND REALITIES**

**TO MY
SISTERS AND BROTHERS**

Shadows and ...Realities

By
ALBERT GEHRING



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To be sure, this spirit has a certain healthy manliness; and it would be folly to undervalue the fresh currents of life which it sends coursing through the social organism, deprecate its results, or attribute all its splendid energy to low greed and vanity. But it also has its shortcomings. There are other goods besides the material and social ones. Happiness, morality, wealth of emotion, intellectual culture, religious faith,—subjective rather than objective conditions,—are the really valuable things in life. And these are by no means to be estimated on the basis of external manifestation. For the realm of things and appearances is but a distorted mirror of the realm of feeling and significance. Life itself is the measure of life, not the external aspects which it happens to assume.

In some of the essays which follow these ideas are clearly presented, in others merely suggested. In some they form the central purpose, in others they have a more incidental significance. A certain reiteration may perhaps be excused, since the essays are not supposed to form a connected treatise, but are thrown together as detached views, reproducing the same subject from different angles of vision.

SHADOWS.

OWING to their unsubstantial character, shadows receive but little consideration in our musings on life. In order to realize their picturesque variety, let us imagine beings whose senses are able to perceive the shadows cast by the objective world, but remain unsusceptible to their tangible sources.

The world of these beings would exhibit wide deviations from that in which we feel ourselves so snugly at home. The abiding tree, for example, would assume a thousand different appearances, according to the variations in the position of the sun, and the presence or absence of light-obstructing clouds. At noon it would be represented by a bush-like circle surrounding the base of the trunk. As the day progressed it would assume a more elongated appearance, and by evening it would have stretched out into a distorted pole, several times its proper length. Through the obstruction of light clouds it would grow dim and uncertain, and with the advent of heavier ones it would vanish completely, leaving night and unconsciousness to prevail.

It would be difficult to construct the aspect of the genuine world out of the fantastic variations of its shadowy accompaniments. Exhaustive study would be required to prove that the bush-like circle and the pole, the sharp, silhouette-like outline and the blurred, grayish figure, were all the manifestation of an identical body. The existence of the genuine world might furnish the basis of discussions like those which center about the Platonic Ideas. There would be controversies about the reality of the "unseen world," one party upholding the existence of hidden realms of being, the other refusing to go behind the immediate data of sense.

We also are living in a world resembling the realm of shadows. Dazzled by the colossal riches and possessions of some of our fellows, and the honour, power, and fame which are enjoyed by others, we fail to realize that these are but the unstable concomitants of a deeper reality, which subsists serene and unmoved through their erratic variations. The immense fortune of the millionaire staggers us, and renders us discontent with our modest capital. The popularity of the statesman awakens envy, and nurtures the desire to rise to similar beatific heights.

Sober reflection, however, convinces us that these things, like shadows, are misleading by their fantastic dimensions, and without proportion to the realities behind

them. The million may be the condition of a satisfaction which in another case is attained by a meagre thousand, the palatial country home reflect a paler joy than the humble wayside cottage, the prima donna's triumph subtend a smaller angle of delight than the faultless recitation of the eager school girl.

An old saying has it that man is the measure of all things. More accurately, sensation is the measure of all things. The feelings which accompany our fortunes are the criteria by which their value is determined. They are the abiding trees, while the objective phenomena are merely the shadows. Whether it takes a carriage ride or a walk in the park to produce enjoyment, whether it requires a palace or a bungalow to satisfy the craving for a home, the satisfaction may be the same in each case; and it is by the internal, not the external experiences, by the realities and not their shadows, that the situations are to be judged.

If the word *dollars* were universally substituted for *cents*, our wealth would apparently be increased a hundred-fold. Every labourer would earn over a hundred dollars a day, and the huckster in the market would be worth a million. Yet our genuine financial status would not be a whit affected. For our fortunes are not determined by the arithmetical sum, or the word, or the appearance, which they assume, but by the internal reso-