

Hand Shadows.

BY BERNARD MILLER.

IT is not too much to say that this pastime is as universal as light itself. The Chinese practised it thousands of years ago; and it flourishes at the Egyptian Hall to-day. That there is money in shadows, as well as in more substantial commodities, will be testified by Mr. David Devant, the eminent *ombromaneur*, who is depicted at work in the first photograph reproduced here (Fig. 1). The apparatus is not elaborate—merely a powerful arc light of 2,000 candle-power, whose beam passes through a small circular opening on to a sheet of ticket-

towards the sheet; otherwise the shadows will be blurred and hazy.

Mr. Devant on one occasion actually gave his shadowgraphic entertainment in the dazzling glare of a noon-day sun, the figures being produced on a sheet spread on the lawn at a fashionable garden-party; much manœuvring was necessary, however. Also, he has done without a sheet altogether, projecting the shadows direct on to a wall.

No one who has not actually seen a professional entertainment of this kind can form an idea of the amusement that may be derived from these hand shadows. Of course, the pictures largely depend for their effect

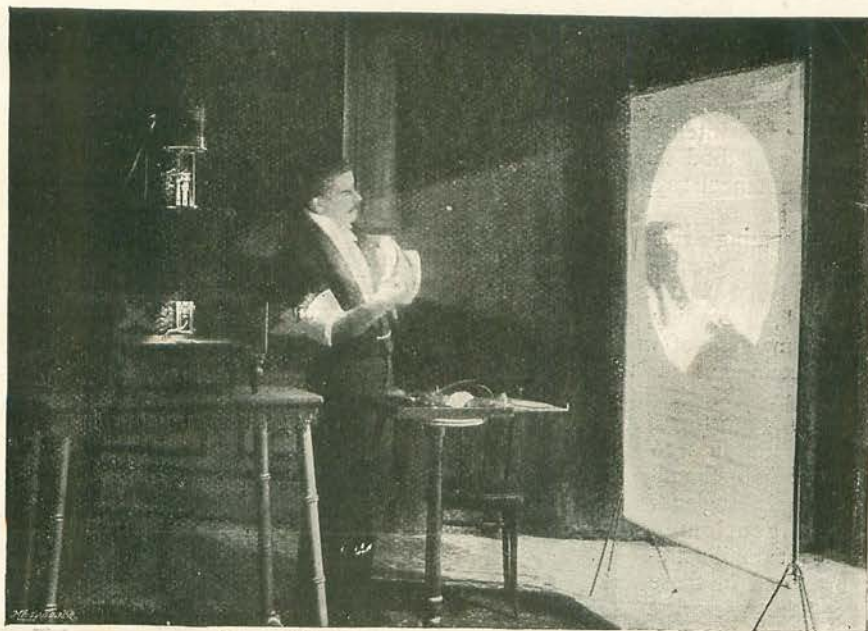


FIG. 1.—BEHIND THE SCREEN: MR. DEVANT AT WORK.

writer's holland. Occasionally some little property—a pipe, a piece of cardboard, or what-not—is used for adventitious effect; but for the most part the "artist" uses his hands simply and solely. What is more, the arc lamp can be dispensed with, and almost equally amusing results produced by the aid of a clothes-horse, a sheet, and a candle. If an oil lamp is used, care must be taken to turn it so that the edge of the flame is

upon incessant movement; yet so cleverly are the figures rendered, that even this series of "still" photographs bears powerful testimony to the skill of the artist.

The "British bulldog" (Fig. 2) is a capital example of unaided hand-work. His ferocity on the screen is extraordinary. He advances threateningly, albeit with the unsteady gait of his kind; and his terrible eye rolls in fearsome style by a truly ingenious *finger-tip*

movement on the part of the shadowgraphist. As Mr. Devant's hands enter the illuminated disc they are quite separate, all the fingers being extended. The operator then proceeds dexterously to "mould" his subject, but in such a manner that all may behold the clever



FIG. 2.—"THE BRITISH BULLDOG."

evolution of the figure. The placing of the hands and the disposition of each finger are swiftly seen by an intelligent audience, who appreciate this method far more than they would the instantaneous appearance of perfect figures.

Before preparing this article, we approached the two great shadowgraphists in this country—Mr. David Devant, of the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, and M. Trewey, who, at the moment of writing, is conducting an entertainment at the ever-popular Crystal Palace. M. Trewey is a veteran entertainer, who has travelled the world over, and he was the first to produce elaborate hand-shadow *séances* in England. Both these gentlemen assure us that the illustrations reproduced in these pages are the very first *photographs* of shadow pictures that have ever been really successful. Obviously, the entertainment is one that does not favour the camera.

But to proceed. In Fig. 3 we have a singularly ingenious representation of a swan, no "property" of any kind being used—unless one so describes Mr. Devant's

own head. Of course, that same head *is* a valuable property—quite a gold mine, in fact, by reason of the paying notions that have their origin therein. The photograph scarcely requires explanation. The stately bird, here shown, well maintains its ancient and familiar traditions. The long, graceful neck comes back in sinuous curves that the plumage (Mr. Devant's hair) may be preened and pecked; and the stiff little tail waggles in pleasurable anticipation as the swan dives beneath the surface of the supposed lake. Finally, the bird sails out of the disc by the simple process of Mr. Devant inclining himself gradually forward. He tells us, by the way, that he has spent many hours feeding the swans in Kensington Gardens and elsewhere, not so much out of benevolence

as from a desire to take mental notes of the attitude and general demeanour of the swan in her native element.

From this it will be seen that in these shadowy figures, as well as in more ambitious pictures, extraordinary attention is given to detail. Indeed, the thing is an art; the faintest movement of a finger altering an expression, and the imparted motion giving an amazing amount of appropriate realism to each subject. Figs. 4 and 5 admirably illustrate this—although, of course, the ceaseless motion is absent. The first of these is supposed to represent the working-man of the demagogic, or tub-thumping, order. Plainly, he is not an amiable person; ignorance, obstinacy, and truculence are writ



FIG. 3.—HOW THE SWAN IS FORMED.

large in his silhouetted profile. Nevertheless, with his pipe he is fairly content — still grumbling and

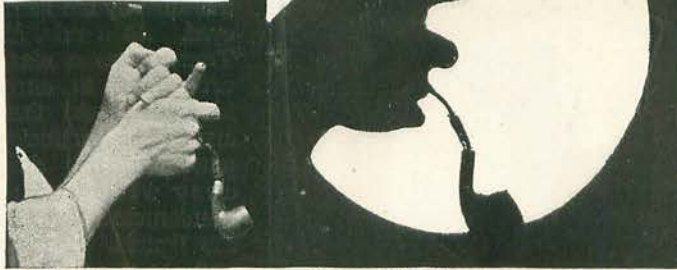


FIG. 4.—“COMPLACENCY.”

“view,” of course; but, on the whole, comparatively good-tempered. Now observe that suspicious angle in the pipe where the stem meets the bowl; it is a “trick” pipe,

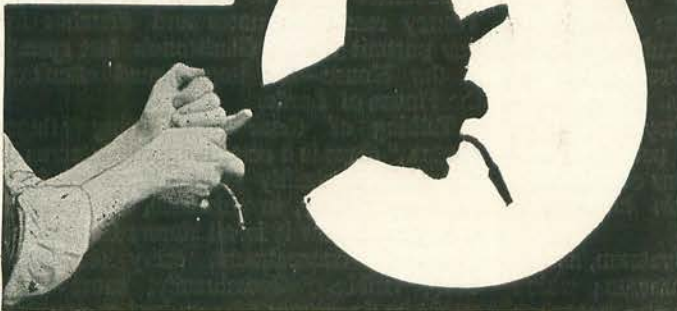


FIG. 5.—“MALEDICTION.”

and our friend's soothing smoke is about to be interrupted. In Fig. 5 the accident has happened—the bowl has fallen off. Surely this is a shadow-graphic triumph, which can in some measure, at least, be appreciated, even in the photos. Look at the swift change of expression from comparative placidity to fierce disgust and (probably) blasphemous imprecation. Interesting to relate, Mr. Devant had a typical sitter for this admirable incident.

Turn we now for a moment to M. Trewey, whose capital bull is shown in Fig. 6; this, as you may see, is a wholly unassisted hand shadow. When about to produce a

sive customer, who spent most of his time in browsing on the uplands of the Haute Savoie. M. Trewey was one day observing the handsome animal, unaware that the latter was also observing *him*. The story is not long. The bull resented the whole business and charged. He charged far more heavily than an ordinary human model would, so that what with damaged clothes and person and shattered camera, M. Trewey found the bull a costly sitter.

These shadowgraphists have pupils. Fathers of large families pay Mr.

Devant eight guineas for a course of ten lessons in the art, that they may amuse

their wives and offspring during the long winter evenings. Mamma cuts out and



FIG. 6.—THE BULL.



FIG. 7.—A SHADOW PORTRAIT OF THE QUEEN.

hems the sheet, while daddy gesticulates strangely in the endeavour to portray new figures of his own invention. M. Trewey's most interesting pupil was an enterprising dentist, who wanted to learn shadowgraphy in order to beguile timid children whilst he removed their offending molars. Then clergymen take a few lessons that they may not be outshadowed, as it were, at parochial tea-parties by the efforts of amateur entertainers. Even lunatic asylum officials have been among Mr. Devant's pupils.

Trewey is a wonderful old veteran, as full of fun as his own entertainments; which is saying much. Amazing as the statement sounds, he can make anything with his hands, from a monarch to a mill-wheel. With becoming gravity and reverence we here reproduce M. Trewey's shadow portrait of our own venerable Queen (Fig. 7). Her Most Gracious Majesty's nose will, we fear, cause some regret among loyal subjects; evidently the artist's knuckle protruded a little too much. It must be admitted, however, that portraits of eminent personages produced in this way

are absolutely unique. What is more, many of these portraits are transformation portraits, one changing into another in sight of the audience, but yet not so quickly that

the various motions are indistinct, or untraceable by the keen-eyed. As a rule, M. Trewey uses a cloak with which to cover his wrists and forearms when producing portraits; this does away with undue slenderness of neck in the figures. Figs. 8 and 9 represent respectively (and respectably too, considering) Mr. Gladstone and Lord Salisbury. The Conservative leader

looks somewhat cynical, while the immortal Hermit of Hawarden has a firm, purposeful appearance. As a matter of fact, M. Trewey made his notes and sketches for this portrait during Gladstone's last speech in the House—the impassioned attack on the House of Lords.

Talking of these transforming "finger photos," there is a certain appropriateness in the G.O.M. swiftly giving place to Lord Salisbury. Only, in this case, one can see at a glance how it is all done; there is no diplomatic concealment, every movement being visible. Occasionally, some little article or "property" is required to complete a portrait. In the case of the Queen,

the artist's fingers are so taxed to form the head and face, that there are none left for the necessary crown;



FIG. 8.—THE G.O.M.



FIG. 9.—LORD SALISBURY ON THE ALERT.

therefore the regal emblem has to be portrayed by means of a piece of cut cardboard. In the Gladstone portrait, the only "property" necessary is something which will indicate the peak of the familiar collar. Strange as it may sound, Lord Salisbury figures without "property" of any sort, the well-known beard being produced in a remarkably ingenious fashion by the fingers of one hand extended downwards.

One of the most effective of these shadow portraits is that of our premier actor, Sir Henry Irving (Fig. 10). The long hair is very cleverly indicated, while a slightly protruding finger-tip produces on the sheet the effect of the *pince-nez*. Of course, as we have remarked before, hand-shadow pictures cannot be judged when stationary. For each and every one of them is designed a certain marvellously appropriate movement; and even the great personages whose portraits appear on the disc are made to exhibit some mannerism or characteristic whereby they are known.

Mr. Devant was on one occasion giving his shadowgraphic performance in the famous subterranean saloons at Welbeck Abbey; and the Duchess of Portland was present

with her pet dog on her knee. Now, one of the funniest of Mr. Devant's scenes depicts a quarrel between two big dogs, which are portrayed solely by the operator's own two palms. When at length these shadowy animals were depicted at it tooth and nail on the sheet, Her Grace's pet could no longer resist joining in the excitement.

"That little dog," remarked Mr. Devant, "howled and barked with all the vigour it could muster. Evidently it was backing one or other of the combatants, or perhaps it wanted to have a

hand—or rather a tooth—in the fight. At any rate," added the popular entertainer, "I considered the incident one of the sincerest and most unique compliments I ever received."

Talking about pupils, the first exercise given to the aspiring amateur is working the fingers in various directions. When the fingers are completely independent of one another (and it is no easy matter to make them so), the hands are considered sufficiently



FIG. 10.—SIR HENRY IN A SMALL PART.

supple to commence upon the simpler figures, such as a rabbit, an elephant, and so on. Thereafter, Mr. Devant considers that it takes an hour's lesson to render the pupil proficient in each "advanced" picture,

The goat (Fig. 11) is a very successful shadow, which on the screen exhibits a

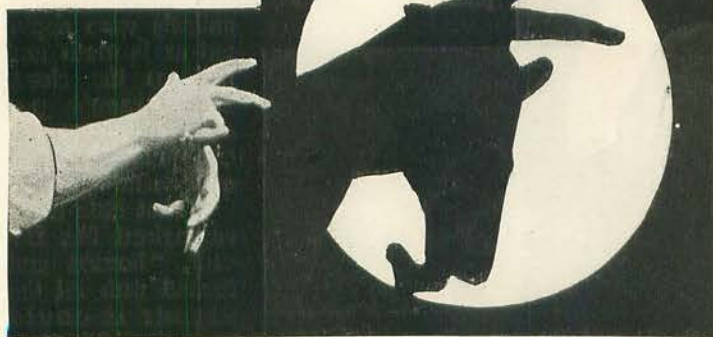


FIG. 11.—THE GOAT.

praiseworthy degree of contrariness and cussedness. You recognise the goat who will walk into your front garden and devour all the geraniums as a kind of *hors d'œuvre*, taking the open door as an *entrée* to daintier things out the back. Notice the uncompromising horns and the contemplative beard, which nods comically to and fro on the screen.

The close finish of a hotly-contested Derby is shown in Fig. 12. Of course, these photographs tell



FIG. 12.—A DERBY FINISH.

their own tale of cleverness and ingenuity, but we cannot help drawing attention to this shadow picture. The noble steed, though obviously handicapped by a big head (M. Trewey's extensive palm), is evidently straining every nerve to respond to its jockey's imperative demand. Observe the set purpose in the intelligent face, the erect ears, and the slender neck which speaks of proud pedigree. And that jockey! Why, he seems actually sobbing with ill-suppressed excitement. He is leaning forward to exhort his gallant horse to another spurt, and the whip is conspicuous by its absence. Truly a thrilling moment!

Turning to Fig. 13,

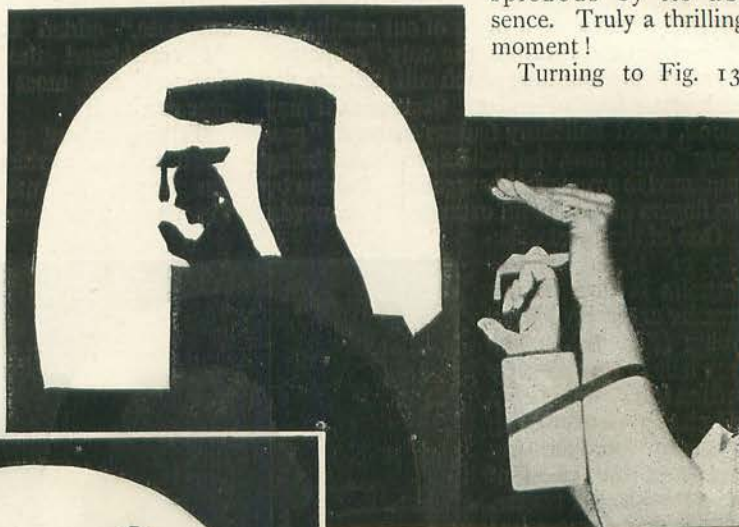


FIG. 13.—A CHRISTMAS SERMON.

a holy calm settles upon us. We are transported from the vitiated atmosphere of the race-course to the sacred precincts of the church. The reverend gentleman is in the middle of an earnest discourse; you can



FIG. 14.—DRESSING FOR A PARTY.

see that he is advising his flock to have nothing to do with book-makers—that he is warning his people to mend their ways and turn their gaze heavenward. At the same time we may point out that if he obeyed this last injunction himself, his benignant eyes would encounter M. Trewey's monstrous fist, which not only does duty as sounding-board, but also forms the back of the pulpit. The body of the pulpit, by the way, is formed by a piece of wood or cardboard fastened to the operator's wrist.

But the world is full of change, and another turn of the artist's hand carries us away to femininity and vanity. Consider for a moment Fig. 14, which depicts a young person of little refinement immersed in the mysteries of the toilet. The properties here used are: (1) a piece of cut cardboard on which coarse wool has been fastened; (2) a few hairpins; (3) a pair of curling-tongs; and (4) another piece of cardboard which casts the shadow of the mirror of a dressing-table. The lady's face and somewhat spare neck are formed by the hands of the shadowgraphist. The pantomime

gone through is amazingly effective. The lady is very much in earnest; evidently it is a toilet with a purpose. The hair is gradually curled, the hairpins placed in position one by one, so as to support an artificial dab of wool, which represents, we believe, a "bun" unknown to confectioners. All this, with many delicate, inimitable touches; a look in the glass now and then; ex-

pressions of alternate disappointment and delight, and final movements of triumph that are simply irresistible.

If anxiety and grim determination are manifested in Fig. 14, the next photo. (Fig. 15) shows unmistakably a complacent survey through a pair of "property" lorgnettes. Now and again during this wonderfully funny dumb pantomime the lady's enormous hand is seen busily at work placing the hairpins. Finally the exit of the "belle" causes roars of laughter, her mincing gait and languishing mien being reproduced with overwhelming comicality.

Some of these shadow pictures are very much advanced—positively life-like in movement and expression. Remember, there is no dialogue to help out and emphasize the



FIG. 15.—"ONE LAST LINGERING LOOK."



FIG. 16.—REMONSTRATION.

action. But the wonderful artistry brought to bear on these hand shadows is nowhere better exemplified than in the little pantomime comprised in Figs. 16 and 17.

It is here necessary to explain that shadowy incidents must be, above all things, simple and obvious. Take Fig. 16. In order to produce this "scenery," a cut-out square of cardboard was placed between the arc lamp and the operator's hands. Then the itinerant musician comes along looking a little mournful; his hat is another little piece of card held between Mr. Devant's fingers. He stops beneath the window and plays a simple, touching air—or, rather, the band does it for him, while he sways rhythmically his aggravating person. The householder is aroused, and goes to the window in his night-cap and a towering rage. "Go away, nasty, noisy, offensive fellow," says he. The "fellow" looks up with an injured air that is reproduced by finger movements

in a manner beyond all praise; at the same time his instrument is not far from his lips, so as to be ready to renew hostilities when the parley is ended.

He refuses to go. Probably he says, doggedly, "*J'y suis, j'y reste*"; but he is far more likely to say "nasty, noisy, offensive" things. The householder retires—not to bed, but to his washhand-stand. Seizing a big jug full of water, he goes to the window

once more. The musician has recommenced tooting-tootling (Fig. 17), that is, with a kind of exaggerated, defiant vigour, simply because he has been told to go away; he little dreams of the Damocletian jug above. As the water (sand, really) teems down, amid shouts of laughter from the audience, the musician collapses, sadder and perhaps wiser, while the triumphant householder shuts down the window with a self-satisfied bang. A moment later Mr. Devant's flexible hands loom large upon the illuminated disc, and the performance is at an end.

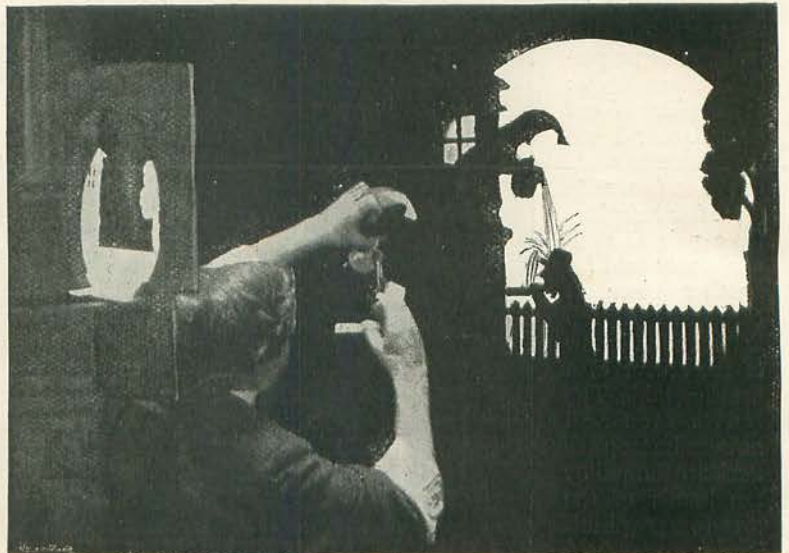


FIG. 17.—RETRIBUTION.