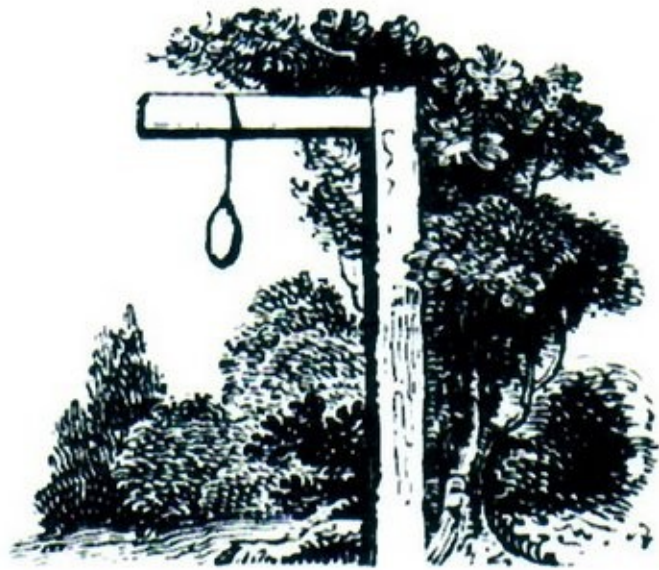


THE MAN WHO COULD NOT BE HANGED

*...and other true stories of the incredible
from Charles Fort*



*Including, for your pleasure, a blasphemous critique of
science and the rational, fragmentary, civilized paradigm.*

Verily, it is a blessing and not a blasphemy when I teach: "Over all things stand the heaven Accident, the heaven Innocence, the heaven Chance, the heaven Prankishness."

"By Chance"--that is the most ancient nobility of the world, and this I restored to all things: I delivered them from their bondage under Purpose. This freedom and heavenly cheer I have placed over all things like an azure bell when I taught that over them and through them no "eternal will" wills. This prankish folly I have put in the place of that will when I taught: "In everything one thing is impossible: rationality."

- Nietzsche

Not a bottle of catsup can fall from a tenement-house fire-escape, in Harlem, without being noted—not only by the indignant people downstairs, but—even though infinitesimally—universally—maybe—

Affecting the price of pajamas, in Jersey City: the temper of somebody's mother-in-law, in Greenland; the demand, in China, for rhinoceros horns for the cure of rheumatism—maybe—

Because all things are inter-related—continuous—of an underlying oneness—

- Charles Fort

Science has been drinking blood in the shadows for too long. Too long has it sucked dry the wonder of existence, and sat shivering neurotically, meticulously laying the parched bones of nature into an elaborate grid of brittle numbers and theorems, training the young to memorize the patterns and repeat them ad infinitum upon the natural world. Cities, built of squares and rectangles and cubes—cities, built of wild-armed trees, of cold dancing rivers, of rugged mountains—

As science would have it, the cubes are what is real.

What, after all, does it mean to say the universe is 13.73 billion years old? Are we to imagine that at the birth of creation the Earth was already mechanically revolving around the sun in revolutions lasting about 365 days, solely for the purpose of our calculating the age of the cosmos?

I much prefer the Hindi image. They say that if there was a great mountain, and that every thousand years a bird flew over the mountain with a silk cloth in its beak, the time it would take for the bird to wear the mountain to sand is how long we've been on our journey—

The poetic is much nearer to the language of the heart, the language of the Marvel, the language of blooming, the language of silence. The scientific is the language of the stale, the dead, the I Am, the illusion of an ego separate from the universe, controlling muscles from somewhere behind the eyes.

The scientist, to remain “objective” and to adhere to cultural superstition, imagines s/he is nothing more than an inhabitant of her/his body, much like the operator of a machine. And so, we get silly assertions such as from a communiqué from the radical occupiers of a hall at UC Berkeley in which one student wrote (and I paraphrase), “We’re discovering that the mind and body are intimately connected. Indeed, they may be the same thing.” So much for education.

In *The Nature of Scientific Thought*, Marshal Walker informs us that, “The scientist says he understands the falling of an apple because the details of its fall can be accurately predicted by Newton’s laws of motion.” I have a better explanation:

*An apple falls
from a tree.*

That is all.

Charles Fort, called the “father of the paranormal,” was an English poet and collector of events and reports of things that didn’t fit snugly in the desolate grids of the scientific, the rational, the civilized. A poet and philosopher, he saw that science was based on an immense taxonomy whose basis for classification is fundamentally unfounded, imagined, and no less juvenile than a rule invented on sheer whim by the looser of a children’s game (no offence to children).

As Fort says, science creates the universal only by excluding everything else, and the first to be excluded is everything that is not Man, that is not His Symbol, that is its own subject, its own story, its own display of the dance of existence. The sun is an object of gravity and nuclear fusion—not THE SUN, our father, the animator of Life. The equation is Sun + Earth = Life, which may as well be Earth + Sun = Life, or better yet Life + Earth = Sun. Better still I’d say, they are all inseparable and adding one to the other only implies an abstract subtraction from their actual unity. By this fractionary logic, impresses Vine Deloria in *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths*, a scientist once identified over 200 distinct species of bear in what we now call simply—black bears. I go even further and say that indeed, I am one and the same species as the black bear and the sun and the earth and stars. That is why my favorite mathematical equation is simply 0.

According to Charles:

“It is our expression that nothing can attempt to be, except by attempting to exclude something else: that that which is commonly called “being” is a state that is wrought more or less definitely proportionately to the appearance of positive difference between that which is included and that which is excluded.

But it is our expression that there are no positive differences: that all things are like a mouse and a bug in the heart of a cheese. Mouse and a bug: no two things could seem more unlike. They’re there a week, or they stay there a month: both are then only transmutations of cheese. I think we’re all bugs and mice, and are only different expressions of an all-inclusive cheese.

Or that red is not positively different from yellow: is only another degree of whatever vibrancy yellow is a degree of: that red and

yellow are continuous, or that they merge in orange.

So then that, if, upon the basis of yellowness and redness, Science should attempt to classify all phenomena, including all red things as veritable, and excluding all yellow things as false or illusory, the demarcation would have to be false and arbitrary, because things colored orange, constituting continuity, would belong on both sides of the attempted border-line.

As we go along, we shall be impressed with this:

That no basis for classification, or inclusion and exclusion, more reasonable than that of redness and yellowness has ever been conceived of.

Science has, by appeal to various bases, included a multitude of data. Had it not done so, there would be nothing with which to seem to be. Science has, by appeal to various bases, excluded a multitude of data. Then, if redness is continuous with yellowness: if every basis of admission is continuous with every basis of exclusion, Science must have excluded some things that are continuous with the accepted. In redness and yellowness, which merge in orangeness, we typify all tests, all standards, all means of forming an opinion—

Or that any positive opinion upon any subject is illusion built upon the fallacy that there are positive differences to judge by—That the quest of all intellection has been for something—a fact, a basis, a generalization, law, formula, a major premise that is positive: that the best that has ever been done has been to say that some things are self-evident—whereas, by evidence we mean the support of something else —

That this is the quest; but that it has never been attained; but that Science has acted, ruled, pronounced, and condemned as if it had been attained.

What is a house?

It is not possible to say what anything is, as positively distinguished from anything else, if there are no positive differences.

A barn is a house, if one lives in it. If residence constitutes houseness, because style of architecture does not, then a bird's nest is a house: and human occupancy is not the standard to judge by, because we speak of dogs' houses; nor material, because we speak of snow houses of Eskimos—or a shell is a house to a hermit crab—or was to

the mollusk that made it—or things seemingly so positively different as the White House at Washington and a shell on the seashore are seen to be continuous. So no one has ever been able to say what electricity is, for instance.

It isn't anything, as positively distinguished from heat or magnetism or life. Metaphysicians and theologians and biologists have tried to define life. They have failed, because, in a positive sense, there is nothing to define: there is no phenomenon of life that is not, to some degree, manifest in chemism, magnetism, astronomic motions.

White coral islands in a dark blue sea.

Their seeming of distinctness: the seeming of individuality, or of positive difference one from another—but all are only projections from the same sea bottom. The difference between sea and land is not positive. In all water there is some earth: in all earth there is some water.

So then that all seeming things are not things at all, if all are inter-continuous, any more than is the leg of a table a thing in itself, if it is only a projection from something else: that not one of us is a real person, if, physically, we're continuous with environment; if, psychically, there is nothing to us but expression of relation to environment." (*The Book of the Damned*)

And thus, we enter the forbidden realm of the Spirit.

Here I have collected a small portion of reports from Charles Fort that may be of interest to anti-authoritarians or anyone looking to disrupt the dominant Fragmentary Worldview (as I herby dub it), along with brief introductions to their inclusion. Hereafter, all italicized sections are mine, the un-italicized entries the stolen gifts of Mr. Fort. I'm sure he wouldn't mind.

While some of these accounts are indeed tragic, don't think me ruthless for including them. As anarchists we must embrace the fact that death is a requirement for life, mirroring Bakunin's assertion that the destructive passion is also a creative passion, and running counter to the aims of science and civilization. As Walker asserts in *The Nature of Scientific Thought*, "The immediate purpose of scientific thought is to make predictions [read: the control] of events in nature. The ultimate purpose is the survival of man." Not the survival of the land, trees, animals, or spirits—only the survival of the isolation of man.

ANOMALOUS CRIMES

Down with the banks!

"A bank in Blackpool was robbed, in broad daylight, on Saturday, in mysterious circumstances"—so says the *London Daily Telegraph*, Aug. 7, 1926. It was one of the largest establishments in town—the Blackpool branch of the Midland Bank. At noon, Saturday, while the doors were closing, an official of the Corporation Tramways Department went into the building, with a bag, which contained £800, in Treasury notes. In the presence of about twenty-five customers, he placed the bag upon a counter. Then the doorman unlocked the front door for him to go out, and then return with another amount of money, in silver, from a motor van. The bag had vanished from the counter. It was a large, leather bag. Nobody could, without making himself conspicuous, try to conceal it. Nobody wearing a maternity cloak was reported.

In the afternoon, in a side street, near the bank, the bag was found, and was taken to a police station. But the lock on it was peculiar and complicated, and the police could not open it. An official of the Tramways Department was sent for. When the Tramways man arrived with the key, no money was found in the bag. If a bag can vanish from a bank, without passing the doorman, I record no marvel in telling of money that vanished from a bag, though maybe the bag had not been opened.

Down with property!

New York Evening Post, March 14, 1928—people in a block of houses, in the Third District of Vienna, terrorized. They were "haunted by a mysterious person," who entered houses, and stole small objects, never taking money, doing these things just to show what he could do. Then, from dusk to dawn, the police formed in a cordon around this block, and at approaches to it stationed police dogs. The disappearances of small objects, of little value, continued. There were stories of this "uncanny burglar or maniac" having been seen, "running lizardwise

along moonlit roofs." My own notion is that nothing was seen running along roofs. There was such excitement that the "highest authorities" of Vienna University offered their mentalities for the help of the baffled policemen and their dogs. I wish I could record an intellectual contest between college professors and dogs; there might be some glee for my malices. There are probably many college professors, who at times read of strange crimes, and sympathize with civilization, because they had not taken to detective work. However, nothing more was said of the professors who offered to help the cops and the dogs. But there was a challenge here, and I am sorry to note that it was not accepted. It would have been a crowning show-off, if this perhaps occult sportsman had entered the homes of some of these "highest authorities," and had stolen from them whatever it is by which "highest authorities" maintain their authority, or had robbed them of their pants. But he did not rise to this opportunity. After we have more data, it will be my expression that probably he could not practice outside this one block of houses. However, he got into a house in which lived a policeman, and he went to the policeman's bedroom. He touched nothing else, but stole the policeman's revolver.

Down with the rich!

A fire in somebody's house did not much interest me: but then I read of a succession of similars. In three months, there had been ten other mansion fires. "Scotland Yard recently made arrangements for all details of mansion fires to be sent to them, in order that the circumstances might be collated, and the probable cause of the outbreaks discovered."

April 2, 1926—Ashley Moor, a mansion near Leominster, destroyed by fire.

Somebody, or something, was burning mansions. How it was done was the mystery. There was a scare, and probably these houses were more than ordinarily guarded: but so well-protected are they, ordinarily, that some extraordinary means of entrance is suggested. In no report was it said that there was any evidence of how an incendiary got into a house. No theft was reported. For months, every now and then there was a mansion fire. Presumably the detectives of Scotland

Yard were busily collating.

The London newspapers, of November 6th, told of the thirtieth mansion fire in about ten months.

Imagine if we could aim phantom bullets!

Windowpanes and automobile windshields have been pierced, as if by bullets, but by bullets that could not be found. Such were the doings of the "phantom sniper of Camden" (N. J.). He appeared first, in November, 1927: but the first clipping that I have, relating to him, is from the *New York Evening Post*, Jan. 26, 1928—a store window pierced by a bullet—the eighth reported occurrence. Later, the stories were definitely of a "phantom sniper" and his "phantom bullets."

New York Herald Tribune, Feb. 9, 1928—Collingswood, N. J., February 8—"The 'phantom sniper,' if it was the work of South Jersey's mysterious marksman, scored his most sensational attack tonight when a window in the home of William T. Turnbull was shattered by what appeared to be a charge of shot.

"Police at first believed it an attempted assassination, but, as in all the other cases, no missile was found."

SPIRIT IN THE SKY

If something unseen and unaccountable can cause such dismay, what do you think of days where absolutely everyone around you seems to be in a good mood?

In December, 1921, there was an occurrence in the village of Zetel, Germany (London *Daily News*, Jan. 2, 1922). This was in the streets of a town. Somebody dropped unconscious: and, whether in an epidemic of fright, accounted for in terms of "mass psychology," or not, other persons dropped unconscious. "So far no light has been thrown on the mystery." It was thought that a "current of some kind" had passed over the village. This resembles the occurrence at El Paso, Texas, June 19, 1929 (*New York Sun*, Dec. 6, 1930). Scores of persons, in the streets, dropped unconscious, and several of them died.

Don't worry, your honor, it's just mass psychology.

The Observer (London) Aug. 23, 1925—"A mysterious tragedy is reported from the Polish Tatra mountains, near the health-resort of Zakopane. A party, composed of Mr. Kasznica, the Judge of the Supreme Court, his wife, a twelve-year-old son, and a young student of Cracow University, started in fine weather for a short excursion in the neighboring mountains. Two days later, three of them were found dead."

Mrs. Kasznica was alive. She told that all were climbing, and were in good condition, when suffocation came upon them. "A stifling wind," she thought. One after another they had dropped unconscious. The post-mortem examinations revealed nothing that indicated deaths by suffocation, nor anything else that could be definitely settled upon. "Some newspapers suggest a crime, but so far the case remains a mystery."

CRYPTID LIBERATION FRONT

From indigenous legend to modern reports, there's no lack of tales of amazing, mysterious creatures. One of my favorites is the infamous Thunderbird, one of which picked up and carried 10-year-old, 70 pound Marlon Lowe for twenty feet before dropping him due to his counter-attacks. His mother witnessed the entire event.

The Bloop, a mysterious sound recorded off the American southwest coast by two naval microphones 3,000 miles apart, has been analyzed by scientists (bleh) who have determined that it was made by what must be the largest animal ever known to have existed.

As civilization deadens the accumulation of organic energy, destroying biodiversity and ecosystems of all kinds, the most rare and wondrous of all creatures—especially those who still elude scientific examination—are at risk just as much as are those familiar species that we know and love. Below are reports of just a couple of the myriad of such creatures.

The Captain of the Royal Yacht Osbourne made a report of an unknown sea creature to the Admiralty. This was reported in both the

London Times, June 14, 1877, and in Land and Water, Sept.8, 1877. The creature was spotted by the captain and his crew on May 2, 1877 off the coast of Sicily. "The creature was turtle-like, visible part of the body about fifty feet long."

There was a similar sighting reported in the New Zealand Times on December 12, 1883. This was a "...report by a sea captain, who had seen something like a turtle, 60 feet long, and 40 feet wide.

Something was seen, off the west coast of Africa, Oct.17, 1912. Passengers on a vessel said that they had seen the head and neck of a monster. They appointed a committee to see to it that a record should be made of their observations. In the Cape Times (Cape Town) Oct.29, 1912, Mr. Wilmot, former member of the Cape Legislative Council, records this experience, saying that there is no use trying to think that four independent witnesses had seen nothing but a string of dolphins or a gigantic strand of sea weed, or anything else, but an unknown monster.

WOMYN POWER!

Let's get Betsy on the black block! Not exactly anomalous, but certainly extraordinary and a challenge to gender conventions.

There is a muscular strength of men, and it may be that sometimes appears a strength to which would apply the description "occult," or "psychic." In the *New York Herald Tribune*, Jan. 24, 1932, was reported the death of Mrs. Betsy Anna Talks, of 149 Fourteenth Road, Whitestone, Queens, N. Y.—who had often performed such feats as carrying a barrel of sugar, weighing 400 pounds—had carried, under each arm, a sack of potatoes, whereas, in fields, usually two men lug one sack—had impatiently watched two men, clumsily moving a 550-pound barrel of salt, in a cart, and had taken it down for them.

To unlock the powers of the mind—

In August, 1883, in the home of Lulu Hurst, aged 15, at Cedarville, Georgia, there were poltergeist disturbances. Pebbles moved in the presence of the girl, things vanished, crockery was smashed, and, if the

girl thought of a tune, it would be heard, rapping at the head of her bed. In February, 1884, Lulu was giving public performances. In New York City, she appeared in Wallack's Theatre. It could be that a girl, aged 15, if competently managed, was able to deceive everybody who went up on the stage. She at least made all witnesses think that, when a man, weighing 200 pounds, sat in a chair, she, by touching the chair, made it rise and throw him to the floor—

And I am very much like an Indian, of long ago; an Indian, thinking of the force of a waterfall; unable to conceive of a waterwheel; simply thinking of all this force that was making only a little spectacle —

Or the state of melancholy into which I am perhaps cast, thinking that a little poltergeist girl, if properly trained, could make all witnesses believe that she raised building materials forty or eighty stories, by simply touching them—thinking that nobody is doing anything about this—

Except that I am not clear that anything would be gained by it —or by anything else.

Lulu Hurst either had powers that far transcended muscular powers, or she had talents of deception far superior to the abilities of ordinary deceivers. Sometimes she tossed about zoo-pound men, or made it look as if she did; and sometimes she placed her hands on a chair, and five men either could not move that chair, or were good actors, and earned whatever the confederates of stage magicians were paid, at that time.

WILD MEN

I include these stories because they seem to speak poetically to the nature of identity and also because any hitchhiker interested in free travel or getting lost in the mist of existence might envy the ease at which these strangers accomplished just that. Unfortunately, the pigs stepped in on many of these mysterious adventures.

A story in the Chatham News in Kent, England on January 10, 1914 reported that "early in the evening of January 6th--- 'weather bitterly cold'--- a naked man appeared, from nowhere that could be found out,

in High Street, Chatham. The man ran up and down the street, until a policeman caught him. He could tell nothing of himself. 'Insanity,' said the doctors, with their customary appearance of really saying something.... This naked man of Chatham appeared suddenly. Nobody had seen him on his way to his appearing-point. His clothes were searched for, but could not be found. Nowhere near Chatham was anybody reported missing.

I have records of six persons, who, between Jan. 14, 1920, and Dec. 9, 1923, were found wandering in or near the small town of Romford, Essex, England, unable to tell how they got there, or anything else about themselves...

I have notes upon an outbreak of ten 'wildmen,' who appeared in different parts of England, in that period of extraordinary phenomena, the winter of 1904-05. One of them, of origin that could not be found out, appeared in a street in Cheadle. He was naked. An indignant policeman, trying to hang his overcoat about the man, tried to reason with him...(the policeman) took it as a self-evident disgracefulness. ...He dumped the 'wild man,' into a sack, which he dragged to the station house. Another of these 'wildmen' spoke in a language that nobody had ever heard of before, and carried a book, in which were writings that could not be identified at Scotland Yard. Like a traveler from far away, he had made sketches of things that he had seen along the roads. At Scotland Yard, it was said of the writings: 'They are not French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian, Turkish. Neither are they Bohemian, Greek, Portuguese, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, nor Russian.'

GO JOHN BLACKMAN!

I guess commies are magic too.

In the town of Eastbourne, Sussex, England, in April, 1922, John Blackman, a well-known labor leader, was committed to prison, under a maintenance order, for arrears due to his wife. The judge who committed him died suddenly. When Blackman was released, he still refused to pay so back he went to prison. The judge who sent him back "died suddenly." He continued to refuse to pay, and twice again was re-

committed to prison, and each time the judge in his case "died suddenly." See *Lloyd's Sunday News* (London), Oct. 14, 1923.

OUR BELOVED JOHN LEE

This account speaks for itself, in all its baffling beauty. May all the jails disintegrate, may all the gallows fail!

In February, 1885, in an English prison, there was one of the dream-like occurrences that the materialists think are real. But every character concerned in it was fading away, so that now there is probably no survivor. From time to time repairs had to be made, because the walls of the prison were dissolving. By way of rusts, the iron bars were disappearing.

Upon February 23, 1885—as we say, in terms of our fanciful demarcations—just as if a 23rd of February, which is only relative to rhythms of sunshine, could be a real day—just as if one could say really where a January stops and a February begins—just as if one could really pick a period out of time, and say that there ever was really a year 1885—

Early in what is called a morning of what is so arbitrarily and fancifully called the 23rd of February, 1885, John Lee, in his cell, in the penitentiary, at Exeter, England, was waiting to be hanged.

In the yard of a prison of stone, with bars of iron, John Lee was led past a group of hard and motionless witnesses, to the scaffold. There were newspaper men present. Though they probably considered it professional to look as expressionless as stones, or bars of iron, there was nothing in Lee's case to be sentimental about. His crime had been commonplace and sordid. He was a laborer, who had lived with an old woman, who had a little property, and, hoping to get that, he had killed her. John Lee was led past a group, almost of minerals. It was a scene of the mechanism and solidity of legal procedure, as nearly real as mechanism and solidity can be.

Noose on his neck, and up on the scaffold they stood him on a trap door. The door was held in position by a bolt. When this bolt was drawn, the door fell—

John Lee, who hadn't a friend, and hadn't a dollar—

The Sheriff of Exeter, behind whom was Great Britain.
The Sheriff waved his hand. It represented Justice and Great Britain.

The bolt was drawn, but the trap door did not fall. John Lee stood with the noose around his neck.

It was embarrassing. He should be strangling. There is something of an etiquette in all things, and this was indecorum. They tinkered with the bolt. There was no difficulty, whatsoever, with the bolt: but when it was drawn, with John Lee standing on the trap door, the door would not fall.

Something unreasonable was happening. Just what is the procedure, in the case of somebody, who is standing erect, when he should be dangling? The Sheriff ordered John Lee back to his cell.

The people in this prison yard were not so stolid. They fluttered, and groups of them were talking it over. But there was no talk that could do John Lee any good. This was what is called stern reality. The Sheriff did not flutter. I have a note upon him, twenty years later: he was in trouble with a religious sect of which he was a member, because he ordered his beer by the barrel. He was as solid as beer and beef and the British Government.

The warders looked into the matter thoroughly—except that there wasn't anything to look into. Every time they drew back the bolt, with John Lee out of the way, the door fell, as it should fall. One of the warders stood in Lee's place, where, instead of placing the noose around his neck, he clung to the rope. The bolt was drawn, the door fell, as it should fall, and down dropped the warder, as he should drop.

There was a woman they could not push. A man they could not crucify. The man they could not drown. There was the man they could not imprison. The dog they could not lose.

John Lee was led back to the scaffold. The witnesses did not know whether to be awed or not. But, after all, it was just one of those things that nobody could explain, but that could not happen again—

Or that to a college professor it could not—to anybody educated in the first principles of mechanics and physics it could not—that, to anybody, not an untutored laboring man, but committed to unquestioning belief in everything that a professor of physics would say in maintaining that the trap door would have to fall—

The bolt was drawn.

The trap door would not fall.

John Lee stood unhangable.

That when, the first time, John Lee was led past these newspaper men, and town officials, and others who had been invited to the ceremony, any one of them could have overstepped any line that all were told to toe would have been little short of inconceivable. But a doctor, whose professional appearance was much faded, interceded. Others were shaky. The Sheriff said that John Lee had been sentenced to be hanged, and that John Lee would be hanged.

They had done everything thinkable. Any suggestions? Somebody suggested that rains might have swollen the wooden door, causing friction. There had been, in all tests, no friction: but, by way of taking every possible precaution, a warder planed the edges of the door. They experimented, and, every time, the door fell, as it should fall.

They stood him on the scaffold again.

The door would not fall.

This scene of an attempted execution dissolved, like a dream-picture. The newspaper men faded away, or burst away. The newspaper men ran out into the streets of Exeter. In the streets, they ran, shouting the news of the man who could not be hanged. The Sheriff, who had tried hard to be a real Sheriff, went to pieces. He'd do this about it, and then he'd do that about it, and then, "Take him away!" He communicated with the Home Secretary. There was something about all this that so shook the Home Secretary that he authorized a delay.

The matter was debated in the House of Commons, where some of the members denounced a proposed defeat of justice by superstition. Nevertheless the execution was not attempted again. Lee's sentence was commuted to life-imprisonment, but he was released in December, 1907. His story was re-told in the newspapers of that time. I take from *Lloyd's Weekly News* (London) Jan. 5, 1908.

I have tried to think of a conventional explanation, in the case of John Lee. All attempts fail. He hadn't a dollar.

There may be some commonplace explanation that I have not thought of: but my notion is that the explanation that I have thought of will some day be considered as commonplace as are now regarded the impenetrable mysteries of electricity and radio-activity.