



A MOONRAKER PREYS ON THE COMPASSIONATE

A year or two ago the writer was sitting on a seat in Kensington Gardens, near the Albert Memorial in London, when a Scotchman with a bandaged hand came along, wheeling a bicycle, and said that he had had an accident and injured his hand, and his bicycle, and was in urgent need of 1s. 6d. for the railway fare to his home. And the writer, being a Moonraker, eventually gave him the fare, receiving in return his name and address and a promise to post a postal order for the loan the same night. He promptly wrote to the address given and received a letter back through the Returned Letter Office, and communicated with the police, but nothing more was ever heard of the injured Scotchman by him or by them.

More than a century and a half before that, a Moonraker preyed upon the compassionate and the credulous, for the following paragraph appeared in the "London Chronicle" for January 16-18, 1759:-

"Last Sunday a man who had long infested the new road in St. George's Fields and other places with a hat tied over his head, a cloth tied under his chin, and a writing upon a board in his hand, was, by the order of William Clark, Esq., apprehended by one of the constables of the parish of Lambeth upon a suspicion of being an impostor in exciting pity and compassion from persons under the false pretence of being deaf, dumb, and afflicted with the palsy, which occasioned a perpetual shaking of the head and hands. He was carried before the above gentleman to be examined (but answered no questions put to him), seemed paralytic, troubled with drivelling, and feigned to have a long tongue; he committed him to the house of correction, and on Tuesday ordered him to be whipped as a vagrant: before the discipline began he cried out, 'I'll do so no more'; said his name was Thomas Mitchell, and that he was born at Chilton in Wiltshire. He was by his own confession, about twelve months ago, apprehended by the officers of St. George's, Hanover Square, and committed to Tothill Fields Bridewell, for nine days, during which time he never spoke nor eat; so that in compassion to his supposed infirmity they discharged him as an object of pity."

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