

**THE TORONTO DAILY STAR**  
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**FAMOUS INDIAN TRICK**  
**DEBUNKED BY GROUP**

. . . Elliot, who was once head of the Indian medical service and who is recognized as one of the most eminent of all ophthalmic surgeons, "will pay £500 (about \$2,500) to anyone who will perform the alleged rope trick. We might have made the offer £5,000 or £50,000 (\$25,000 or \$250,000) for any chance there is of it being claimed, but we have kept it down to a limit which makes it plain that we mean business.

On the platform while all this was happening sat the noted English mental specialist, Dr. Alexander Cannon, who claims that he can levitate himself across vast gorges; Magician Aleister Crowley, known widely as "the worst man in the world," and Mr. Harry Price, renowned spiritualist director of the Physical Research Institute. The rope trick is a mere bagatelle compared to what these men claim to be able to do: and they sat there smiling as crudité scions of Britain's aristocracy shot holes all through India's famous bit of legerdemain.

**Just a Dream**

Now it takes an Englishman to damn with faint damns and with smiling ruthlessness. These mild, white-haired old men, who have empire-built across the world and ruled millions of people, politely took this famous Indian rope trick apart. You see, they not only said the Indian rope trick was a fake, they said it simply didn't exist. I sat there in a crowded hall expecting them to prove that the Indian rope trick was merely an optical illusion. But no, they were far more uncompromising: they maintained that no one had ever seen the Indian rope trick. Mighty oaks, they said, from little acorns grow, and the Indian rope trick had become a mighty oak of a legend, the acorn being what someone dreamed some six hundred years ago.

The acorn concerned, said noted sceptic S. W. Clarke, is nothing less than the old fairy tale about Jack and the Beanstalk. In the year 1355 an Arab sheik named Ibn Batutah claimed to have seen the rope trick in China. The thing next

appeared in written annals in 1550, at Magdeburg, Germany. Since the British conquered India thousands of tales have been told about the rope trick; but this investigating committee, after many years of investigating, has failed to find anyone who had worthwhile evidence that such a thing as a rope trick was ever seen.

You know, of course, what the Indian rope trick is. Probably your grandfather saw it when he went to India for the Durbar, or something. A fakir throws a rope into the air. The rope stands there, straight. A small boy climbs up the rope to the top, and when he gets to the top he disappears. It's the most famous trick in the world: and apparently it doesn't even exist. Not even as a fake.

"Perhaps the rope was a bamboo pole, someone suggested. "Nonsense!" said the Magic Circle. "Rubbish!" said Lord Amptill. The meeting exquisitely tittered; and as the evening unfolded itself I began to glow at the curious thought that probably there was a little sanity in the world after all.

### **Claims He Saw It**

So much for all that. But listen, my little ones. Gather round, my sweet little heads of cabbage. This morning as ever is I interviewed a man who maintains, literally and in effect, that the exquisite titterers of above are crazy like the well-known coot: that to say they were mote-eyed old dodos would be flattering them: and that he, John William Tooley, superintendent of the Dens Shipowners' Corporation, has, with his eyes, seen the Indian rope trick which is the subject of this farago. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Mr. Tooley.

"Among my friends," said Mr. Tooley, when I called him on the telephone after reading about him in a London paper, "I am known as a hard nut, never given to hallucination, fantasy and illusion, and seldom even to flights of imagination. But in 1892 I saw the Indian rope trick. It was in Tokio.

"Now I come from Lancashire," continued Mr. Tooley, "and I am, as I said, a hard nut. No fakir could make me say in 1934 that I saw the rope trick in 1892 if I hadn't seen the rope trick in 1892. And what happened was this:

"I was standing with some friends, including the skipper of our ship, on the terrace of a hotel, and a fakir came up to us. From a basket he took a rope, made of some kind of grass or reed. He coiled the rope, and threw it into the air. It stood there straight, like a steel rod.

"Then a little boy grinning like a monkey climbed the rope—there, I tell you, before our eyes. When he got to the top of the rope, he disappeared. Then the rope disappeared. We never saw them again."

It might have been apt at this point to intimate that there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But I merely said brightly: "It must have been a trick."

"Exactly," said Mr. Tooley. "The rope trick may be and undoubtedly is a trick; a fake; an illusion: or a work of hypnotism. But the point is, I did see the rope trick."

So what about that, Lord Amphill? . . . "I lean to the belief," pursued Mr. Tooley, who had been at first reluctant to speak but had warmed to the occasion, "that it was hypnotism. I am not, as you might say, peculiarly susceptible to hypnotism: but I don't know what else it could have been. After all, I know what I saw. I saw a rope stand up straight in the air, and a little boy climb up it and disappear, and that's all I've got to say."

### **Hits Scotland Yard**

And Mr. Tooley isn't the only man who refuses to be squashed by the recondite dicta of the Magic Circle. Take Mr. J. Collier, a member of Scotland Yard—yes, Scotland Yard itself. "At Umballa, when I was 15 years old, I saw an Indian do the rope trick," he declared. "The rope stood rigid in the air. A boy climbed it. When he reached the top he waved his hands at us. Then he came down, and I pinched him to see whether I was dreaming—"

"When people suspect they are dreaming," I interrupted, "they always pinch themselves, not somebody else."

"I pinched him to see if I was dreaming," said Mr. Collier imperturbably. "And I wasn't. Magic Circle or no Magic Circle, scientists or no scientists, I would swear an affidavit that I had seen the rope trick."

Now, is there an Indian rope trick or is there an Indian rope trick?