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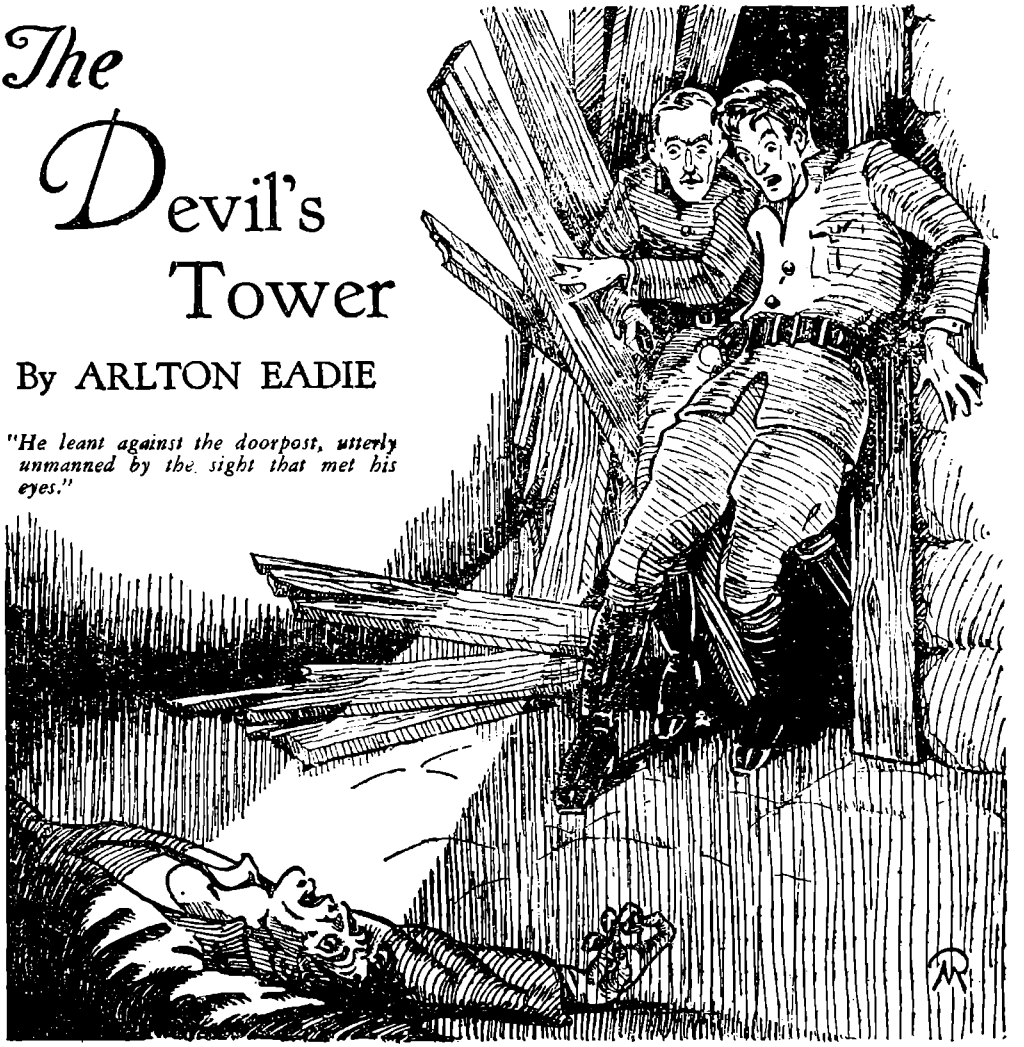
The Devil's Tower

By ARLTON EADIE



"He leant against the doorpost, utterly unmanned by the sight that met his eyes."

A startling tale of the Tower of London, haunted by the ghosts of dead conspirators

THE Tower of London! Every student of history must be acquainted, by repute at least, with that ancient stronghold which rears its gray, many-turreted head on the north bank of the River Thames, seeming still to be keeping watch and ward over the great city which stretches on every side as far as the eye can reach.

Figuring at different times as British earthwork, Roman fortress, Plantagenet palace, and Tudor prison, its time-stained walls have echoed to the din of war, the trumpet-blast of proud chivalry, the mirth of kingly revels, the sighs of languishing captives, and the groans of the hapless victims of "foul and midnight murder." Its history is the history of England itself, for few indeed are the events recorded therein in which it has not played its part.

Yet, in spite of its interesting associations, it was with very mixed feelings that I learnt, in February, 1917, that I was to have the privilege of residing within its

walls. Like so many other mounted regiments during that time of national emergency, my unit, the Honorable Artillery Company, had been converted into infantry, and as such had been ordered to relieve the Guards' battalion which then formed the garrison of the Tower.

Of course, this does not imply that the military authorities contemplated utilizing the old relic as a part of the defenses of the capital. Formidable though the massive walls may have been in the age in which they were built, a modern howitzer battery could have shelled the whole place into a heap of rubble for an afternoon's practise. From time immemorial it had been the custom to keep an armed force there; and so, when we marched in and took possession with much pomp and ceremony, we were but carrying on the tradition which had existed from pre-Norman times. We were the legitimate successors to the mail-clad billmen and bowmen who had fought at Agincourt and Crecy, the dour Puritan pikemen of Cromwell's day, and the red-coated grenadiers from whose bayonets Napoleon's Old Guard had recoiled at Waterloo.

It would be invidious for me to express an opinion as to why our particular unit was selected for this honor, but I do not think I will be accused of undue *esprit de corps* when I describe the Honorable Artillery Company as a crack regiment. Professional men, artists, actors, men of letters, together with a fair sprinkling of college undergraduates, formed the bulk of the rank and file, and I must admit that they proved themselves a remarkably efficient and well-disciplined body of men. Considering that nearly everybody was keen on getting a commission (the other units used to call us the "Unofficial Officers' Training Corps"), it is scarcely surprizing that crime—I use the word in its military sense—was almost non-existent among us. There was but one blot on our fair fame in this respect, and that was Private Michael Maloney.

BY WHAT series of mischances Maloney managed to find his way into the H. A. C. is a problem that I have never been able to solve. He had previously served in France with the Royal Munsters, and had there behaved with such gallantry that he had been awarded the Military Medal and promoted to the rank of sergeant. Then he had been wounded, sent to England, and then—probably at the instigation of some well-meaning "brass hat" who thought thereby to enhance Maloney's prospects of further promotion—transferred to us. As it turned out, this was about the worst thing that could have happened to him. Rough, uneducated, though with a heart of sterling gold and as brave a soldier as one would wish to command, poor Maloney was like a fish out of water among the rather high-toned company in which he found himself. Being unable to live up to his new surroundings, he took to seeking his diversions among the rather questionable characters who at that time were always to be found not far away from a military station, and who were only too willing to help him get rid of his pay in the local public-houses. Troubles soon began to accumulate around his not over-intelligent head. He became slack in his duties and slovenly on parade; and—an unpardonable offense in war time—began to allow his hours of alcoholic indulgence to encroach on his hours of duty.

First he lost the stripes he had so bravely won at Ypres; then he was initiated into the irksome mysteries which are indicated by the letters C.B.; finally figuring in a general court-martial, by which he was awarded twenty-eight days' detention in "the clink."

"He's getting to be a positive disgrace to the regiment," Major Faversham, the adjutant, said to me as we sat together in the smoke-room of the Mess. "And the funny part about it is that he had an exemplary record-sheet before he came to us."

I nodded in agreement. Much as I liked the erring Irishman, the fact of his numerous sentences spoke for itself. "Still," I added, "there must be some reason at the back of it all. A good soldier does not suddenly start going wrong for nothing."

For a few moments Major Faversham sat smoking thoughtfully; then he sprang to his feet.

"You're right," he cried, "and I'm determined to get to the bottom of the matter. I just hate to see a promising man going to the bad as he's going. I'll have him up here for a friendly, informal chat, and talk to him like a father."

Considering that Maloney stood six feet in his socks and was built in proportion, the major's observation was not without its humorous side. But I managed to keep a straight face, and merely asked:

"Do you wish me to be present, sir?"

"Yes, I think it would be better. You're his company commander, and I've noticed that he seems to have rather a liking for you. You may be able to suggest something."

APPARENTLY the orderly who was sent to round up the black sheep had no difficulty in locating his quarry. In a few minutes Maloney entered, clicked his heels smartly as he came to the salute, and remained standing stiffly to attention, his features frozen into that wooden, blank-eyed expression that all good soldiers are apt to assume in the presence of their superior officer.

"Now, Maloney," said the major, suiting the action to the word, "I'm going to take off my tunic."

"Yis, sor." Maloney answered in his rich brogue. Except that his eyes opened a trifle wider, he showed no surprize at Faversham's unusual behavior.

"Can you guess why I've done that?" the major asked as he tossed his discarded coat and Sam-Browne belt on the couch.

"Oi can not, sor."

"It's because I want you to look on me for the next half-hour or so, not as your superior officer, but as a human being like yourself. You needn't stand there as if you're on 'general inspection.' Sit yourself down and try one of these cigarettes. I'm going to talk to you like a father."

"Oi niver knew my father, sor——"

"You're going to know one now, Maloney. Sit down. And now," he went on when Maloney had reluctantly and uneasily lowered his bulk into one of the easy-chairs, "what about it, eh?"

"About phwat, sor?" asked the wondering private.

"About the way you've been carrying on lately. Aren't you about tired of doing C.B. and pack-drill? What about keeping straight for a bit of a change?"

It was evident that Faversham had carefully rehearsed his speech, for he reeled it off with the breathless eloquence of a sergeant-instructor detailing "Slope arms by numbers." During the oration I stole a glance into the face of the man for whose benefit it was being delivered, and I was rejoiced to see, by the uneasy shuffling of his feet and the embarrassed blush on his open and ingenuous countenance, that the major's good seed was not falling on stony ground. By the time the peroration had come to an end—it was an appeal to save the good name of the regiment, such as no soldier can listen to unmoved—poor Maloney was almost reduced to tears.

"Oi know it's all thrue, sor, ivvery

worrd uv it," he said dolefully. "Oi know it's worse than a baste Oi am whin Oi've taken dhrink. But Oi can't help getting dhrunk, and that's the honest truth, sor—at least not whoile Oi'm living in this disthressing ould place."

I raised my eyebrows at this. "Is there anything wrong with your quarters?" I asked.

"Oh, they're comfortable enough, sor," he admitted readily. "It's the place itself. Faith, nivver a minute's pace of moind have Oi had at all since the moment Oi came here. It's haunted, the place is, sor!"

"Haunted?" I felt inclined to laugh, but the intense, almost pathetic earnestness with which he made the statement caused me to refrain. "Who's been telling you that nonsense?"

"Nivver a soul said a worrd, sor. It's what Oi've seen wid me own eyes."

I LOOKED at him curiously before replying. He was of that dark-haired, dark-eyed type of Irish which one occasionally encounters among the coast-dwellers of Munster and Connaught. In features and complexion strongly resembling the natives of southern Europe, their presence among a light-haired population has long been a puzzle to ethnologists; so much so, indeed, that they have been forced to adopt the theory that they are the descendants of the soldiers and mariners of the Spanish Armada, the bulk of whose ships were wrecked on that rock-bound coast. But, be his ancestry what it might, there could be not the slightest doubt but that he was in deadly earnest in his assertion that the Tower was haunted. I allowed no inkling of my real feelings to show as I asked carelessly:

"And what have you seen, Maloney?"

"Things that didn't ought to be seen at all, sor—things that aren't of this world," was his hushed answer. "Aye—and Oi heerd 'em, too! Didn't Oi, whin shovelling the colonel's coal into thim dungeons ahint the Boochump Tower, didn't Oi hear the groans of the poor divils that had been imprisoned there, maybe hunnerds of years ago? Didn't Oi hear the clank of their chains and their prayers to be put out of their misery? Whin Oi mounted guard at noight, on the path by the Traitors' Gate, didn't Oi see a boat row up where there was niver a dhrop of water, and the prisoners come up the steps? Didn't Oi hear the muffled tolling of the bell when Oi saw the little percession make its way to the railed-off spot near the chapel, wid a man carrying a whacking great ax on his shoulder lading the way? Oi tell ye, sor, what Oi've seen since Oi've been here is enough to sind anybody on the dhrink!"

During this extraordinary recital I caught Major Faversham's eyes fixed on mine with a quizzical, half-humorous expression. It was clear that Maloney's novel explanation of his lapses had taken him by surprize, and, recalling the major's oft-expressed disbelief in things supernatural, I surmised that it obtained scant credence in his mind. But with me it was otherwise. At that time I had not, it is true, any settled opinions regarding the possibility or otherwise of spirits from another sphere revisiting the earth. But I was intensely interested in the subject; and here, ready to hand, was a case which might possibly repay investigation.

After all, I argued to myself, mediumship is not confined to the educated classes. If one could credit the utterances of eminent spiritualists, the gift might be possessed—sometimes quite unknowingly—by those in the humblest walks of life. Might not this man, rude and unlettered though he was, yet have that mysterious psychic power of perceiving things invisible to other less delicately attuned minds? Cases have certainly been recorded of

such; might not the man before me be another?

A grim laugh from Major Faversham interrupted my train of thought.

"So you've been seeing ghosts, have you?" he was saying. "Well, I'm going to give them the job of reforming you."

"Reforming me, sor?" There was an uneasy look in Maloney's eyes as he repeated the words.

"Yes, I'm going to give you one last chance of keeping off the drink and becoming a decent soldier. But the next time you're 'on the peg' I'm going to take your case myself and sentence you to a night's solitary confinement — *in the Devil's Tower!*"

Maloney did not seem to comprehend. "Beggin' yer pardon, sor, but which one is that? There's so many different towers about the place that Oi mix up the names."

Unseen by the other man, Major Faversham turned to me and gave me a slow, expressive wink, which I assumed to mean that he had some deep-laid scheme in hand.

"It is the tower which stands at the northwestern angle of the outer walls," he explained in a solemn and impressive voice. "It contains the ancient torture-chamber. Within it, Guy Fawkes—to mention only one case—was racked, to make him confess who were his fellow conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot. It is the place that has more ghosts hanging around it than all the rest of the other dungeons put together—and that's where you're going to spend the night the next time you get drunk!"

Maloney was visibly impressed by the threat. To a disbeliever in ghosts the punishment might have appeared absurdly light, but for him it had real terror.

"Is that punishment in the King's rules and reg'lations, sor?" he asked in an unsteady voice.

In spite of his assumed gravity, I could see the corners of Faversham's mouth twitch.

"The War Office does not take cognizance of the unseen world," he replied, controlling his amusement. "Solitary confinement is quite in order, and I'll throw in the ghosts free gratis. So let's have no more trouble, Maloney. Have a glass or two and welcome, if you wish to, but don't mix up duty and drinking. If you do——"

"Yis, sor?"

"You're for a night alone with the ghosts of the Devil's Tower!"

DURING the days which followed this serio-comic interview I kept an anxious eye on the behavior of Private Maloney. In my mind I had but little faith that the major's threat of an enforced sojourn among disembodied spirits would outweigh the allurements of the spirits of a more potent and material nature, the effects of which had hitherto formed a lively accompaniment to such pay-nights as Maloney had been at liberty to indulge in them. But one Friday came and went without alcoholic celebrations; then another and another, until I began to think that the impossible had happened, and that he had been weaned from his besetting failing by a bogy which existed only in Major Faversham's fertile imagination. For at that time we had no reason to regard his statement that the Devil's Tower was haunted as otherwise than a somewhat grim jest.

This tower, which forms a defense of the outer walls, is commonly known as the "Devereux Tower," but that was not its original name. In an ancient survey of the fortress, taken in the reign of Henry VIII, it is called "Robyn the Devyll's

Tower," but in a later plan of 1597 it figures as the "Develin Tower." It is only when we come to 1601 after Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, had been confined there, that we find it referred to as the "Devereux Tower."

There can be not the slightest doubt that it is an extremely antique structure—some authorities assigning to it a date anterior to the square Norman keep known as the White Tower, and it retains for the most part its original character, having undergone little or no alteration. In form it approaches almost to a circle, and consists of two stories, with one apartment on each, ascended by a narrow winding staircase of stone. The basement floor, which is vaulted and groined, is about nineteen feet in diameter, and the walls are eleven feet thick.

Though undoubtedly used as a state prison from the earliest times, there was not the slightest evidence of it ever having contained the ancient torture-chamber—that part of the story had been an entirely gratuitous assumption on the major's part. But we were soon to receive tragic proof that his words, lightly uttered though they were, had come surprizingly near the truth.

"HALT! Who goes there?"

"Keys."

"Whose keys?"

"King George's keys."

"Advance, King George's keys, and all's well."

It was the ancient ceremony of "The King's Keys," that quaint, old-world ritual which for centuries has been repeated nightly at the main guard-house when the gates of the Tower are locked for the night.

On the particular occasion of which I write, however, there was a new and unrehearsed incident introduced. No sooner had the red-cloaked yeoman-porter commenced to close the massive gates than a wild and dishevelled figure appeared on the bridge that spans the moat. My heart sank as I recognized it. It was Private Maloney, hatless, coatless, and fighting drunk. Heaven knows by what miracle he had forced his way past the picket at the other end of the bridge, but his grazed knuckles and swollen lip showed that his passage had not been undisputed.

Half a dozen flying strides took him across the bridge; then, lowering his head, he charged the gate like a bull. The next few minutes were more like a night raid in the trenches than the peaceful ceremony of locking up the Tower. Taken by surprize, the venerable old gentleman with the keys performed a complicated evolution not to be found in the drill-book, which ended by his assuming the supine position on top of the equally venerable old gentleman who carried the lantern. The next instant a smashing left from Maloney had sent the sergeant of the guard down to keep them company.

But Maloney's triumph was short-lived. Recovering from their astonishment, the guard laid aside their rifles and closed round him, a pair of handcuffs clicked on his wrists, and he was helpless. But his spirit was far from subdued, even then.

"Take these bracelets off, ye dhirty blackguards, and Oi'll show ye——"

"Silence!" I roared in my best parade manner. "Are you mad?"

"Divil a bit of it—'tis only dhrunk Oi am, Captain darlint. Faith, and what 'ud Saint Pathrick's Day be widout a sup or two to remimber it by? Sure, for the honor of ould Oireland Oi had to——"

"Now then, what's all this row about?" said a voice out of the darkness. Major Faversham, attracted by the din, had come from his quarters to ascertain the reason of it.

There was no need for explanation, however. No sooner did his eyes rest on our prisoner than he had grasped the situation.

"So it's you again, eh? Well, I warned you what was going to happen the next time. You're going to have a night's lodging in the Devil's Tower—with the ghosts to keep you company."

An instantaneous change took place in the bearing of Private Maloney. The words seemed to sober him like a dash of ice-cold water. His truculent attitude dropped from him like a cloak, and in its place there came an emotion very much like fear.

"You're going to lock me up in that place ye spoke about—the Devil's Tower?" he said slowly.

"You've stated my intentions exactly."

"But—think, sor"—there was undisguised terror in the man's voice now—"the place is haunted!"

I stepped forward and called the guard to attention. Then I turned to Maloney.

"You knew perfectly well what you were up against if you got drunk again," I told him sternly, as I placed myself at the head of the little squad. "Sergeant, get the keys of the Devil's Tower. Guard . . . slope arms! By the right . . . quick march!"

Five minutes later the iron-studded door had clanged to, and Private Maloney was a prisoner in the Devil's Tower.

I MUST confess that my mind was not entirely at ease as I made my way to my quarters and turned in. Had Major Faversham been as clever as he had thought? Not that I thought for a moment that the old place was really haunted; it was rather its possible effect on the mind of the man who *did* think so that left me filled with vague misgivings.

I was still worrying over the problem when I fell asleep, and it was the first thing that leapt to my mind when, some two hours later, I was awakened by an urgent and insistent knocking. Leaping from my bed and snapping on the lights, I found it was the sergeant of the guard.

"What's the trouble, sergeant?"

"There's something queer going on in the Devil's Tower, sir—something I can't make head or tail of."

"The Devil's Tower?" I cried in amazement. "Why, that's where we put Private Maloney!"

"Yes, and it's from his cell that the noises are coming."

"What kind of noises?" I demanded, as I began to dress hurriedly.

"Talking in different voices, and sounds I can't put a name to. There seemed to be three people in there. Maybe more."

"Then why on earth didn't you open the door?"

"I tried to, sir—it was the first thing I did—but the key wouldn't fit."

"Nonsense!" I cried. "It opened easily enough when we put him in. You must have taken the wrong key."

The sergeant shook his head positively. "I tried every one on the bunch, sir."

Telling the sergeant to arouse Major Faversham and apprise him that something was amiss, I buckled my belt, slipped my revolver into its holster, and made my way along the path in the shadow of the battlements and a few minutes later stood before the door of Maloney's cell. I had the bunch of keys in my hand, but before attempting to use them I stood still and listened.

There was a confused low muttering coming from within. I bent my ear close to the nail-studded door.

"Lave me alone, will ye?"—it was obviously Maloney's voice—"For what d'ye want to kape botherin' me? Oi don't know what ye're talking about at all."

Then, to my surprize, there came another voice. It was clear and bell-like, as much removed from the Irishman's brogue as is possible to imagine.

"Tell me the names of thine associates in thine enterprise," it said. "It is useless to prevaricate—it will but make thy punishment more terrible. Confess everything, and His Majesty will show his clemency by having thee executed forthwith."

"Then ye can thank him from me for nothing!" returned Maloney emphatically.

"Thy treasonable speech showeth that thou art hardened in thy guilt," said the silvery voice. "Methinks there is naught to do but put thee to the torment. So Robin and his fellows must persuade thee with their arts. Ho, knaves! Seize him!"

I waited to hear no more. Quickly selecting the key, I thrust it into the lock. Strange!—the key was much too small. Withdrawing it, I examined it by the light of my electric torch. Surely it was the right key, for there was the name of the tower engraved on the haft. Could I be at the wrong door? Impossible—had I not heard Maloney speaking inside?

I was still trying to straighten out the chaos of my thoughts when hurried steps on the spiral stairs announced the arrival of Faversham and the sergeant. In a hurried whisper I explained what I had heard, and immediately afterward, as though to confirm my words, there came the sounds of a short, sharp struggle from within, followed by a prolonged creaking like that of an ill-greased cart-wheel.

"Thou seest, we do not jest," said the bell-like voice. "For the last time, who are thine accomplices?"

"Ye're crazy! How can Oi tell ye what Oi don't know meself?" demanded Maloney wrathfully.

"I fear me thou art obdurate. So . . ."

The voice ceased as though the speaker had made a gesture to some unseen person. At once the creaking was resumed, but this time it sounded as if the wheel were revolving more slowly.

I turned to look at Faversham, and I remember wondering if my own face was as deathly white as his.

"This is beyond me," he muttered. "There's something so cursedly strange about the business that——"

A terrible cry came from behind the locked door—a sobbing, gasping shriek such as is wrung by direct agony.

"He's being murdered in there!" shouted Faversham. "Break down the door!"

With one accord we threw ourselves against it, but the massive, iron-bound oak remained unmoved by our puny efforts. Desperately we panted and sweated, and all the while we could hear the devilish creaking from within, interspersed with faint groans and the sound of the ice-cold voice urging, "Confess—confess."

At last Faversham staggered back against the wall and thrust his fingers in his ears to keep out the sounds.

"I can stand it no longer!" he gasped. "Sergeant, go to the bomb-store and bring me a Mills number two. We must blow open the door."

THE sergeant saluted and clattered downstairs, returning in a few seconds with the bomb. Loosely tying the four corners of my handkerchief together, I placed the deadly, egg-shaped engine of destruction inside, and hung the knotted loop on the door-handle so that the bomb rested against the ponderous lock. With a warning to the others to take cover, I pulled out the safety-pin, allowing the lever to fly up, then ran for my life.

I had barely time to wedge myself behind a neighboring stone pillar before the fuse reached the ammonal. There came a flash of white fire, a sharp, ear-splitting detonation, a whirring and tink-

ling of flying fragments against the stone walls.

Coughing and choking with the acrid fumes of the explosion, I dashed through the splintered door and swept the beam of my torch round the apartment. Then I staggered and leant, sick and trembling, against the door-post, utterly unmanned by the horrible and unexpected sight which met my eyes.

Our unfortunate prisoner lay on the floor in a stiff and constrained attitude, his arms and legs stretched out rigidly to their fullest extent. His face was livid and wet with the sweat of mortal agony. His eyes were wide open and fixed with a stony stare straight in front of him. And although he had been untouched by the fragments of the bomb, he was quite dead.

For a few moments I stood swaying as I tried to realize the meaning of it all. Then, for the first time in my life, I suppose I must have fainted.

I HAVE not the slightest idea whether I walked back to my own quarters or was carried there. My first clear recollection is feeling the tang of raw spirits in my mouth, and seeing the face of our Medical Officer bending over me.

"Yes, the poor fellow was past all aid when I arrived," he said in answer to my first question. "And it wasn't the explosion that killed him, either. He just died of mortal terror."

I uttered some words—heaven knows what. Probably they were half-hysterical, for the M.O. again held the brandy to my lips.

"Sip this; then tell me everything that occurred."

I did so, hiding nothing. When I had finished there was a queer, brooding light in the doctor's eyes.

"So Major Faversham told the man that he was about to be confined in the old torture-chamber?"

I nodded, and after a long, thoughtful pause he went on:

"Auto-suggestion in a suitable subject is sometimes liable to go to incredible lengths. It is scarcely necessary for me to cite the well-attested phenomena which have resulted from time to time from prolonged mental stress; no doubt many of the miracles of the Middle Ages were due to this cause, possibly accentuated by religious ecstasy. But I have certainly never known any form of self-hypnotism capable of dislocating a man's arms and legs!"

"What?" I cried, aghast at this new horror.

"The dead man's limbs had been wrenched from their sockets, and violently, too. I suppose this could not have happened in the struggle when he was arrested?"

"Impossible! He was well enough when we left him."

The M.O. pressed his lips together and a line of perplexity barred his forehead.

"Nor was that all," he said. "Around each wrist and ankle I found broad, red weals, such as might have been made by the ropes that used to stretch the victim on the rack——"

"The rack!" A dim light of understanding began to dawn on my mind. "The rack—in that old torture-chamber . . . I wonder . . ."

"So do I," said the doctor softly.

And we're wondering still.