

LONDON'S GRIM TOWER

SOME OF THE HORRORS OF ELIZABETHAN 'JUSTICE.'

It was principally in the reign of Queen Elizabeth that the Tower of London became the prison of those who professed the Catholic faith and refused to subscribe to the so-called reformed principles of religion (says the *Irish Weekly*). Many Catholics had been incarcerated in its dungeons in the time of Henry VIII., but their numbers were few when compared with those who forfeited their lives within its sinister precincts in the days of his daughter, Elizabeth. When Mary of Scotland was executed in 1558—her death took place at Fotheringay, in Northamptonshire—the event seemed to provide a signal for the filling of the prisons of the Tower, for eight Catholic priests were known to be immured there in 1561, while the number of Catholic priests who were allowed to die of disease or were secretly murdered will never now be known, since all Catholic churchmen were then at the mercy of 'common informers,' and summary imprisonment was invariably their portion. It is, however, certain that during the persecution ages, over three hundred priests and laymen and religious women lost their lives within the walls of the Tower. Certainly nothing in the barbarous history of the worst of the Middle Age tyrants can exceed, for rennement of cruelty and torture, the story of the Tower.

The history of the White Tower is gruesomeness itself. Here was the torture-chamber, and the holes in which the four posts of the rack were sunk are still to be seen. On this instrument Fathers Campion and Briant were (according to the boast of the rick-master, Norton) stretched a foot longer than Nature had intended them to be; while Father Gerard had his hands screwed into two iron rings, by which he was suspended to a column, so that his feet just touched the ground. Thrice he was subjected for hours at a stretch to this torture and that of the thumb-screws. He was one of the few priests who ever escaped from the place, two lay brothers, dressed as watermen, rescuing him at night through his cell window and rowing him down to Gravesend, whence he escaped.

Within the White Tower was a dungeon which was known as 'Little Ease,' and was so built that the prisoner could neither stand upright nor lie down at full length. A pipe connected this cell with the moat and admitted the water from the Thames at high tide, to the height of several feet, so that in addition to the torture of this plight, the unhappy captive was nearly drowned and even bitten by hungry river rats that swam in with the foul and slimy water. Here, too, in earlier ages, Jews were first subjected to the 'total darkness' torture in order to force them to part with treasure; and it is recorded that in the year 1580 there were one thousand prisoners who were kept there in durance, and daily gave their jailers practice in torturing. Most of these prisoners were Jesuits, and so revolting were the tortures that a Government inquiry was instituted to investigate the horrors practised. So fearful were the tortures inflicted on Father Southwell, that his father sent a petition to Elizabeth 'praying that his son might be either executed or treated as a gentleman!' Even Elizabeth relented.

Among the most illustrious prisoners was Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, whose father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were also executed in the Tower. Howard died in his prison in 1595, and permission was refused him to see his wife or the son born to him when he had been but a few months in prison. He refused the Queen's pardon with its provision that he should become a Protestant, and never again saw either wife or son. Then there was the heroic Dr. John Store, who was also condemned for his Catholicity to be hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn, now the north side of Hyde Park, or Marble Arch. Store was duly hanged, but was cut down before he was deprived of his senses, when, as the executioner was about to per-

form the horrible surgery of the sentence, the condemned man rose and felled him with a terrific blow. Store was then seventy years old.

Thomas Fitzgerald, son of the Earl of Kildare, once left the Tower with two of his uncles, and all were executed at Tyburn on February 3, 1537. Tower Green is now a paved square, but was formerly as beautifully laid out as a bowling green; in its centre was the scaffold, and here Lord Essex, Bishop Fisher, and Thomas More were executed. Close by the Green is the chapel, once known as that of St. Peter ad Vincula, but now closed. From this chapel a long procession of historic personages went their sorrowful way to the scaffold on the Green—More and Fisher, Queen Catherine Howard, Monmouth (as late as 1685), and several Dukes of Norfolk. Of this spot and its adjoining cemetery Macaulay writes:—

'In truth there is no sadder spot on earth than this little cemetery. Death is there associated, not as in Westminster and St. Paul's with genius and virtue, with public veneration and imperishable renown; not as in our humblest churches and churchyards, with everything that is most endearing in social and domestic charities, but with whatever is darkest in human nature and in human destiny; with the savage triumph of implacable enemies, with the inconstancy, the ingratitude, the cowardice of friends, with all the miseries of fallen greatness and blighted fame. Thither have been carried through successive ages, by the rude hands of jailers, without one mourner following, the bleeding relics of men who had been the captains of armies, the leaders of parties, the oracles of senates, and the ornaments of courts.'

Opposite Tower Hill stood the Conning Tower, where prisoners condemned to die were handed over to the civic authorities. It was here that the venerable Bishop Fisher awaited among other condemned his turn to be decapitated, and whilst the Sheriff delayed, he took out his Testament and asked our Lord to send him some words of comfort. He opened on the text: 'This is eternal life, to know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.' That, he said, is enough to satisfy my soul.

Here, again, died Father James Fenn, who, being left a widower, had become a priest. When he was (February 12, 1587) on the way to the scaffold he looked up and recognised his little daughter, Frances, weeping bitterly as she stood in the crowd. He kept his habitual calm, and lifting his pinioned hands as high as possible, gave the little maid his last blessing, and so was borne away.

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