

The Blind House

A picturesque building is the old Town Hall of Faringdon, standing in the market Place with the Crown INN at its side. The latter was the Court House in times gone by for the trial of Prisoners. In the corner of the building under the same roof as the



Town Hall was a small cell called the Blind House, a dismal little place lighted only by a few bars of grating over the door- hence its name. The prisoners incarcerated in the Blind House, awaiting the coming of the magistrates, must have spent the time in somewhat cramped positions, the space being extremely limited. Their friends did their utmost to ameliorate their misfortunes; by squeezing packets of tobacco and eatables through the bars of the prison. These sympathetic people outside had also an ingenious device lest the inmates of the Blind House should chance suffer from thirst. The bowl end of a long clay pipe was inserted into a pot of beer. The other end found its way into a mouth owned by the thirsty soul inside a cell, the prisoners standing in turn upon the lock of the door in order to reach the refreshing draught. Much squabbling must have gone on over that friendly pipe and some difference of opinion as to when each turn had come to an end, or perhaps- who knows- there was honour among thieves, and the whole thing was arranged amicably.

Just outside the door of the Blind House the stocks were set up, and the passers-by were treated to glowering looks from the prisoners in them. IN most villages the stocks were placed just outside the church gate in order that the righteous glances of the churchgoers might have an effect of still more putting the delinquents to shame. A primitive idea of punishment, this idea of openly shaming wrong doers; harmless, perhaps but not very elevating either for the spectators or for those who were looked.

'If they were put in the stocks when the people went into church there they had to stop till 'em came out again,' an old man told me. He himself, so the story goes, had been the last man to occupy the stocks in Faringdon. But as to this occurrence he maintained a rigid silence- 'Oh yes he remembered the stocks well enuf'- but nothing more. The lapse of time I thought might have invested the situation with some humour in his eyes- turned it in fact into a huge joke. I was grievously mistaken.

L.S.