

animal matter present in a marshy soil; its motion is accounted for by the flame being communicated along the line of a stream of the gas.* In former times the Will o' the Wisp, Jack o' Lantern, &c., was an object of superstition amongst the inhabitants of the district where it appeared, and was believed to be due to evil spirits, attempting to lure the traveller to his destruction; travellers have been misled by it, taking it for a lamp, and decoyed into marshy and dangerous places. Gay, in one of his poems, is playful over the subject:—

Will-o-wisp leads the traveller a-gadding,
Through ditch and through quagmires and bog;
No light can e'er set me a-podding,
But the eyes of my sweet Molly Mogg.

Not of late years, nor, indeed, within the memory of man, has Will o' the Wisp visited his former haunts or been seen or heard of near the old Gaol, nor did he follow the establishment to the new quarters on Bierton Hill.

On another occasion (says Thomas Ellwood) "this same Bennett committed six other Friends to Aylesbury gaol; the batch included a Mr. Parker, a doctor." The state of the gaol was again brought into prominence. The warrant for committal being read, the wife of Dr. Parker expostulated with the justice for cruelly exposing the prisoners to disease and death, reminding him that it was a sickly time, and that the pestilence was reported to be in Aylesbury gaol; she desired him to consider in time how he would answer the cry of their blood, if, by his sending them to be shut up in an infected place, they should lose their lives. This made him alter his purpose, and by a new mittimus he sent them to the house of correction at Wycombe.

In 1666 Mary Pennington, with her children, took a small house at Aylesbury, in order to be near her husband during his cruel imprisonment in the plague-stricken gaol. On another occasion, when Pennington was a prisoner, the gaol was so crowded with Friends and other Nonconformists that he was confined in an incommodious old malt-house adjoining the gaol premises. Ellwood describes the place as "So decayed that it was scarce fit for a dog-house. And so open it lay, that the prisoners might have gone out at pleasure. But these Friends were purposely put there, in confidence that they would not go out, that there might be room in prison for others, of other professions and names, whom the gaoler did not trust in the old malthouse." Sixty or seventy Quakers were kept imprisoned in this miserable place.†

In the summer of 1784 there was a lamentable outbreak of fever in the gaol; it

* "Audivi sapiens a Buckinghamiensi meis tale quid nebulonibus desperatis accidens ad regium carcerem Aylesburiensem, ubi nocte præeunte judicis adventum, prodigiosa quedam flammula apparere solet in cacere, illis omnibus fatalis a quibus visitur. Unusquisque enim ex incarcerationis cui contigit hanc flammulam (quem vocant, *the Wisp*), conspexisse, actum est de illo: nihilque in posternum expectat præter patibulum. Non adeo sum infelicitè peritus ut hæc ex propria experientia affirmare ausim: at ex oppidanis ipsis diligenter didici; isque hominibus fide dignis."—MS. of John Gregory.

† This malthouse, which was connected with the Bear public-house in Walton Street, was standing a very few years ago; it was pulled down and stabling erected by Mr. Lepper, veterinary surgeon.

spread into the town and neighbourhood, several cases of death being recorded from "gaol fever." A man from Stoke Goldington was put in gaol for a £10 debt; he took the fever and died of it. His wife came to nurse him, she caught the fever, and carried it home to Stoke Goldington; she died of it; it spread through the village and a great many died; the children recovered, but it was mostly fatal to grown up people. Anthony a Wood gives the following account of the gaol fever out of the Register of Merton College:—"Sometimes getting out of bed, agitated with, I know not what, with fury from their distemper and pain, they would beat and drive from them their keepers with sticks; others run about the yards and streets like madmen; others jump head foremost into deep waters. The sick labour with a most violent pain both of the head and stomach: they are taken with a frenzy; are deprived of their understanding, memory, sight, hearing, and other senses. As the disease increases, they take nothing; they get no sleep; they suffer none to tend or keep them; they are always wonderful strong and robust even in death itself; no complexion or constitution is spared; but the choleric are more particularly attacked by this evil, of which the physicians can neither find the cause or cure. The stronger the person is, the sooner he dies. Women are not seized with it; nor the poor, neither does any one catch it that takes care of the sick or visits them. But as this disease was strangely violent, so it was but of short duration."

Starvation was another prison grievance. At Epiphany, 1693, "divers poor distressed prisoners in the gaol presented a petition to the Court of Quarter Session," showing "that by reason of the dearthness of corn the County allowance of three halfpence per diem for bread is become so small that it will not keep them alive," and praying that the Court would save them from perishing by famine. The allowance was thereupon increased to threepence a day. In 1695 it was reduced to twopence, but it was soon found necessary to raise it again to threepence.

The state of Aylesbury gaol was not worse than that of prisons generally. We are told by Howard (the prison reformer, whose visit to Aylesbury was in 1779) that he found in Hertford gaol two small rooms for men felons, in which they were always locked up, without fire in winter or exercise at any time. At Salisbury he found just outside the prison gate a chain passed through a staple in the wall, at each end of which a debtor padlocked by the leg stood offering to those who passed by nets, laces, purses, &c., made in prison. He found also felons chained together, going about the city at Christmas, one carrying a sack or basket for food, another a box for money. And he mentions, as a tolerably general custom, that an innocent man acquitted by a jury of his fellow countrymen could not obtain his release from confinement without the payment of fees amounting to £1 6s. 8d. In Winchester he found a dark, damp, and close dungeon, eleven steps underground, in which, the surgeon informed him, twenty prisoners had died of gaol fever in one year. At Cardiff the gaoler informed Mr. Howard that an Exchequer debtor had been confined in the old prison for ten years, for a debt of seven pounds, and had died just before his visit. In Thetford the dungeon for the felons, descending