XVIII. *Observations on Card-playing. By the Rev. Mr. Bowle. In a Letter to the Hon. Daines Barrington.*

Read March 2, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

AS you did me the honour to impart to me your sentiments on cards, I will take the liberty to mention to you what I formerly noted down, and have investigated upon this matter.

The first authority for the general use of these, which I have discovered, is *B. Platina*, who died in 1481, in his book *De tuenda Valetudine*, printed at Basil 1541, with Apicius in 4to. He has a section lib. i. De joco et ludo. His direction is—“*Ludus fit, talis, tessera, scacho, chartis variis imaginibus pictis.*” I should think it not easy to produce earlier authority for their use: and that Monsieur Bullet [a] may be relied on as to the time of their invention: sc. in the reign of Charles the Fifth of France, who died in the year 1380, Sept. 16, aged forty-three. I do not find aught said about them in Fauchet, nor Pasquier, from whence I infer they are not very antient. As far as I have searched, they are unnoticed in Chaucer, though he mentions other games:

They dancen and they play at ches and tables. C. T. 11212. I entirely acquiesce in your idea of their being Spanish, for reasons I shall produce, and it is not improbable that they might

[a] Ihre. v. Kort.

have been introduced among us at the time prince Arthur married Catherine of Aragon. Not only the terms in card-playing generally, but particular games are unquestionably such. *Quadrilla*, or *quadrille*, in all its parts is so. So also is the once common, now disused, *Primera*. This game, according to the Dictionary of Madrid, is played by dealing four cards to every one: the seven is worth 21 points, the six 18, the ace 16, the deuce 12, the trey 13, the four 14, the five 15, and the figure 10. The best chance, and which wins every thing, is the flush, which is four cards of one sort, after the fifty and five, which is composed precisely of seven, six and ace of one suit, after the *Quinola* or *Primera*, which are four cards one of each sort. If there are two which have a flush, he gains it who holds the largest; and the same happens with him that has the *primera*, but if there is nothing of this, he wins who has most points in two or three cards of one suit. We have here a copious account of it.

Notwithstanding the proclamation made the eighteenth year of his reign, as mentioned by Hall, against all unlawful games, according to the statutes made in this behalf (with which doubtless you are well acquainted) so that in all places, tables, dice, cards, and boules, were taken and brent, Shakespeare speaks of Henry VIII's playing at *Primero* with the duke of Suffolk, Act V. It is probable he had some authority for the use of this game in his reign. That it continued in use in the time of queen Elizabeth is very certain. But it may not be amiss to mention what the facetious Sir John Harrington noticed, "On the games that have been in request at the court;" Epigrams, Ed. 1615, 4°. B. ii.

I heard one make a pretty observation

How games have in the court turn'd with the fashion.

The first game was the best, when free from crime,

The courtly gamesters all were in their *Prime*.

The second game was *Post*, untill with posting
They paid so fast, 'twas time to leave their posting.
Then thirdly follow'd *heaving of the maw*,
A game without civility or law,
An odious play, and yet in court oft seene,
A sawcy knave to trump both king and queen,
Then followed *Lodam*.—
Now *Nody* follow'd next.
The last game now in use is *Bankerout*,
Which will be plaid at still, I stand in doubt,
Untill *Lavolta* turne the wheele of time,
And make it come about againe to Prime.

These Epigrams were afterwards enlarged into four books :
the ninety-ninth of the third is The Story of *Marcus*' life at
Primer.

Fond *Marcus* ever at *Primer* playes,
Long winter nights, and as long summer dayes :
And I heard once, to idle talk attending,
The story of his times and coines mis-pending.
At first, he thought himselfe halfe way to Heaven,
If in his hand he had but got a sev'n,
His fathers death set him so high on flote,
All rests went up upon a sev'n and coate.
But while he drawes for these gray coats and gownes,
The gamesters from his purse drew all his crownes.
And he ne're ceast to venter all in prime
Till of his age quite was consum'd the prime.
Then he more warily his rest regards,
And sets with certainties upon the cards,
On fixe and thirtie, or on seven and nine.—
But feld with this he either gaines or saves ;
For either *Faustus*' prime is with three knaves,

Or

Or *Marcus* never can encounter right,
 Yet drew two ases, and for further spight,
 Had colour for it with a hopefull draught,
 But not encounter'd it avail'd him naught.
 Well, sith encountring he so fair doth mise,
 He sets not till he nine and fortie is.
 And thinking now his rest would sure be doubled
 He lost it by the hand.—
 At last both eldest hand and five and fifty,
 He thinketh now or never (thrive unthrifty)
 Now for the greatest rest he hath the push:
 But *Crassus* stopt a club, and so was flush.
 And thus what with the stop, and with the packe,
 Poor *Marcus* and his rest goes still to wracke.

What *Prime* was it is not very easy to say: it probably bore some resemblance to *Primero*, as we may be allowed to judge from the Pair Royal of the three knaves mentioned above. These passages will receive much elucidation by comparing them with the account afore given, and by a survey of the several terms, which are unquestionably Spanish. *Post* is derived from *Apostar*, which means, to place in the hands of a third person a certain sum of money, or an equivalent, for the winner. *El resto*, or the rest, is the money which the player has before him on the table. *El encuenstre*, or encounter, means a pair, as two kings of the like. *El flux*, or the flush, varies only with us in the pronunciation. The disuse of the two last is accidental. It seems doubtful whether our first cards had the tens: the honours, as we term them, seem to have answered that number. As Sir John stiled them *coate* cards, we may presume they were so called. In his *Metamorphosis of AJAX* he has this passage: “ When Brutus had discarded the kings and queens out
 “ of the packe, and shewed himself a sworn and avowedemie

“ to all the *coate* cardes, then crept in many new formes of government.” H. Howarde in his “ Defenfative against the poison of supposed Prophecies, Lond. 1583,” has this observation. “ The drifte is like a packe at Primero, where the smallest carde being cutte awrie, or comming between by chance, overthrowes the fortune of the fraudulent, and conveyes it to their aduersarie.”

As we owe this game to Spain, we are indebted to the same quarter for another, yet sometime used, and that is the *Veyntun*. *Cervantes* in his pleasing Novel of *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, makes the former of these sharpers acquaint his comrade that he had got his livelihood betwixt Madrid and Sevil by this game—*jugando a la veyntiuna*, and advises him to play with him with a view to take in some carrier, telling him that if such an one should desire to make a third, he should be the first to leave his money. From the same source we have the *Quinze* [b].

And now, Sir, begging your pardon for trespassing so much on your time, I most heartily wish you the return of many years of health, and every gratification of your wishes, and remain

Your most obedient servant,

JOHN BOWLE.

[b] Anotaciones a Quixote. P. 2. 130. 28.