

XIII. *The Bull-running, at Tutbury, in Staffordshire, considered. By the Reverend Mr. Pegge.*

Read at the SOCIETY of ANTIQUARIES, February 14, 1765.

I KNOW of nothing that affords the inquisitive mind of man so much pleasure, as the developing the original of antient and obscure customs ; and if it happens, that former conjectures have miscarried, and men's opinions concerning them have been thereby misled, the satisfaction will then be double, because, at the same time that you establish a truth, you are routing and convicting an error.

THE Bull-running at Tutbury, in Staffordshire, is a custom, or tenure, of so singular a nature, that our Antiquaries could not well avoid taking notice of it. Mr. Blount, accordingly, in his *Antient Tenures*, has given us a short account of it, p. 168, and another from the Coucher of the honour of Tutburye, cap. de libertatibus, p. 171 ; also an account of the modern usage, p. 174. But the fullest and best description hitherto extant is in Dr. Plott's *Natural History of Staffordshire*, p. 439, et seq. Yet this author, in my opinion, is entirely mistaken as to the original of this custom. But to judge of this, I must here give you the Doctor's words.

AFTER he has given us an account of the election of the king of the minstrels, and the officers of that body, he proceeds thus : “ The
 “ court riseth, and all persons then repair to another fair room within
 “ the castle [of Tutbury], where a plentiful dinner is prepared for
 “ them ; which being ended, the minstrels went antiently to the
 “ abbey gate, now to a little barn by the town side, in expectance
 “ of the bull to be turned forth to them, which was formerly done
 “ (according

“ (according to the custom above-mentioned) by the Prior of Tut-
“ bury, now by the earl of Devonshire : which bull, as soon as
“ his horns are cut off, his ears cropt, his tail cut by the stumple, all
“ his body smeared over with soap, and his nose blown full of beaten
“ pepper ; in short, being made as mad as it is possible for him to
“ be, after solemn proclamation made by the steward, that all
“ manner of persons give way to the bull, none being to come
“ near him by forty feet, any way to hinder the minstrels, but
“ to attend his, or their own safeties, every one at his peril ; this
“ then forthwith turned out to them (antiently by the prior)
“ now by the lord Devonshire, or his deputy, to be taken by them,
“ and none other, within the county of Stafford, between the
“ time of being turned out to them, and the setting of the sun the
“ same day ; which if they cannot do, but the bull escapes from
“ them untaken, and gets over the river into Derbyshire, he
“ remains still my lord Devonshire’s bull : but if the said min-
“ strels can take him, and hold him so long, as to cut off but some
“ small matter of his hair, and bring the same to the mercat cross,
“ in token they have taken him, the said bull is then brought to
“ the bayliff’s house, in Tutbury, and there collared and roapt,
“ and so brought to the bull-ring in the High-street, and there
“ bated with dogs : the first course being allotted for the king, the
“ second for the honour of the town, and the third for the king of
“ the minstrels ; which, after it is done, the said minstrels are to
“ have him for their own, and may fell, or kill and divide him
“ amongst them, according as they shall think good. And thus
“ this rustic sport, which they call the Bull-running, should be
“ annually performed by the minstrels only, but now-a-days they
“ are assisted by the promiscuous multitude, that flock thither in
“ great numbers, &c.”

As to the original of this custom, the Doctor is pleased to bring it from Spain, and the world has hitherto acquiesced with him in that

that

that notion. He observes, that as much mischief may have been done at this bull-running, “ as in the *feu de taureau*, or bull-fighting practised at Valentia, Madrid, and many other places in Spain [a]; whence, perhaps, this our custom of bull-running might be derived, and set up here by John of Gaunt, who was king of Castile and Leon, and lord of the honour of Tutbury; for why might not we receive this sport from the Spaniards, as well as they from the Romans, and the Romans from the Greeks? Wherein I am the more confirmed, for that the *ταυροκαθαιψιῶν ἡμέραι* amongst the Thessalians, who first instituted this game, and of whom Julius Caesar learned it, and brought it to Rome, were celebrated much about the same time of the year our bull-running is, viz. pridie idus Augusti, on the 12th of August [b]; which, perhaps, John of Gaunt, in honour of the Assumption of our Lady, being but three days after, might remove to the 15th, as after-ages did (that all the solemnity and court might be kept on the same day, to avoid further trouble) to the 16th of August.”

THIS conjecture concerning the first rise of this custom is undoubtedly very plausible at first sight, but I doubt it will not bear examining; on the contrary, it will appear, upon consideration, that there is too much reason for dissenting from the learned Doctor on this article.

FIRST, it does not at all appear, that John of Gaunt, king of Castile and Leon, was the person that instituted the bull-running at Tutbury, or was any way concerned in it. He gave the minstrels their charter, and they were his servants, and the four stewards were chosen in his court; but the bull was found, and turned out, by the prior of Tutbury, and his grace the duke of Devonshire,

[a] Franc. Willoughby's *Voyage through Spain*, p. 499.

[b] Prideaux, in notis ad marmor *Ταυροκαθαιψιῶν*, inter *Marmora Oxoniensia*.

I presume,

I presume, finds the bull at this time, as successor to that prior, and as grantee of the site of the priory, and the estates belonging to it [a]. The bull was turned out antiently at the abbey-gate, and by the prior; John of Gaunt or his officers being no way employed in that service.

I OBSERVE next, that the dimission of the bull is entirely for the benefit and diversion of the minstrels; whereas the *Toros*, or Bull-fighting in Spain, is an exercise of the cavaleros on horseback, a game of the *circus*, and totally different from the former; in proof of which, I need only refer to the account given of it by an indisputable author, the earl of Clarendon [b].

It appears plainly from lord Clarendon's narration, that the two diversions, of the bull-running at Tutbury and the *Toros* in Spain are entirely of a different nature, and consequently of a very different original, the former being by no means borrowed or copied from the latter. The one is a martial exercise for noblemen and gentlemen on horseback, the other a ludicrous diversion for a company of fiddlers and pipers on foot; for, as Dr. Plot observes, though there be now a mixed multitude, it ought to be annually performed by the minstrels alone. In one, the bull, and many of the species, is to be *killed* with the utmost dexterity of a single combatant; but at Tutbury he is only to be *won* by a number of persons, part for their entertainment, and part for their benefit and advantage: indeed the two pastimes seem to agree in no one point but this, that sport is to be made with a bull.

I OBSERVE lastly, that the bull-running is a *tenure*, as well as a diversion; that is, the finding and dimission of the bull is a condition or term, on which his grace the duke of Devonshire holds the priory of this place: and it was probably such at the first insti-

[a] Tanner's Notitia Mon. p. 493.

[b] Life, vol. I. p. 224.

tution of the sport, which, for aught any one can tell, may be as antient as the erection of the priory, A. D. 1080. It is remarkable, that John of Gaunt, in his grant to the minstrels, refers to the customs of *antient times* [c], insomuch that one has reason to think that this practice of turning out a bull for their use and diversion, might be an usage also of high antiquity. If this be the case, the deriving of the custom from Spain, and the introducing of it by John of Gaunt, will be totally superseded. However, the custom being of the nature of a tenure, it differs materially from the public entertainment of the *Toros* either at Rome or in Spain.

WHAT Dr. Plot remarks in regard of the time, is very frivolous. At Tutbury, the celebration of the bull-running is in the summer, as one would expect it to be; but in Spain, the *Toros* is exhibited three times a year of course, and is celebrated moreover on every extraordinary incident of national joy. Nothing certainly can be inferred, as to the derivation of the bull-running from Spain, from the day of celebrity, the 15th or 16th of August.

IN short, the chief foundation of Dr. Plot's mistake concerning this business seems to be, his ascribing to the honour or manor of Tutbury, and consequently to John of Gaunt, what belonged in fact to the priory at that place. And now that we, after thus discarding the Doctor's notion, may here, for a conclusion, add something better of our own, I would beg leave to observe, that this affair of soaping, curtailing, and turning out a bull to be caught at Tutbury, seems to me, exclusive of its property as a tenure, to be no other than a *rustic sport*, as Dr. Plot, in one place, rightly calls it of the same kind with those that are now sometimes practised all over this country. For on occasions of rendezvous and public meetings of merriment in a village, the landlord of the ale-house will give a tup, (so they call a ram) or a pig, well soaped,

[c] Plot, p. 436. Blount, p. 167.

with

with the tail, and the horns, and the ears, respectively, cut off. He that catches the tup is to have him; but if he be not taken, he returns to the landlord, just as the bull does here at Tutbury to the prior, that is, to the duke his representative. One sees something of the same kind at Kidlington, in Oxfordshire, where, on Monday after Whitsun week, a fat lamb is turned out, and the maids of the town having their thumbs tied behind them, run after it; and she that with her mouth takes and holds the lamb, is declared *Lady of the Lamb*, &c. [d] Upon the whole, the running after the tup, or pig, being a common diversion at wakes, and other times of festivity, especially in the summer, this running of the bull at Tutbury seems only to differ from it, in that it is a sport of a higher kind, and is made the matter of a tenure.

[d] Blount's Tenures, p. 149.