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NOTES ON THE STAMFORD BULL-RUNNING.

Read at Meeting, 20th April, 1904.

THE practice of chasing a bull helter-skelter through Stamford, and of eating its flesh after it was done to death, seems to have been popular from time immemorial till 1839. The 13th of November, the second day after Martlemas,¹ was the day on which the running took place, and it is possible that the custom was once an autumnal sacrifice connected with the appeasing of the spirits of the dead, or with some feast held after the harvest had been safely housed.

As I once pointed out in *Folk-Lore* (vol. vii., p. 346), it does not seem unlikely that bull-baiting originated in some now discarded worship. "Indications which suggest its association with the cult of water are still to be found. In the Stamford bull-running, for instance, the great object was to 'bridge the bull,' which meant to tumble him by main force over the bridge which spans the Welland into the river beneath. At Tutbury, if the minstrels could succeed in cutting off a piece of the bull's skin before he crossed the River Dove into Derbyshire, he became the property of the King of Music; but if not he was returned to the prior of Tutbury, who had provided him for the festival." And according to *Notes and Queries*, 5th S., vol. xii., p. 456, "the last bull-baiting in Rochdale (Lancashire) took place in 1819, when seven people were killed in consequence of the falling in of the river wall. The baiting was performed in the bed of the shallow river (the Roche) in the centre of the town."

In the *Antiquary*, too—vol. xxvii., p. 140, April, 1893—the Rev. Canon Atkinson stated: "Some twenty-five or thirty years ago I had pointed out to me, at Guisborough, the stone, to a ring socketed into which the bull that was being baited had been customarily chained. The bull-baitings continued, as I was informed, down to the commencement of the present century, or nearly so. And I was also informed that the chain used in securing the bull to the ring was the self-same chain that had been used to debar passage across the bridge over the Tees into or from out of the county of Durham after nightfall. My information was, as I had reason to be assured, perfectly trustworthy."

It may be well to point out in this connection that Stamford is

¹ See *Folklore*, iv., 107.

situated at the junction of three counties, Lincoln, Northampton, and Rutland, though it actually lies in the two former. Possibly the men of these shires anciently met by the Welland to observe traditional rites intended to secure the prosperity of their territories.

According to legend, however, the sport was instituted as late as the reign of King John by Earl Warren, who looking down from his castle saw two bulls fighting for a cow in the meadows below, when a butcher, the owner of one of the bulls, set his mastiff on the beast to force it into the town, which action caused all the butchers' dogs of the place to run together in pursuit of the animal, to the high diversion of the earl (Butcher's *Stamford*, 1646).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the *bullards* who chased the bull had "uncouth and antic dresses." And in 1789 a bull was driven into the town by a woman named Anne Blades, who was attired in a smock-frock. "This," observes the author of the *Chronology of Stamford*, p. 52, "appears to have been the origin of the Bull-woman, who until 1828 used on the morning of the 13th of November to dress in blue from top to toe, carry a blue bull-stick, and collect money from the inhabitants, which was appropriated to the purchase of the bull and her own benefit." But notwithstanding this opinion, it may be held that the Bull-woman was an old institution, for at Mere, in Wiltshire, is a spot called the Bull-ring, where bulls were baited till 1820 or thereabouts," and an old gentleman who died about 1891 asserted that he could recollect a woman named Dolby, who was the last person who rode the bull to the place for the purpose of being baited. She was called "Bull-riding Betty" (*The Antiquary*, vol. xxvii., p. 235, June 1893). Hence it may be concluded that Anne Blades and her successors were not the only women who acted as officials on such occasions.

A carefully-compiled and detailed account of the Stamford bull-running, collected from various sources, is given by Mr. Burton in *Old Lincolnshire*, vol. i. (1883-1885), from whom the following information is quoted:

"Hogsheads were placed at various points, round which the bullards might manœuvre when hard pressed by the furious beast, and often unfortunate were they who could not fall back upon one of these redoubts." So fond were the people of the

sport that a second bull was frequently subscribed for and run in some of the streets on the Monday after Christmas. "The candidates for Parliamentary honours won the poorer electors more by promising a bull than by bribery in other shapes.¹ The Liberal candidate in 1809 was Mr. Oddy. . . . And Mr. Wm. Barton and Mr. Justin Simpson have each a little yellow pitcher with oval medallions picked out in black and bearing the words 'Oddy and a Bull.' Yellow was Mr. Oddy's fighting colour. . . . So recently as 1831 the Conservative or Burghley candidates canvassed under a large flag with a painting of a bull ; but this was soon set aside, as the clergy and some others of their party refused to join them till it was removed."

In 1788 an effort had been made to suppress the brutal and dangerous amusement, which had formerly been encouraged by the churchwardens and civic authorities, and a troop of dragoons was called in both then and in the following year. About 1833 the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was incited to oppose the popular diversion by "several Nonconformists and others of the town." The wretched bull was sometimes tortured with vitriol before he would show himself sufficiently belligerent. But it was not till 1839 that the custom was put down, military aid again being invoked.

"A sketch of the history of bull-running," says Mr. Burton, "would be deficient without some reference to the Bullard's Song, and the air with which the song seems to have been always accompanied. At public-houses and other convivial assemblies in the town for six weeks before and six weeks after the Taurine festival it was customary for men to sing the glories of the sport. . . . Every incident that calls to the mind of the lower classes the ancient holiday of the 13th of November is at the present time seized upon with enthusiasm, and the old 'Bull tune' is invariably demanded when anything in the shape of music attracts attention. . . . The origin of the tune is not known. A veteran violinist . . . discovers in it a close resemblance to the quick and merry music of Scotland. . . ."

"Several oil paintings of memorable scenes in which the Stam-

¹ At Beverley, previous to 1817, when the sport of bull-baiting was abolished by the mayor, "it was usual for the successful candidates at Parliamentary elections to give a bull to be baited, after which it was killed and the flesh given to the freemen." (W. Stephenson, the *Antiquary*, vol. xxvii., p. 183.)

ford bull was a prominent figure are extant. But the mode of expressing the local sentiment was not confined to canvas. We have seen how members of Parliament hit upon the fictile art in the shape of 'bull-pitchers.' Mr. Snarth, chemist, Red Lion Square, Stamford, has a drinking-vessel made of part of a horn of the bull that was run in 1799." Among other ornamentation this vessel shows the initials of Anne Blades, the famous bull-woman, and the lady herself wearing an elaborate crown. Another memento is a pair of beautifully polished sharp-pointed horns in the possession of Mr. H. Johnson, of Rutland Terrace, Stamford." These horns "were presented to Mr. Haycock, an enthusiastic bullard, who was indicted at Lincoln assizes for 'riot'—a term which the law applied to bull-running."

I have not succeeded in discovering whether bull-baiting and bull-running, as distinguished from bull-fighting of the Spanish type, was ever a favourite amusement in continental Europe. Could foreign instances be studied some light might be gained as to the origin of the sport.

The *Lay of Havelok the Dane*, a poem of great local interest to Lincolnshire people, contains references to bull-baiting. When Havelok was knighted by Earl Ubbe great rejoicings were made. Harping, piping, romance-reading, wrestling, butting with spears, and other pastimes were indulged in. Moreover—

"þer mouhte men se þe boles beyte,
And þe bores, with hundes teyte."—ll. 2330, 2331.

And again, a little later we read of Godard—

"þat he rorede as a hole,
þat wore parred in an hole
With dogges forto bite and beite."—ll. 2438, 2439, 2440.

No doubt many other allusions to this diversion might be found in the literature of the Middle Ages.

Perhaps I should add that Stamford had two bull-rings. Speaking of these, Mr. Burton says that bull-baiting fell off in the town "*pari passu* with bull-running."

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