WHEN A MAID'S MARRIED!

By Frederick Boyd Stevenson.

How Women Have Been Wooed, Won and Married in Ancient and Modern Time.

A BRIDE—blushing, of course—a white, long, trailing gown of silk or satin or soft, clinging stuff; diamonds, perhaps, anyway a profusion of orange-blossoms; a proper groom in conventional dress suit; an alert best man, good looking and prosperous; maids of honor, sweet, amiable and faultless as to fashion; a clanging of bells, inclined to the doleful rather than the joyous; a church with lights, low and mellow; a gently anxious throng; a dreamy wave of sensuous perfumes; a flutter of femininity; a whirl of youth-ushers; a wedding march in soft, low strains; a benediction, clear and choice; a rumble of carriage wheels; a breakfast; a stifled sob; a tear in mother's eye; a shower of rice and old shoes, and a chorus of "good-bys" and "God bless yous," and 'tis done.

This is the vision of the modern marriage ceremony of civilization. We are certainly a great way from the methods of the Fiji Islander, the New Zealander and the native Australian, who carry off their wives by strategy and brute force. We avoid some of the outlandish customs of ancient nations, and have fostered the sacredness of the marriage vow, but the taint of paganism still clings to many of the rites that we hallow and hold dear. Thus, while we smile at the wife-stealing propensity of the savage or half-savage nations, we cherish as our dearest form a custom that had its direct origin in this very self-same practice.

The "best man" who plays important a part in well-regulated marriages that have any pretense at all to the fashionable, once on a time in Sweden occupied a position that was useful as well as ornamental. In the old days the Swedish groom found it desirable, in fact, to have several "best men," to defend him from the assaults of rivals and prevent them from carrying away his bride. The Scandanavian warrior of ancient times was far more too lofty in his ideas to condescend to plead for a maiden's hand. So he patiently waited until some other man who was more gallant had obtained the fair one's consent. Then when all the details had been nicely arranged, the proud warrior, with a body of well-trained retainers, dashed down on a wedding party, and if strong enough, carried off the bride. The "best man" (and it was very essential that they should be the best men in those days), therefore, became necessary fixtures to the marriage ceremony, and they were so well esteemed and their popularity became so permanent that when the reason for their existence was removed they were still retained. And hence, the custom is preserved in the "best man" of today.

Obtaining wives by force was an old custom among many nations, especially those of warlike tendencies. The Spartans exhibited their equestrian skill, by pursuing their intended brides on horseback, and made a show of violence, but generally with the sanction of the relatives of the woman. The practice was probably engaged in more as a compliment to the gentler sex, who desired to establish a precedent of resistance, than for any other reason. Especially was this idea of feminine resistance encouraged by the Dorians, who invariably went through the form of stealing the bride after all arrangements for the wedding had been made. One of the Roman laws for plebeian marriages provided for the use of the symbol of capture, and was doubtless a relic of the ancient custom of actual wife-stealing. When this form was employed the bridegroom and his friends proceeded to the house of the bride, where matters had been arranged and with a force that was only assumed, carried her away to her future home.

Among the New Zealanders, the Fiji Islanders and the Australians, however, the case was different, and the resistance on the part of the woman a stern reality. If, for instance, an Australian saw a woman whom he fancied, he asked her to be his wife. If she refused, he knocked her down, provided he could catch her, and carried her off to his hut. But if she were too quick for him, and ran away, he threw his spear at her, and sometimes severely wounded her. As a result of this mode of courtship all the native young women of Australia who had any pretense for personal beauty were badly disfigured with blows from clubs and with scars from knives and spears. The greater the number of wounds a maiden could show, the greater her reputation as a popular belle.

The natives of The Deccan and of Afghanistan captured their wives, and the conflict between the followers of the bride and those of the bridegroom was often very serious. In later years the semblance of force was still in use in some parts of southern India, but it was always carried out in accordance with prearranged plans, and the friends of both parties fought only sham battles.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was a common practice in Prussia, Lithuania, Samogitia, Poland, Muscovo and Livonia to capture women for wives; and, in fact, there is little doubt that the same custom prevailed in all barbaric countries.

The nuptial ceremonies of the nations form a study both interesting and useful; and if the thoughtful man will but note the graduation, step by step, from the crude customs of barbarians to the refining functions of civilization, there will be revealed to him, in colors bright and clear, a picture of the progress of the world. He may look back to the rude times of the Scythian warriors and shudder at a custom that would not permit the marriage to a maid whose hands had not been stained with blood. Or he may turn with loathing from the practice of the Lydian women, whose dishonor was the means of furnishing them their marriage portion. He will learn that the Parthians reveled in polygamy, even marrying sisters and mothers. He will blush for manhood's sake at the brutality of the Nestorian groom, who, on the wedding eve, kicked the bride. He may smile at the Assyrians, who sold by public crier all the young girls, bestowing the money received for the handsomest on those who were plain, as a marriage portion, thus providing husbands for every one of them. He will, perhaps, condemn the bridegroom of Syria, who paid a stated sum to the father of his bride, or wonder at the superstition of the Mohammedan, who killed a sheep and compelled a newly married wife to step over the blood that flowed upon the threshold.

The simplicity of the ceremony of the Nasamones, a people of Barbary, who plighted their troth by drinking out of each other's hands, will attract his attention, as will also the lottery-like procedure of a tribe in India, whose men poke sticks through the interstices of a fence and wedded the women who grasped the sticks on the other side. Then he will learn of men who formed a club and all married the same woman, one agreeing to furnish rice, another clothes, another oil, and so on. He will become acquainted with the religious belief of the ancient Persians, who, to assure the happiness of deceased friends, hired the living to be married to the dead. He will learn of the queer customs of the Turks; the bundling of the Fins; the beating of gongs among the Dyaks, of Borneo; the mere shaking of hands among the old Germans; the planting of marriage trees in the Tyrol; the closing of a door in Holland, never to be opened again till man or wife was carried out a corpse; the marriage by proxy at Auvergne; the sending of finger-nails by the groom to the bride in France; the widowed squaw of the North American Indian choosing a husband from the prisoners of the enemy condemned to death, and many other things both odd and curious.

If he study the customs of the Chaldeans he will see a ray of light—a plimpse of devotion, a sacred symbol of the beauty of the married life—for with them the priest came into the bridegroom's house and lighted a fire that was not to go out while the man and woman lived. Thus was barbaric rudeness led to better things. Nations grew gentle, and the wedding-days were hailed with prayers and songs.

The Jewish bridegroom dressed himself in gaudy attire, placed on his head a garland of roses, or gold or silver, and was perfumed with myrrh and frankincense. The bride wore a veil—still worn by Jewesses to-day—covering her face and entire body, indicating her submission to her husband. The bridegroom proceeded to her house with musicians, and conducted her to his home, where there was feasting and dancing, the festivities being continued sometimes for many days.

The Greeks held single life to be a crime, and old bachelors were compelled to walk naked through the market-place in winter singing satirical songs directed against themselves. Plato's laws made it a punishable offense for men who did not marry before the age of thirty-five. It was also held that all men in marrying should consider the interests of the State before their own convenience or pleasure. Archidamus, the Spartan king, was fined for marrying a little woman, as it was thought her issue would be degenerated. The Athenians did not allow their citizens to marry foreigners. Their bridal parties went in procession to the temple, accompanied by friends who danced and sang songs. In the evening the bride was conducted to her husband's house in a chariot, surrounded by torch-bearers and musicians.

The Roman ceremony was somewhat similar to the Grecian in the way of processions and flowers and music. When the virgins of Syracuse were about to marry they entered the temple of Diana, preceded by musicians, and friends bearing vases of incense, while tamed tigers and other animals accompanied them.

So the evolution of marriage has resulted in refined and beautiful ceremonies; but among the most beautiful and most refined we still see traces of the pagan rites. We are thankful that we do not steal our wives, and we therefore ring the church-bells announcing to the world that our marriages have been sanctioned. But in doing this we ignore the fact that our ancestors rang the bells to scare away the devil, and before them untutored wild men beat rude drums to repel the imps of darkness. There are many other customs that have been handed down from the ages, year by year, until they have become a very part of the modern marriage ceremony. There is the ring, for instance. The English church has made it absolutely necessary that the ring shall be used at marriages. It is expressly directed in the Rubric that "the man shall give unto the woman a ring, laying the same upon the book with the accustomed duty to the priest and clerk. And the priest, taking the ring, shall deliver it unto the man, to put it upon the fourth finger of the woman's left hand. And the man, holding the ring there, and taught by the priest, shall say, 'With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.'" Many of the denominations have attempted to abrogate the use of the ring altogether in the marriage ceremony. The objections were all based on the ground that it was of pagan origin. Certain it is that mystic significance has been connected with it from the earliest times, and its circular continuity has been regarded as a symbol of undying love.

The Jewish nation placed great stress on the importance of rings in marriage ceremonies, and, according to the ancient law, it was necessary that they should be of certain value. Sometimes they were of extraordinary size and elaborately carved. It would be a very difficult matter to definitely locate the origin of the wedding or betrothal ring. Both ancient Greeks and Romans wore them. It would appear that the Christian church adopted the wedding-ring from the pagans of Italy before marriage was generally accepted as a religious ceremony. In the early days of Christianity, among the Romans especially, marriage was regarded simply as a civil contract, which was entered into before a magistrate. It appears that the betrothal-ring was generally worn on the third finger of the left hand. One reason for this was that an idea prevailed that a vein ran directly from that finger to the heart, the supposed seat of love.

When Anglo-Saxon parents betrothed their children, a ring, which was given as a pledge, was placed on the maiden's right hand, but as soon as the marriage was celebrated the ring was changed to the left hand. The ring was placed on the right hand of the Anglo-Normans, usually on the middle finger. The portraits of the time of George I. and George II. show that the wedding-ring was worn on the thumb, but it was generally transferred there after marriage, having first been placed on the third finger.

It is superstition that leads us to select different seasons of the year or particular days for the celebration of our weddings, and we are indebted in a good part for this to the ancients. At Athens winter was regarded as a favorable time. The fourth day of the month was recommended by Hesiod, and Euripides was in favor of the time of the full moon. The Romans were great believers in favorable and unfavorable days. The calends, the nones and the ides of each month were regarded as unsuitable for marriage ceremonies, as were also the months of May and February. June was the most esteemed of all, and is still in great favor among many nations.

The custom of throwing old shoes and rice has prevailed for many years in America, England and Scotland. It came from the Eastern nations, and was originally intended as a sign of relinquishment by the relatives of their authority over the bride. An old Jewish custom provided that a brother of the childless man had the first privilege of marrying the widow, and until her brother-in-law refused her she could not marry again. Another authority maintains that the throwing of the shoe was a sham assault on the groom, who was supposed to be carrying off the bride.

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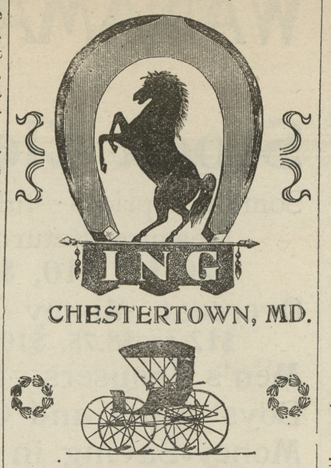

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Unknown Heirs of Patrick Murray,

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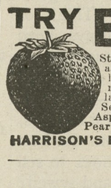

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