

OLD NOTIONS CONCERNING BRIDESMAIDS.



A PLEASING and graceful usage which still retains its time-honoured place in our marriage ceremonies is the appointment of bridesmaids. Indeed, these daintily-attired attendants on the bride have an additional interest when we recollect that they can boast of a somewhat eventful and romantic history.

Thus, their office is in all probability

a survival of the early primitive practice of marriage by capture, when the lady's friends resisted her being seized and carried off. Various traces of this custom may be found here and there throughout the country in some of our village weddings, where a mock contest between the friends of the bride and bridegroom forms part of the day's proceedings. Sir W. Scott, it may be remembered, in describing the marriage of Lucy Ashton, in the "Bride of Lammermoor," probably alludes to the custom of protecting the bride in the following speech of the boy-bridesman, Henry Ashton:—"I am to be bride's-man, and ride before you to the kirk, and all our kith, kin, and allies, and all Bucklaw's, are to be mounted and in order, and I am to have a sword, belt, and a dagger."

In some parts of the county of Durham, the bridal party is escorted to church by men armed with guns, which they fire again and again close to the ears of bride and bridesmaids. At Guisborough, in Cleveland, these guns, adds Mr. Henderson, in his "Folk-lore of the Northern Counties" (1879, p. 38), are fired over the heads of the newly-married couple all the way from church. There can be no doubt that this firing of guns is a survival of the fighting which really happened in primitive times, when marriage by capture was in force.

In this country, as far back as the days of the Anglo-Saxons, bridesmaids attended the bride at the wedding ceremony, although in later times they seem to have escorted the bridegroom, his friends waiting on the bride. As recently, for instance, as the middle of the last century, this was the popular mode of procedure, an illustration of which is given in the "Collier's Wedding":—

"Two lusty lads, well dressed and strong,
Stept out to lead the bride along;
And two young maids of equal size
As soon the bridegroom's hands surprise."

In Beaumont and Fletcher's "Scornful Lady" we have a further allusion to this practice:—"Were these two arms encompassed with the hands of bachelors to lead me to the church;" and in the old "History of John Newchombe, the Wealthy Clothier of Newbery," we have a graphic account of how his bride was "led to church between two sweet boys, with bride-laces and rosemary tied about their silken sleeves."

At the marriage of Philip Herbert and Lady Susan at Whitehall, in the reign of James I., two noblemen escorted the bride to church; and Elizabeth Stuart was conducted to the altar by two of the Palatine's bachelor friends. Spenser, again, in his charming picture of an Elizabethan bridal, "The Wedding of the Medway and the Thames," gives the bride for her attendants two bridesmaids and two bride-pages:—

"On her two pretty bridesmaids did attend,
Which on her waited, things amiss to mend
And her before there paced pages twain,
Both clad in colours like, and like away."

The custom, of course, varied in different localities, and thus Waldron, writing of a Manx wedding, says:—"They have bridemen and bridesmaids, who lead the young couple, as in England, only with this difference, that the former have osier wands in their hands as an emblem of superiority."

On her return from church, the bride was generally escorted by two married persons; and Polydore Virgil, who wrote in the time of Henry the Eighth, informs us that a third married man preceded the bride, bearing instead of a torch a vessel of silver or gold. This was popularly known as the "bride-cup," in which it was customary to place a sprig of rosemary. As a remuneration for their services on this happy occasion, those who led the bride to and from church received from her a pair of gloves during the wedding feast: a custom which apparently was at one time extended to all the guests, for Pepys, writing in the year 1663, tells us that he was at a wedding, and had "two pairs of gloves, like all the rest."

Again, instead of being so many graceful ornaments at the marriage ceremony, as nowadays, the bridesmaids in olden times had various duties assigned to them. Thus, one of their principal tasks was dressing the bride on her wedding morning, when any omission in her toilet was laid to their charge. At a wedding, too, where it was arranged that the bride should be followed by a numerous train of her lady friends, it was the first bridesmaid's duty to play the part of a drill-mistress: "sizing" them, says Mr. Jeaffreson, in his "Brides and Bridals," so that "girls of the same height walked together, and no pair in the procession was followed by a taller couple." She was also expected to see that each bridesmaid was not only duly provided with a sprig of rosemary, or a floral posy

pinned to the breast-folds of her dress, but had a symbolical chaplet in her hand.

In many parts of Germany it is still customary for the bridesmaids to bring the myrtle wreath, which they have subscribed together to purchase on the nuptial eve, to the house of the bride, and to remove it from her head at the close of the wedding day. After this has been done, the bride is blindfolded, and the myrtle wreath being put into her hand, she tries to place it upon the head of one of her bridesmaids as they dance round her; for, in accordance with an old belief, whoever she crowns is sure to be married within a year from that date. As may be imagined, this ceremony is the source of no small excitement, each bridesmaid being naturally anxious to follow the example of the bride.

Referring once more to the bridal wreath and chaplet, it is still a current notion in many parts of our own country that the bride in removing these must take special care that her bridesmaids throw away every pin. Not only is it affirmed that misfortune will overtake the bride who retains even one pin used in her marriage toilet, but woe also to the bridesmaids if they keep any of them, as their prospects of marriage will thereby be materially lessened.

Importance was formerly attached to the colours which the bride wore on her wedding day. Thus, in an old book entitled the "Fifteen Comforts of Marriage," a bride and her bridesmaids are represented conversing together respecting the colours to be used for the decoration of the bridal dress. It was finally decided, after various colours had been rejected, "to mingle a gold tissue with grass green," this being considered symbolical of youthful jollity.

Again, that the office of a bridesmaid was in times past not altogether a *sine qua non* may be gathered from the fact that during the period of the wedding festivities, which often extended over a week, the bridesmaids were expected to be in attendance, and to do whatever they could to promote their success.

Then there was the custom of "flinging the stocking," at which the bridesmaids took a prominent lead: a ceremony to which no small importance was attached. It has been made the subject of frequent allusion by our old writers, and one rhyme, describing a wedding, tells us:—

"But still the stockings are to throw;
Some throw too high, and some too low,
There's none could hit the mark."

Misson further informs us that if the bridegroom's stocking, thrown by one of the bridesmaids, fell upon his head, it was regarded as an omen that she herself would soon be married; and a similar prognostic was taken from the falling of the bride's stocking, thrown by one of the groomsmen. It was the bridesmaid's duty, too, to present the bride with the "benediction posset," so called from the words uttered over it: a practice thus noticed by Herrick, in his "Hesperides":—

"What short sweet prayers shall be said,
And how the posset shall be made
With cream of lilies, not of kine,
And maiden's blush for spiced wine."

Suckling thus alludes to this custom:—

"In came the bridesmaids with the posset,
The bridegroom eat in spite."

Once more, the bridesmaids were supposed to look after the bride's pecuniary interests. Thus, at the church porch, when the bridegroom produced the ring and other articles relating to his marriage, the chief bridesmaid took charge of the "dow-purse," which was publicly given to the bride as an instalment of her pin-money. Horace Walpole, writing to Miss Berry in the year 1791, speaks of the dow-purse as a thing of the past, and writes as follows:—

"Our wedding is over very properly, though with little ceremony, and nothing of ancient fashion but two bridesmaids. The endowing purse, I believe, has been left off since broad pieces were called in and melted down."

It has been pointed out, however, that a survival of this usage is preserved in Cumberland. The bridegroom provides himself with gold and crown pieces, and when the service reaches the point, "with all my worldly goods I thee endow," he takes the money, hands the clergyman his fee, and pours the rest into a handkerchief which the bridesmaid holds for the bride.

In Scotland, the bridesmaid is popularly known as the "best maid," and one of her principal duties was to convey the bride's presents on the wedding to her future home. The first article generally taken into the house was a vessel of salt, a portion of which was sprinkled over the floor, as a protection against the "evil eye." She also attended the bride when she called on her friends, and gave a personal invitation to her wedding.

Mr. W. Gregor, in his "Folk-lore of the North-east of Scotland" (1881, p. 92), describing an old Scottish wedding, tells us:—

"After the church door had been opened, the beadle or bellman was in attendance to lead the bridegroom to the *bride-steel*: that is, the pew that was set apart for the use of those who were to be married. The bride was now led forth and placed beside him, and great care was used to have her placed at the proper side. To have placed her improperly would have been unlucky in the extreme. Next to the bride stood her 'best-maid;' this office, though accounted an honour, not being unattended with risk. Three times a bridesmaid was the inevitable prelude of remaining unmarried."

Lastly, referring to similar customs on the Continent, it appears that in many parts of Russia the bride's attendants are often middle-aged women. Thus, according to one authority, when the priest has tied the nuptial knot at the altar, the clerk sprinkles on her head a handful of hops, after which "she is muffled up, and led home by a certain number of old women." Sir John Carr, noticing a Danish wedding procession which he one day saw, thus writes:—

"The fair heroine was preceded by three girls in mob caps, decorated with little bits of gold and silver lace, dressed in red jackets, each with a hook in her

hand, and followed by two old women with hooks also."

In years past marriages, we are told, in Spain were frequently attended with enormous expense, and one of the principal duties of the bridesmaid was to preside over the collection of bridal gifts, which were publicly displayed. Thus, to quote Lady Hamilton's words, in her "Marriage Customs" (1822, p. 140), she enumerated "the articles, carefully pointed out what belonged to the bride, what she owed to the tenderness or vanity of her lover, and what was given to her by her parents, whose generosity was always the greater

from their knowing the public would be acquainted therewith."

Indeed, in most cases the bride has from time immemorial had her lady attendants, but it must not be supposed that they were always the elegantly-attired young ladies they are in our own country. Whereas nowadays they may be regarded as so many pretty and attractive appendages of the nuptial ceremony—symbols oftentimes of youth and beauty—they were formerly far less elaborately dressed, and were busily employed by the bride in making all the arrangements throughout the eventful season.

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A MODERN PYGMALION.

BY CATHARINE CHILДАР, AUTHOR OF "A MAID CALLED BARBARA," &C.



JOHNNY LUPTON was a very enthusiastic young man. Whether literature, art, or music, he raved about all and dabbled in each. Fortunately, he was not dependent upon any one of them for his daily bread, or Johnny might have been reduced to a very dry crust; he held a small Government appointment, where the pay was pretty good as times go. So he

scraped his violin, and daubed his canvases, and wrote his little verses with a gay and careless heart.

The summer had come, and Johnny was to have his holiday. He determined to spend it abroad—not with crowds of tourists, nor in the most beaten tracks, but to strike out a little for himself. He was tired of being petted (or patronised, as he called it) by all his acquaintance; for there was something so fresh and youthful about Johnny Lupton that people were led to treat him at once in a friendly—not to say *familiar*—manner. This Master Johnny resented. His very name was a perpetual annoyance to him. He preferred to be called Mr. Lupton, or Lupton, or even Jack by intimate friends; but it was no use—every one called him Johnny, and Johnny he was likely to be till the end of the chapter.

So he determined to assert his personal dignity, and to travel alone. After much consideration, he fixed upon Innsprück as his head-quarters, whence he could make excursions into the Tyrol. He directed his luggage "Herr Lupton" in the most ostentatious manner, and hoped, for a few weeks at least, to get rid of the sound of the obnoxious "Johnny."

He was so pleased with Innsprück that he seemed likely to spend all his holiday there. The people were

very friendly, the town was picturesque; but it was not only these charms which enthralled Mr. Lupton. We have said he was very enthusiastic. The fact was, he had seen a picture in the museum which so captivated his youthful fancy that the romantic young man was becoming a second Pygmalion. It is true he had not painted the picture, as the Greek sculptor had hewn his statue, but he was equally in love with an inanimate object.

The lady of his dreams was dark, crowned with a diadem of starry jessamine; and jewels round her neck. Her velvet dress hung in heavy folds, and from her waist hung a dagger in a highly ornamented sheath. But the lady did not look murderous. Her full red lips were smiling, and her eyes soft, as if welcoming a lover. The sky behind her was blue, like the sky of sunny Italy, and in her hand she held a bunch of orange-blossoms. Her name, however, was German. In a corner of the picture one read, "Carlotta, Gräfin von Werdenfels." This was the lady who kept Johnny Lupton in Innsprück.

He had obtained permission to copy in the museum, and day after day saw him there, endeavouring to transfer the fair features to his canvas.

But he was to be driven away sooner than he expected. One morning, as he was standing in his accustomed place gazing in rapt admiration, he was roused from his reverie by a slap on the back—yes, an unmistakable, jovial slap on the back.

He turned round, with outraged dignity in every feature, which turned into consternation when he saw the man. It was the greatest bore in the office! Flight was the only possible course. Johnny gazed round like a hunted animal. How was he to get away?

"Ah! Johnny, me bhoy!—delighted to see ye! I've just been longin' to see a craythur that could understand the langwidge. Drawin' a picture, too. A foine, strappin' wench! Not so good-looking as Philippina Welzer, though. Come and have a look at her now."

"I'm sick and tired of Philippina Welzer, and