

## Brides.

BY EDWARD SALMON.



STUDY of the marriage customs of the world, as described in a multitude of works of travel, and of miscellaneous papers written, or lectures delivered, by travellers, carries one inevitably to the conclusion that the English bride has most reason for including in her trousseau the kindly smile, the cheerful spirit, and the brightening eye which Thackeray made Mr. Brown, in his letters to his nephew, hope that Mrs. Bob would bring with her on her wedding-day.

The Anglo-Saxon bride, even at the end of the nineteenth century, stands almost alone in regard to the degree of freedom with which she may treat Master Cupid when he enters into her life. Her heart is in the main a fortress at her own disposal. She may hand the keys of the gate over to whom she lists, and she yields them up almost invariably with the honours of war. That is to say, she alone almost, among brides, is permitted an independent voice in the matter of her life's partner. At its worst, in England, America, and the British Colonies, the interference of parents and friends is of a less serious character than that which disposes for good or ill of the French, Portuguese, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, or, indeed, any other maiden whose forebears were not British.

In no other country is it given to girls to experience the exquisite joys known to the English maiden when first the man for whom she has conceived a liking asks

her to be his, and she alone of the brides of the world can regard her position on the nuptial day with entire self-respect and unqualified hopefulness. She stands on the threshold of a new world. The future is all sunshine, tinged, perhaps, with the smallest cloud of doubt, barely realized, but there all the same, which only enhances the glad anticipation of a rôle in which she will be her husband's equal in all desirable respects, in some his willing slave, in others his tender tyrant, in all his mate.

With the appearance of the bride of England everyone is familiar, and to describe her at length is entirely unnecessary. Whether she is the daughter of a duke, of a millionaire, of a tradesman, or of a domestic servant matters little. The marriage customs are pretty much the same. Bride and bridegroom meet for the first time on the wedding-day at the church; there are the bridesmaids, the parent or guardian to give away the bride, the best man, the simple ceremony, the departure from church amid showers of rice, the breakfast or reception, and the honeymoon trip, inaugurated with the aid of an old slipper.

A sight, however, which comparatively few people have witnessed, though it is to be seen often enough, is a costermonger's wedding. As with their social betters, the worthy folk make the day one of festivity and rejoicing. In this respect the affair differs little from an ordinary holiday, on which they bedeck themselves in all their best, and eat, drink, and generally make merry. The novelty of the thing is the conduct of affairs at the altar. Bridegroom and bride have spared no resource of alleydom to insure the most presentable appearance possible. His billycock hat is turned well down at the ends of the brim and well up at the sides; he wears a velveteen coat with numerous pearl



A COSTER BRIDE.



buttons, flannel shirt and gorgeous necktie, and trousers which fit closely about the thighs, and from the knee downwards are suggestive of a giant candle-extinguisher. She wears a large hat with a feather or combination of feathers which for size a Duchess of Gainsborough might envy, a long black jacket, a bright red dress, and a white kerchief round her neck. With the swinging gait characteristic of costermongerland, the pair make their way up the church, followed by their friends, most of whom take their places in the pews.

The one feature then wanting in a usually solemn ceremony is solemnity. The bride especially seems to regard the affair as a grand joke, and in the middle of it all thinks nothing of turning round and giving her friends behind the most knowing of winks. They in their turn do not wait for the conclusion of the ceremony to commence pelting the bridal pair with rice. Dismissed by the clergyman after a while, the bridegroom marches off, leaving his bride to follow. They both give and receive coarse but good-natured chaff, though the bridegroom seems for the moment somewhat over-absorbed in a consciousness of his own importance.

Whatever else may be asserted of the costermonger's bride, it cannot be said that she does not know her man. They have probably spent years in each other's company, and in this way are more fortunate than brides in many countries which pride themselves on their civilization. The French bride has often no knowledge of the bridegroom beyond, perhaps, what she has gleaned at a few most cursory interviews, and what her parents are condescending enough to tell her in ordinary conversation.

Marriages in France are arranged by parents and friends, who pick up all possible information about the antecedents and connections of the opposite side; and if gossip proves satisfactory, a meeting is decided upon—this sometimes taking place at a theatre. The young man is told how the lady will be dressed, and that she will be seated in a certain place. He will gaze upon her to his heart's content—or otherwise—and will signify subsequently his approval or disapproval. In the majority of cases, one would be pretty safe in saying that they are allowed to meet and exchange a few words before the final decision on either side is given.

If they approve of each other, the young man is invited to his bride's home; the contract is signed in a day or two, a ring is given,

and, according to a writer in the *Figaro* a few years ago, the young man dines with his future parents-in-law every night until the wedding, which takes place probably just as soon as the trousseau is ready. The bridegroom is supposed to make his *fiancée* very handsome presents, and these, together with the gifts from friends, are exhibited on the day on which the civil marriage contract is signed. On this occasion, which is merely formal, and consequently quiet, the bride wears a dress of rose-colour—symbolic, perhaps, of a period when everything should be *couleur de rose*.

On the following day the religious ceremony is performed. This, says our authority, may be marked by "as much pomp as you please. The bride wears a white satin dress, with lace veil over her hair, and a wreath of orange blossoms, the face being uncovered." Little opportunity as the two thus bound together have had of learning something of each other's views and character, the restrictions on their intercourse have not been reduced to the absurdity which obtains in Portugal, Spain, and among the races sprung from them in South America.

It would, from all one can learn, be considered the height of impropriety to allow a young man and maiden in, say, Lisbon to meet and talk together. The method of courtship is consequently unique. A couple by some means or other conceive a mutual liking—though probably they have never spoken, and the extent of their knowledge is such as can be acquired by staring rudely at each other as they pass in the street. The attachment having become a reality, the girl takes up her position regularly at her window; whilst the swain takes his stand on the street pavement opposite. He executes all sorts of dumb but no doubt eloquent signs, his devotion sometimes assuming the more poetic form of the serenade. In Portugal this happens before he has made any proposal; after he has put the fatal question to the girl's parents and been accepted, he is allowed to come to the house quietly until the wedding-day.

In Mexico this absurd custom is carried to even more absurd lengths. After the betrothal, the Mexican bridegroom, according to one chronicler, spends his time largely in twiddling his fingers at his bride from the pavement and making romantic faces. Even if he lives in the same house he has to go into the street to carry on his love-making. Yet with all this precautionary nonsense, when the two meet at a ball no one



places any serious obstacle in the way of their dancing every, or nearly every, dance together.

The bridegroom in Mexico finds marriage a very costly business. He is expected to buy the trousseau, and he is fortunate if he can satisfy the extravagance sanctioned by custom and prompted by ardent passion. Young men from the country are said to be often seen in the city of Mexico purchasing all sorts of finery for the ladies of their choice, and the spectacle they present as they constantly consult the measurements, which they carry with them, for all sorts of garments, would be amusing to English eyes.

It is generally assumed that the days of wife capture are past, but "either as a stern reality or as an important ceremony," as Sir John Lubbock tells us in the "Origin of Civilization," "it prevails in Australia, and amongst the Malays, in Hindustan, Central Asia, Siberia, and Kamtchatka; among the Esquimaux, the Northern Redskins, the Aborigines of Brazil, in Chili and Tierra del Fuego, in the Pacific Islands, both among the Polynesians and the Fijians, in the Philippines, among the Arabs and the Negroes, in Circassia, and, until recently, throughout a great part of Europe."

In the Scottish Highlands and in parts of Ireland simulated capture is said to be still part of the marriage ceremony, whilst in Wales we have it on the authority of Professor Rhys that *quasi*-capture obtains. Once, when a boy, he assisted at one of these entertaining functions. He arrived at the bride's house early, and the door was locked and barred and preparations were made to resist



A PORTUGUESE WOODING.

attack. When the bridegroom appeared, admittance was refused, and a long parley, conducted in verse, ensued between the father and his would-be son-in-law. At last he was permitted to enter, but no bride was to be found. She had been disguised by her friends so effectually that she was unrecognisable. Leaving the house later for the church, the road at some distance forked, and the bride and her father carefully took the wrong road in an attempt to escape, but the friends of the bridegroom were on the alert, and speedily brought them back.

If one may judge by other chroniclers, however, the Welsh bride is seldom anxious even to pretend that she wants to get away. Directly she meets a man she cares for she begins to oil her hair— one sign that she

loves—and on the wedding morn, among the lower order, the bride and bridegroom parade the streets in their Sunday best, accompanied by the groomsmen and the bridesmaids.

Pretty much the same description is given by George Sand of a wedding in provincial France as is given by Professor Rhys of what he has witnessed in Wales. The bride and her friends, we are told, shut themselves up in the house and barricade it, in view of the coming of the man who would carry her off to another roof-tree. When he arrives, admittance is summarily refused, and he uses every artifice known to diplomacy to induce them to let him in. He assures them that he and his friends are weary pilgrims, or that they seek refuge from the police, who are on their track. But the wary defenders see through the ruse, and there seems nothing for it but



to attempt to take the place by storm. Pistol shots are fired, the door is hammered vigorously — men shout, women scream, and confusion reigns supreme. But still the defenders hold on, until at last the attacking party announce that they have brought a husband and presents for the bride. On this they are admitted, when the fight begins anew for "possession of the hearth," in which the bridegroom is naturally and necessarily victorious. The bride is his, and the marriage ceremony is proceeded with.

In parts of Germany, again, the capture of the bride has to be effected before she is finally won, and Mr. Baring-Gould, in his account of "Germany Past and Present," has referred to the chasing of the bride in the Black Forest as a relic of the custom of primitive times. In the Fatherland the bride not only receives a ring but gives one, and values the band of plain gold all the more highly if her husband has been sufficiently thoughtful to have her name engraved within it. Among the better classes this is usually done as a matter of course. A pretty custom which obtains in some parts of northern and central Europe is the wearing of the virginal crown. In Norway especially the bridal crown is the thing for which most girls live, and the custom prevails so generally that in the rare cases where the bride is unable to purchase her own crown and outfit, they are provided by the Church for the purposes of the ceremony.

In barbarous or semi-barbarous lands capture is seen in more or less serious form, and where the bridegroom does not



A NORWEGIAN BRIDE.

actually use brute force, the bride is yet afforded an opportunity of escaping a hated union by outdistancing him in a race, in which she is given a start that insures her winning if she cares to.

An amusing variant on the story of Hippomenes and Atalanta is to be found in the neighbourhood of Singapore. Marriage there is a very easy affair, depending almost entirely on the arrangement made with the parents of the girl. If the tribe lives on the bank of a lake or stream, she is placed in a canoe, and started off some time before the would-be husband is allowed to enter another. These contests must often be very exciting. If the girl is anxious not to be caught she need not be. If, on the other hand, she wishes to be married, she may yet give her lover a smart run, and only slow down sufficiently to let him overtake her in the end. When no stream is near, Mr. J. Cameron, in his account of Malayan India, says that the race is run on land, under the same conditions, but in this there is nothing exceptional.

A race for a wife is among the commonest



A SINGAPORE BRIDE.



forms of a survival of the system of marriage by capture. It is to be seen in Lapland, where the maiden is not asked to say "Yes" or "No" to the suitor, but with her friends goes to an open space and plays the part of Atalanta. If she loves or is anxious to marry, the young man will not lose an undue quantity of breath ere he catches her.

Among the Kirghis in Central Asia it is the custom, according to Eugene Schuyler, to place the bride, armed with a formidable whip, on a fleet horse. She is then pursued by

in the method of capture and the means by which the girl is retained. Dr. Nansen, in his account of his journey "Across Greenland," says that on the west coast marriage nowadays roughly follows the lines of marriage in Europe, but on the east coast old customs prevail. A man having made up his mind to take to himself a wife, goes to the tent of a family one of whose girl members meets his views, catches her by the hair or in some other equally rude way, and drags her forth to his home. He there presents

her with a bucket or some useful domestic utensil, and the ceremony is complete.

According to Baron Norden-skiöld, etiquette requires that the bride should receive hard blows. She does not submit readily, but bewails her fate, appears with torn garments and dishevelled hair, and makes a show of getting away from her husband. Sometimes her grief is sincere, and a sensitive European would certainly not know whether it was so or not. He might be tempted to interfere, in which case he would probably

find himself opposed by the bride as well as bridegroom. In order that the apparently miserable woman might really be compelled to remain in her new home, the barbarous custom used to exist of branding her feet so that they were too painful for her to walk. By the time they were well she could with propriety declare herself resigned to her position.

In Greenland it is easy to tell who is married and who is not. The Esquimaux women gather up their hair into a huge tuft on the top, tying it with a ribbon, the colour of which denotes their position. A maid wears red, a married woman blue, a widow black; a widow anxious to remarry,

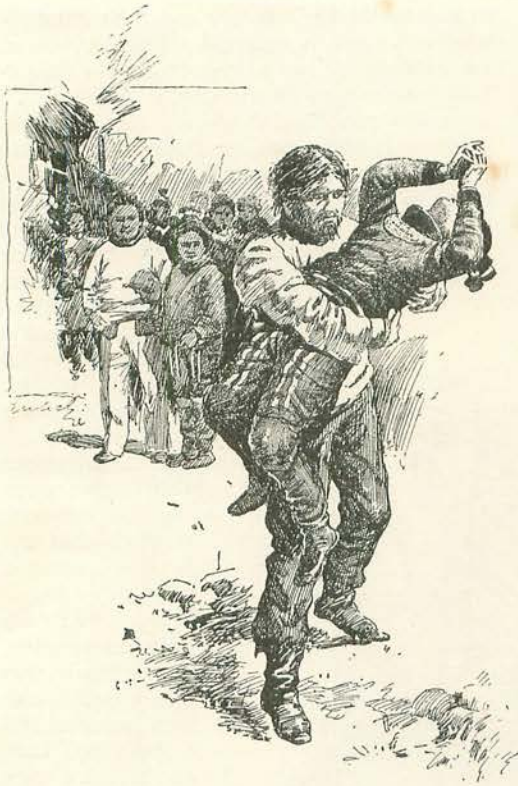


A KIRGHIS BRIDE.

the young men who aspire to her hand, but if she does not like the one who gets nearest to or closes with her, she uses the whip on him as mercilessly as she has used it to urge her animal forward, and it is pretty safe to predict that the man who captures her is the man for whom she cares most. In several other parts of Asia it is customary for the bridegroom to secure his bride by force and run off with her. Her friends make a mock attempt to regain possession of her, but the raid of the bridegroom is rendered successful by the loyalty of the friends who stand stoutly by him.

For wanton cruelty in the capture of a bride we must go to Greenland. There we find something more than simulated violence





AN ESQUIMAUX BRIDE.

black and red ; a widow too old to remarry, white.

For the bride and her friends to regard marriage as an occasion for sorrow rather than rejoicing is not uncommon. A few years ago a paper by Mr. E. Colborne Baber, describing, among others, the marriage ceremonies of the independent Lolos, who inhabit an almost unexplored corner of Western China, was read before the Royal Geographical Society. Marriages for their children are contracted by heads of families in the market-places, just as cattle are bargained for. The wedding ceremony of the Lolos is elaborate and suggestive. The bridegroom, if he is a Blackbone — that is, an aristocrat — and is marrying a girl of his own social station, invites the bride with her relations to a banquet spread on the hill-side. After the feast the bride goes home with her friends, and it is only after the third wedding breakfast that the happy pair are united. Presents are interchanged, the family of the bride receiving the larger number. Mr. Baber quotes the following account of the ceremony as coming from a source which may be relied on :—

“The betrothal is ratified by a present from the husband’s family of three vessels of wine and a pig. On the wedding morning the parents of the bride assemble their friends, and the ceremony is opened by the bridesmaids with the melancholy song : ‘In spite of all the affection and care your fond parents have lavished upon you since the day you were born, you must now desert them. Never again will you sit beside them at work or at meals. You will not be nigh to support them when they grow old, nor to tend them when they feel sick. You must leave them, and go away to the house of a stranger.’ Whereunto the bride responds, also in song, broken with bitter weeping : ‘Leave them I must, but not by my desire or fault. They must bear with my absence. My brothers and sisters will support them. I go to my husband, and my duty will be to help his parents, not, alas ! my own. But if any trouble befall my dear father and mother, I shall pine to death : I am sure I shall. Seldom can I visit them ; but when they are sick let them send for me, and I will come, I will come.’”

Mr. Baber then describes the general sorrow, which may be simulated or real. Whilst the bride is being arrayed in her richest garments and choicest ornaments, a wailing prayer is started by her friends to the effect that the bridegroom may not prove unkind to the dear girl. Tears flow freely, and in the midst of the lamentations the male friends and relatives of the husband rush in and seize the bride. A scene of great confusion ensues as she is carried off. She is then mounted on a horse, and taken to her new home. Sometimes the friends of the bride repel the attack, employing for that purpose heavy sticks and other weapons, which inflict on the bridegroom’s party blows that they will not forget for many a day. Another custom said to obtain among some of the tribes in this part of the world seems, as Mr. Baber says, too grotesque to be credible. The bride is placed by her parents on the upper branch of a large tree whilst the elder ladies of the family cluster on the lower branches. The bridegroom literally storms the tree. As he attempts to climb up the trunk, he is vigorously opposed by the defenders ; and it is easy to imagine the fight he has ere he can touch the foot of the girl, and so establish his right to claim her as his bride.



We have seen how, in some cases, brides have to be captured by simulated assault, and in others by racing. In the Malay Archipelago there is another very curious custom. In Sumatra, the large island which lies to the north-west of Java and the south-west of Singapore, the bridegroom is expected to give evidence of his intention to be generous to his wife. This is supplied by means of a giant balance placed in front of the bride's house. One scale belongs to the bridegroom, and the other to the bride's parents. On the wedding-day the latter put their presents into their scale. The bridegroom brings his later. His *fiancée* is said to watch the scales from a place of concealment, and only goes to him when his gifts outweigh her parents'. His good-nature is universally applauded, and the union of the happy pair is celebrated with feasting and dancing.



A BRIDE OF JAVA.

In Java the marriage ceremony is short, but the feasting long. The explanation of this is that a marriage with the Javanese is only the equivalent of an engagement with us. After the ceremony bride and bridegroom do not live together for three months, during which they have the amplest opportunities of learning whether they care for each other. If either side can advance any good reason

Vol. vi. i.—91.

why they should not continue their union, a divorce is granted, the bride returning all the presents she has received from the bridegroom.

In the East, marriages are arranged very largely by go-betweens, who are either professional or friendly counterparts of the matrimonial agent not unknown to Englishmen. There is, however, a material difference. The agent in England brings two people together, and leaves them to make the momentous decision. In the East the go-betweens settle matters more or less absolutely, though sometimes the parties most concerned exercise an independent judgment at the last moment. Thus, in Tunis the old ladies who perform the office of go-betweens do not always hit the views of the bridegroom. He is usually a gentleman at once more youthful and more exacting than the Western bridegroom, and he has notions of beauty which would strike the latter as peculiar, if not repugnant.

In Tunis no woman who is not fat is considered good-looking, and it is recorded that a lady who weighed twenty-five stone was regarded as having attained perfection. In order to reach the necessary standard of adiposity the maid will put bangles round her arm, and feed herself up until they are tight to the flesh. Her husband does not see her till after the marriage ceremony, which is purely official; and if the go-between were desirous of giving the poor



A BRIDE OF TUNIS.



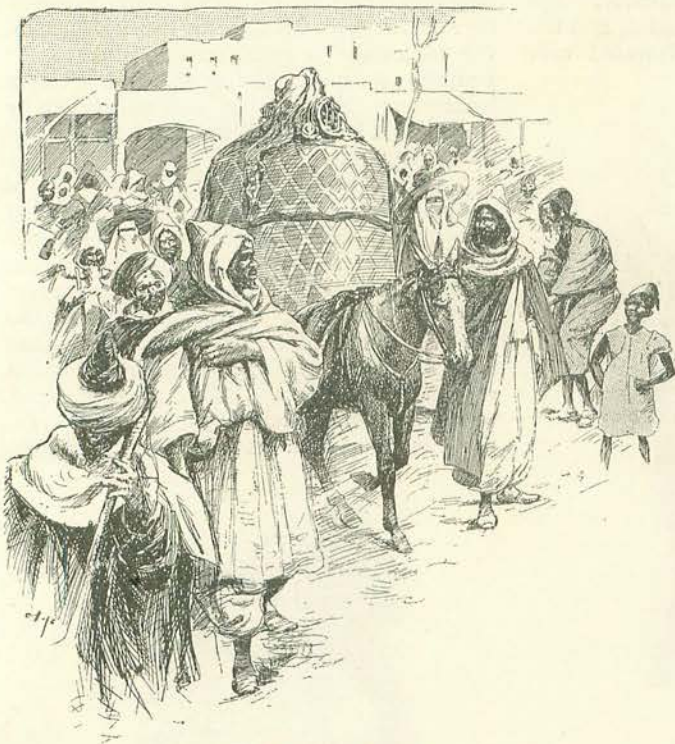
young man a great shock, or sending him into a serious rage, she could probably not take a better course than to arrange that the face he should look upon when his bride uncovers contains only the amount of flesh seen on that of a European girl. The Tunisian maiden, in a word, fattens herself up for the matrimonial market precisely in the same way as a farmer fattens his pigs and his poultry with a view to fair day.

As in Tunis, so in Morocco—the selection of the bride is left to the mother or some female relative. Few sights in Morocco are more queer than a wedding such as that of which Mr. Stephen Bonsal gave a full

the corners. A procession was formed, the lights in the bride's house were extinguished as a token of sorrow at her departure, and the procession moved away to the refrain of a wedding march, whilst from the house-tops women yelled "Yo, yo, yo, yo, ye, ye, ye, ye." On reaching the bridegroom's house, the box was carried inside, and the bride arranged on a divan, so that she might present the most attractive appearance possible on the entrance of the husband who would see her face for the first time.

In China, again, the bride is supposed to be unknown to the bridegroom, and all arrangements between the parents of the contracting parties are in the hands of their representatives. The Chinese girl is betrothed very often in her babyhood, as is the Indian girl; but whenever the betrothal takes place, she is henceforth regarded as married. Chinese and Indian women cannot remarry, so that, if the husband dies before he has taken the girl to his home, she is doomed to a lifelong widowhood without ever having been a wife. In China, bride and bridegroom meet for the first time in the court of the bride's father's house, when they both make a profound obeisance, and kneel down and worship the heavens and the earth—a proceeding regarded as symbolic of the unity of the marriage tie. There is great rejoicing, and the two spend a considerable portion of the rest of the day in visiting each other's friends.

The preliminaries observed in Japan resemble those which obtain in France. A go-between selects, in a general way, the bride or bridegroom, as the case may be, and arranges for an interview at his own house, or some friend's, or at a picnic, or a theatre. This mutual inspection, as it is called, is the only opportunity the two have of knowing whether there is any chance of their liking each other. If either does not approve of the other's bearing or appearance, the negotiations are supposed to cease forthwith. As a matter of fact, the girl has



A SOUDANESE BRIDE.

description in his book on Morocco eighteen months ago. He formed one of the crowd which watched the ceremony as performed in Tetuan. An old Soudan woman led a white mule carrying a large box, like a pigeon-house, to the home of the bride. The box was taken into the house, the bride got into it, and the old woman staggered under its weight back to the mule. It was then bedecked by young girls with Spanish brocades and Fez silk, whilst the bride's sister attached bangles, anklets, and pearls to



little or no voice in the affair. She has to take whoever may be found for her. The marriage ceremony is simplicity itself. There are no bridesmaids, the only persons present being the go-betweens and a young girl. The latter hands the bride and bridegroom a two-spouted cup containing native wine. One drinks from this and hands it to the other, the sharing of the wine out of the same vessel being held to symbolize the readiness of the couple to share life's joys and sorrows.

After the ceremony, which usually takes place at the bridegroom's house, there is feasting and general merriment. The bride is supposed, according to Miss Bacon, who recently published a very full account of Japanese girls and women, to be equipped by her parents with writing-desk, work-box, trays, tables, chopsticks, bed-furnishings, and sufficient clothes for all times and seasons to last the best part of her lifetime. The old people show their regard for her in the quality and quantity of the things which go to make up the trousseau they provide. If she is divorced she takes away with her all she brought, and, unfortunately, the beautiful symbol at the marriage ceremony is so meaningless that divorce is terribly frequent in Japan.

Sometimes, no doubt, happy marriages are contracted, but it would probably be found in these cases that the go-between had been a good-natured soul who had utilized the opportunities of the position to bring two devoted hearts together. There is little to

make life bright for the Japanese wife. She is the servant of her husband and of her mother-in-law. In this respect she resembles the majority of wives in the East. Thus the Armenian bride goes through a ceremony which is as hypocritical as the Japanese. She and the bridegroom bend forward till their foreheads touch, and the priest pronounces them to be one body. Strings are tied round their heads, and they partake of the loving cup. But there is no equality between the two, and Mrs. Bishop has told us in her last book of travel how the

Armenian bride becomes a member of her father-in-law's house, and is so much a slave that, until she comes a mother, she is compelled to remain silent. She may look forward to the time when she will enjoy the privileges of a mother-in-law herself, as do most women in the East, but remembrance of what they went through does not seem to affect their conduct towards their sons' wives.

Between the Jews and the Japanese there are at least two points in com-

mon. Weddings are as often as not the outcome of the genius of a professional match-maker, and at the ceremony both bride and bridegroom drink from the same vessel. Here, however, the likeness ends. The Jewish wedding, whatever the status of the parties, is always a more or less imposing affair. In the synagogue is erected, on four poles, a canopy, the drapings and decorations of which are sometimes magnificent, sometimes simple. The bride is escorted by women, and the bridegroom by men. They



A JAPANESE BRIDE.





A JEWISH WEDDING.

are led to the canopy by their respective mothers, or their nearest relations. A glass of wine is given them by the Rabbi, which they sip. The Rabbi pronounces his benedictions, they both drink again of the wine, symbolizing their desire to share whatever life has in store for either, the bridegroom places the ring on the bride's finger, saying: "Behold, thou art wedded unto me by this ring, according to the law of Moses and Israel"; the glass from which they have a minute before drunk is placed on the floor, the bridegroom puts his foot on it and crushes it, those present cry "Good luck," and the happy pair conclude this portion of the day's programme with a kiss.

The practice of aiming things at the bride and bridegroom by way of insuring them luck in after-life is not confined to ourselves. Rice-throwing plays a principal part in the marriage ceremony of the Parsees. A white

sheet is hung along the middle of the apartment in which the wedding takes place, and bride and bridegroom are for a time separated by it. Presently it is removed, and each attempts to be first in throwing a handful of rice at the other. They then sit side by side, and the priest enters upon a long oration concerning their mutual duties. He holds rice in his hand, and frequently emphasizes his rhetoric by sprinkling it over them. Rice-throwing on the part of the newly-wedded is a sign of affection: on the part of the priest it signifies a hope that life may be prosperous for them.

With us rice is supplemented by the oldest of old slippers, and the nearer the latter goes to the bridegroom's head the greater the guarantee of good fortune; the Romans use, or used,

nuts; at Anacapri, in Italy, it is recorded of a wedding which took place in the clouds—that is, high up on the mountain—that as the bride left the church, her friends pelted her with comfits; whilst Mrs. Bishop tells us that in Syria, as the bride is taken by her friends away from her own village to her husband's, he gets on to the roof of a house near which she must pass, and carries with him a store of apples, "which, after signing himself with the cross, he throws among the crowd." If he succeeds in hitting the bride, it is deemed a sign of good luck.

It was an apple with which Eve, somewhere in this part of the world, tempted Adam. The Syrian young man to-day reverses the early order of things, and aims the fruit at his bride's head instead. May his success ever be as potent for good as Eve's was for ill!