

The
Knot Tied.



Marriage Ceremonies
OF
ALL NATIONS.

SCOTLAND

1877

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SCOTLAND.

Before the preliminaries of a regular marriage in Scotland, both parties ought, strictly speaking, to reside in that country, at least, six weeks in the same or different parishes; but this condition is usually dispensed with, if one of the parties resides for the prescribed period, and the other party is out of the kingdom. The banns are then put up in the parish or parishes where the parties reside, if both are resident in Scotland, if not, in the parish of the party resident, and they must be put up in the parish church, and accompanied by a certificate of residence

from two householders or an elder of the parish. According to the proper legal usage, the banns are then published on three successive Sundays, so that when the law is exactly obeyed, a probationary period of nine weeks, six of residence, and three for the currency of the banns, precedes a regular marriage; but, in the case of the wealthier classes, this condition is evaded generally, and, in consideration of a money payment, the publication of banns may be all made on one Sunday. The fees, however, for this privilege, are in many parishes exorbitantly high, the result being that the limitation of nine weeks extends to the mass of regular marriages. After these formalities, regular marriages may be celebrated by the clergy of all communions, now on an equal level in this respect. There is no restriction as to time or place; and the ceremony may be, and often is, performed at night, and in a private house, such as the residence of the parents of the bride. This practice is common among the Presbyterians, but not among the Episcopalians and Roman Catholics.

A system of registration is also provided for these marriages, which is said to work well in practice, though the duty of registering them is thrown upon the contracting parties themselves, and not on the minister who performs the ceremony.

Irregular marriages (which form but a small portion at the present time of the whole) may now,

as 700 years ago, be contracted, by mere words of present consent, at any hour, at any place, without any antecedent notice, in the absence of an officiating person, without formalities, and without a witness. "The leading principle," said Lord Deas, in a judgment delivered by him a few years ago, "is that consent makes marriage. No ceremony, civil or religious, no notice before or publication after, no consummation, no cohabitation, no writing, no witnesses even, are essential to the constitution of the most important contract which two private persons can enter into, whether affecting their domestic arrangements or the pecuniary interests of themselves and their families. Matrimonial consent can be verbally and effectually interchanged when no third person is present; and, if it can be proved, even at the distance of years, by subsequent written acknowledgments, or oath of reference, the parties will be held to have been married." It must also be borne in mind that, as the *lex loci*, governs this contract, all persons, though not of Scottish domicile, who marry in Scotland are bound by its law, and may enter there into irregular marriages—a rule, however, partly modified by the statute against Gretna Green marriages. The Gretna Green marriages will be described in a succeeding part of this work.

CHAPTER VII.

LOCAL MANNERS AND CUSTOMS RELATING TO MARRIAGE.

SCOTTISH LOCAL CUSTOMS.

MUCH that is curious, interesting and instructive, has been written on the manners, customs and superstitions of Scotland, by the Rev. Charles Rogers, LL.D., the efficient Secretary of the Royal Historical Society. In his able work, entitled "Scotland, Social and Domestic," issued in July, 1869, to the members of the Grampian Club, we have interesting notices of Scottish marriage rites, and, by the kindness of the author, we are enabled to present them to our readers. We are told:—

Among the peasantry, betrothals were conducted in a singular fashion. The fond swain, who had resolved to make proposals, sent for the object of his affection to the village alehouse, previously informing the landlady of his intentions. The damsel, who knew the purpose of the message, busked herself in her best attire, and waited on her admirer. She

was entertained with a glass of ale; then the swain proceeded with his tale of love. A dialogue like the following ensued:—"I'm gaun to speir whether ye will tak' me, Jenny?" "Deed, Jock, I thocht ye micht hae speir't that lang syne." "They said ye wad refuse me, lassie." "Then they're leears, Jock." "An' so ye'll no refuse me, lassie?" "I've tell't ye that twice ower already, Jock." Then came the formal act of betrothal. The parties licked the thumbs of their right hands, which they pressed together, and vowed fidelity. The ceremony possessed the solemnity of an oath, the violator of such an engagement being considered guilty of perjury. In allusion to this practice, a favourite Scottish song commences,—

"There's my thumb, I'll ne'er beguile thee."

The pressure of moistened thumbs, as the solemn ratification of an engagement, was used in other contracts. The practice, as confirmatory of an agreement, existed both among the Celts and Goths. The records of the Scottish courts contain examples of sales being confirmed by the judges, on the production of evidence that the parties had licked and pressed their thumbs on the occasion of the bargain. The Highlander and the Lowland schoolboy still, in many parts of Scotland, lick thumbs in bargain-making.

At the close of the eighteenth century another method of betrothal was adopted. When the damsel

had accepted her lover's offer, the pair proceeded to the nearest stream, and there washing their hands in the current, vowed constancy with their hands clasped across the brook. A ceremony of this description took place between Burns and his "Highland Mary." When the parties had mutually betrothed themselves, they proceeded diligently to revive their acquaintance with the Shorter Catechism, for every clergyman insisted that candidates for matrimony, should be able to repeat the Proofs, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. A marriage was stopped by the Kirk-Session of Glasgow in 1642, until the bridegroom should inform himself of these religious fundamentals. Latterly the Church has permitted persons to enter into the nuptial bonds, without any inquiry as to their Scriptural knowledge.

Between the first Sunday of the proclamation of banns and the day of marriage, forty days were allowed to elapse. The reason of the delay has not been explained. On the evening before the wedding, the bride was attended by her maidens who proceeded to wash her feet. Much diversion was a concomitant of the ceremonial; it ended with festivities.

A wedding was the most important of rural celebrations. When a country bridal was arranged, the neighbours hastened to send contributions. At a remote period, a penny Scots, equal to a modern shilling, was levied from those who intended to be

present at the festival; hence the name *Penny Weddings*. During the last century, these entertainments were prepared in pic-nic fashion. Lairds contributed joints of beef and mutton; cheese, eggs and milk, came from the farm dairies, and the minister and schoolmaster supplied the cooking utensils. The relations of the bride provided only one dish, which was designated the "bride's pie." Every guest was privileged to receive a portion of it.

In the Highlands, marriages were solemnized in the churches. In Lowland districts the nuptials were generally performed at the residence of the bride's parents. There was a custom in certain localities where the bride went bareheaded to the nuptial ceremony, and so continued all that day, but was covered ever after. Nearly all avoid contracting marriage in May. The Lowlander was disinclined to marry on Friday: in Ross-shire that day was deemed the most hopeful for the occasion. In Highland districts a marriage was held only to promise good fortune, when, prior to the ceremony, all knots in the apparel of both parties had been loosened. At present, no couple in Orkney would consent to marry unless in the increase of the moon.

When the marriage ceremony was performed, the bride received the congratulations of her relatives. She was expected to proceed round the apartment attended by her maidens, and kiss every male in the

company. A dish was then handed round, into which every one placed a sum of money, to help the young couple to commence housekeeping. At the marriage of persons of the upper class, favours were sewn upon the bride's dress. When the ceremony was concluded, all the members of the company ran towards her, each endeavouring to seize a favour. When the confusion had ceased, the bridegroom's man proceeded to pull off the bride's garter, which she modestly dropped. This was cut into small portions, which were presented to each member of the company.

After luncheon the bride and bridegroom prepared to depart on their trip. They passed through a double file of their friends and the household domestics, each of whom carried a slipper. When the couple had entered their carriage, a shower of slippers was thrown, in token of "good luck."

It was the duty of the bridegroom's man to attend to the public intimation of the nuptials. We present some specimens of matrimonial announcements, from the *Glasgow Journal*, one of the most fashionable of Scottish intelligencers a century ago:—

— March 24, 1744.—On Monday last, James Dennistoun, junior, of Colgreine, Esq., was married to Miss Jenny Baird, a beautiful young lady.

— May 4, 1747.—On Monday last, Dr. Robert Hamilton, Professor of Anatomy and Botany in the University of Glasgow,

was married to Miss Molly Baird, a beautiful young lady with a handsome fortune.

— August 3, 1747.—On Monday last, Mr. James Johnstone, merchant in this place, was married to Miss Peggy Newall, an agreeable young lady with £4,000.

At rural weddings the newly-married pair remained to enjoy the festivities provided for them by their friends. A hundred persons frequently assembled on these occasions, and the rejoicings were protracted during a succession of days.

During the seventeenth century Penny Weddings degenerated into scenes of social disorder. In 1645 they were condemned by the General Assembly, and in 1647 the Presbyteries of Haddington and Dunbar insisted on their suppression, as “the seminaries of all profanation.” By these courts it was ordained that not more than twenty persons should assemble at weddings, and that piping and dancing should cease. Kirk-sessions subjected pipers and fiddlers to their severest censures for discoursing music at bridals. Persons who were convicted of “promiscuous dancing” were mulcted in considerable penalties, and placed on the stool of repentance. Ecclesiastical tribunals subsequently discovered that the irregularities at the penny wedding did not arise from the arts of the musician or of the dancing master, but were owing to the quantity of liquor which was consumed. They passed regulations to check the

extent of the potations. It was provided that the festivities should not be prolonged beyond a single day. The presence of strangers from neighbouring parishes was prohibited, except when a considerable payment was made to the kirk-session for the privilege of receiving them. When marriage feasts were furnished by publicans, kirk-sessions ruled that the *lawin* should not exceed a certain amount. A "lawin" of six shillings of Scottish money was commonly allowed.

When the bride was led into her future house, she paused on the threshold, and a cake of shortbread was broken on her head. The fragments were gathered up and distributed among the young people as *dreaming bread*. In some districts of the Highlands the newly-married couple were sent to sleep in a barn or out-house, while the neighbours made merry in their dwelling. The pastime of *winning the broose* was common at marriages in the southern counties. After the marriage, the men of the bride's party rode or ran to the bride's former dwelling, and the first who entered it was held to have won the *broose*. It was a nominal honour, for a basin of soup constituted the prize. In allusion to this practice an anecdote may be related of the Rev. William Porteous, the eccentric minister of Kilbucho, who, at the close of his marriage service, and almost as a part of it, used to exclaim, "Noo, lads, tak'

the gait, and let's see wha amang you will win the broose!"

In Border villages and certain towns of Ayrshire, those who had been present at the bridal assembled next morning to *creel the bridegroom*. The process consisted in placing upon his back a *creel*, or wicker basket, and then laying a long pole with a broom affixed over his left shoulder. Thus equipped, he was forced to run a race, while the bride was expected to follow, to disengage him of his burden. The alacrity with which she proceeded in her chase was supposed to indicate her satisfaction with the marriage. In Argyllshire the bride and bridegroom made daily processions, preceded by a piper. They visited those families who had contributed to their bridal festivities. These processions closed on the eve of the *kirking* day, after which the couple settled down to the ordinary concerns of housekeeping.

In Haddingtonshire, a burlesque serenade, termed Kirrywery, was enacted at the doors and windows of persons who, for a second time, had entered into matrimonial bonds. The serenade was conducted by youths, who made a sort of mock music with kettles, pots and other culinary utensils, accompanying the din with boisterous shouting.

Pay weddings are still common in the upper ward of Lanarkshire, chiefly among the mining population. Every marriage is celebrated on Friday, and is fol-

lowed by a tavern dinner, to which the neighbours contribute. The festivities are continued the whole of Saturday, which is styled the *backing up day*.

In the burgh of Rutherglen, Lanarkshire, till within the last twenty years, persons were married without proclamation of banns, by a peculiar arrangement on the part of the authorities. A friend of the parties was sent to the procurator-fiscal, to lodge information that they had been married without legal banns. The fiscal summoned the delinquents before the sheriff, who, on their admitting the charge, imposed a fine of five shillings. The fiscal took the penalty, and handed to the parties a printed form, duly filled up, which, by discharging the fine, certified the marriage. Rutherglen, or "*Ruglen*," marriages have passed into a proverb.

DOWERIES IN SCOTLAND.

The Highlanders give dowers according to their means—cattle, provisions, farm-stocking, &c.; and where the parents are unable to provide sufficiently,

it is customary in Scotland for a newly-married couple to "thig," or collect grain, &c., from their neighbours, by which means they procure as much as will serve for the first year, and often more. The portion of a bride is called a tocher. The wedding feasts are scenes of great mirth and hospitality. It is often the case that they are "siller bridals,"—otherwise, those in which the parties are paid for the entertainment, which is sometimes resorted to as a means of raising a few pounds to begin the world with; but the feasts are generally free, and consist of an abundance of everything.

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN SCOTLAND, PRIOR TO 1750.

The bride's favours were all sewn on her gown, from top to bottom, and round the neck and sleeves. The moment the ceremony was performed, the whole company ran to her and pulled off her favours; in an instant she was stripped of all of them. The next ceremony was the garter, which the bridegroom's man attempted to pull from her leg, but she dropt it through her petticoat on the floor. This was a white and silver ribbon, which was cut in small morsels and distributed among the guests, every one receiving a piece. The bride's mother then came in with a basket of favours belonging to the bridegroom; those of the bride's were the same, with the liveries of

their families—her's pink and white, his blue and gold colour. All the company dined and supped together, and had a ball in the evening.

OLD HIGHLAND WEDDING CUSTOMS.

When a young couple are married, for the first night the company keep possession of the dwelling-house or cottage, and send the bride and bridegroom to a barn or out-house, giving them straw, heath, or fern for a bed, with blankets for their covering, and then they make merry, and dance to the piper all the night long.

Soon after the wedding-day, the new-married woman sets herself about spinning her winding-sheet, and a husband that would sell or pawn it is esteemed among all men one of the most profligate.

At a young Highlander's first setting up for himself, if he be of any consideration, he goes about among his near friends and relations, and from one he begs a cow, from another a sheep; a third gives him seed to sow his land, and so on, till he has procured for himself a tolerable stock for a beginner. This they call *thigging*.