Mrs Alfred Copeland
with kind regards
from John Evans.

POSY-RINGS

A FRIDAY EVENING DISCOURSE

AT THE

Royal Institution of Great Britain

MARCH 25, 1892

BY

JOHN EVANS

D.C.L., LL.D., Sc.D., P.S.A., Treas. R.S., &c.

CORRESPONDANT DE L'INSTITUT DE FRANCE

LONDON

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AND NEW YORK: 15 EAST 16th STREET

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 PRICE SIXPENCE

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PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
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Posy-Rings.

I HAVE chosen for my subject this evening 'Posy-Rings,' not as being one of scientific importance, but as one involving no inconsiderable amount of human interest. We all, no doubt, have some proper conception as to what is meant by a ring, but probably the impression conveyed to the minds of many of you by the word posy will bear to be rendered more distinct.

In the early editions of Johnson's Dictionary a posy is defined to be 'a bunch of flowers,' but the word is stated to be of unknown derivation. Brand, in his *Popular Antiquities*, says that nosegays are called 'posies' by the vulgar in the North of England. We in the South, without being especially 'vulgar,' make use of the term in this sense; and among our poets, from the days of Kit Marlow and Sir Walter Raleigh onwards, 'posies' is the established rhyme to 'roses.'

Posy is, however, merely an abbreviated form of poesy, and Sullivan[1] is probably right in saying that it originally meant verses presented with a nosegay or bunch of flowers, and that hence the term came to be applied to the flowers themselves. Wedgwood thinks that there was an enigmatical significance in the flowers themselves, and that they, when together in a nosegay, constituted a poesy, couched according to the modern phrase in the 'language of flowers.' Spenser speaks of 'bridegroom's posies,' and an early author has shown the near affinity betwixt marriage and hanging, as in each ceremony the victim provides a great nosegay, and shakes hands with everyone he meets, as if he were preparing for a condemned man's voyage.

Swift makes use of the term in the nosegay sense where he says that we make a difference between suffering thistles to grow among us, and wearing them for posies. The best definition of the word seems to be Richardson's: 'A brief poetical sentiment;

[1] *Dictionary of Derivations.*

hence any brief sentiment, motto, or legend, especially one inscribed on a ring.'

Our ancestors seem to have been particularly fond of these short, rhyming mottoes, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Camden, in his *Remaines concerning Britaine*, has chapters on Allusions and Impreses; and a small volume was published in 1674 (since reprinted for the Sette of Odd Volumes by Mr. James Roberts Brown), bearing the title of *Love's Garland, or Posies for Rings, Hand-kerchers, and Gloves; and such pretty Tokens that Lovers send their Loves.* Among these are posies sent with bracelets, girdles, and scarves, and one that was sent 'pinned to the Orange tawny top of a very fair pair of Gloves, of six pence.'

Another set of objects which in early days constituted a favourite vehicle for 'occasional verses' or posies were the sets of wooden trenchers,[1] plain on one face and decorated on the other, which seem to have been used for light refreshments. It is with regard to these that Puttenham, in his *Art of English Poesie*, published in 1589, mentions the little epigrams which we call 'poesies, and do paint them now-a-dayes upon the back sides of our trenchers of wood, or use them as devices in rings and armes.'

In Webster's *Northward Ho!* Doll, in addressing her 'City Poet,' Bellamont, says, 'I'll have you make twelve posies for a dozen of cheese-trenchers.' There are also trenchers mentioned, 'upon every one a month—January, February, March, April'—'aye, and their posies under 'em.' These may remind us of the sets of old Delft plates, each with a month and a motto upon them, of which modern reproductions are now made. In my own collection is a set of fruit-trenchers given in 1625 as a wedding-present to Roger and Mary Simpson, half of them bearing the name of the one, and half the name of the other, with fruits and flowers painted on them, and a posy in the centre of each as well as around it. I cannot say much for their poetry. Take one with the device of pears upon it:—

> I much resemble man in fading state:
> Soone ripe, soone rotten, that's my utmost date.

Burton's appreciation of the wisdom displayed on trenchers is amusing. In his *Anatomy of Melancholy* he places them next to the ancient philosophers. 'Looke for more in Isocrates,

[1] See *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, 2nd series, x. 207, xii. 201.

Seneca, Plutarch, Epictetus, &c., and for defect, consult with cheese-trenchers and painted cloathes.'

I have mentioned Delft plates as descended from wooden trenchers. In England also are lineal descendants from trenchers with posies upon them to be seen in dessert-plates of old Lambeth ware. The complete set consists of six pieces, with the following inscriptions upon them :—

1. What is a merry man?
2. Let him do what he can
3. To entertain his guests
4. With wine and merry jests;
5. But if his wife do frown,
6. All merriment goes down.

But as Ephraim Jenkinson says in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, 'I ask pardon—I am straying from the question.'

And yet, before coming to my subject of posy-rings it will be desirable to say something with regard to rings in general, and more particularly as to those that bear inscriptions upon them.

The custom of wearing rings seems to have originated quite as much in their affording a convenient means of carrying a seal, which in ancient times was so important a warrant of authority and so necessary for purposes of identification, as in any idea of personal ornament. Among the Egyptians,[1] before the introduction of any coinage, gold usually circulated in the form of rings, and the Egyptian at his marriage placed one of these pieces of gold on his wife's finger, in token of his entrusting her with all his property. The early Christians, says Clemens, saw no harm in following this custom, and in our own marriage ceremony the man places the same plain gold ring on his bride's finger when he says, 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow.'

As to the ring-finger, 'an opinion there is which magnifies the fourth finger of the left hand; presuming therein a cordial relation, that a particular vessel, nerve, or artery is conferred thereto from the heart, and therefore that especially hath the honour to bear our Rings.' But that this was 'a Vulgar Error' has been shown by Sir Thomas Browne,[2] whose words I have been quoting; and 'Macrobius, discussing the point, hath alleged another reason, affirming that the gestation of Rings upon this hand and finger might rather be used for their convenience and preservation than

[1] Sharpe's *Egyptian Mythology*, p. x.; quoted by King, *Antique Gems*, i. p. 354.

[2] Book IV. chap. 4.

any cordial relation.' The thumb was too active, the forefinger too naked, 'the middle and little finger were rejected as extreams,' being either too big or too little; and of all they chose out the fourth, as being the least used of any, and as being guarded on either side. Can anything be more prosaic? Let us still believe that the nerves proceed from the heart, and not from the brain, that the heart is the seat of consciousness, and that the ring-finger is (as Aulus Gellius asserts) in the most direct communication with it!

It is true that at the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a custom of wearing the wedding-ring upon the thumb. In the *British Apollo*[1]—the *Notes and Queries* of the days of Queen Anne—is an inquiry 'from whence the Custom of our wearing the Wedding-ring upon our Thumb, since when we are married it is put upon our fourth Finger?' To which the editors in their wisdom reply that they 'take it to be nothing else but a corruption of that Custom of wearing the Ring upon the fourth Finger.' So early as the days of Elizabeth[2] portraits show ladies wearing their wedding-rings on their thumbs, and Southerne, at a later date, in his *Maid's Last Prayer*, makes one of his characters say, 'Marry him I must, and wear my wedding-ring upon my thumb, too, that I'm resolved.'

In the over-pious days of the Commonwealth[3]

> Others were for abolishing
> That tool of matrimony, a ring,
> With which the unsanctified bridegroom
> Is married only to a thumb.

In Italy there have been instances of ladies who have been 'very much married,' having had, not only a ring on the proper finger of the left hand, but several others placed on different fingers of both hands.

Generally speaking, the Romans, whether men or women, wore their rings in olden times on their fourth fingers only; but afterwards, as Pliny[4] says, 'they began to honour the forefinger with a ring, according to the manner which we see in the images of the gods, and in process of time they took pleasure to weare them upon the least finger of all. Now a daies, except the middle fingers, all the rest must be sped and charged with rings, yea, and every joint by themselves.' In Gaul and Britain, however, rings, it is said, were used on the middle finger.

[1] Vol. i. p. 226.
[2] Jones, *Finger-ring Lore*, p. 289.
[3] *Hudibras*, Pt. III. canto 2, v. 303.
[4] *Nat. Hist.* xxiii. c. 1.

In Pliny's time, 'the wedding-ring which the bridegroom sendeth as a token of espousals to his bride' was of iron simply, without any stone set in it; but if you ask me to give particulars as to the wedding-rings of the ancient Greeks and Romans, I must, with the accustomed candour of an antiquary, confess my inability to do so. I can only say, that the giving and receiving of rings was not confined to those who stood or were about to stand to each other in the relation of husband and wife.

Rings, however, having upon them inscriptions both in Greek and Latin are not of uncommon occurrence, and exhibit some analogy with our own posy-rings. Many of these seem to belong to Christian times, and bear the name of the recipient, with such a word as 'ΖΗΣΑΙΣ' ('mayest thou live'), or 'VIVAS IN DEO,' 'SPES IN DEO.' In Mr. Franks's collection is a beautiful Roman gold ring with the inscription, 'ACCIPE DVLCIS MVLTIS ANNIS' ('Accept this, dear, for many a year'). The ring has a prolongation in the shape of a key upon it, as if the recipient had been endowed with all the worldly goods of the donor. I have a seventh-century gold ring, found in Sicily, with the text, 'GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO ET IN TERRA PAX,' engraved around it on the outside. Others of the same character are known.

The inscriptions which occasionally are to be seen on Anglo-Saxon rings relate, as a rule, to ownership. That of Aethelswith, Queen of Mercia, has her name engraved inside. On a silver ring in my own collection is the inscription, 'SIGERIE HEÐ ME A GEWIRCAN' ('Sigerie commanded me to be wrought').

We may now skip a considerable period, and come down to Plantagenet times, when the fashion of inscribing mottoes in rings was very prevalent, and the foundation was laid for what some two or three centuries later became the almost universal custom, so far, at all events, as betrothal- and wedding-rings are concerned.

These mottoes are, as a rule, in Norman French, and it will be well to give examples of them, such as are to be seen in rings of the fourteenth, and more frequently the fifteenth, century. One of the prettiest occurs also on brooches—'JE SUI ICI EN LIEU D'AMI'; and another, which also is found both on rings and on brooches, is 'PENSEET DELI PARKI SUICI.' Other rings, which also appear to have been gifts, bear 'AMIE AMET'; 'JE SUI DUN D'AMI'; 'PRENEZ EN BONNE FOY'; 'A NUL AUTRE.' They are sometimes mentioned in early wills. That of John Bury, of Bury, 1463, devises some 'rynges of sylvir therein wreten, *Grace me governe.*' The motto

sometimes refers to the device on the ring. I have one bearing on the bezel a beautifully-executed figure of St. George, and inside the words, 'nul si bien.' Rings seem often to have been given as new-year's gifts, and the inscription 'en bon an' occurs on them in various forms.

Rarely the motto is in English, as 'for ever,' and

Most in mynd and yn myn herrt
Lothest from you ferto departt.[1]

Now and again we have it in Latin, such as 'AMOR VINCIT OMNIA,' which, it will be remembered, was the device on the brooch of Chaucer's Prioresse[2] in the *Canterbury Tales*:—

Full fetise was her cloke, as I was ware;
Of smale corall about her arm she bare
A pair of bedis gaudid alle with grene,
And theron hong a broch of gold full shene,
On whiche there was first writ a crownid A
And after AMOR VINCIT OMNIA.

The practice of inscribing mottoes or posies on brooches has survived in Scotland until comparatively modern times, and silver brooches or buckles in the shape of a heart with a crown above it are of frequent occurrence. They are known as 'Luckenbooth brooches,' from their having been sold in the Luckenbooths around St. Giles's Church at Edinburgh, and were mostly used as love-tokens and betrothal gifts; but it is not suggested that the recipients 'wore their hearts upon their sleeves for daws to peck at.' I have in my collection examples with

My hart and I
vntill I dy.

Of earthly Joys
thow art my Choise.

While life is myne
My heart is thyne.

These posies are precisely such as occur on rings in England; but I must again postpone my proper subject to say a few words with regard to another class of rings which, though bearing inscriptions upon them, have nothing to do with love, unless such a passion is constantly entertained between a successful barrister and those who have been successful before him—I mean the rings known as Serjeants' rings.

[1] *Arch. Jour.* xx. 195.

[2] *Prologue*, l. 157.

In the fifteenth century, Judge Fortescue says that on the appointment of serjeants-at-law they shall give *gold* according to ancient custom, and that the rings that he himself gave away cost him 50*l.*, no inconsiderable sum in those days. About 1577[1] Sir Nicholas Bacon, the Lord-Keeper of the Great Seal, was thus addressed by the most 'ancyent' of seven serjeants then sworn in: 'Yf it please yowe my lord keeper, by the ancyent order in this realme, yt hath been accustomed that the newe sergeants at ther creation, should give to the king or quenes heighnes of this realm, for the time being, a ring of gold in token of their duetyes and thancks to ther majesty. And also hath byn the olde custome that the same serjeaunts should humbly desire the lord chauncelor of this realme, or the lord keeper of the great seale of England for the tyme beinge to receyve that ringe of them, and to deliver it to his or her majestie; therefore I and my brethren here most humblye beseeche your good lordshipp to take this ring and to deliver the same accordinglie.'

This practice of giving rings to the Crown continued until the office of serjeant-at-law was abolished by the Judicature Act of 1873, and I believe that at Windsor candlesticks exist formed of such rings placed one above the other.

It was not, however, to the sovereign alone that rings had to be presented: each serjeant was bound to give a ring also to each of his brother-serjeants. These were of lighter weight than the royal ring, and sometimes so small that they could hardly be worn. It is uncertain at what date mottoes were first placed upon the rings, but it has been stated that it was not until 1577 or 1578, when 'LEX REGIS PRÆSIDIVM' was the inscription. This statement is, however, erroneous, as it is on record that in 1485 Sir John Fineux[2] used the inscription, '*Sucæ quisque fortunæ faber.* In my own collection is a serjeant's ring, not of later date than the time of Henry VIII., reading 'VIVAT REX ET LEX.' In character the serjeants' rings differ from the ordinary posy-rings, as they consist of a flat band of gold with a moulding at top and bottom, and the inscription is placed on the outer surface of the ring, and not on the inner. The mottoes, as a rule, are in Latin, and God, the king, or the law, or one or more of the words Deus, Rex, and Lex nearly always enters into their composition. They are rarely in English, but 'FERE GOD ONLI' is on a ring in my collection.

It will, however, be thought that it is high time to come to those posy-rings that form the immediate 'theme of my dis-

[1] Herbert's *Inns of Court*, p. 371. [2] *Archæologia Cantiana*, v. 21.

course.' Though some few have decorative patterns on the outside, they are, in the great majority of cases, plain rings, almost semicircular in section, and such as are now well-known under the name of wedding-rings. They are of various weights, and though commonly of gold, are sometimes of silver, and even of brass. The diameter and the weight of the gold rings were no doubt regulated by two factors—the dimensions of the finger of the recipient, and the capacity of the purse of the donor.

Before considering the posies on the rings in some little detail, it will be well to cite a few of the passages in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors relating to posies, many of which will already be well known to readers of *Notes and Queries*. In the 'Merchant of Venice' we find Gratiano and Nerissa quarrelling

> About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring
> That she did give me, whose poesy was
> For all the world like cutler's poetry
> Upon a knife, *Love me and leave me not.*

By way of parenthesis I may mention two knives in my collection, on the brass handle of one of which is engraved 'tot por bien prenez en gre ce' ('All for good; take this in good part'). On the handle of the other, which is a clasp-knife, is cast in relief—

> he that doth a good knife lack
> by me i am steel unto the back.

Some wedding-knives with posies on them are in the British Museum. But to return to Shakespeare. When in 'Hamlet' Prologue enters and recites—

> For us, and for our tragedy
> Here stooping to your clemency,
> We beg your hearing patiently,

Hamlet seems justified in asking, 'Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?'

In Hall's *Chronicle*, written early in the sixteenth century, the word posy occurs as a synonym with motto, 'The tente was replenyshed, and decked with this posie: *After busy labor cometh victorious rest.*' And Nicholas Udall, poor Thomas Tusser's harsh master at Eton, 'where fifty-three stripes given to me at once I had,' in his commentary on St. Luke says: 'There was also a superscription or *poisee* written on the toppe of the crosse—This is the King of the Jewes.' Udall also uses the word more than once in his translation of the *Apothegmes of Erasmus*, and mentions a title being 'set up as a *poysee* or a

woorde of good lucke, that no misadventure might light on the house' that bore it.

Posies on wedding-rings seem in early times to have been also called 'reasons,' and to have been chosen by the ladies. In the days of Henry VI. three daughters of Sir Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, were married:—

1. Margaret, to Sir John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. 'Hir reason was, "*Till Deithe Depart.*"'

2. Alianour, to Edmund, Duke of Somerset. 'Hir reason was, "*Never newe.*"'

3. Elizabeth, to Lord Latymer. 'Hir reason was, "*Till my lives ende.*"'

It appears to have been Lady Cathcart who, on marrying her fourth husband, Hugh Macguire, in 1713, had the well-known lines—

If I survive
I will have five,

engraved in her wedding-ring. At a somewhat later date, John Thomas, Bishop of Lincoln, is credited with much the same posy on marrying his fourth wife:—

If I survive
I'll make them five.

Another bishop, Cokes, in far better taste, had a hand, a heart, a mitre, and a Death's-head engraved on his wedding-ring, and inside, the posy:—

These three I give to thee
Till the fourth set me free.

As might have been expected, Herrick in his *Hesperides* makes more than one mention of posy-rings:—

What posies for our wedding-rings,
What gloves we'll give, and ribbonings!

Even George Herbert brings in the subject:—

Indeed, at first Man was a treasure,
A box of jewels, shop of rarities,
A ring, whose posy was, 'My pleasure,'
He was a garden in a Paradise.

His short poem, 'The Posy,' is so neat, pious, and altogether Herbert-like, that it is worth citing in full:—

Let wits contest,
And with their words and posies windows fill;
Less than the least
Of all thy mercies is my posy still.

This on my ring,
This by my picture, in my book, I write;
Whether I sing,
Or say, or dictate, this is my delight.

Invention rest;
Comparisons go play; wit use thy will:
Less than the least
Of all God's mercies is my posy still.

In the *Diary of John Manningham*, under November, 1602, are given 'Posies for a jet ring lined with sylver':—

'One, two,' soe written as you may begin with either word.

'This one ring is two,' or both sylver and jet make but one ring: the body and soule one man; twoe frends one mynde.

'*Candida mens est*,' the sylver, resembling the soule, being the inner part.

'*Bell' ame bell' amy*,' a fayre soule is a fayre frend, &c.

'Yet fayre within.'

'The firmer the better,' the sylver the stronger and the better.

There seems in some cases, and probably in most, to have been a considerable amount of pains bestowed on the choice of a posy. Among the Nicholas Correspondence is a letter from Matthew Nicholas, apparently to Edward Nicholas, afterwards Secretary to Charles I., dated from Winterborne, May 17, 1622, the recipient being apparently a person about to marry, in which the following passage occurs:—

'That you may not suspect my desire to helpe you in your choyce of a posie I will sende you such as haue come into my minde by often meditating thereon, though I am pleased with none of them: Unum si nôris ambos noueris (Terence). Deus nobis hæc otia fecit (Vergil). Unus deus, deus unionis; Una anima in duobus corporibus. I write not these because I have an opinion of them, as that you should make your choyce out of them; only to give you assurance that I have not neglected your request, though unable to satisfy your desire.'

Tusser, in his *Points of Huswifery*, gives a series of 'Husbandly Posies for the hall, the parlour, the guests' chamber, and thine

own bedchamber'; but as these are not for rings, I will cite but one, which is among those for the hall:—

> The world doth think the wealthy man is he that least shall need,
> But true it is, the godly man is he that best shall speed.

To have great excellences and great faults, *magnæ virtutes nec minorâ vitia*, says Sir Thomas Browne, is the posy of the best natures; and perhaps it would be a great fault to go on adding quotations with regard to posies. Enough has been said to show that from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century the term was 'familiar in their mouths as household words.'

The rings themselves seem from the nature of their posies to fall into several classes, though in some instances it is difficult or impossible to assign a cause for the mottoes upon them. The greater number, however may be regarded as—

1. Betrothal-rings and love-tokens.
2. Wedding-rings.
3. Rings given on St. Valentine's Day.
4. Memorial or funeral rings.

There is, of course, some difficulty in settling the question whether a ring is a betrothal-ring—what nowadays would be called an 'engagement-ring'—or a real wedding-ring; and this difficulty is not lessened by the probability that in many cases it may have been a ring 'contrived a double debt to pay'—when plighting troth, and on the wedding-day. On some rings, however, the posies seem to imply that they were adopted at an early stage in the courtship. Some posies of this class I will cite, and in doing so, as with those in the other categories which will follow, I shall not confine myself to my own collection, but shall take such as may seem worth mentioning in other collections, as those of the late Lord Londesborough and Mr. Waterton, Sir Henry Peek, Mr. Robert Day, Mr. Franks, and others.

To begin with simple love-tokens, we find such posies as these:—

A token of my love.

A token of goodwill.

A token sent
with true intent.

As true to love
as turtle-dove.

Love is my token.

In hart love me.

I give it thee,
my love to be.

I may here allude to the charge brought against Lysander in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' as to 'witching the bosom' of the daughter of Egeus :—

> Thou hast given her rhimes,
> And interchanged love-tokens with my child;
> Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,
> With feigning voice, verses of feigning love.
> And stol'n the impression of her fantasie
> With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gawds, conceits.

In some cases a delicate doubt seems to dwell in the breast of the admirer, which is reflected in the posy. If the motto did not remind one of the saying attributed to an English statesman, 'Je wouldrais si je couldrais,' what could be prettier than the 'GE VOULDROY' of a lover who probably lived some 400 years ago? How neatly is the sentiment put in

Yf fortune will, I shall.

or, again, in

My wille were.

The lover to whom small favours were great mercies, or who desired that this should be thought of him, gave a ring with

lite to requite;

or

Remember the ♡ *that is in payne;*

or

I desier to desarve.

Of course, the heart, being the principal organ affected, plays a very considerable part in such posies.

My harte is your.

My ♡ *you have,*
and yours I crave.

My heart and I
until I die.

My ♡ *lives where it loves.*

You never kneu
a ♡ *more treu.*

Sometimes the lover shows a fair amount of confidence in his future fate. Though deep in love, the giver of a ring with

If this, then me,

showed no small amount of reasoning power. But a more heartless philosopher gave the ring with '*If not, how then?*' inscribed in it. Not unfrequently the posy bears some direct reference to the actual ring, as it does in, at all events, the first of these two cases.

Neither wayghte, nor fashion, but fortune.

Not the valew, but my love.

Not this, but me.

My giving this
begins my bliss.

Love ever, not the guift, but the giver.

If love you bear, for me this wear.

The gift is small, the love is all.

This and the giver are thine for ever.

When ye loke on thys
Thyncke on him who gave ye thys.

This accepted, my wish affected,

afford instances of this kind; but the prettiest of all the allusions to the ring is in the posy:—

Like this, my love
shall endless prove.

This would seem to have been adopted by one who had read the *Hesperides* of Herrick,[1] one of whose poems I am tempted to quote:—

Julia, I bring to thee this ring,
Made for thy finger fit,
To shew by this that our love is,
Or should be, like to it.

Close though it be, the joint is free;
So when love's yoke is on
It must not gall or fret at all
With hard oppression;

[1] *Amatory Odes*, lxxxvi.

But it must play still either way,
And be too such a yoke
As not too wide to overslide,
Or be so strait to choke.

So we who bear this beam must rear
Ourselves to such a height
As that the stay of either may
Create the burthen light.

And as this round is nowhere found
To flow or else to sever,
So let our love as endless prove,
And pure as gold for ever.

But to return to the betrothal-rings themselves, and the posies upon them. Some, besides those that I have already cited, give expression to earnest hopes, devoted affection, judicious flattery, and, occasionally, injudicious confidence:—

I LYVE IN HOPE.

I long to be made one with thee.

Twas God to thee directed me.

Love as I, or else I dye.

NEVER TO CHANGE.

Noe star to mee soe bright as thee.

Many are the starrs I see, yet in my eye no starr like thee.

This latter has stars on the outside.

Love me ever, or love me never.

Thy vertue is thy honor.

Conceave consent, confirme content.

A very early posy is

Quant Dieu plera uner nous sera,

of which the feeling seems to us better than the grammar.

The following are not so much in accordance with the views of the present day:—

I fancy none but thee alone.

I am your lott, refuse me not.

Love merits all things.

Yeld to Reson.

The ring with the next posy seems to have been given to a 'young Jamie' who 'went to sea.' Let us hope that the 'promise past did ever last':—

On thy return from See
United wee will bee.

A few relate to lovers' quarrels. Mr. Franks has a ring with a black-letter inscription:—

I wis, my letul prate fo,
Ye ar to blame, so mot I go.

Other posies are defiant:—

Blind Cupid shall me never enthrall.

Love may make sadd, shall never make me madd.

In Mr. Franks's collection are also three rings, one within another, each inscribed with one of these lines:—

+ By treuth ye shall trye me.
+ By time ye shall spye me.
+ So find, so set by me.

Many of these betrothal and lovers' rings are formed so as to represent two hands holding a heart, much like the rings still surviving at Claddagh, on the coast of Galway. These are a more modern form of what were originally gimmal or twin rings which were made of two rings linked together, on each of which was a hand that, when the rings were brought together to form a single ring, clasped the other. Rings of this character made in three pieces are still common in the island of Madeira, where they are termed 'mãos dadas' rings. I have a Roman ring formed of three, united by two very small rings, one set with a ruby and one with an emerald, representing the man and woman respectively. In another form the two rings fold together, and have the appearance of being but one, though set with two stones. The usual motto is 'Quod Deus conjunxit,' on one half, and 'Homo non separet' on the other. Both Martin Luther's reputed marriage-ring and that of Sir Thomas Gresham are of this form, the legend in the former being in German. The gimmal ring mentioned by Herrick seems to have been jointed in three pieces:—

Thou sent'st to me a true love-knot, but I
Return'd a ring of jimmals, to imply
Thy love had one knot, mine a triple tye.

The word gimmal is probably derived from 'gemelli,' twins; but

hinges in old times were constantly called 'gimmows,' or 'gimmals,' from the two parts being so exactly alike. A 'gimmal' ring may, therefore, be a 'hinged' ring.

It is, however, time to leave posies in the optative mood, and to turn to those in the possessive, or actual wedding-rings. These are, of course, more common, as many of the betrothal-rings seem to have borne posies which were equally appropriate after the rings had been used in the marriage ceremony. A large proportion of the posies are of a religious character; some give hints as to the difficulties that came across the course of true love; some breathe affection in truly poetical language, while others give a bald statement of facts, or express a platitude in the most prosaic terms.

Who cares to learn from a ring that 'JAMES AND AMELIA LOVE,' or to be informed that '*Content is a treasure*,' that it is '*the truest riches*,' or '*supplies all wants*'? though, of course, if wants are not supplied, Discontent is not unlikely to come in. The statement, 'I AM YOURES,' may have been pleasing at the time, but seems devoid of general public interest. 'I LYKE MY CHOYS,' and '*I wishe no chainge*,' were no doubt true at the time. Circumstances may have justified the use of posies in assuring terms such as '*You have my hart*,' '*All I refuse and thee I chuse*,' and '*I bid adue to all but you*.'

'*Keepe Promiss*,' '*Let Patience be thy pennance*,' and '*Onlie honestie*,' may each have had their personal application.

Other posies seem to bear an even closer relation to the circumstances of the courtship:—

Thoe many thought us two to sever,
Yet God hath joyned us two together.

and

Tho the world hath strived to part,
Yet God hath joyned us hand and heart,

have the elements of a novel in themselves.

Who can tell what was the history or the mystery attaching to the posy that someone wore for life within her wedding-ring: '*Sin no more—lest sin consume thee and thy store*.' One can draw a mental picture of the lady with the posy, '*I am blacke but comely*,' but the ring with '*Feare God and lye Abed till Noone*,' seems hardly complimentary.

Occasionally, though rarely, the posies are quotations from Holy Writ; the form, 'THEM WHICH GOD COPLETH LET NO MAN PUT THEM ASONDAR,' comes from some earlier translation than the

Authorised Version. '*My beloved is mine, and I am his*' is an accurate and appropriate quotation from the Song of Solomon. '*Let israell hope in the Lord*' is an equally accurate quotation from the Psalms, but its applicability is not so striking. Direct appeals to the Deity are extremely common. '*God above*' is an inevitable rhyme to '*our love*,' and He is prayed not only to '*unite*' and '*joyne*' our love, but to '*continue*' and '*increase*' it. '*Alone*' is a favourite rhyme to '*one*,' as may be seen in—

God alone made us two one.

God alone of two makes one.

God alone my love hath shown;

but

When we this thing done,
God made us both as one,

gives another rhyme. Some of these religious posies are very neat and pretty.

God be a guide to thee, my Bride.

God's gift thou art, my derest heart.

God's blessing be on thee and me.

God unite our ♡s aright.

God hath sent my harts content.

God bles for ever us two together,

may be taken as samples, though the sentiment of the last of these mottoes is superior to its poetry.

Another set of posies of this class is more fatalistic in character, and the mottoes range from a mere suggestion that the parties united in matrimony were made for each other, to a resigned acceptance of her lot by the bride. Let me take what may be termed a graduated selection:—

God for me apointed thee.

God did foresee we should agree.

God decreed, and we agreed.

God did decree that it should be.

God's intent none can prevent.

Gods secret purpose and decree
is manifest in chusing thee.

God's will is done, and I have mine,
My hearts at rest in having thine;

and, finally :—

As God hath apointed, I am contented.

The fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, takes a full share in the posies :—

FEARE GOD EVER.

Feare God only.

Feare God and love thy choise.

Feare God, love the giver.

Fear the Lord and rest content,
so shall we live and not repent.

All that I desire of thee
is to fear God and love me.

Whoe feares the Lord are blest wee see;
Such thou and I God grant may bee.

The name of the Saviour is also frequently invoked on these religious rings. Such posies as these are common :—

Christ and thee my comfort be.

Christ and thee are all to me.

Christ for me hath chosen thee.

In Christ alone we two are one.

Joyned in one by Christ alone.

In God above and Christ his sonne
we two are joyned both in one.

But far superior to any of these is the posy :—

Remember him who dyed for thee,
And after him, remember me.

Heaven is more rarely invoked :—

Our contract was heaven's act.

Heaven us bless with happiness

afford instances of its occurrence. Trust and confidence in God are very frequently inculcated or claimed. Varieties of

In God is all my trust

are often seen; and this inscription, possibly with an *arrière pensée* as to the danger of fire, is engraved on a warming-pan of Elizabethan date.

Virtue is often praised in general terms:—

Vertue gaineth glory.

Vertue passeth riches.

Let vertue rest within thy breast.

Virtue in thee a crown to me.

Let virtue still direct thy will.

Where vertue lyes love never dies.

For Vertue's sake my wife I take.

A vertuous wife preserveth life

will suffice as examples. Of special virtues, constancy is the most frequently lauded. '*Constancy is a noble vertue*,' says one of the posies, and others enlarge upon the topic:—

CONTINEW CONSTANT.

In constancy lets live and die.

If in thy love thou constant bee,
My heart shall never part from thee.

Constant you, for I am true.

As I expect, so let me find
a faithfull ♡ *& constant mind.*

Wit, wealth and beauty, all do well,
But constant love doth far excell.

This last posy occurs on a wedding-knife.

The idea of constancy is often associated with that of faithfulness until death, of which the shortest exposition is

KEPE FAYTH TELL DETHE.

and

Rather death than false of faith.

More usual formulas are some of these:—

Thee love will I untill I die.

True in hart till death us depart.

True lovers' hartes death only partes.

Only Death shall separate love.

Whilst life is mine my love is thine.

Death only parts united harts.

Let death lead love to rest.

Such liking in my choice I have,
Nothing shall part us but the grave.

Since God hath thee for me create,
nothing but death shall seperate ;

and, finally :—

Ryches be unstable and beuty will dekay,
But faithful love will ever last till death dryve it away.

The knitting of the knot and the union of hearts also afford constant themes for posies, often of a religious turn, sometimes quaint :—

As God saw fitt, our knott is knit.

Knit in one by Christ alone.

Knotts of love are knitt above.

Where hearts agree there love will be.

Two ⚯ *soe tide let none devide.*

Two Bodys & on hart.

In unity let's live and die.

As love hath joyned our harts together,
so none but death our harts shall sever.

On some rings we find an expression of a feeling of triumph in success, or of thankfulness at having attained to a haven of repose :—

Long expected is now effected.

Now have I my desiar on earthe.

Happy in thee hath God made mee.

I do rejoyce in thee my choyce.

In thy brest my hart doth rest.

In thy sight is my delight.

I like, I love, I live content,
I made my chois not to repent.

The injunctions to love are naturally numerous :—

Love him in heart whose joy thou art.

As God hath joyned us two together,
Let us live in love and serve him ever.

Be kind to me, I will to thee.

Love is the cause, lett love continue.

Sometimes the posy is a simple expression of deep attachment :—

My worldely joye, all my trust,
Hert, thought, lyfe and lust.

My heart, my dear, to thee I give,
To be kept by thee whilst I live.

My eyes did find, my heart made choice
Of her who makes me now rejoice.

My heart is fixt, I cannot range,
I like my choice to well to change.

In thee I find content of mind.

The love is true that i. o. u.

The dearest of all that I hold dear.

Hearts content cannot repent.

Allusions to the Marriage Service are rare, but I have a ring bearing :—

LOVE, SERVE, AND OBEY.

Perhaps this motto may have been chosen by the husband, as may also have been that in Latin :—

MVLIER VIRO SVBIECTA ESTO.

On the other hand, there are rings with these posies :—

Deare wife, thy rod doth leade to God.

I kiss the rod from thee and God.

There are several posies referring more or less directly to the rings themselves besides those already mentioned—like '*As endless is my love as this*' :—

This hath alloy, my love is pure.

As gold is pure let love indure.

Content, indeed, doth gold exceed.

I am his that gave me this.

I will ever love the giver.

Win gold and wear it.

Divinely knitt by grace are wee;
Late two, now one, the pledge here see.

Love him who gave this ring of gold,
'Tis he must kiss thee when thou art old.

But it is time to come to an end of this dictionary of quotations. I will only add one or two which seem to prove that the present French custom of husband and wife addressing each other as 'mon ami' prevailed also in England:—

Your friend am I assuredly.

Yours loving frend till deth us end.

A friend to thee Ile ever be.

A true friend's gift.

It seems probable that a certain number of posy-rings with the more *banal* inscriptions were kept in stock by the goldsmiths of the day. The Rev. Giles Moore,[1] in his diary for May, 1673, records having bought in London for Ann Brett, for the price of 13*s.* 8*d.*, a gold ring, this being the posy: '*When this you see, remember mee.*' In most instances, however, the posy was selected for engraving. This was certainly the case with the ring already mentioned:—

If I survive
I'll make them five.

This part of the subject would be incomplete were no mention made of the English rings bearing posies in other languages than English. Not a few bear French inscriptions, but, as a rule, of an ordinary character:—

Espoir en Deeu.

J'aime mon chois.

Nos ♡♡ *unis en Dieu.*

De nos ♡♡ *le désir s'accomplit.*

The Latin posies seem to be more numerous and much better in quality:—

Amorem pro amore cupio.

Sis eadem in utraque fortuna.

In adversis etiam fida.

[1] *Sussex Arch. Coll.* i. 115.

Qui dedit se dedit.

Animam Deo cor sponsæ dedi.

One giver of a ring makes a Latin pun, being probably in good spirits at the marriage being arranged:—

Infra annum spero annulum.

(Within the circle of the year I hope another circle's near.)

One or two English rings bear Hebrew inscriptions. I have an example with the names of Simon and Sarah.

A certain proportion of the posy-rings now extant are of so small a size that they can hardly have been worn by grown-up persons. Although, so far as I am aware, there is no record of such a practice having existed, it is by no means improbable that such rings were given by men or boys to their youthful valentines. The custom of obtaining a valentine by drawing lots was in full vogue in the seventeenth century, as Poor Robin, in his Almanack for 1676 puts it, opposite February 14:—

Now Andrew, Anthony, and William,
For Valentines draw Prue, Kate, Jilian.

Pepys, in his Diary for April 26, 1667, records that the Duke of York being once Mrs. Stewart's valentine, 'did give her a jewell of about 800*l.*, and my Lord Mandeville, her valentine this year, a ring of about 300*l.*' In 1667 Pepys was valentine not only to Mercer, his maid, to whom he gave 'a guinny in gold for her valentine's gift,' but also, by agreement, to his wife, and he regretfully writes: 'This year I find it is likely to cost 4*l.* or 5*l.* in a ring for her, which she desires.'

In 1667 Mrs. Pierce's little girl was his valentine, and he was not sorry for it, as it eased him of something more that he must have given to others. 'But here,' he says, 'I do first observe the fashion of drawing of mottos as well as names. What mine was I have forgot, but my wife's was, "Most courteous and most fair."'

This collocation of presents and mottoes raises a presumption in favour of these small rings being valentine presents to little girls, which is confirmed by the character of the posies upon them:—

Tho little accept it.

Y for a kis take this.

I wishe it better.

Vertue rule you.

No cute to unkindnes.

Tho absent yet constant,

are not out of keeping with such childish presents.

There remains one other class of rings bearing posies or mottoes inscribed within them—the memorial rings, which in old times were frequently given away at funerals, as well as bequeathed by will. In the obituary of Richard Smith for the years 1672 and 1673 are several entries illustrative of the funeral custom. At Alderman John Smith's burial in Cripplegate Church there was a sermon by Dr. Prichard, and the chronicler adds: 'The posie of his rings, "*Ever Last.*"' When Samuel Crumbleholme, schoolmaster of Paul's School, was buried, rings were given whose posie was '*Redime tempus*'; and when Mr. John Looker, Clerk of the Company of Coopers, was buried, Smith records: 'No sermon, but rings engraven "*J. L., obit., Mar.* 28."'

In 1661, when Lady Batten and Mrs. Pepys attended the burial of a daughter of Sir John Lawson, they had rings for themselves and their husbands. In 1662, rings were given at the funerals of Sir Richard Stayner and Mr. Russell. The same was the case at some other funerals that Pepys attended; and at his own funeral, in 1703, no less than 123 mourning-rings were given away, some valued at 20*s.*, and others at 15*s.* and 10*s.* apiece.

Isaak Walton, in a codicil to his will in 1683, fixed both the value of his memorial rings and the legend they were to bear. The value was to be 13*s.* 4*d.*, and on those given to his family the words or mottoes were to be, '*Love my memory, I. W., obiit*'; and on one for the Bishop of Winchester, *A mite for a million*, and on those for other friends, '*A friend's farewell, I. W., obiit.*' In all he bequeathed about forty rings.

Speaker Lenthall directed by will that '*Oritur non moritur*' should be inscribed on fifty gold rings to be given away in his family at his death; and Sir Henry Wotton left, in 1637, to each of the Fellows of Eton College a ring with this motto: '*Amor unit omnia.*' The mourning-rings of later date than the seventeenth century usually give the name of the testator and the date of his death, and the practice of bequeathing a ring or money for the purchase of one has survived to the present day.

Memorial rings of various kings and queens of England are to be seen in most collections. The most interesting are those commemorating the death of Charles I., some of which are

so contrived as to hide his portrait within them from public view. The motto is often '*Sic transit gloria mundi*,' or '*Gloria Anglicæ emigravit.*' I have a silver heart-shaped box with a small medallion portrait of Charles inside, and the legends, inside and outside, '*I morne for monarchie*,' above an eye dropping tears; '*I live and dy in loyaltye*' above a heart pierced with two arrows; and '*Quis temperet a lacrymis, January* 30, 1648,' above another weeping eye.

Some widows on the death of their husbands converted their wedding-rings into mourning-rings. This was done by engraving outside the ring an elongated skeleton, the bones of which were brought into prominence by a background of black enamel. I have one the outer surface of which has been engraved with flowers and enamelled black and white, and which has this posy inside:—

I restles live yet hope to see
that day of Christ, and then see thee.
L. P. 1656.

Another class of rings have a human skull, or 'Death's-head,' enamelled on a flat bezel, and such mottoes as 'MEMENTO MORI,' '*Live to die*,' '*Breath paine, Death gaine*' upon them. The more common rings are of the same form as wedding-rings, but frequently have a 'Death's-head' engraved on them outside. The mottoes are generally of wide application:—

As I am, you must bee.

DEATH SY MYN ERITAG.

Prepare for death.

Prepare to follow R. J.

I am gone before.

Heaven is my happyness.

A few are in Latin, as:—

ERAM NON SVM.

Prudenter aspice finem.

Ora pro nobis.

Non hic.

A ring weighing half an ounce was evidently a bequest. It bears inside, 'REMEMBER YOUR FRIEND.' A more touching

posy is, '*My friend is dead, my joys are fled.*' But of all those commemorated on my rings, I should best have liked to know G. H., whose memorial is inscribed :—

G. H. was allwayes the same.

I have now, in a somewhat cursory and disjointed manner, brought the subject of posy-rings before my audience, and, however imperfectly I may have done so, I am sure that all will acknowledge that these rings throw light on some phases in the life of our ancestors which are of no small interest. But apart from this there is a personal feeling about the rings which, with hardly an exception, does not attach in the same degree to any other objects of antiquity.

On coins we may see the likenesses and trace the history of those of old; and in handling them we may speculate on the fate and character of those who have in past ages done so before us. But in each of these rings there are concentrated the hopes, the love, and the experience of two human beings who, it may be. have been all-in-all to each other for fifty years. Waller's 'Lines on a girdle' are equally applicable to these smaller circles :—

My Joy, my Grief, my Hope, my Love
Did all within this circle move.

It would, indeed, be hard to find such a concentrated epitome of hopes and fears, of joys and sorrows, of failure and success as, without personal knowledge of those who once wore them, may be found in a tray of posy-rings.

I must, however, conclude. As Sir Thomas Browne says, 'The *Quincunx* of Heaven runs low, and 'tis time to close the five Ports of Knowledge.' 'The Huntsmen are up in *America*, and they are already past their first sleep in *Persia*.' I will only add my best wishes for all those whose present posy is, '*If Fortune will, I shall*'; my sincere congratulations to those who can say: '*I like, I love, I live content, I made my choice not to repent*'; and my earnest hope that when the day comes to any of us for our friends to receive the last memorial rings, these may, like Isaak Walton's, be fittingly inscribed, '*Love my Memory.*'

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON