




THE  
WEDDING  
RING

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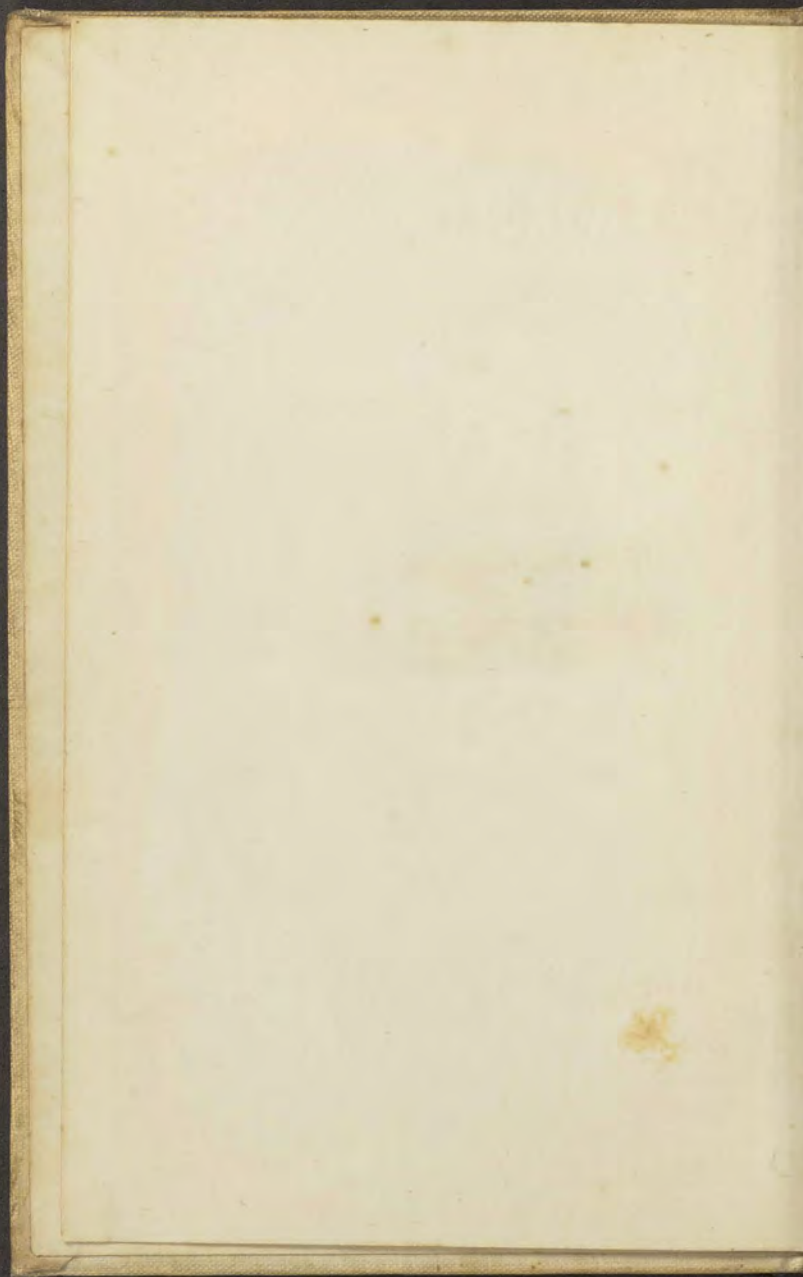
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THE  
WEDDING-RING:

*ITS HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND THE  
SUPERSTITIONS RESPECTING IT.*

BY

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- "The ring is on;  
The 'Wilt thou?' answered, and again  
The 'Wilt thou?' asked, till out of twain  
The sweet 'I will' has made ye one!"—TENNYSON.
- "And as this round is nowhere found  
To flaw or else to sever;  
So let our love as endless prove,  
And pure as gold for ever."—HERRICK.
- "Zerbino, take your wedding-ring,  
Of serious, sacred use—a thing  
That used or well or ill will bring  
To mortals joy or sorrow."—DIBDIN.

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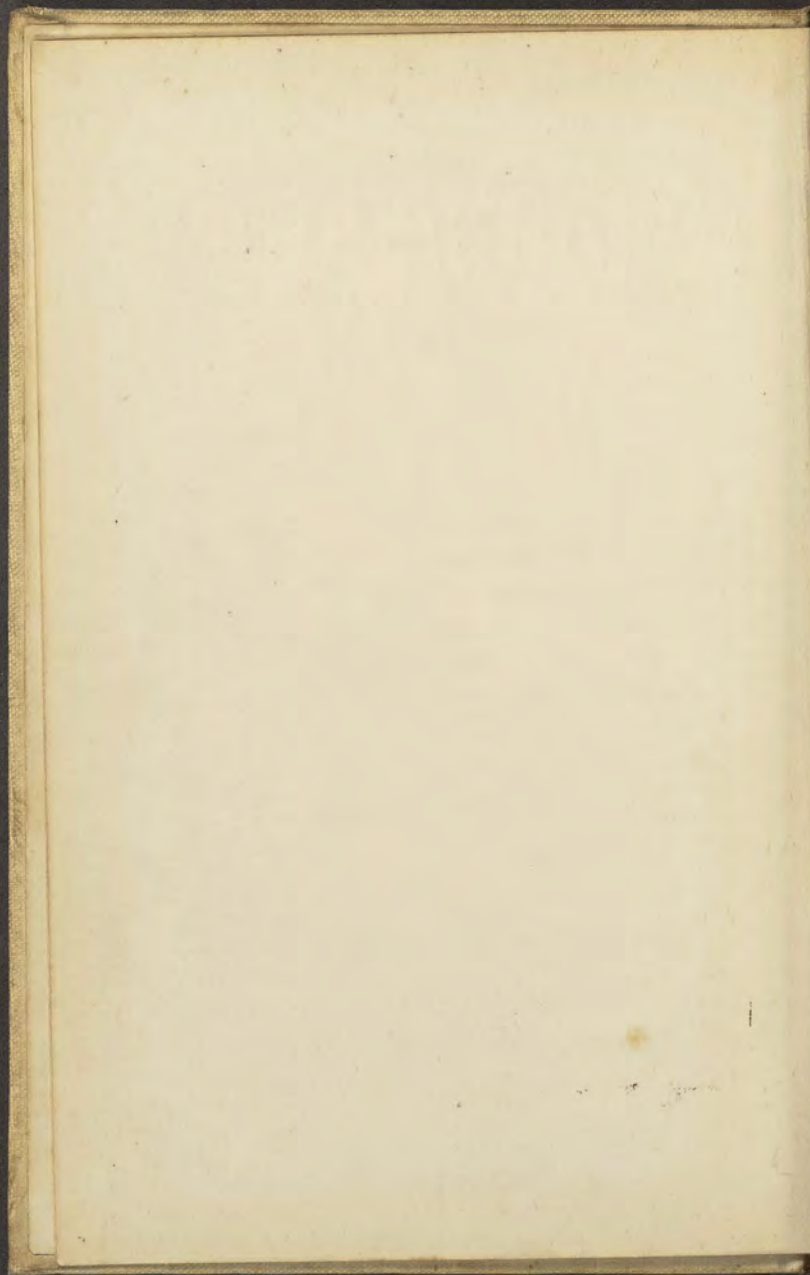
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THE Ring is by positive institution a *token and pledge* of the covenant made by the parties contracting marriage ; and, as it is a permanent monument of the vows and promises made, so it ought to be a perpetual monitor, that these vows be religiously obeyed, and these promises faithfully performed."—Shepherd's "Elucidation of the Church Service."

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## THE WEDDING-RING.

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**I**N all marriage ceremonies amongst civilised nations the ring plays a most important part, and is regarded as the becoming and distinctive ornament of the married woman ; inasmuch as the ring has, from the earliest period, been treated as an emblematical object, as an appropriate type of eternity, and of the stability and sincerity of affection. Yet long before its adoption into the sphere of courtship and wedlock, the ring was employed both for ornamental and useful purposes. It will, therefore, be necessary briefly to trace its previous history.

The custom of wearing finger-rings is so ancient that its origin is enveloped in fable. Tradition ascribes the invention to Prometheus, a real hero, no doubt, but around whose exploits such a halo of extravagance has been thrown, that he has been commonly regarded as a fabulous personage. The mythologists fabled Prometheus to have "stolen the sacred fire from heaven ;" Jupiter, from revenge, ordered him to be chained to the frosty Caucasus, where a vulture should feed upon his liver for 30,000 years. At length the god relented, but, in order not to violate his oath, he commanded that Prometheus should always wear upon his finger a link of his chain—an iron ring—to which should



be fastened a small fragment of Caucasus, so that it might be true in a certain sense that Prometheus still continued bound to that rock.\* Quite a different version of this ancient tradition is related in Swinburne's "Treatise of Spousals." "The first inventor of the ring was one Prometheus; the workman that made it was Tubal-Cain, who, by the counsel of our first father Adam, gave it unto his son to this end, that therewith he should espouse a wife. But the first ring was not of gold, but of iron, adorned with adamant."

The great antiquity of the finger-ring may, however, be inferred from a more authentic and trustworthy historical record. In Genesis xli. 42, we read that Pharaoh, after bestowing other marks of respect upon the patriarch Joseph, "took off his ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand."†

Joseph lived about 500 years before the Trojan War; nevertheless, Pliny questions the great antiquity of the ring, from the absence of any express reference to it in the Homeric poems: evidently, although customary in Egypt, it had not, at that early date, passed into Greece. Probably this custom originated in Asia, the cradle of luxury and civilisation; at what period it was adopted by the Greeks it is impossible to trace. In spite of the contrary statement of Pliny, the Romans do not

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\* Pliny, "Historia Nat.," xxxiii. 4. Catullus, c. lxiv. 295.

† Some writers refer to an earlier instance, Gen. xxiv. 22, but the jewel there mentioned amongst the personal ornaments of Rebecca is clearly a *nose-ring*. Moreover, although seal-rings appear in the Bible, not every reference to the signet proves a *ring*. In Gen. xxxviii. 18, the signet of Judah was worn round the neck, suspended by a string. According to Herodotus, seal-rings were universally worn in Babylon.

appear to have acquired this custom from Greece, but from their ancestors in Etruscan Italy. Early legends describe the Etruscans as wearing gold rings of great value and beauty. With reference to Greece, this fact, at least, is ascertainable, that finger-rings were common to all classes before the time of Solon, worn not so much for an ornamental, as for a useful purpose—for carrying the signet. Signet-rings were worn in all the states of Greece; they were made of gold, silver, iron, ivory, and amber; the Lacedæmonians confined themselves to iron only. The signet-ring is the most ancient form of this custom with which we are acquainted; it implies, I think, that the original invention was dictated rather by utility than by the desire of ornament; for in this, as in all the arts, "necessity was the mother of invention."\*

Amongst the laws and customs of the Roman Commonwealth, the ring plays a very important part. By the *jus annuli*, for many centuries none but senators and magistrates were permitted to wear the ring of gold; silver, brass, and iron were allowed to the rest of the people. Indeed, the iron signet-ring was, for a long time, the only one worn in Rome; even this was denied to slaves, part of the ceremony of whose manumission was the gift of a ring. Tarquinius Priscus is said to have been the first who adopted the ring of gold, which gradually

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\* See Müller's "Ancient Art."—"All rings were at first signets; then they became ornaments and badges of honour." The plain Roman ring was often hollow, and could contain a poisonous liquid. Thus Hannibal committed suicide; and in modern times Pope Alexander VI. is said to have disposed of his enemies in this manner.

obtained amongst the senators and nobles till it spread downwards to the common people. The *jus annuli* was enacted, no doubt, in the desire to check an extravagance which tended to annihilate all distinctions between the patrician and plebeian orders. By it, as we have seen already, the gold ring was limited to senators and magistrates. Consequently this was a privilege much coveted by the common people. After the Republic, the right of granting it fell, as a matter of course, to the emperors, at whose hands the privilege was so much abused that the *jus annuli* became of no practical utility, till, at length, under the Emperor Justinian, it was finally abolished by an ordinance allowing the ring of gold to be worn by all citizens of the empire. In this particular, history is repeating itself here in England with reference to a kindred privilege—the right of bearing arms. So long as there are ignorant people ready “to send name and county” to the unscrupulous advertiser who promises in return to supply them with “a beautifully-enblazoned copy of their coat of arms,” of what practical utility is the ordinance that “none shall bear arms unless they shall have received a grant of the same personally from the sovereign, or shall be able to prove to the satisfaction of the heralds that they are lineally descended from the person to whom the arms have been granted in the customary manner”? As long as the “heraldic engravers,” as they call themselves, are allowed to carry on this irregular trade, would it not be better to repeal the above-mentioned ordinance, since it is practically inoperative?

During the best years of the Roman Commonwealth the *jus annuli* was treated with due respect.

Strictly-conservative Roman families, hating all innovations, continued to wear the ring of iron; but the gold ring was more usual amongst the nobles. This was often put aside in times of sorrow, and iron adopted in its stead; it was usually worn on the left hand, because less occupied than the right. We read of rings for each finger-joint, also of heavy ones for winter and lighter for summer.\* The gold ring, as the distinctive token of nobility, appears in an interesting narrative of Plutarch. When Cinna and Caius Martius were slaughtering the citizens of Rome, the slaves of Cornutus, after hiding their master in the recesses of the house, took a dead body, and putting a gold ring, and the clothes of their master upon it, dressed it for the funeral as the body of Cornutus, thereby saving his life.†

The ring, of course, owes its circular form simply to convenience, since no other could be so well worn on the finger, but it will be readily understood that it acquired an emblematical character from this shape. Amongst all the Eastern nations the circle denotes eternity. Hence Brahma bears a ring in his hand, as the creator. The circle is the natural and expressive emblem of endless duration, of truth, completeness, and symmetry. Thus the ring, from

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\* Pliny and other writers complain of the Roman extravagance in rings. Livy (xxiii. 12) relates that after the battle Cannæ, three bushels and a half of gold rings were collected from the bodies of the slain Roman knights. See Dante, "L'inferno," xxviii. 11. Lucian speaks of a rich Roman who wore sixteen rings. The Hindoos and other Easterns carried this custom to still greater extravagance, wearing circlets even on their toes.

† Plutarch, "Life of Caius Martius."

its shape and portability, became the symbol of authority and fidelity, of an honest compact, of a binding agreement, of confidence and troth. Sent from one person to another it became a credential of trustworthiness and a pledge of sincerity. Such credentials are frequent in history; the Roman ambassadors received a ring as part of the *insignia* of their office; the ring with which Joseph was invested by Pharaoh was of similar character—more than the signet, it invested him with part of the royal power, and as soon as it was assumed, the people “bowed the knee.”\* Hence the ring naturally acquired a sort of mystic sacredness, and was frequently treated as an amulet or protection against misfortune. The initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries received a ring to shield them from evil spells and from bad luck; and, amongst the Greeks, rings inscribed with a secret token were deemed securities against every kind of danger. Magic rings were highly prized; supernatural endowments were ascribed to them.† Such amulets also figure very frequently in Eastern legends. That of Solomon appears, for instance, in the “Arabian Nights” as possessed of the power to disarm and drive away evil demons. Josephus‡ refers to the skill of Solo-

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\* The student of English history will remember the ring which saved Cranmer from impeachment, and also that which ought to have saved Queen Elizabeth's favourite, the Earl of Essex.

† Oliver, “Signs and Symbols of Free-Masonry” (1857), p. 204. Becker's “Charicles,” p. 191 (English edition, 1854).

‡ B. viii. 2. “Archæologia,” xxi. 124. All through the middle ages the great importance of rings was recognised. Readers of Boccaccio will recall the tale of the three by which Melchisedek escaped the plot laid for him by Saladin, “Decameron,” Nov. 3. See also Bojardo (Berni), “Orlando Innamorato,”

mon in the manufacture of these enchanted rings, describing, with all the gravity of a historical statement, the cure of a demoniac by means of a ring made according to Solomon's *recipe*. Plato\* tells the story of the famous ring of Gyges, found upon the body of a man in a grave by the master shepherd of King Candaules, which rendered the wearer visible or invisible, according to the position in which it was worn. By its means Gyges, the finder, acquired so great power that he finally became King of Lydia.

But very probably these magic virtues were due, in the estimation of the ancients, less to the circlet of metal than to the stone inserted in it, together with the cabalistic inscription which it bore. Although the earliest rings were plain hoops of metal, the custom of setting them with stones rapidly came into prevalence.† And nothing in modern jewellery can be said to surpass these ancient examples; they are usually of great beauty, seeming to be encrusted rather than set in gold in our slight manner. A whole volume might be written upon the supposed magical virtues residing in precious stones, every gem having its special virtue; although some virtues belonged to all, yet

c. i. 53; the "Orlando" of Ariosto; Sir W. Jones' Persian drama, "The Fatal Ring;" the amusing comedy of Rotrou, "La Bague de l'Oublie"; and Wright's "Domestic Manners and Sentiments," p. 266. For a curious amulet-ring, see "Notes and Queries," Second Series, viii. 228.

\* "Republic," ii. 3. Pliny, "Historia Nat.," xxxiii. 4.

† The value of the stone generally surpassed the material in which it was set. See Petrarch, "Sonetta," 294, where he speaks of life, after the death of Laura, as "senza gemma anello."

the more precious the stone the more potent was the virtue. Thus, the ruby banished sadness and preserved from the plague; the emerald put evil spirits to flight and cured fevers; the sapphire inspired continence and assauged the wrath of God; the topaz cured cowardice, brightened the wit, and remedied the effects of asthma; the opal cleared and sharpened the eye-sight; the turquoise relieved headache, reconciled lovers, and preserved from falls and bruises; the agate was good against venomous serpents; the coral circumvented the Devil, and was also an especial remedy against hæmorrhage. Finally, a ring of jasper, especially if set in silver, is recommended by Galen for its general healing properties; and the sapphire, as inspiring chastity, was in later times worn specially by ecclesiastics.\*

I am disposed to think that it was the symbolical and sacred character which the ring thus acquired which led to its adoption as an important part of the ceremonies to be observed at that most sacred of all human compacts—marriage. Some writers have chosen to regard the ring in marriage as essentially a Christian custom, and trace it to an ecclesiastical origin.† They see in the wedding-ring only a humble imitation of that with which the Christian bishop used to be invested at his consecration. It has been adopted, they say, after the

\* Compare Migne, "Encylo. Theol.," viii. p. 68.—"Innocent III., dans la lettre qu'il adressa à Richard Cœur de Lion, en lui envoyant quatre anneaux—Le vert l'émérante le symbole de ce que nous devons croire, le bleu du saphir celui de ce que nous devons espérer, le rouge du grenat l'embleme de ce que nous devons aimer, et la couleur brillante de la topaze celui de nos actions vertueuses." See also Nicholl's "Lapidary; a History of Precious Stones" (1625).

† See "Notes and Queries," First Series, vii. 601.

model of the Episcopal ring, to teach the wife that fidelity and duty which she owes to her husband. But this attempt to account for the origin of the ring in marriage rests, however, upon a very insecure foundation. The custom of sealing the ceremony of marriage by the placing of a ring upon the finger of the bride is probably more ancient, by many centuries, than the foundation of the Christian religion, and the institution of Episcopacy. It would be even more correct to say that the ring of the bishop has been borrowed from that of the marriage ceremony. The earliest record of the Episcopal ring occurs in the "Sacramental of St. Gregory" (A.D. 590), which prescribes its employment, together with the pastoral staff, for the consecration of every bishop. The Fourth Council of Toledo (A.D. 633) treats it as so essential to the office, that on the deposition of a bishop, his ring is to be taken from him, to be returned whenever he may be restored to his dignity. The ring finds no place in the Ordinal of the English Church,\* but in that of the Church of Rome it plays a most important part. After having been sprinkled with holy water, and hallowed by a solemn prayer, it is delivered to the bishop by the consecrating prelate, with these words—"Accipe annulum discretionis et honoris, fidei signum ut quæ signanda sunt signes et quæ aperienda sunt prodas, quæ liganda sunt liges, quæ solvenda sunt solvas, atque credentibus

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\* Nor in that of the Greek Church. It is singular that in the Roman Communion the ring is forbidden to all ecclesiastics below the Episcopal order. "Les ecclésiastiques ne doivent non plus porter aucune espèce d'anneaux; l'anneau est une marque de dignité réservée aux prélats."—Gousset, 'Theologie Morale.' ii. 480.



per fidem baptismatis, lapsis autem sed pœnitentibus per mysterium reconciliationis januas regni cœlestis aperias; cunctis vero de thesauro dominico ad æternam salutem hominibus, consolatus gratiâ, D.N. Jesu Christi."

The bishop wears his ring on the right hand, and it usually remains on the finger after his decease.\* Great pains have been taken to give a mystical significance to the Episcopal ring, and to justify the ceremonial by which it is consecrated to the use of the bishop, as the badge of fidelity, and the pledge of his betrothal to Christ and His Church. But all this symbolism came in a little too late to be worth overmuch respect. The earliest references to the Episcopal ring prove it to have been originally nothing more than a signet, and of no higher character than to supply a seal of authority to the letters patent, testimonials, and epistles of the bishop.

It is, therefore, incorrect to trace the wedding-ring to an ecclesiastical source, but it is quite fair to claim for it a religious origin, since it was very probably adopted on account of the sacred character which it had acquired, even anterior to Christian times. In adopting the ring as an integral part of the ceremony of Christian marriage, the Church, no doubt, considered herself fully justified in consecrating to Christian uses an innocent and appropriate heathen custom. Although we speak of *Christian* marriage in connection with the early Church, it

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\* The ring of the Mediæval bishop is usually found amongst his remains, whenever an Episcopal grave is opened. For further particulars respecting the *annulus Episcopi*, see Migne's "Encyclopédie Théologique," tome xi. p. 250, and Martene "De Ritibus Eccl.," i. 128.

must be observed that not until some time after the adoption of the Christian religion by the Roman emperors as the religion of the state, was the ceremony of marriage celebrated in churches, or treated as a religious rite. It is said that Pope Innocent III.\* was the first who ordered marriage to be always treated as a religious ceremony. Before his time, it had been left under the care of the magistrate, as a merely civil contract. I make this statement only as an historical fact, without for one moment questioning the propriety of the religious, as a sequel to the civil, ceremony. It may, however, be amply proved that the wedding-ring had established itself as an important, if not essential, part of the ceremony, long before marriage came to be regarded as an institution of the Church.

We have spoken of the use of a ring by all classes for the mere purpose of carrying the signet. The mention of the ring as an ornament to distinguish the married from the unmarried woman, is far less frequent in classical literature. Although this custom was prevalent amongst most of the civilised nations of antiquity, and all antiquarians agree that both the Greeks and the Romans employed it, I

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\* At the Fourth Lateran Council (A.D. 1215). But Martene (*"De Ritibus Eccles. Antiquis"*) refers to early rituals to prove that marriage had been celebrated before the priest from a remote period. See also Bingham, *"Antiquities,"* xxii. 6. It would seem that, while the Church admitted the validity of the civil contract, she preferred to depute the ceremony of marriage to the Christian minister, hence in Hooks' *"Church Dictionary,"* we find, "To correct abuses, Charlemagne enacted, in the eighth century, for the Western Empire, and Leo Sapiens, in the tenth century for the Eastern, that marriage should be celebrated in no other way than by sacerdotal benediction and prayers, to be followed by the holy eucharist."

have not been able to find any express reference to the marriage-ring in Greek literature.\*

Our sources of information with reference to the Roman custom in this particular are more numerous and explicit. Pliny† describes the nuptial-ring as a plain hoop of iron without any gem; and from Juvenal we learn that it was placed upon the finger of the bride by the bridegroom, as at the present day. Tertullian calls it the *annulus pronubus*, and hints that it was frequently of gold, "which being the nobler and purer metal and continuing longer uncorrupted, was thought to intimate the generous, sincere, and durable affection which ought to be between the married parties."‡

Some think that the *annulus sponsalium* is of Hebrew origin, yet its use does not appear amongst the records of the ancient Hebrews, although the modern Jews usually adopt it. Selden, Leo of Modena, and Basnage, are all of opinion that this custom did not exist in the Old Testament times since no mention is made of it in the Talmud. Basnage regards the ring in the ceremony of a modern Jewish marriage as a substitute for the piece of money which was formerly given to the bride in pledge of dowry.§ Nevertheless, the ancient

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\* Nor does it appear (Sub. *Marriage*) in Potter's "Archæologia Græca," nor in Panofka's "Manners and Customs of the Greeks."

† "Hist. Nat.," xxxiii. 4. Plautus, "Miles," act iv., scene i.

‡ Juvenal, "Sat.," vi. 27. "Digito pignus fortasse dedisti."—Tertullian, "De cultu Fœminarum."

§ Rings were often employed for money. See Layard's "Nineveh," and Wilkinson's "Ancient Egyptians," and many papers in the "Transactions of the Archæological Society," respecting Irish ring-money. For a Jewish inscribed ring, see "Notes and Queries," Third Series, vii. 387.

Hebrews treated the ring, whether used at the marriage ceremony or not, with great respect, regarding it as the symbol of fidelity and of adoption into a family (as in Luke xv. 22); and in their modern marriages the Jews appear to allude to a more ancient rite, "By this ring thou art my spouse according to the customs of Moses and Israel."

To the unmarried woman, unless betrothed, the earliest laws of Rome denied the use of the ring; subsequently only the ring of gold was denied to them, but permitted to matrons.\* This was put on by the husband, not at the complete ceremony of marriage, but at the previous signing of the nuptial contract. It was worn on the left hand, on the finger next the least, because of the erroneous idea that a nerve ran from that finger directly to the heart, and to signify that the husband expresses the dearest love to his spouse, which ought to reach her heart, and engage her affections to him again. Macrobius† assigns the same reason: but also quotes the more reasonable opinion of Ateius Capito, that the right hand was exempt from this office, because it was much more used than the left hand, and therefore the precious stones of the ring were not so likely to be broken, and that the finger of the left hand was selected which was least used.

Many of these Roman marriage or spousal-rings may be seen in museums; of gold, iron, copper, or brass; some with little knobs in the form of a key, to signify that the husband entrusts his wife with

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\* As a sort of tradition of this, we find, by the "Westminster Canons" of 1138, gold rings forbidden to nuns; subsequently by Langton's "Constitutions," one was allowed them.

† "Saturnalia," vii. 13; and "Aulus Gellius," x. 10.

the keys of his house ; and others are inscribed with good wishes and mottoes, as *bonam vitam ; amo te, ama me ; virtutem ama*, etc.

In the ritual of the Christian Church the wedding-ring has always been regarded with great interest, and its significance duly honoured in the ceremony of marriage. Hooker affirms that it was adopted by the Church for a symbolical reason ; "The cause why the Christians use it, as some of the Fathers think, is either to testify mutual love, or rather, to serve for a pledge of conjunction in heart and mind agreed upon between them."\* Wheatly is more prosaic in his account of the origin of the custom. Observing that the Prayer-Book of King Edward VI. enjoins that the ring was to be accompanied with "other tokens of spousage, as gold or silver," and that the Sarum *Manual*, before the minister proceeds to the marriage, directs him "to ask the woman's dowry—viz., the tokens of spousage ; and by these tokens to understand *rings or money* or some other things to be given by the man," Wheatly intimates that "the ring is simply the remains of an ancient custom, whereby it was usual for the man to purchase the woman, laying down for her price a certain sum of money, or else performing certain articles or conditions which the father would accept of as an equivalent." . . . "The reason why a ring was pitched upon for the pledge rather than anything else, was, I suppose, because anciently the ring was a *seal*, by which all orders were signed and things of value secured ; and, therefore, the

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\* "Eccles. Polity," b. v. lxxiii. 5, 6 ; Isidore, "De Eccles. Officiis," ii. 19 ; and Wheatly, "Illustration of the Common Prayer," *Marriage*.

delivery of it was a sign that the person to whom it was given was admitted into the highest friendship and trust." . . . . "As to the form of it, being round, the most perfect of all figures and used by the ancients as the hieroglyphic of eternity, it was understood to imply that the conjugal love should never have an end. But these seem only allegorical significations ; the use of it was intended at first to imply something more—viz., that the woman, in consideration of a certain dowry contracted for by the man, of which the ring is delivered as an earnest and a pledge, espouses and makes over herself to him as his wife."

Of these two accounts of the origin of the ring in connection with Christian marriage, you will have learned already that I prefer the former, and agree with Hooker, that the intention of the ring was "to testify mutual love, or rather, to serve for a pledge of conjunction of heart and mind agreed upon between them." In this light it has generally been regarded amongst Christian nations.

But it is right here to mention that two other reasons for the use of the ring in marriage have been adduced by different authors. Thus, in connection with the primitive employment of the ring as a seal, it is contended by some that the original wedding-ring was nothing more than a *signet* which the husband handed to his wife on the day of the marriage, in token that he entrusted her with equal rights in the protection and management of his property, more particularly his household and domestic effects. It would seem that amongst the Romans, certainly as there were not in the earliest times locks and keys, things of value were preserved in sealed cases ; and that the wife, in order to take

the care of these things, would require a *jac simile* of her husband's signet, to wear both as a pledge of trust, and equality with him in domestic matters, and also for the more ready discharge of her duty as custodian of his valuables at home.\*

The other account of this custom is, that, as a chain consists of links or rings, the ring is the token of that mutual bondage to each other into which matrimony brings husband and wife. Hence "Muller's Chips from a German Workshop," vol. ii. p. 282, "What is the meaning of the wedding-ring which the wife has to wear? There is no authority for it either in the Old or New Testament. It is simply a heathen custom, originally expressive of the *fetter* by which the wife was bound to her husband. In England it is the wife only who wears the golden fetter, while all over Germany the tie is mutual; both husband and wife wearing this badge of the loss of their liberty." Compare also Barrera's "Gems and Jewels," p. 325, "The ring presented to the betrothed maiden was an iron one; a loadstone was set in place of a gem; it indicated the mutual sacrifice made by the husband and wife of their liberty; the magnet indicated the force of attraction which had drawn the maiden out of one family into another."

The two latter reasons for the origin of the marriage-ring gain strength from the fact that a ring was anciently worn both by husband and wife, which may account for the interchange of engagement rings in more recent times. With the idea of

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\* See Barrera's "Gems and Jewels," London, 1860, p. 335; "Clement of Alexandria" refers to the nuptial token as intended for a signet. "Pædag," lib. iii. cap. 11. This also is the opinion of Dean Comber, "Companion to the Temple."

servitude accords the custom by which the Doges of Venice annually, on Ascension Day, wedded the Adriatic, by casting a ring of gold into the sea, in token of their empire over it.

Of these four attempts to account for the use of the ring in Christian marriage, I repeat my preference for that defended by the "judicious Hooker," already quoted.

But when we are speaking of the ancient ceremony of Christian marriage as practised on the continent of Europe, or in our own country before the Reformation, we must always understand that the rite of marriage really consisted of two separate ceremonies—betrothal, or espousals, and benediction, or complete marriage. A considerable interval of time frequently occurred between these two ceremonies. In our service, and generally throughout the modern Church, they are united into one. This is worthy of notice, because the wedding-ring was not anciently first used at the complete marriage ceremony, but at the previous ceremony of espousals, as a pledge of future marriage; and alike in Christian as in heathen Rome, at the signing of the nuptial contract.\* We have a tradition of the same custom in our engagement-rings; but the ceremony of espousals was a much more significant and binding ceremony than the mere promise to marry is in our degenerate days! Let us keep in mind, then, that the ring was first used at the betrothal, or incomplete marriage ceremony; hence it is often called the *annulus desponsationis*

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\* Muratore, "Antichita Italiane," i. dis. xx. See also, for this *anello pronubo*, Boccaccio, "Decameron," v. 4, x. 8; Gregory of Tours, "De Vitis Patrum; and Maffei, "Gemme Antiche," iv. 118, 142.



—the ring of betrothal—which was always treated with significant regard. There is considerable difference of opinion respecting the finger upon which it was worn—probably upon the right hand, to be transferred to the left at the final ceremony of marriage. In that beautiful picture in the Brera Gallery at Milan, the “Spozalizio” of Raphael, the ring is being placed by Joseph upon the third finger of the Virgin’s *right hand*.\* This, although it proves nothing with respect to Jewish marriages, clearly indicates that, at the Christian ceremony of espousals during the middle ages, the ring was placed upon the right, to be afterwards transferred to the left, hand. After the custom of keeping distinct the betrothal and the marriage ceremony fell into disuetude, the betrothal-ring was still retained under the name of the engagement-ring, but not always used for the final ceremony. Amongst those whose circumstances admit of it, this token of engagement is retained to the present day, worn, however, not on the right hand, but upon the bridal finger.† Indeed, in modern times, more attention

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\* The same finger is being held out in the fresco of “The Espousals,” by Ghirlandajo, in Santa Croce, Florence; also in the “Spozalizio” of Van Loo. Not, however, invariably so. The supposed nuptial-ring of the Virgin Mary is venerated amongst the relics in the Duomo of Perugia.

† “Love’s Telegraph,” a poor book, professes to vouch for the following as a modern American custom:—“If a gentleman wishes to make known his desire to be married, he wears a ring on the first finger of the left hand; if engaged on the second; if married on the third; and on the little finger if he is a determined old bachelor. The same rule applies to the ladies. A ring worn on the first finger is a silent advertisement for a husband, on the second a token of engagement, the third matrimony, and the little finger the gentle intimation of the wish to die an old maid.” See Edwards’ “Finger-Rings,” p. 54.

has been paid to the beauty and significance of the betrothal than of the wedding-ring. Modern wedding-rings resemble their most ancient types in being plain hoops of gold. Once it was customary to ornament them in many ways, more especially while the ceremony of betrothal was kept separate from the marriage ceremony. But now that betrothal and marriage is one and the same ceremony, all the ornamentation is devoted to the engagement-ring. A very pretty form of the earliest kind of betrothal-rings is the Gemmal, or Jimmal. This is mentioned as a love-token in Herrick's "Hesperides"—

"Thou sent'st to me a true love-knot; but I  
Return'd a Ring of Jimmals, to imply  
Thy love hath one knot, mine a *triple-tye*."

The words *triple-tye* will explain the nature of this token. It consisted of two or more links united into one by means of a hinge, so that, when the flat surfaces were brought together, they formed one ring. The word Gemmal is of French origin, and in Wright's "Dictionary" is defined, "a double ring, consisting of links." Probably it comes from *Gemelli*, twins, two hoops being sufficient; but any number might be adopted. Thus, an Italian example is described in "The Archæological Journal" for 1860, p. 184, consisting of nine hoops interlaced. A Gemmal of two hoops is most usual; these, turning upon a pivot, could be shut up into one solid ring. At the time of making the engagement, each of the lovers put a finger through one of the hoops, to imply that they were in this manner yoked together; the ring was then torn asunder,

each person keeping a link.\* If the Gemmal consisted of three links, one was taken by the witness to their betrothal. When the marriage contract was fulfilled at the altar, the different portions were again united, and the solid ring used for the final ceremony. In the "Archæologia," v. 12, a Gemmal of Sir Thomas Gresham is described. It consisted of two links, enamelled and set with jewels, a diamond and a ruby; on one link was inscribed, *Quod Deus coniuxit*; on the other, *Homo non separat*.

Exchange of rings, quite distinct from the custom of dividing the Gemmal, was also practised at betrothal. Chaucer, in his "Troilus and Cresseide," describes the heroine as giving her lover a ring

\* See Dryden's "Don Sebastian," (4<sup>o</sup>, Lond. 1690, p. 122)—

"A curious artist wrought them,  
With jeynts so close as not to be perceived;  
Yet are they both each other's counterpart,  
Her part had *Juan* inscribed, and his had *Zayda*,  
(You know these names were theirs) and, in the midst,  
A heart divided in two halves was placed,  
Now, if the rivets of those rings, inclosed,  
Fit not each other, I have forged this tye;  
But if they join, you must for ever part."

See also "The Exeter Garland," (1750)—

"A ring of pure gold from her finger she took,  
And just in the middle the same she then broke;  
Quote she, as a token of love you this take,  
And this as a pledge I will keep for your sake."

† When the Gemmal was united, it usually appeared as a circle formed by two right hands joined. Tacitus, "Hist.," i. 11, calls it a *dextras*, and more modern writers a *fede*. In the "Liber de Formicariis" of J. Nyder (1478), there is a legend describing a rustic virgin who desires to find a ring in token of her espousal to Christ. She finds one of a white colour, like pure silver, upon which two hands are engraved,

upon which a motto was engraved, and receiving one from him in return. To the same custom Shakespeare alludes in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," where Julia gives Proteus a ring, saying, "Keep this for thy Julia's sake," and he replies, "Why, then, we'll make exchange; here, take you this." In France, even at the public ceremony of betrothal, rings were exchanged, and the ritual provides a form—*per benedictionem annulorum, benedic Domine hos annulos*. This custom is still continued in the Greek Church. Two rings are provided, silver and gold, the latter being retained by the bride after marriage.\* Nevertheless, with respect to France, Brand, in his "Popular Antiquities," considers that these tokens were only exchanged in exceptional cases, implying that it was no necessary part of the ceremony, but depended, probably, upon the good feeling of the lady.

As we have remarked already, the wedding-ring in England, and, indeed, generally in modern times, is employed for the first time at the actual marriage service. The Rubric directs "that the man shall stand on the right hand and the woman on the left"; this is from the "Sarum Office Book." Our ancestors gave mystical reasons for this; some because Eve was formed out of a rib on the left side

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\* See "Englishwomen in Russia" (1855), p. 113; and Migne, "Encylo. Theol.," viii. p. 754. "En orient, les futurs epoux viennent à la fin de la missa pour recevoir ce sacrement, le pretre remet à chacun d'eux un cierge allumé fait sur eux plusieurs signes de croix, les encense et prenant deux anneaux, l'un d'or et l'autre d'argent, il donne le premier à l'epoux, le second à l'epouse." etc. Compare Martene, "De Ritibus," ii. 124, 140, 143.

of Adam ; others to denote that the right hand of the man should be free to protect and defend the woman ; but no doubt its simple purpose was the more conveniently to place the ring upon the finger of the bride. The next direction is that "the man shall give unto the woman a ring, laying the same upon the book with the accustomed duty to the priest and clerk. And the priest, taking the ring, shall deliver it unto the man, to put upon the fourth finger of the woman's left hand. And the man, holding the ring there, and taught by the priest, shall say, 'With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow, in the name of the Father,'" etc. The placing of the ring on the book, and delivering it into the hands of the minister, is simply a remnant of the ancient hallowing of the ring by the priest before it was placed by the bridegroom on the finger of the bride. This custom is still retained wherever the Roman Catholic religion is established. The ring is consecrated by the priest, sprinkled with holy water in the form of the cross, and then returned to the bridegroom. The formula for hallowing the ring is similar both in ancient and modern times :

"Thou Maker and Conserver of mankind, Giver of spiritual grace, and Granter of eternal salvation, Lord, send Thy blessing upon this ring, that she which shall wear it, may be armed with the virtue of heavenly defence, and that it may profit her to eternal salvation through Jesus Christ," etc. . . .

. . . "Hallow Thou, O Lord, this ring which we bless in Thy name, that what woman soever shall wear it may stand fast in Thy will, and live, and grow, and wax old in Thy love, and be multiplied

into that length of days through Jesus Christ," etc.\*

"The accustomed duty to the priest and clerk" is not at the present time laid upon the book along with the ring; yet a similar custom obtained not long since in some parishes of South Wales; at the words, "with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow," the bridegroom put his hand into his pocket and produced what money he had about him, which he gave to the clergyman; out of this the clergyman took his fee, and delivered the remainder to the bride.

You will observe that the bridegroom is to place the ring upon the *fourth* finger of the bride's left hand; we have remarked already that this was the favourite finger amongst the ancients, not merely for brides, but for both sexes. Discarding the hoary fiction that the fourth finger of the left hand was selected for its connection with the heart, we accept the more likely explanation that it was chosen because less employed than any other finger, and, therefore, the best for the preservation of the ring.† Consequently the fourth finger of the left hand has come to be the bridal finger, generally, if not universally.

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\* See Migne, "Cérémonies et des Rites Sacrés;" "Encyclo. Theol.," tom. 15, 16.; Moroni, "Dict. Eccle.," *Anello* (Venezia, 1860). Bingham's "Antiquities," xxii. 3. The ring given to the king at coronation was hallowed in a similar manner. See "The Complete Account of the Ceremonies observed at the Coronation of the Kings of England" (London, 1727), where the royal ring is figured and described as a plain hoop of gold, with a large table ruby violet, wherein a plain cross, or cross of St. George, is curiously enchased. The Queen-Consort's ring is similar, but the ruby is smaller, and it is moreover set all round with small stones.

† See Brown's "Vulgar Errors," b. iv. 4.

An ancient Pontificale ordered the bridegroom to place the ring successively on three fingers of the right, and then to leave it on the fourth finger of the left hand, in order to mark the difference between the marriage-ring, the symbol of a love mingled with carnal affection, and the Episcopal ring, the symbol of entire continence and chastity.\*

The Sarum ritual required the ring to be placed successively on the thumb, the forefinger, and the middle-finger, to symbolise the doctrine of Trinity. The was to be done as the words, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" were pronounced, and with the word "Amen," the ring was to be placed on the fourth finger, where it was to remain.† The old writers on this subject delight in finding mystical reasons for every part of the marriage ceremony, and not content with repeating the ancient superstition respecting the left hand, they declare, in addition, that this hand was chosen, as inferior to the right, in token of the servitude and subjection into which the bride is brought by matrimony, which, as we have seen already, is by some thought to be symbolised in the ring itself.‡ Dr. Johnson appears to have held a similar opinion, since he somewhere defines a ring as "a circular instrument, placed upon the noses of hogs, and the fingers of women, to restrain them and bring them into subjection." Nevertheless, it is quite in keeping with that apparently boorish and cynical, but really

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\* Pontificale Lyrensis (? A.D. 600). Martene, "De Antiquis Ritibus," v. 2, p. 128.

† "Notes and Queries," Second Series, iv. 199; also Fourth Series, ii. 15.

‡ Licetus, "De Anulis," chap. vi. and vii. Coats' "Dict. Heraldry."

most tender and kindly, man's character, that he never treated his own wife otherwise than with the most affectionate regard. Mrs. Johnson has been described as "perpetual illness and perpetual opium" yet her husband never swerved from dutiful respect and consideration. He kept the anniversary of her death with prayer and tears, and her wedding-ring was preserved by him as long as he lived, with most affectionate care, in a little round box, on the inside of which was the following inscription:—

*Eheu! Eliza Johnson, Nupta, July 9<sup>o</sup> 1736. Mortua, eheu!  
Mart 17<sup>o</sup> 1752.*

We learn from Southey's "Table Book," that during the reign of George I., the wedding-ring, though placed upon the customary finger at marriage, was afterwards worn on the thumb. In the portrait of Lady Ann Clifford, the famous Countess of Pembroke, the ring is worn on the thumb.\*

Wedding-rings were not always worn plain, as now, but at one time more nearly resembled modern betrothal tokens in being chased, set with stones, and inscribed with emblems and mottoes.† The most common emblem was the clasped hands, as on the Gemmal ring already described. Posies and

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\* See Fosbroke's "Encylo. of Antiqs.," p. 249. The custom of wearing the ring on the thumb is very ancient in England. In the time of Queen Bess, aldermen, magistrates, and other grave persons adopted this fashion. I can find nothing respecting the *origin* of such a custom; many of the rings in museums are very large and could only have been carried on the thumb or forefinger.

† See an Italian nuptial-ring of the 14th century, described by Mr. Waterton in "The Archæological Journal," xvi. 192.



mottoes were more frequent than emblematical devices or jewels. There would hardly be a wedding-ring without one, during the middle ages, and even down to the end of the 17th century. Posies were also frequent on Roman rings. Many such have been found, and may be seen in different collections, bearing short mottoes in Greek and Latin, and with *intaglia* engraved upon them. For instance—*Vivas; Bonam fortunam; χαιρε καλη, χαιρε ψυχη, κυρια χαιρε. Ειρηνη ερωσ, &c.* The Roman example has been lavishly imitated in more modern times. Thus, the wedding-ring of St. Louis of France, bearing a sapphire *intaglio* of the crucifixion was inscribed—*Dehors cet anel pourrions avoir amour?*

On the wedding-ring of Beau Fielding *temp.* Queen Anne—*Tibi soli.*

The posy of John Dunton the bookseller, commemorated in "The Duncaid," was, "God saw thee, most fit for me;" and a ring dug up at Somerton, Lincolnshire, bore,

"I love you, my sweet dear heart,  
So I pray you please my love."\*

The wedding-ring of the wife of the famous Bishop Bull had a singular but most appropriate motto—*Bene parere, parere, parare det mihi Deus*—God make me a good mother, and an obedient housewife.

A ring advertised for sale *circ.* 1659, bore—*United hearts death only parts.* Another dug up at Iffley, near Oxford—*I lyke my choyce;* and on

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\* "Gents. Mag.," lxxv. 801, 927. For a singular wedding-gemmal of the Earl of Hertford, see "Notes and Queries," Second Series, vi. 451.

the ring of Lady Cathcart, at her (fourth) marriage with Hugh M'Guire, in 1713, was inscribed—*If I survive I will have five.*\*

On a ring *temp.* Rich. II., bearing the device of St. Catherine and her wheel, and St. Margaret, patroness of women in their hour of travail, we read—*Be of good heart.*

Posies were also engraved upon the plain ring, and many of them are as beautiful as they are appropriate.† Thus—

Till death divide.

Nemo nisi mors.

Tout pour bein feyre.

In bone fay.

Sans mal desyr.

Amor vincit om.

Till my life's end.

Erunt duo in carne una.

Mulier viro subiecta esto.

Semper amemus.

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\* Burke's "Anecdotes of the Aristocracy."

† No doubt many of these are posies for betrothal rings, like that mentioned in Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice," act i., scene i.—

"Whose posy was, 'Love me, and leave me not.'"

Since the limits of this work do not admit of my giving the authority for each individual motto recorded in the text, I may generally say that they are copied from the following sources:—"The Archæological Journal," vols. i.-xxii.; "Croker's Catalogue of Rings belonging to Lady Londesborough;" "Notes and Queries," Second and Third Series.

## THE WEDDING RING.

In Christ and thee my comfort be.  
Honneur et joye.  
Let reason rule affection.  
God continue love to us.  
Mon cur avez.  
Deux corps ung cuer.  
Amour et constance.  
Most in mynd and yn myn heart,  
Lothest from you for to departt.  
God unite our hearts aright.  
Knit in one by Christ alone.  
God's providence is our inheritance.  
Our contract was heaven's act.  
In thee, my choice, I do rejoyce.  
God above increase our love.  
My heart and I, until I dye.  
Not two, but one, till life be gone.  
When this you see, remember me.  
Julia is mine own peculiar.  
I cannot show the love I O.  
Divinely knit by God are we,  
Late one, now two, the pledge you see.  
We strangely met, and so do many,  
But now as true as ever any.  
As we begun, so let's continue.  
My beloved is mine, and I am hers

True blue will never stain.  
Against thou goest, I will provide another.  
In loving thee, I love myself.  
Let him never take a wife,  
That will not love her as his life.  
A heart content cannot repent.  
I do not repent, I gave consent.  
No gift can show the love I owe.  
What the heart saw the love hath chosen.  
Love one little, but love one long.  
Love him who gave thee this ring of gold,  
'Tis he must kiss thee when thou art old.  
This circle, though but small about,  
The devil, jealousy, will keep out,  
If I think my wife is fair,  
What need other people care ?  
God's appointment is my contentment.  
Love, I like thee ; sweet requite me.  
With heart and hand at your command.  
My heart in silence speaks to thee,  
Though absence barrs tongue's liberty.  
Faithful ever : deceitful never.  
I like, I love as turtle dove.  
As gold is pure, so love is sure.  
Despise not mee : y<sup>t</sup> joyes in thee.  
If you deny, then sure I dye.

## THE WEDDING RING.

Your sight is my delight.  
As true, bee just.  
No better smart shall change my heart.  
This ring is a token I give to thee,  
That thou no tokens do change for me.  
My dearest Betty is good and pretty  
I did commit no act of folly,  
When I married my sweet Molly.  
'Tis fit no man should be alone,  
Which made Tom to marry Joan.  
Sue is bonny, blythe, and brown ;  
This ring hath made her now my own.  
Like Phillis there is none :  
She truly loves her Choridon.  
My life is done when thou art gone.  
This hath no end, my sweetest friend :  
Our loves be so, no ending know.  
God send her me my wife to be.  
As God decreed, so we agreed.  
God above increase our love.  
Take hand and heart, I'll ne'er depart.  
Live and dye in constancy.  
A virtuous wife that serveth life.  
As long as life y<sup>r</sup> loving wife.  
I will be yours while breath endures.  
Love is sure where faith is pure.

A virtuous wife doth banish strife.  
 God did forsee we should agree.  
 Love me, and be happy.  
 None can prevent the Lord's intent.  
 Virtue surpasses riches.  
 Let virtue rest within thy breast.  
 Time lesseneth not my love.  
 Joye without ende.  
 Let lykinge laste.  
 This and the giver are thine for ever.  
 Think on mee.  
 Let love increase.

I conclude my list of mottoes with one of the prettiest ever devised, found upon a mediæval armillary ring, consisting of eight loops, each having a portion of the motto—

Ryches be vnstable,  
 Beuty wyll deokay,  
 But faithfull love wyll ever laste  
 Tyl deth drive itt away ;

which, of course, is never, since death cannot destroy love.

In the Rubric of the English Church, the ring is placed upon the finger of the bride with these words, *with this ring I thee wed*. The word "wed" implies a covenant or contract, the ring being a proof and pledge that it has been made. In the Prayer-Book of King Edward VI. was added, "This gold and silver I give thee," at the repetition of

which it was customary to place a purse of money in the woman's hands as an instalment of her dowry. This was left out of the revised Prayer-Book, because all who came to be married could not afford a dowry.\*

The words which follow—*with my body I thee worship*, are open to much misconception. Originally the word worship implied simply "worthyship," *i.e.*, I give thee so much honour as thou art worthy of and entitled to. It does not therefore imply, as some cavillers object, that the bridegroom is to worship the bride, but to give her all respectful consideration of which she is worthy; or in the words of St. Peter, "Giving honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel." So also the Rhemish ritual, *et de mon corps je vous honore*, *i.e.*, thou art honoured with a share in all the titles and honours that belong to my person, as such; a share in the husband's name, for instance, and all that belongs to his station in the world, according to the old proverb which says, "The husband makes the wife and not the wife the husband."†

But we may amplify the word honour to embrace very much more than this. The honour which is due to the wife is grounded, of course, upon the fact that

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\* A similar ceremony is, I believe, still observed in France, *ad usum Remense*, Martene, "De Antiquis Ritibus," ii. 124. —"Ponens tres denarios in manu dextra vel bursâ sponsæ subjiçiat: *et de mes beins je vous doue*."

† Bishop Sparrow says that the Jews anciently used the same phrase, "Be unto me a wife, and I, according to the Word of God, will worship, honour, and maintain thee, according to the manner of husbands among the Jews." See also Nicholls' "Commentary on the Prayer Book." In an old translation of the Bible I Samuel 2-30 was rendered "Them that worship me, I will worship," *i.e.*, will make worshipful.

her nature is weaker, more delicate, and susceptible than the husband's. Every good man realises this tender regard to the woman's weaker nature, and is careful therefore never to wound or take advantage of it. He gives his wife her due place as the partner of his joys and sorrows, and the sharer of his good or evil fortune. He respects her modesty and shrinks from shocking it, shields her from insult and from harm; remembers always her greater susceptibility to emotion, both of pleasure and pain, and thus realises his duty to love, cherish, support, and protect her who has consented at the very sacrifice of self to sink her own personality in his. Most women, no doubt, are capable of purchasing this "worship" and respect by a faithful discharge of their part of the marriage engagements, and by a discreet use of their natural charms. Ninety-nine out of a hundred unhappy couples are unhappy because there are faults on both sides. The wife may gain the husband quite as easily as the husband may gain the wife, and secure all that honour of esteem, attachment, confidence, and attention which is due to her. Cruelty and cold-heartedness on the husband's part, which of course is never excusable, but deserves the severest reprobation and the most exemplary punishment, is, nevertheless, in a multitude of cases, produced by the neglect of her duties on the part of the wife, or by her want of judgment. It can never, then, be too strongly enforced that the engagements and duties of wedlock are mutual; that each party has an equal claim upon each other's services and affections, and that mutual esteem and goodwill are best promoted by mutual desire to be all that each has promised to be. At the same time, due allowance must be made for



human imperfection, and each must practise the virtue of forbearance with little faults and failings. No words of my own can better express what I wish to say than the following admonition, given by that excellent old maid, Hannah More:—"When young persons marry, even with the fairest prospects, they should never forget that infirmity is inseparably bound up with their very nature, and that, in bearing one another's burdens, they fulfil one of the highest duties of the union."

And the same admirable sentiment is implied in the advice of the witty Thomas Fuller, chaplain to King Charles I.—"Deceive not thyself by over expectation of happiness in the married state. Look not therein for contentment greater than God will give, or a creature in this world can receive, namely, to be free from all inconveniences. Marriage is not like the hill of Olympus, wholly clear, without clouds. Remember the nightingales, which sing only some months in the spring, but commonly are silent when they have hatched their eggs, as if their mirth were turned into care for their young ones."

We have spoken, then, of the honour of esteem, affection, and forbearance; there is also the *honour of maintenance*, which the husband promises in the words, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," that is, in all my worldly goods you have a common share with myself, which, indeed, the English wife has by common law; just as the Roman matron who received, when she first crossed her husband's threshold, fire and water, in token that she had an equal share in everything there; and also had the keys of the household presented her in token that she was to rule *in rebus domesticis*. This is, un-

questionably, the proper sphere for a wife.\* She was created, according to Moses, to be "a helper suited to man," therefore to be his equal in her own sphere and not his slave, to be treated with confidence and respect. Hence the old saying with respect to the creation of Eve, "She was not taken from Adam's head, lest she should rule over him; nor from his feet, lest he should trample upon her; but from his side, that she might be his equal; from under his arm, that he might protect her; and from near his heart, that he might cherish and love her."

The ring is used in all ceremonies of Christian marriage, except in the Society of Friends; but even many Quaker ladies wear a wedding-ring after, although it is not employed *during*, the marriage ceremony. I am informed that the wedding-ring does not obtain amongst the Mormons; probably from economical reasons.

It has been remarked already that there is no trace of this custom in the Talmud, nor in ancient Jewish history; but the modern Jews have not only adopted the wedding-ring, but make it a most important feature in their marriage service. According to the ordinances of modern Judaism it is required to be of a certain value; it is therefore examined and certified by the officiating Rabbi and chief officers of the synagogue, when it is received from the bridegroom, whose absolute property it must be, and not obtained on credit or by gift. After this, it is returned to him and he is permitted

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\* See Shepherd's "Elucidation." "These words promise a maintenance suited to the man's quality. Wherever he is master she is mistress. The wife is to have all things in common with the husband except the power of alienating his estate."

to use it, if certified, for the marriage ceremony. I am informed that the Hebrews usually put the "golden fetter" on the index finger, at the wedding, although they afterwards transfer it to its customary place.

The ring is rejected by the Quakers, and by some other Protestant sects, because of its supposed heathen origin, which rejection, in their case, extends to the day of the month, week, and to many other innocent social observances. The same reason nearly caused the marriage-ring to be abolished during the time of the Commonwealth. The facetious author of "Hudibras" refers in the following terms to the Puritan prejudice against this custom—

"Others were for abolishing  
That tool of matrimony, a ring,  
With which the unsanctify'd bridegroom  
Is marry'd only to a thumb ;  
(As wise as ringing of a pig,  
That's used to break up ground and dig),  
The bride to nothing but her will,  
That nulls the after-marriage still."\*

In the English Church, a ring is absolutely necessary to the ceremony, but, as no metal is specified, silver, copper, or iron is as allowable as gold. A ring of brass was employed some years since at Worcester. The marriage was celebrated

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\* See also "The Character of a Puritan," a dialogue (1640).

"A Puritan is he who when he prays,  
His rolling eyes to heaven doth raise . . .  
That crosses each doth hate, save on his pence,  
And loathes the publick rope of penitence:  
That in his censure each alike gainsays,  
Poets in pulpits, holy writ in plays . . .  
Roods in the windows and *the marriage ring*,  
The churching veil, and midwife's christening. . . ."

in the registrar's office, and the registrar was threatened by some over-officious persons with a prosecution, which, it is scarcely necessary to say, could not possibly have been sustained. I have heard of a clergyman in a very poor parish, employing a common brass ring in a case in which the parties were too poor to provide the necessary token and pledge which is enjoined in the Prayer-Book. In Ireland, also, I am told, the same ring is used for many marriage ceremonies, which ring remains in the custody of the priest.

From these instances, we may infer that the ring, although necessary to the due celebration of the marriage ceremony, need not be retained and worn afterwards. Yet, very properly, right-minded women treat their wedding-rings with special respect and honour, and would sooner part with any other description of ornament than this. Hence, no doubt, the reason for the adoption of the *keeper*, to be the protector and shield of the wedding-ring. Many married women are so strict in their notions respecting the wedding-ring, that neither when they wash their hands, nor at any other time, will they take it off their fingers, extending, it should seem, the expression of "till death us do part," even to this golden circlet, the token and pledge of matrimony.\* Hence the request on the part of some ladies to be even buried in their wedding-rings, and many, if they break or lose them, become very unhappy, under the idea that something terrible will happen. Two instances of this, one can hardly

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\* See Brand's "Popular Antiquities," Ellis's ed. p. 62, etc. The coronation-ring of Queen Elizabeth was always worn by that queen, till the flesh growing over it, it was obliged to be filed off a little before her death.

call it *superstitious*, reverence of the wedding-ring have come under my own notice. I remember a poor woman in the West of England, who pined away and died from acute mania, her illness commencing with grief at the loss of her ring. Another instance occurred during a brief ministry of mine in the northern part of Essex, where a terrible murder deprived a respectable family, of the yeoman class, of its industrious head. "Ah," said the poor widow, when I paid her a visit shortly afterwards, "I thought I should soon lose my husband, for I broke my ring the other day; and my sister broke hers just before she lost her husband—it's a sure sign." Under such distressing circumstances, I could not then and there attempt to combat the fatal sentiment; and certainly it was a most singular coincidence that two sisters should both suffer from the same loss after experience of the same sad omen.\*

In the days when the nuptial-ring received the benediction of the priest, we can imagine that it would be regarded with especial reverence, and become the subject of many superstitions; some few of these still linger in distant country villages. Thus, in Ireland, the wedding-ring cures warts as well as sores; and, in Somerset, rubbed upon what is

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\* A recent case occurs in the police reports of the *Times*, where a woman, applying for the restoration of some property, mentions the loss of her wedding-ring as a thing foreboding great evil. See further, Atkinson's "Memoirs of the Queen of Prussia." At the betrothal of Frederick and Sophia (first King and Queen of Prussia) the ring worn by Frederick in memory of his deceased wife, and inscribed, *A Jamais*, broke suddenly, which was looked upon as an omen that this marriage would also be of short duration.

called a sty on the eyelid, will rapidly remove it. Almost any sore or wound stroked with the ring-finger is curable. So said the gossips of the last generation. The same opinion was held by the ancients. A secret virtue was supposed to reside in this finger, and, therefore, physicians used to stir their medicines with it. But virtues of this kind were not confined to wedding-rings. Rings made of money gathered in church on Good-Friday, and afterwards hallowed by the priest, were in the middle ages considered good for the cramp.\* And we read of Lord Chancellor Hatton sending to his royal mistress, Queen Elizabeth, "a ring against infectious air," to be worn "between the sweet dugs of her breast." The famous ring of King Edward the Confessor, was for many centuries preserved in Westminster Abbey as a remedy for epilepsy and cramp.

Many of the bridal-ring superstitions are connected with the wedding-cake. Slices of this are sometimes put through the ring and laid under pillows at night, to cause young persons to dream of their future spouses. The cake must be drawn nine times through the ring. According to another custom, a similar ring is mixed with the ingredients of the cake, and baked in it. When it is cut, the person who secures the slice containing the ring will secure with it unusual good fortune during the ensuing year, which good fortune, should the possessor be a maiden, would imply an eligible suitor and a happy marriage.

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\* On the whole subject of hallowing rings for the cramp, etc., see the "Archæological Journal" for June, 1864.

When William the Conqueror landed in England he wore a ring which had been hallowed by Pope Hildebrand.

With respect to the *literature of the wedding-ring*, much has been written on the general subject, very little on the special subject of my lecture. The principal works which I have examined are these—

Joh. Kirchmann, *De Annulis Liber*, Leyden, 1672.

Licetus, *De Anulis Antiquis*, Utini, 1645.\*

Alexander ab Alexandro, *Genialium dierum, libri sex*, 1673.

Curtius, *Syntagma de Annulis Historico-Symbolicum*, 12 Ant. 1720.

Taylor (Bishop Jeremy), *The Marriage-Ring*, in the *Golden Grove*.

Edwards (Charles), *History and Poetry of Finger-Rings*, New York, 1855.

The treatise of Edwards is the best work on the subject in the English language. I have frequently consulted it in the preparation of these pages, preferring, however, Edwards' authorities to his own statements. The book has some blemishes, but on the whole it is well done, and written in an agreeable and popular style. Jeremy Taylor's little work is simply a short treatise on the duties of married life, than which nothing could be more happily put. The treatise of Kirchmann and its appendices are very valuable and exhaustive—all subsequent writers quote him and adopt his statements,

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\* In the frontispiece to this work are several specimens of ancient rings engraved. For a still better collection of engraved specimens see Gørælæus (A.) "Dactylitheca," Leyden, 1695.

As to collections of rings, besides the *Blacas'* collection in the British Museum and the specimens at South Kensington, I am informed that Sir William Peek, formerly M.P. for Surrey, has a most valuable collection. Mr. J. W. Singer, of Frome, has also a number of curious and interesting specimens.

often without consulting his authorities. The work of Licetus is equally curious and interesting, especially on the mystical uses of rings. I may also refer to the essays of Mr. Waterton in the "Archæological Journal," to the "Catalogue of Rings in the Collection of Lady Londesborough," made by Mr. W. J. Croker, to that of Lord Braybroke's collection in the "Essex Archæological Transactions," vol. ii., and to the four valuable volumes of Mr. C. W. King, on the "Natural History of Gems, Precious Stones, and Metals." It would have needlessly encumbered these pages to have subjoined a note of reference to every authority. I have only done so in special instances.\*

"The Wedding-Ring" gives the title to an English opera by Charles Dibdin, adapted from the Italian drama of "Il Filosofo di Campagna." There is also a curious sermon, dated early in the seventeenth century, entitled, "A Wedding-Ring Fit for the Finger," but containing nothing further than good advice to married pairs.

It is somewhat strange that this subject should have inspired fewer poets than its highly poetical nature would lead us to expect. A few, however,

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\* "Cribbing" facts, ideas, and even entire pages of any work, without acknowledgment, is vulgarly attributed to the clergy in preparing their sermons. It has fallen to my lot, not only to discover that this practice is not exclusively clerical, but also to receive the very highest compliment that could be paid to any author, by having to listen to the repetition, almost word for word, without acknowledgment, of the principal portion of the first edition of this work by a popular lecturer on the same subject, whose advertisement caught my eye during a sea-side holiday, and whose lecture I attended, much to my amusement. In the current Nos. of "The Antiquary" there is a series of articles on finger-rings by the late H. M. Westropp.



have written very sweetly upon it. The following is taken from Davison's "Poetical Rhapsody," published in 1611:—

“ If you would know the love which I you beare,  
 Compare it to the ring which your fair hand  
 Shall make more precious when you shall it wear.  
 So my love's nature you shall understand.  
 Is it of metal pure? so you shall prove  
 My love which ne'er disloyal thought did stain.  
 Hath it no end? so endless is my love,  
 Unless it you destroy with your disdain.  
 Doth it the purer wax the more 'tis tried?  
 So doth my love, yet herein they dissent,  
 That whereas gold the more 'tis purified  
 By waxing less doth show some part is spent,  
 My love doth waxe more pure by your more trying,  
 And yet increaseth in the purifying.”

The following address to the wedding-ring appears in a Collection of Poems, by Dr. Drennan, of Dublin, 1801:—

“ Emblem of happiness not bought nor sold,  
 Accept this modest ring of virgin gold.  
 Love in the small but perfect circle trace,  
 And duty in its soft, though strict embrace.  
 Plain, precious, pure, as best becomes the wife,  
 Yet firm to bear the frequent rubs of life,  
 Conjugal love disdains a fragile toy  
 Which rust can tarnish or a touch destroy;  
 Nor much admires what courts the general gaze  
 The dazzling diamond's meretricious blaze,  
 That hides with glare the anguish of a heart  
 By nature hard, though polished bright by art.  
 More to thy taste the ornament that shows  
 Domestic bliss, and, without glaring, glows.  
 Whose gentle pressure serves to keep the mind  
 To all correct, to one discreetly kind.  
 Of simple elegance the unconscious charm,  
 The only amulet to keep from harm;  
 To guard at once and consecrate the shrine,  
 Take this dear pledge—it makes and keeps thee mine.”

In Woodward's "Poems" (Oxford, 1730), we find this address :—

" TO PHŒBE, PRESENTING HER WITH A RING.

" Accept, fair maid, this earnest of my love ;  
 Be this the type, let this my passion prove ;  
 Thus may our joy in endless circles run,  
 Fresh as the light, and resiless as the sun ;  
 Thus may our lives be one *perpetual round*,  
 Nor care nor sorrow ever shall be found !"

In the "Gentleman's Magazine," vol. i., for 1780, p. 337, are some verses as unique as they are beautiful, inasmuch as they are addressed, not merely in all the freshness of a young love to a bride, but to a wife in middle age. They realise the saying of that good man who declared—"To see a young loving couple is a sweet and pleasant sight ; to see an old loving couple is the best sight of all."

" TO MRS. —, WITH A RING.

" Thee, Mary, with this ring I wed—  
 So, sixteen years ago, I said.  
 Behold, another ring—for what ?  
 To wed thee o'er again ? Why not ?  
 With that first ring I married youth,  
 Grace, beauty, innocence, and truth ;  
 Taste long admired, sense long revered,  
 And all my Mary then appeared.  
 If she, by merit since disclosed,  
 Prove twice the woman I supposed,  
 I plead that double merit now  
 To justify a double vow.  
 Here, then, to-day (with faith as sure  
 With ardour as intense and pure,  
 As when, amidst the rites divine,  
 I took thy troth and plighted mine),  
 To thee, sweet girl, my second ring  
 A token and a pledge I bring.

With this I wed, till death us part,  
 Thy riper virtues to my heart ;  
 Those virtues which, before untried,  
 The wife has added to the bride ;  
 Those virtues whose progressive claim  
 Endearing Wedlock's very name,  
 My soul enjoys, my song approves,  
 For conscience' sake as well as love's.  
 For why? They show me, hour by hour,  
 Honour's high thought, affection's power,  
 Discretion's deed, sound judgment's sentence,  
 And teach me all things—but repentance ! ”\*

A still more beautiful poem appears in “Songs by the Way,” by the late Dr. Doane, Bishop of New Jersey, entitled,

“ON A VERY OLD WEDDING-RING.

“*Device*—Two hearts united.

“*Motto*—Dear love of mine, my heart is thine.

“ I like that ring—that ancient ring,  
 Of massive form and virgin gold ;  
 As firm, as free from base alloy,  
 As were the sterling hearts of old.  
 I like it—for it wafts me back  
 Far, far along the stream of time,  
 To other men and other days,  
 The men and days of deeds sublime.

“ But most I like it, as it tells  
 The tale of well-requited love ;  
 How youthful fondness persevered,  
 And youthful faith disdain'd to rove—  
 How warmly *he* his suit preferred,  
 Though she, unpitied, long denied—  
 Till, softened and subdued, at last,  
 He won his fair and blooming bride.  
 How, till the appointed day arrived,  
 They blamed the lazy-footed hours.

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\* By the Rev. S. Bishop, M.A., head-master of Merchant Taylors' School, ob. 1795.

- “ How then, the white-robed maiden train  
 Strewed their glad way with freshest flowers—  
 And how, before the holy man,  
 They stood in all their youthful pride,  
 And spoke those words, and vow'd those vows,  
 Which bind the husband to the bride.  
 And this it tells ;—the plighted troth—  
 The gift of every earthly thing—  
 The hand in hand—the heart in heart—  
 For this I like that ancient ring.
- “ I like its old and quaint device—  
*Two blended hearts*—though time may wear them ;  
 No mortal change, no mortal chance,  
 ‘Till death,’ shall e'er in sunder tear them.  
 Year after year, 'neath sun and storm—  
 Their hopes in heaven, their trust in God—  
 In changeless, heartfelt, holy love,  
 These two the world's rough pathway trod.  
 Age might impair their youthful fires—  
 Their strength might fail 'mid life's bleak weather—  
 Still hand in hand they travelled on—  
 Kind souls ! they slumber now together.
- “ I like its simple posy too—  
 ‘ Mine own dear love, this heart is thine. !’  
 Thine, when the dark storm howls along,  
 As when the cloudless sunbeams shine.  
 ‘ This heart is thine, mine own dear love.’  
 Thine, and thine only, and for ever ;  
 Thine, till the springs of life shall fail,  
 Thine, till the chords of life shall sever.
- “ Remnant of days departed long,  
 Emblem of plighted troth unbroken,  
 Pledge of devoted faithfulness,  
 Of heartfelt, holy love, the token,  
 What varied feelings round it cling !  
 For these I like that ancient ring.”\*

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\* Let me also refer my readers to some admirable verses entitled, “ The Worn Wedding-Ring,” in a volume bearing that title, by W. C. Bennett, a living author, and a sweet singer of “ Songs of the People.”

The wedding-ring has also inspired, at the least, one good riddle :—

“ Though small of body, it contains  
 The extreme of pleasures and of pains ;  
 Has no beginning, nor no end ;  
 More hollow than the falsest friend.  
 If it entraps some heedless zany,  
 Or in its magic circle, any  
 Have entered—from its sorcery  
 No power of earth can set them free.  
 At least all human force is vain,  
 Or less than many hundred men.  
 Though endless, yet not short, nor long ;  
 And what though it's so wondrous strong,  
 The veriest child that's pleased to try,  
 Might carry fifty such as I.”

But it is quite time that I should bring this gossip to a close. I cannot better do so than by giving expression to the admirable, though hackneyed sentiment ; “ The single married, and the married happy.” I know of nothing better to say in favour of matrimony, than that it is *God's ordinance*, intended to be the normal condition of the human race.

“ 'Tis *He* who clasps the marriage band,  
 And fits the spousal-ring,  
 Then leaves ye kneeling, hand in hand,  
 Out of His stores to bring  
 His Father's dearest blessings, shed.” \*

Indeed, marriage, being the ordinance of God, is a duty incumbent upon all good and true men. “ The law and the testimony ” are expressly averse to celibacy. The law declares “ it is not good for man to be alone,” and hence all the ancient nations paid special honour to the married. Amongst the

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\* Keble.

Jews marriage has always been reckoned so honourable that he who declines it without good reason is regarded as hardly less than criminal. In ancient Greece—Sparta especially—neglect of marriage was punishable by law. In Athens, none but married men could hold any public office, because it was said that by entering upon matrimony an individual had given proof and pledge of good behaviour. An old English writer declares of a man without a wife, that he is like a turtle without its mate, like one leg when the other is lopped off, like one wing when the other is plucked, like one-half of a pair of scissors, or candle-snuffers—simply useless. And a great preacher once said, in my hearing, that a married man was rarely an unbeliever in God and revelation. Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rosseau, and Bentham were all of them unmarried. Had they been husbands and fathers we might never have heard of those frosty and infidel philosophies from their pens, by which so many hearts have been chilled and cursed!

Forbidding to marry is classed by Scripture amongst "the doctrines of devils," and amongst the tokens of a declining faith. Yet, of late years, that very prohibition has been to a great extent revived, and it has been discussed in our newspapers whether any man has a right, consistant with the claim of decency and good sense, to marry upon less than £500 a year. Not being a political economist I cannot pretend to be able to continue this discussion, but as a Christian minister, I contend that this is altogether a derogatory method of treating the subject of marriage. The end of life is to be happy here, and fit for another and better home hereafter. Marriage was created by God to contribute to that

end. And the happiness of marriage does not consist in being able to tread upon Brussels carpets, to wear Indian shawls, to drink Château Margaux, and to dine off real silver. If it be so, then, let none but the rich marry and people the land—a piece of political economy which would soon destroy the rich as well as the poor;—but this is an argument which I have neither time nor inclination to pursue. The happiness of life, and that of marriage also, consists in mutual trust, genuine affection, and tender, unpurchasable sympathy. The great and good Book says, “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith”—who can dare to doubt it?

Duly recognising the importance of prudence in marriage, and all the sad consequences of hasty, thoughtless, selfish unions, nevertheless, I am sure that it is far better for married pairs themselves, and for the community at large, that a moderately early, respectable marriage, and a marriage of affection, rather than a splendid match and a liberal settlement, ought to be the primary consideration of those parents and guardians who have daughters to give away, and of those maidens who have hearts and hands to bestow.

“O marriage! marriage! what a curse is thine,  
Whose hands alone consent, and hearts abhor!”

My friends, whether married, betrothed, or desirous of so being, may yours be a happy lot! May your experience of matrimony be such as shall lead you to speak of it as enthusiastically as a good old divine of the seventeenth century, “Marriage is the preservation of chastity, the seminary of the Commonwealth, seed-plot of the Church, pillar

(under God) of the world; the right hand of Providence, supporter of laws, states, orders, offices, gifts, and services; the glory of peace, the sinews of war, the maintenance of policy, the life of the dead, the solace of the living, the ambition of virginity, the foundation of cities, countries, universities, succession of families, crowns, and kingdoms—yea (besides the being of these) it is the well-being of their being made, and whatever is excellent in them or any other thing, the very furniture of heaven in a kind depending thereupon."

I quote from Daniel Roger's "Matrimonial Honour," 1642; but similar ideas are more beautifully expressed in a sonnet of Cesarotti—

"Era un bosco la terra; in vano a squadre  
 Gli uomini errando, e sì mescean quai fere:  
 Sceso Imeneo dalle celesti sfere,  
 La sua possanza, ah di qual ben fu madre.  
 Sacri nomi s'udir di sposo e padre;  
 Ministro di virtù fessi il piacere;  
 Saggio divenne amor, dolce dovere:  
 Nacquer leggi, cittadi, arti leggiadre.  
 Fu di famiglia pria quel che fu poi  
 Amor di patria; ché ad amar s'apprese  
 Ne'suoi sé stesso, e nella patria i suoi."

I quote also from the poet, Samuel Rogers, the following sweet lines on this topic:—

"The holy vow  
 And ring of gold, no fond illusion now,  
 Bind her as his. Across the threshold led,  
 And every tear kiss'd off as soon as shed;  
 His house she enters, there to be a light  
 Shining within, when all without is night;  
 A guardian angel o'er his life presiding,  
 Deubling his pleasures and his cares dividing  
 How oft her eyes read his; her gentle mind  
 To all his wishes, all his thoughts inclined:



Still subject, ever on the watch to borrow  
Mirth of his mirth, and sorrow of his sorrow.  
The soul of music slumbers in the shell,  
Till waked and kindled by the master spell ;  
And feeling hearts—touch them but rightly—pour  
A thousand melodies unheard before."

It is strange that a subject involving some of the most serious and important topics connected with human life and happiness should ever be the occasion of mere amusement. Scripture always speaks of marriage as a Divine institution, and our Church refers to it as "Holy Matrimony."

Eminently marriage is a sacred subject, a religious institution, and the moral character of every nation largely depends upon the serious and sacred respect with which this institution is regarded. Our Church speaks with no uncertain sound on this topic. It is God's ordinance and holy wedlock. A Christian can only look upon it in this serious light. Christian marriage is the union of two individuals only, as an expression of supreme affection to each other, in accordance with some legal form, and with a view to live faithfully together "in holy love," till the bond is severed by death. The Christian regarding marriage in this light as indissoluble on earth, will never form such a connection hastily, thoughtlessly, as a mere result of passion and self-will, but prudently, and in the fear of God. Before undertaking such solemn obligations, it is the duty of all to enquire whether the affection is likely to last, whether the choice is genuine on both sides, whether there is likely to be suitability of companionship and disinterested friendship. The man's duty is to see that his worldly means justify the additional expenses necessary, lest he should impose needless worldly

anxieties and burdens upon a trustful and gentle being, simply because he admires and selfishly wishes her for his own. Trials, troubles, sorrows accompany every earthly lot, and the question arises — are both of us qualified to bear them? Other considerations come in. It is not only necessary that a marriage should have the general sanction of the Scripture and the Church, but the further sanction of the civil government of the land in which we live. It is cruel indeed to expose an innocent, confiding, and comparatively helpless woman to needless trouble, and perhaps disgrace, unless every legal form is carefully attended to. Other essentials to happiness in marriage are as nearly as possible equality in age, in station and education, considering that it involves a companionship that is to last through life. But, above all, there should be harmony and agreement in religious belief. If agreement stops short at the highest and most essential of all things that belong to the peace and happiness of human life, all other agreements must be imperfect. Unless the wedded pair are prepared to worship together at the same altar, to seek relief from care at the same sacred source, and to drink at the same fountain of spiritual refreshment and joy, there can be no sure hope of permanent affection. Depend upon it, they only reap true happiness in wedded life who resemble the parents of John the Baptist—Zacharias and Elizabeth, “They *were both* righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of God.”

During the more than thirty years that I have been an ordained minister of the Church, I have seen many both happy and unhappy unions. I have

also observed that some of my most esteemed, most intelligent, and most charming lady friends have never married; because they were too wise to barter away a present sure happiness for an uncertain prospect. It cannot be too seriously impressed upon young people that marriage is so tender and sacred a thing, that they had better remain single than enter upon hasty, thoughtless, and self-willed engagements only to reap a life-long repentance. It will not do in this matter merely to hope for the best. Before they barter away their liberty and their peace, they must seek for some better guarantee of future happiness than flattery and the show of great affection. There must be the *sure* pledge of steadiness, sobriety, and good conduct. No man is likely to make a good husband who is not a dutiful son, a kind brother, a diligent workman, attached to home, temperate, frugal, controlled in temper, respectful and chaste in speech, and pure in life. All must be on their guard against the least sign of selfish impatience, impurity of language and action. Some men from being at first kneeling slaves, end in being cruel and selfish tyrants; and then women in their despair are forced to exchange sunny smiles for sullen looks, fretful complaints, and slatternly habits. Life is too imperfect for us to expect perfect happiness here; but a genuine affection accompanied by a religious life will inspire patience, compensation for trial and suffering, and bring down from heaven the blessed inheritance of a—

“Peace that makes life glide away  
Our long and lovely marriage-day.”

## ADDENDA.

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*The iron signet-ring, the only one originally worn in Rome (p. 7).*

CLEMENT of Alexandria (Pædag. ii., 11) has a protest against wearing a profusion of rings and Pagan ornaments, "We must wear but a single ring for the purpose of a signet, all others must be cast aside." This protest came with the increase of worldliness amongst the early Christians to be disregarded, and was repeated by Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, and others, in terms of great severity. The Museum of the Louvre, at Paris, is rich in Etruscan and Roman rings. There are many interesting specimens in the Blacas and Castellani collections in the British Museum; also at South Kensington.

There is a good deal about the collection in the Louvre in Eugène Fontenay's "Les Bijoux Anciens et Modernes," Paris, 1887.

*The ring as a credential of trust and a mark of office (p. 10).*

Alexander the Great, when dying, remitted his signet-ring to Perdicas, in token that he confided to him the reins of government. As the monarch left no other successor than an unborn child, and without any special declaration of his will, Perdicas took the command of the army, and distributed amongst the principal generals the various provinces of the empire.

In the Book of Esther we find Ahasuerus giving his ring to Haman, as a warrant for exterminating the Jews, and when he ordered Mordecai to write letters annulling the decree, he took the ring from Haman and handed it to Mordecai. "To trust a man with your ring," is a Bedouin proverb to express unbounded confidence in any one.

*Magic rings* (p. 10).

The ring of Gyges, which rendered its wearer invisible, is variously asserted to have been found by the Shepherd of Candaules in a human grave, and in the flanks of a bronze horse; by means of this talisman Gyges was enabled to enter into the king's chamber unseen, and murder him. A ring with similar properties appears in the legend respecting King Arthur and his knights. Owain had one given him by Luned, and in consequence his intended assassins were unable to see him when they came to put him to death. Another curious ring, given by Lioness to Sir Gareth, changed the colour of things, and preserved its wearer in the strife of battle from loss of blood. (See Mallory's "History of Prince Arthur," i., 146.)

The ring which Polycrates threw into the sea, and which was afterwards found in the stomach of a fish served up at the tyrant's table, was, in all likelihood, a magical circlet. The story is related by Herodotus (iii., 40), and forms the subject of a stirring ballad by Schiller. It is curious how frequently this legend of the "Fish and the Ring" reappears in history. A fish with a ring in its mouth is figured on the arms of the City of Glasgow, and the tradition is that it commemorates a miracle of St. Kentigern, who saved the honour of the Queen of Cadyon by recovering a ring—the gift of her husband—which had been thrown into the Clyde, and was afterwards found in a salmon's mouth. This story appears in full in MacGeorge's "Inquiry as to the Armorial Insignia of Glasgow"; but a more prosaic account of the origin of the shield may be read in Hamilton's "Gazetteer," vol. ii., 168. "The ring represents the Episcopal dignity which Glasgow enjoyed; the salmon the abundance of that and other fish taken from the river." A similar story is told to account for the "Fish and the Ring" in the arms of Lady Berry, on her monument in the church of St. Dunstan, Stepney. This singular shield has given rise to the tradition that Lady Berry is the heroine of the popular ballad entitled, "The Cruel Knight, or Forsaken Farmer's Daughter," the scene of which is, however, laid in Yorkshire. According to the ballad, a knight, passing by a cottage, heard the cries of a woman in labour, and through his knowledge of hidden lore, learned that the newly-born infant was to be his wife. He tried in every way to elude his destiny, and was always defeated. At length, when the girl had grown to womanhood, he took her to the seaside, and, casting a ring into the sea, refused to see her

face again till she could produce the ring thrown away. In a few days a cod-fish was caught with the ring in its mouth, and in the result the knight and the maiden were united in marriage. A somewhat similar story is told in the "Thousand and One Nights."

*The Annulus Episcopi* (p. 12).

The character of the Episcopal ring appears to have been definitely fixed by a decree of Innocent III., in 1194, enjoining a hoop of "pure, solid gold, set with a gem, not engraved." A previous Pontiff, Gregory IV. (827-844), in his "De Cultu Pontificum," contends that the Episcopal ring should not be placed on the left hand, but on the right, as a protest against the Pagan idea that the third finger was connected with the heart. He claims it for "the more worthy hand which gives the Holy Benedictions." The Episcopal ring is presented to the faithful to be kissed in some ceremonies of the Papal Church.

In "Archæologia," vol. xxxi., p. 249, two interesting Episcopal rings are figured and minutely described. They were found in 1844, in Hereford Cathedral, in the graves respectively of Bishop Stanbery, who died in 1474, and Bishop Mayew, in 1516. The first bore a sapphire, engraved with the motto, "En bon an"; the other, a ruby, stamped with the figure of the cross, filled with green enamel, and bearing also the words, "Ave Maria."

In 1875, during excavations made in the Chapter House of Durham, sapphire rings were found in the coffin of Bishop Flambard (1099-1128), and in those of Geoffery Rufus and William de St. Barbara, his successors in the See. The signet-ring of William of Wykeham is still preserved at Winchester.

The "Ring of the Fisherman," with which the Pope used to seal all briefs and bulls, is quite distinct from his Episcopal ring. It bears an image of St. Peter in his fisher's barque. It is kept in the office of the Roman Chancery, under the care of a chamberlain. That at present in use is modern, having been made on the restoration of the Papal States after the French Revolution in 1815. It plays an important part in the ceremony of the Pope's investiture, being placed on the finger of the Pontiff by the officiating cardinal, when he is asked what name he will take. (See "Archæologia," xl.)

*The nuptial-ring of the Virgin* (p. 22).

In the Duomo of Perugia this is preserved in a casket with no less than fourteen locks. This casket is kept in a chapel called "Del Santo Anello." The ring is of onyx or agate, set in gold.

*Exchange of rings* (p. 24).

Though not provided for in the English ritual, either in ancient or modern times, it would seem to have been not unusual. (See Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," v. 1)—

"A contract of eternal bond of love,  
Confirmed by mutual joinder of your hands,  
Attested by the holy close of lips,  
Strengthened *by interchangement of your rings*,  
And all the ceremony of this compact  
Sealed in my function by my testimony."

*Some synonyms for the wedding-ring.*

The Italian name for the *annulus spousalium* is *fede*—faith, as the symbol of plighted troth. Hence the two hands joined, so frequent on Italian rings, to signify mutual trust and affection. Compare Scott, "Lady of the Lake," canto vi., 28—

"Thou still dost hold  
That little talisman of gold,  
Pledge of my faith—the ring";\*

and the motto not infrequent on old French rings, "Je suis ici en lieu d'ami."

In English we often call the marriage ornament and token by the beautiful name of the "golden fetter," a link in the chain of a bondage which is, both materially and also morally, *golden*, i.e., not grievous, nor unwilling. Alas, that marriage should ever be an alliance in which material gold is the only connecting medium, and matrimony degenerate into a mere *matter o' money!*

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\* Scott, is here, however, referring to a signet-ring given as a royal pledge by the King to the hero, Fitz-James.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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