

## MARRIAGE CEREMONY.

BY REV. JOHN HEWITT.

The use of a precomposed set form of marriage is every year becoming more popular. In fact opposition to precomposed forms in religious ceremonies of all kinds is fast passing away. "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" of the Episcopal church has done much toward breaking down this opposition. Although it was many years ago embodied in the book of discipline of the Methodist church it was almost never used by the ministers of that church until recently, and the ministers of other religious bodies, which reject forms altogether, now use it upon request of those who come to them to be married.

## THE REASON

is not far to seek. Weddings have come to be regarded as great social events. And society imperiously demands obedience to the minutest details of the forms and ceremonies pertaining to it. Its best representatives seek the best forms to express the highest order of refinement and culture. Hence they appeal to art, whose special province is to find the best and truest expression for thought and feeling according to the occasion. Society therefore has become the most generous patron of art, and thus emphasizes its regard for the eternal fitness of things. However gross by nature men or women may be, if they desire recognition in any given social circle they must observe the unwritten but autocratic rules which govern it, or else presently find themselves left outside of that particular circle.

But not society only, institutions of religion also seek the aid of art so far as it can serve them in their endeavors to appropriately express the highest thought and feeling and purpose in relation to the duties and engagements peculiar to them.

In this respect at least the church and society are in agreement. And since marriage is an institution of religion, and the wedding has come to be regarded as a great social function, it is natural to expect that those ceremonies attending it will be most popular and acceptable which most nearly satisfy the aesthetics of both religion and society. The marriage ceremony of the Episcopal church seems to do this and hence it is coming into general use.

## ITS CONSTRUCTION

But have people generally a clear conception of all that this beautiful ceremony expresses? As it now stands it comprises parts of two ceremonies formerly separate and distinct, abbreviated and thrown together, and conforming to a state of society different from that which existed when they were separate.

The two parts are the betrothal and the nuptials. The history of these and of how they were brought together is too long to relate here and not necessary to our purpose except in so far as it may help to convey an intelligent idea of what they are designed to express.

It was the custom in olden time, when the church ruled society, if a couple wished to be joined in marriage, to make the fact known to the minister of the parish in which they lived, and it was his duty on the next occasion of public worship to publish the fact in the presence and hearing of the people. At that time the persons wishing to be married advanced to the steps of the choir space in the church and remained standing there upon the floor of the nave before the minister, who gave them an exhortation or instruction on the duties of the married state, received from them an audible expression of their willingness to take each the other, and gave opportunity to the people present to say whether they knew of any scriptural reason why they should not be joined together. This ceremony was called "betrothal" and gave rise to the custom which now prevails in some circles of announcing engagements. It is with reference to this that so much stands usually conducted at the entrance to the choir.

## THE NUPTIALS.

The bans or proclamations of marriage were made on several Sundays following. On the day appointed for the marriage the groom-elect with his friends appeared again at the same place and there awaited the arrival of his affianced bride. Led by her father or nearest relative or friend she also came to the place and the minister being in waiting there asked the question, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" The woman's father, mother or nearest friend then took her right hand and placed it in the hand of the minister who in turn placed it in the right hand

of the man. The significance of this part of the ceremony is thus explained: The two are about to be united in a sacred bond, by a religious rite which reads back to the institution of marriage in the time of man's innocence in the Garden of Eden before his fall. The author of the Book Genesis says that after the Lord God had "formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam, \* \* \* there was not found an help meet for him;" and that the Lord God "made a woman and brought her unto the man." It is with reference to this that the woman is given to the man at marriage. God indeed made all things, and all things are already his. But he gave man dominion over them to use them in His service, and among them was woman whom He made and gave to the man. In recognition of His goodness in thus giving him all these things man offers them again to God. Now the church is regarded as that institution through which God deals with men in spiritual things, and the ministers of the church are His ministers. Moreover every act of religion implies a devotion, a dedication, or an offering to God of something that we have from Him. In this instance a woman is dedicated to Him for the sacred purpose of becoming the wife of a man according to God's ordination in the beginning. She is therefore first given to the church which represents Him, among men in such matters, and the minister being the person appointed to execute the offices therein, her hand is placed in his. She now belongs to the church and the minister in the name or on behalf of God and his church gives her to the man by placing her right hand in his. The minister then goes within the chancel rail, into the place called the sanctuary, where the altar stands, and the man, still retaining the woman's hand, follows and leads her through the choir to the steps of the sanctuary. Hence originated the phrase often used to designate a marriage—"he led her to the altar."

The ceremony of uniting the two is now performed. Taught by the minister the man first pledges himself to the woman to be faithful "until death do us part," and the woman taking the man's hand makes the same promise to him. And notice that since they are to be joined as Christians they use only their Christian names—the names they received at baptism and not their surnames or their nicknames.

## THE RING.

As a sign or token of the agreement now entered into a ring of gold is usually given and received. This custom probably originated with the Egyptians and was afterwards followed by the Jews and other nations. The woman has been given to the man, and he has taken her "for better for worse." But he is the breadwinner and must share whatever he is or has with her. So he gives to her something which represents both. Mark that he gives the ring to the woman, and not to the minister. She gives it to the minister, the church's representative, as an offering to God of her worldly substance. The minister then usually asks God's blessing upon it and returns it to the man who places it upon the fourth finger of the woman's left hand, and the left hand not because it is "nearest the heart" as some say, but because the left hand keeps and uses what is devoted to the service of self, while the right hand is devoted to the service of God and fellow men. Moreover the man gives the ring in the name of the sacred Trinity, thus acknowledging the God of the Christian faith and invoking Him to witness his vow. But the ring has a further and higher significance. In the transaction just described not only was a ring given, but in the giving of it a circle was described, the idea to be conveyed being thus doubly expressed. The significance of the ring itself is threefold. Being a circle it signifies the endlessness of the life in which the two are to become one, and the perpetuity of that fidelity to each other in which they have just pledged themselves, and being of pure gold it represents both the purity of the life and the wealth, much or little, which they are to enjoy in common. After a prayer for God's blessing upon the twain and for His grace to enable them to live faithfully together and to "keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made," the minister, still acting as the representative or executive officer of God's church, joins their hands and says: "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." This joining of hands is the outward sign or symbol of their union, and the words of the minister declare

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that the union is God's act and not man's, a union as to which he warns all that no man must dare to dissolve. For immediately afterwards he pronounces them "man and wife, in the name of the Father, and of the Sun, and of the Holy Ghost," and what one does in the name of another is understood to be done in their behalf and pursuant to their wish.

## THE WEDDING FEE.

The custom of giving a fee to the minister seems to have a double origin. As has been said already the idea of an offering of some sort belongs to every act of religion. The parents of the woman have made an offering of her to the church and through the church, to the man. The woman has made an offering to God of what she received from the man when he gave her the ring, by giving it to the minister. The man must now offer something in return for what he has received from the church. To do this appropriately and to carry out the idea of an offering, instead of waiting until the bridal party have left their places, or the people have left the church, the groom or his best man should then and there present his offering to the minister and wait until it has been duly placed upon the Lord's table as an offering to God. This was formerly the custom in the church when it was the rule to administer the Communion in connection with the marriage ceremony. But since the administration of the communion was dropped, a fee to the minister is all that is left of the idea of an offering on the part of the man. But back of this is to be found another reason for the giving of a fee. We give it in the words of another. "Among the Jews, and generally throughout the East, marriage was considered as a sort of purchase which the man made of the woman he desired to marry. And therefore in contracting marriages, as the wife brought a portion or possession to the husband, so the husband was obliged to give her or her parents money or presents in lieu of this portion. This was the case between Hamor, the father of Shechem, and the sons of Jacob with relation to Dinah. And Jacob, having no money, offered his uncle Laban seven years service, which must have been equivalent to a large sum. The same custom also obtained among the Greeks and other ancient nations; and it is to this day the practice in several eastern countries, particularly among the Druses, Turks and Christians who inhabit the country of the Hashuran, and also among the modern Scenite Arabs, or those who dwell in tents."

## CONCLUSION.

It seems quite clear from what has been said that the marriage ceremony of the Episcopal Church is artistic in form since, in its construction, words, symbols and acts are gathered from the past and brought together into harmony to express exactly and simply and appropriately the true idea of the divine institution it always was and now is intended to celebrate as the foundation stone of human society. That it is distinctively religious and Christian in its character throughout. That none who reject the Christian religion can consistently resort to its use. That the union intended to be effected therein is a spiritual union which men and women should not enter into "unadvisedly or lightly, but soberly, discreetly, advisedly and in the fear of God." That those who regard marriage as merely a civil contract which they may at some time desire to cancel had better not be married by this ceremony, because it requires acceptance

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## NOTICE.

## CHATTEL MORTGAGE SALE.

First Publication June 8.

Notice is hereby given that by virtue of a chattel mortgage, dated on the 29th day of April, 1895, and duly filed in the office of the county clerk of Lancaster county, Nebraska, on the 29th day of April, 1895, and executed by J. E. Howe to M. L. Thomas to secure the payment of the sum of \$28.00 and upon which there is now due the sum of \$28.50. Default having been made in the payment of said sum and no suit or other proceedings at law having been instituted to recover said debt or any part thereof, therefore I will sell the property therein described to-wit:

One oak roll top desk, one oak ice chest, two eight foot maple birdseye show cases, three counters eighteen feet in all, ten feet of shelving, one square oak card table, one square black walnut card table, one four gallon water cooler, eight high back chairs four of them cane seat and four wood seat, one six foot rustic oak seat, one soft coal heater round sheet iron drum six electric light burners and all other furniture and fixtures belonging to said J. E. Howe and kept at number 110 north 13th street at the time said mortgage was executed, at public auction at number 1127 O street in the city of Lincoln, Lancaster county, Nebraska on the 25th day of June, 1895 at one o'clock P. M. of said day.

M. L. Thomas, mortgagee.

By C. S. Rainbolt, his attorney.

June 22

of the condition that it shall not be annulled or broken except by an act of God.

That if society, so called, adopts its use because its "good form" commends it, it should be prepared to accept with it all that it expresses, and thus help the church to lift the institution of marriage itself, on which the family life is based, to the highest plane of moral beauty and excellence. At any rate it is difficult to conceive how a man and a woman, understanding all that this ceremony expresses, can fail to find in it at the very beginning of their new relation as husband and wife, an incentive to lead a "sober, righteous, and godly life." To use it merely for the purpose of being in the fashion, is to play with a divine institution, and to degrade the estate to which it is the introduction.