

WEDDING CUSTOMS IN FRANCE

LITTLE CHANGE, NO MATTER WHAT THE LAWS MAY SAY.

The Dowry and the Proposal by Proxy Still Prevail Gifts Are Many. Beginning With the Jewels From the Bridegroom Unmarried Women's Dress.

The French young girl says to her father: "I have been obedient; I have effaced myself; I have kept my eyes on the ground. I am entitled to a husband. Find me one."

And the life work of father and mother since her birth has been to fit themselves to answer:

"Patience, you shall have your little

to a husband in her parents' right to a son-in-law. Naturally they court the most charming in person and situation. The plain girl profits wonderfully. Young men who could not make long love to that plain face and ugly disposition may plunge in a single act of heroism and say "Yes!" to the girl's father.

In France, where prudent marriages and prudent living have raised up a wonderfully numerous class of small but sufficient incomes from investments, girls are tagged with the exact figures of their dowries.

It is the family sinking fund, and the gossips have precise data. "Suzanne? She puts on airs because her father has refused the doctor. She told Marcelle that with \$10,000 dot] her mother says that they ought to get a rising politician."



"THE GAUDY SWISS IN HIS RED COAT TELLS THE PARTY WHAT TO DO: KNEEL, RISE, TAKE THE CANDLE, ADVANCE TO THE ALTAR."

husband. We are giving \$20,000 dot with you, dear child, and have a right to be particular as to the person. Patience, we are occupied with your affair."

"And Berthe?" "Her father courts the new young notary who bought the Vasseur practice. But what will you? It cost him \$16,000, therefore he should marry \$20,000 dot."



"MAY PLUNGE IN A SINGLE ACT OF HEROISM AND SAY 'YES' TO THE PLAIN GIRL'S FATHER."

Practically it has done nothing. At the Council of Trent, 350 years ago, the French prelates sought, though vainly, to make the consent of parents essential even to the validity of marriage.

There are, however, lovely creatures capable of turning young men's heads, and lots of just nice girls with money. When, as happens even in France, a young man falls in love with one of these the council refused Napoleon almost granted to parents in his Code; and the freedom which the law proposes to middle class and upper class young people is a freedom which all their surroundings prevent them from exercising.



"NOW HE HAS A RIGHT TO MAKE A CALL, ON WHOM? ON HIS FUTURE MOTHER-IN-LAW, OF COURSE."



"A LONG DRAWN OUT CEREMONY WITH CARPETS, CANDLES, FLOWERS, ORCHESTRA AND SWISS IN THEIR KNEE BREECHES AND COCKED HATS POUNDING THE CHURCH FLOOR WITH THEIR HALBERDS."

partner and together they call on a friend of the girl's parents. They have a talk and go away. The friend has a talk with the parents of the girl and goes away. If all is well, notes are exchanged by the same intermediary. It is only after making sure that real appropriateness exists that they meet.

Each morning he must send the girl a white bouquet. He arranges with a florist for the job—not to have it on his mind. The French courts have decided that such florist bills are recoverable later on, out of the girl's dot. It is only after making sure that real appropriateness exists that they meet.



"PATIENCE, DAUGHTER, WE ARE OCCUPIED WITH YOUR AFFAIR."



"MADEMOISELLE, IF YOU PLEASE, THEY HAVE NOT PASSED BY THE CHURCH YET."

the young man makes a call. On whom? On his future mother-in-law naturally. He ought to thank her warmly for a good quarter of an hour. He should make himself very agreeable. Then, just before taking his departure, he may ask to see the girl. It is a rare kindness; until they are betrothed it is improper now for them to meet. The betrothal is a very private family party; you do not expose the blushing joys of a young girl to the critical amusement of friends.

The mornings are for the trousseau, and it is unbecoming that he should even hear the trousseau mentioned. The corbelle is his personal gift to the girl, often representing a little fortune in jewels, always at least a couple of nice rings with real stones.



"THE YOUTH MAY HAVE WRITTEN BILLETTS DOUX AND STAMMERED A FORMAL PHRASE, AS 'MAY I ASK FOR YOU?' BUT HE DOES NOT."

and he must put it on the girl's finger. The mother cannot always take her place. Generally it is after lunch, when the young folks are allowed to talk together without being overheard. Alone? Dear no. In France you marry first and do your courting afterward.

not for himself, but for the two of them considered as one person, and it gives the wife a mortgage on all his property. In the case of divorce or her dying without children, the dot question becomes awkward for the husband. Really, on the ground of sentiment, the French husband might be pitted. He gets a dot with a string tied to it and finds his wife's family tied to the other end, for he is bound always to give his wife's parents a place in his household if they demand it or else find them a home. If he refuses they can sue him. His



"IT IS THE FRENCH ORDER OF THE GARTER. HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE!"

only solace is the thought that should he need it he can sue his mother-in-law to support him.

All this and more may be read between the lines of the marriage contract. It is a blithe morning. Many guests are present. The notary reads the contract, but the young man ought not to listen. Good taste demands that he should whisper gayly to the girl to show disinterestedness.

The notary has finished reading. The mother of the girl should turn to the oblivious lovers with a tender and indulgent smile. The young man should step forward, briskly grab the pen, sign hastily—and kiss the girl, smack, on the cheek. At last! He has put in six months between the kiss on the hand and the kiss on the cheek.

And the kiss on the lips? When they are married! There are tens of thousands of married men in France who never kissed their wives upon the lips until their wedding day. Yet the old French principle of "Marry first and court her afterward" does not say "Marry first and love her afterward."

You see, they have the wisdom of old custom to constrain them to love. Think of those daily white bouquets! The corbelle too goes far to win a girl's heart. Faust put it into the jewel scene of "Goethe."

The engagement ring began it. It is a thing never changed; some girls fear pearls for telling tears. For the corbelle also he asks the girl what jewels she wants, and the jewel scene continues. The "first parure" is always diamonds, the second is of pearls or rubies. Even in the middle class families, where the girl's dot does not exceed \$20,000, the jewels will cost the youth at least \$3,000.

Gifts, gifts! The family give enormously, friends give enormously. The institution of godfather and godmother is a great thing for young housekeepers. They are strong on weddings, their gifts running into Government securities, building lots, silver services and valuable furs.

It helps to love to be full stocked for life. The young couple, giggling, sympathize like two successful thieves. The two families together buy the furniture, but it is the peculiar province of the girl to bring all linen.

I say linen with intention, for this is the land that disdains cotton, and the quantities of sheets, counterpanes, tablecloths, handkerchiefs, napkins and pillow cases which young French girls bring to their husbands is astounding. As to her own personal lingerie, here is a curious fact. During years before her marriage the French girl has been accumulating fine things which she never puts on. While a young girl she wears coarse linen things without the slightest decoration.

If you should ask a hundred young French matrons what was the first favor they asked of their husbands after marriage ninety-five of them would answer: "I sent him out to buy crimping irons."



"I SENT HIM OUT TO BUY A CRIMPING IRON."

society. I have known a girl's mother to grow indignant when the guests at the lunch addressed her, "Madame."

music, the bride is in the sacristy weeping with her mother. "What are all those carriages? They are wedding carriages, of course, but engaged for the entire afternoon, and I will tell you why. Truly fashionable folks have given up the practice, but Parisian avenues in summer time are none the less gay by thousands of such processions.



"GIRLS TAGGED WITH THE EXACT FIGURE OF THEIR DOT."

following. Then they had the religious service very private. It is a long drawn out ceremony with carpets, candles, flowers and "Swiss" in their knee breeches and cocked hats pounding the church floor with their halberds.

The father of the bride leads his daughter, the bridegroom leads his own mother; the mother of the bride is accompanied by the father of the bridegroom, while the organist, assisted by harp, tears off Bach's "Prelude."



"ROLL, MUSIC: THE BRIDE IS IN THE SACRISTY WEeping WITH HER MOTHER."

Behind the cascade there is a restaurant, there are restaurants all over Paris. Some job wedding breakfasts for the poor. Others furnish wedding banquets for the wealthy. In each case the party is hilarious. Conversation sparkles before the champagne and explodes after it.

The poet of the family reads his verses, every one must make a speech or sing a song—even the bride, who like a girl of spirit lifts her glass and trills out bravely. Corks pop, a pandemonium of happiness lets itself loose. What laughter and what blushes! Until a small boy instructed by the officiant stealthily crawls underneath the table and attacks the bride's left leg.

The small boy is bustling for her garter, a special garter all of ribbons. When the small boy gets the garter it is taken from him and cut into small pieces. Each guest pins a piece in his buttonhole. It is the French Order of the Garter. Honi soit qui mal y pense.



"IT IS THE BENEDICTION OF PARIS."