What's In a Wedding Custom?

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What's In a

Wedding

Custom

by Janice Furman
Technical Journalism Freshman

Several traditional customs connected with the ceremony which seemingly have no explanation today, have become an important part of our culture because of the part they played in the past.

Few would suspect that the best man was originally the groom's henchman, stealing some unfortunate maiden from the safety of her father's cave in the dead of night. The ring symbolizes the ropes once used to bind the struggling captive.

Shoes tied behind the newly-weds' fleeting car are reminiscent of the days when rocks were hurled at the departing prehistoric bride and groom. Even the honeymoon is a reminder of the few weeks when couples would retreat from the community to allow the family's wrath to cool.

* * *

The tradition of the wedding ring evolves from the customs of the early Pharaohs. To the Egyptians, the groom proved that he trusted his bride with the custody of his house when he placed the ring on her finger. The Romans went a step farther and had a double ring ceremony much like today's except that the rings were exchanged between the father-in-law and the groom.

The Christians were the first to begin the practice of exchanging diamonds. The diamond, long a symbol of constancy and endurance, and the circle representing eternity were combined by the Christians as a token of mutual fidelity.

There have been several romantic theories as to why the ring is placed on the third finger. Romanticists in the medieval ages claimed that from this finger a vein ran directly to the heart. They even gave it a Latin name meaning Love Vein. However, present-day doctors have sadly admitted that although it's a beautiful thought, there is no basis for the belief. Historians present the unromantic theory that the ring is placed on the third digit because this finger is safest from damage or loss. Another explanation is that the officiating clergyman would touch the first three fingers and say, "In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," and the ring went on the last finger touched.

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