

MARRIAGE IN THE CATHEDRAL

Those whose ancestors were married in Manchester Cathedral will be interested in an account of such a ceremony- particularly if they were one of a number of couples married on the same day. It was published in a newspaper in 1863 and is itself a report from another publication, Mr. Hawthorne, in a paper in the Atlantic Monthly, on 'Outside Glimpses of English Poverty' gives the following picture:

I was once present at the wedding of some poor English people, and was deeply impressed by the spectacle, though by no means with such proud and delightful emotions as seem to have affected all England on the recent occasion of the marriage of its Prince. It was in the cathedral at Manchester, a particularly black and grim old structure, into which I had stepped to examine some ancient and curious woodcarvings within the choir. The woman in attendance greeted me with a smile, (which always glimmers forth on the feminine visage, I know not why, when a wedding is in question), and asked me to take a seat in the nave till some poor parties were married, it being the Easter holidays, and a good time for them to marry, because no fees would be demanded by the clergymen.

I sat down, accordingly, and soon the parson and his clerk appeared at the altar, and a considerable crowd of people made their entrance at the side door, and ranged themselves in a long huddled line across the chancel. They were my acquaintances of the poor street, or persons in a precisely similar condition of life, and were now come to their marriage ceremony in just such garbs as I had always seen them wear: the men in the loafers' coats, out at the elbows, or their labours' jackets, defaced with grimy toil; the women drawing their shabby shawls tighter about their shoulders, to hide the raggedness beneath; all of them unbrushed, unshaven, unwashed, uncombed, and wrinkled with penury and care; nothing virgin-like in the brides, nor hopeful or energetic in the bridegroom - they were, in short, the mere rags and tatters of the human race, whom some east wind of evil omen, howling along the streets, had chanced to sweep together in an unfragrant heap. Each and all of them conscious of his or her individual misery, had blundered into the strange miscalculation of supposing that they could lessen the sum of it by multiplying it into the misery of another person.

All the couples (and it was difficult in such a confused crowd to compute exactly their number) stood up at once, and had execution done upon them in the lump, the clergyman addressing only small parts of the service to each individual pair, but so managing the larger portion as to include the whole company without the trouble of repetition. By this compendious contrivance, one would apprehend, he came dangerously near making every man and woman the husband or wife of every other; nor, perhaps, would he have perpetrated much additional mischief by the mistake; but, after receiving a benediction in common, they assorted themselves in their own fashion, as they only knew how, and departed to the garrets, or the cellars, or the unsheltered street corners, where their honeymoon and subsequent lives were to be spent.

The parson smiled decorously, the clerk and the sexton grinned broadly, the female attendant tittered almost aloud, and even the married parties seemed to see something exceedingly funny in the affair; but for my part, though

generally apt enough to be tickled by a joke, I laid it away in my memory as one of the saddest sights I ever looked upon".

Another account of multiple weddings from The Bridal Bed by Joseph Braddock (Robert Hale Ltd. 1960):

'Then there were ... multiple weddings..round the turn of the last century as many as forty couples were married together. One marriage service only was read, but the sacred words of union were spoken by the clergyman to each couple. In the nineteenth century, because of the low fees charged, the Manchester Parish Church became so popular that numerous wholesale weddings took place there. Sir George Head has described, with entertaining detail, one such multiple wedding in The Old Church at Manchester on a Monday morning.

" The couples were all poor people, and as to the brides and bridegrooms, as few were dressed in special costume, and all were very generally attended by friends and relatives, it was not easy to say which was which. One party arrived at the church-door evidently wishing to belong to the higher classes, and, though dragged by one solitary horse, made a strenuous effort to outshine. Their carriage, a narrow vis-a-vis fly intended for two persons, now contained four, besides a fat man with bushy whiskers, probably the bride's brother, who occupied the box with the coachman. Within, packed as close as they could possibly sit, on one side were two bridesmaids; opposite to these the bride and bridegroom; the latter a spruce, sandy-haired young man, looking flushed and eager. One of his arms circled the waist of the young lady, on whose blooming countenance he bestowed glances of the very tenderest description - in fact, his looks were so particularly expressive, that, attitude and all considered, I hardly knew whether to compare him, in my mind, to the statue of cupid regarding his Psyche, or a Scotch terrier watching at a rat hole.

The people sat in the fly until the church-door was opened, and then the ladies got out and tripped across the pavement into the church. They wore short petticoats and white satin bonnets scooped out under the hind part, with sugar-loaf crowns, and their back hair underneath combed upwards. When all was ready, and the church-doors opened, the clergyman and clerk betook themselves to the vestry, and the people who were about to be married and their friends seated themselves in the body of the church opposite the communion-table, on benches placed there for the purpose. There was little 'mauvais honte' among the women, but of the men, poor fellows! some were seriously abashed. At the advance of a sheepish-looking bridegroom, he was immediately assailed on all sides with, 'Come in, man; what art afraid of? Nobody'll hurt thee.' And then a general laugh went round in a suppressed tone, but quite sufficient to confound and subdue the newcomer.

At last a sudden buzz broke out - 'the clergyman's coming!' and then all was perfectly silent. About twelve couples were there to be married; the rest were friends and attendants. The clerk now called upon the former to arrange themselves together round the altar. In appointing them to their proper places, he addressed each in an intonation of voice particularly soft and soothing, and which carried

with it the more of encouragement as he made use of no appellative but the Christian name of the person spoken to. Thus he proceeded: 'Daniel and Phoebe; this way, Daniel; take off your gloves, Daniel. - William and Anne; no, Anne; here, Anne; t'other side, William. - John and Mary; here, John; oh, John; gently, John'. And then addressing them all together: 'Now all of you give your hats to some person to hold.' Although the marriage service was generally addressed to the whole party, the clergyman was scrupulously exact in obtaining the accurate responses from each individual."

Another story has been reported of the Rev. Joshua Brookes, who also ministered at this church, that once, having been told that he had accidentally joined in wedlock the wrong parties, replied~~~~: "Pair as you go out; you're all married; pair as you go out".'

There are several books which relate Manchester life in the 1800's one is the Manchester Man by Mrs Linneus Banks, which is now out of print but can probably be found in the library.

The Manchester Cathedral was, at that time called the "Old Collegiate Church" and was the only place for miles around licensed for marriages. This meant that many people wanted to marry there. Special days were set aside for marriages and people came from miles around without having made any appointment with the church. They milled around the church, the men usually coming from the pubs, to which the women were banned. People had no watches, nor clocks, how could there be a timetable? Many men, drunk, arrived late and missed the event, some were even married in their absence by proxy. The Vicar was said to have married more people than any other of his time, and he lined the groups up all along the alter rail, often writing their names on a piece of paper which he stuffed in his pockets-goodness knows how many did not get their names in the registers. Groups of ten to twenty couples were married at a time, and there were as many groups in a single day. For the rich, of course, special rules applied, no mixing with those smelly people.