

supposed to be a voluntary matter, but it takes a strong man with a thick hide to turn up at a wedding reception without having sent a gift. It is almost as fatal to one's future social life not to send a present when one does not go to the ceremony, even though it was obvious that the invitation in the first place was sent for the present it would rake in. (Cast thy bread upon the waters, and it shall come back as sardines on toast! is the popular wedding slogan.)



"What about your hocking now?"

One of the highlights of any wedding is when the best man searches his eleven pockets for the ring, slips it to the white-gilled groom, and the poor fellow grabs his beloved's trembling left hand and tries to force the circle of gold or platinum on to her fourth finger. Why a ring? Why fourth finger, left hand? Once upon a time, the Egyptians used to get married, too, and they chose a ring as a symbol of marriage because it was endless as a true marriage should be. (Long sighs not permitted here.)

But why single out the finger next to the little one on the left hand? One theory is that it is the least used finger of the ten. The more romantic people say that a vein runs direct from this finger to the heart, and so it is fitting that the ring should remain ever close to it. This sentiment does not appeal to those who marry with the head and not the heart, for money and not for love.

The Greeks and the Romans believed in the story of the vein. They always stirred their medicines with the fourth finger because they believed that if anything harmful should have got mixed with the potion the versatile vein would immediately give warning to the heart of the danger.

And so they took to wearing their wedding rings on that finger. Did they perhaps expect the combination of ring and vein to give warning in the same way of unfaithfulness?

If there is one custom that does not make the happy couple happier—no it is not the institution of the mother-in-law—it is the habit of throwing things at them as they leave the church. True, they have to get used to this throwing business—plates, rolling-pins, pots and pans—but why start straight after the ceremony heaving handfuls of confetti, rice, and even old *scarpas* at the luckless pair?

It all started with the Romans. In those ancient times, the bride, when she gave her right hand to the groom, made sure she carried in her left three wheat ears, symbolising plenty. The ceremony was followed by the eating of a cake made of flour, salt, and water. (*Niente zucchero, niente cioccolato.*) This custom died out—no wonder—but the carrying of the three ears of wheat remained until the Middle Ages. Eventually it became the custom of the local single lasses to gather at the church door and



"Mind the scarpas, Millie"