



Henry Raine's Marriage Portion Ceremony

described by William Quekett in *My Sayings & Doings* (Kegan, Paul & Trench 1888) pages 90-97

RAINES CHARITIES

This noble and interesting Charity is, perhaps, without a rival, either in this or any other part of the civilised world. It stands forth as a glorious monument of the wisdom and beneficence of its good and pious founder, and a model for the contemplation of the philanthropist in all succeeding ages.

This Charity, which comprises two establishments, was founded by Mr. Henry Raine, a brewer, in the parish of St. George's Middlesex, who, in 1719, commenced the good work by erecting in a place now called Charles Street, Old Gravel Lane, in that parish, a substantial and appropriate building, since called the Lower Schools. These schools, with suitable residences attached for the master and mistress, were for the education therein of 50 boys and 50 girls, who were clothed and educated at the founder's expense. From the year 1719 to 1736 these schools were carried on under the superintendence of the founder, by who, in the latter year, they were permanently endowed. The boys were admitted at the age of nine years, and the girls at eight.

In 1736 Mr. Raine extended the Charity by the erection and endowment of a new school, called the Asylum.

THE ASYLUM

In this building 40 girls, "chosen out of the most deserving of those brought up in the old school, and who have continued therein two years," are wholly maintained, clothed, and educated. Ten are elected into it annually, and after being there four years (during the last of which they are instructed in the duties of domestic servants), they go out to service; and at the age of 22 are entitled, on production of satisfactory testimonials, to become candidates for the marriage portion of one hundred pounds, for which six of them may draw lots on every 1st May and 26th December, two of such marriage portions being given in each year; the unsuccessful candidates, continuing unmarried, may draw again from time to time until they obtain the prize. The proposed husband must be a man of good character, and belong to the Church of England, and be approved of by the trustees.

DRAWING FOR THE MARRIAGE PORTION

This ceremony takes place in the great room of the asylum, in the presence of all the girls of the establishment and many visitors, principally ladies. The scene is a very interesting one, as may be conceived from the description given of it by the founder in his will, who, after exhorting his two nephews to purchase £4,000 stock in order to make a permanent provision for these marriage portions, thus pathetically expresses himself: - "I doubt not but my nephews would cheerfully purchase the said stock if they had seen, as I have, six poor innocent maidens come trembling to draw the prize, and the fortunate maid that got it burst out in tears with excess of joy." From this account here given it is evident that the benevolent founder gave away marriage portions in a similar manner before he built the new school.

THE WEDDING

The 1st of May is a day of exciting interest and cheerfulness throughout the parish of Saint George. From an early hour in the morning, and at intervals during the day, the fine set of church bells ring a merry peal, the flag is raised on the church's lofty tower, the marriage of the happy couple is solemnized at the Parish Church, the whole of the 140 children and the trustees afterwards attend divine service there, and a sermon is preached by the lecturer who, under the will, takes the prominent part in the management of the asylum, and the children and trustees then return to the asylum, where the drawing takes place for the next marriage portion, to be given away on the ensuing 5th November.

THE DINNER

On the day of the wedding a dinner is provided for the bride and bridegroom and their friends in the matron's room at the asylum. The trustees and friends of the Charity also dine together at the asylum, at their own expense, the senior girls assisting in the preparation of the dinner and in waiting at table. At an appointed time after dinner the bride and bridegroom and their friends enter the room near the head of the table; the girls of the asylum then range themselves at the other end, in a half-circle, and sing the following ode to an organ accompaniment, performed by the parish organist. The music to this ode was written, at my request, by the celebrated Dr. Gauntlett, the ode having been before this merely recited by the children, and it was performed for the first time, under his own conductorship, in the year when I, as a trustee, presided at the dinner, and by brother Edwin, who lived in the parish and was elected a trustee, took the vice-chair. The members of Parliament and magistrates and many other gentry dined on these occasions.

First Ode



Spi-rit of Raine! let thy se-raphic strain But for a moment know suspense,



And each gen'rous mind possess, While we chaunt forth the pleasing theme of thy muni-ficence.

To the Children



Daughters of in-dustry, attend, With us com-memorate your friend, Whose



gratitude to heav'n displays Each year his own im - mor - tal praise.

Chorus



Proclaim his worth, ful - fil the plan Of this un - ri - vall'd friend of man.

To the President and Trustees
Patrons of innocence and youth,
Encouragers of plighted truth,
Ye who would save the infant poor
From vicious pleasure's baneful lure,
Chorus

To the Bride and Bridegroom



Here mo-dest merit, vir-tous love, The sweet rewards of both may prove; Here



many a nymph and many a swain May bless with joy the name of Raine.

Chorus



To God whose goodness crowns the year, Whose mercies in each work ap - pear, Whose mercies



in each work appear, To Him your grateful voi - ces raise, Ex-ert each ta - lent in His



praise, To God your grateful voi - ces raise, Ex-ert each ta - lent in His praise.

PRESENTATION OF THE MARRIAGE PORTION

The bride and bridegroom then advance towards the Chairman, who delivers an address of congratulation and admonition, and presents the bride with a prize containing one hundred new sovereigns obtained from the Mint as her marriage portion, given to her in a handsome bag made by some young lady in the Parish, after which the following ode is sung as before, with the organ accompaniment:-

Second Ode



Let us all glad thanks ex-pressing, Our Cre - a-tor's boun-ty sing;



Ev'-ry good and perfect blessing Streams from that e - ter - nal spring:



'Tis a fountain ev - er flowing, Here are all our wants sup-plied;



Ne-ver wearied in be - stowing, Thee we sing, Our Heav'nly Guide.

To the Patrons and Benefactors



With thankful love we greet Our Patrons kind to - day; For you the God of Heav'n en -



treat His smile to bless your way....., His smile to bless your way. From His bright



seat a - bove May he your work re - ward, And bid you en-ter, in His love, The glo - ry



of your Lord....., The glo - ry of your Lord.

Chorus

Let us all unite in praises, To the God of earth and sky;
He from want and sorrow raises, Sets the humble poor on high.
Many favoured thus before us, Pour'd to heav'n the grateful song,
Many a voice shall swell the chorus, and for ever praise prolong.

To the Bride and Bridegroom

May blessing from God's throne Descend on dove-like wing;
Your blooming years in peace roll on, A bright perennial spring.
Your happy lot be crown'd With love and length of days;
Your hearts with gratitude abound, Your life be hymns of praise.

Chorus

Lord! we pray Thee, grant Thy blessing To this work of Charity;
Richly Thy dear love possessing, Thou our Guide, our Patron be.
Lord! we praise Thee with glad voices, Each devoted to thy fear,
In one tide of song rejoices; Hear our prayers, our praises hear!

The trustees and visitors then rise, and drink to the health and happiness of the bride and bridegroom, after which the newly married couple and their friends retire.

I remember a pleasing incident which is worth mentioning in connection with this Charity. A young gentleman applied to me, as the lecturer, for permission to dine with the trustees. He said he had an important message to communicate, but could not do so until the dinner. Although this was somewhat informal, yet, seeing that he was a gentlemanly well-to-do young fellow, I gave the required permission. As the appointed time he sat down with the rest of the guests, and all passed off as usual until after the collection had been made for the funds of the Charity, when the young man obtained leave to say a few words. He told us that he was now one-and-twenty, and that he had been sent there by his mother, who had been brought up as one of the girls of the institution. She had drawn the prize of £100, and it had pleased God to bless her with great prosperity ever since. She was now in the possession of a plentiful fortune, and she had requested him to return to the trustees the £100 with her sincere thanks, and the earnest hope that others would be similarly blessed. The young man handed to the Chairman a £100 bank note; and the whole party rose and drank his good health, suitably expressing their thanks to his worthy mother for her generous gift.