

AN AMISH WEDDING

THREE VIRTUES — FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY — EXEMPLIFIED BY SOLEMN CEREMONY

High noon neared and a solemn hush fell upon the two hundred and fifty relatives and guests assembled in the home of Benjamin Esh, at Mascot, Lancaster county, Pa., to witness a solemn wedding ceremony.

To Sarah, nineteen, eldest daughter of the Esh household, the great moment of her life had arrived—the biggest event in the life of any Amish girl. She was about to be married to David King, of near Intercourse.

Four bishops, a preacher and a deacon took part in the solemn proceedings. It was a typical all-day ceremony of the “old order” of “house” Amish. It began early Tuesday and was concluded, as such affairs are, after midnight Wednesday morning. Among the invited guests was a friend, who also happened to be a reporter¹—hence this story—for the Amish Church does not seek publicity.

INVITATIONS NEVER REFUSED

No one refuses an invitation to an Amish wedding; and nobody who attends ever forgets one, for the event is a revelation. One finds on such occasions an expression of genuine friendship for others, and a spirit of goodwill among themselves, that is unexcelled elsewhere. One goes away with the impression of having been with a truly devout and reverent people; also, one learns from the sacredness and solemnity of the ceremony, why there is never an Amish divorce and why infidelity is unknown. Would that the world might get the lesson!

The King-Esh wedding is not singled out for special attention. It happened to be typical of similar occasions now taking place throughout the county. The Amish marriage season, now at its height, usually begins about November 1st and runs to Christmas—no one knows why, except that it follows an established custom. It is as good a time as any to marry, the elders point out; because the crops are in the barn, farm work eases, and a wedding fits in well with harvest festivals, general thanksgiving and the period of gaiety and rejoicing.

GUESTS ARRIVE AT DAWN

Before daybreak, teams began to drive into the Esh farmyard (the old order of Amish do not use automobiles.) Hostlers were there to unhitch the teams, care for the horses throughout the day, and hitch them again when—

¹ An article entitled, “Plain Wedding is a Revelation to Newspaper Man,” by Miller Ressler, was published in The Lancaster Daily Intelligencer and Journal of Friday, November 16th, 1934.

ever the drivers were ready to return to their homes. Such details are arranged far in advance of the day.

The house was crowded by eight-thirty o'clock, and the services began with forty-five minutes of singing, by the congregation. An outsider unfamiliar with the proceedings (all the services,—preaching, singing and prayer, are in German) might have mistaken the wedding ceremony for a funeral, so solemn is the spirit of the occasion. It is an axiom that at a marriage ceremony the *mother* of the bride always weeps; but at an Amish wedding, nearly everybody weeps, including the preachers.

But there is a beauty and dignity in the solemnity and simplicity of the service that is unforgettable—an impressiveness and seriousness which helps one to understand why Amish couples remain married unto death.

C. B. Miller, uncle of the bride, of near Bird-in-Hand, had charge of seating the guests, no small problem, since all present wanted to "see everything," if possible. To accommodate the greatest number, the preachers spoke in the doorway between the two large rooms.

AUDIENCE LISTENS GRAVELY

Seated on the long benches, without backs, throughout the lower rooms of the home, the audience listened gravely. The men and the women are segregated. Some of the elders had arm chairs, and a few of the very aged were provided with cushions. All the women, and even infants in arms, wore the traditional white caps, except the bride and her female attendants. She wore a black cap, as the custom is for the first time in her life, and will never wear it again.

The ceremony itself lasted more than three and one-half hours. After the singing, Rev. John Spicher, of Zook's Corner, uncle of the bride, preached until ten o'clock. A silent prayer followed, everybody kneeling. Then, Daniel King, deacon, of Leacock township, read an impressive passage from the Scriptures.

Bishop Henry Lapp, of Leacock township, took up the discourse shortly after ten o'clock and preached until about eleven-thirty, when the couple to be married, seated nearby, were summoned to stand up and answer the fateful questions. He placed their hands together and pronounced them man and wife.

Brief and appropriate remarks followed by other clerics present, without rising from their seats. These included Bishop Aaron Esh, of Monterey, uncle of the bride; Bishop John Beiler, of Groffdale; and Bishop Samuel M. Stoltzfus, of Morgantown.

WEDDING FEAST FOLLOWS

The serious mood of the morning gave way to cheerfulness in the afternoon and gaiety in the evening. Immediately after the solemn marriage ser-

vices were concluded, shortly after noon, many helping hands cleared away the benches and chairs, and in a very short while the tables are ready for the wedding feast.

Now, two hundred and fifty people can eat a lot of food, but there was enough for all and to spare. Twenty-two ducks, a number of geese and chickens, and a multitude of cakes, pies, cookies, meats, and other viands, were provided that would tempt the appetite of the most hopeless of dyspeptics.

Tables were set in several rooms to expedite the feast. "Have you eaten yet?" and, if so, "Did you get enough?" or, "Do you want to eat again?" were asked again and again as they set before the guests the best food to be had in heaven-blessed Lancaster county.

It is interesting to know that friends who are unable to attend are never forgotten. For instance, a neighbor, preparing dinner for her husband, was surprised by a member of the wedding party who "just dropped in with a little snack." She found that the "snack" was enough for several meals.

INVALIDS NOT FORGOTTEN

Then there was Aunt Annie King, grandmother of the groom, eighty-one next January, too old to attend, who also must have a share in the merriment. Before any one else had a bite, a cardboard box, two feet long, a foot wide and a foot deep, was crammed to the brim with the best of everything. Because she lived several miles away, and it was time for dinner, Enos Nolt, of Mascot, a guest, went at once to her home in his car, in order that the "snack" might be there in good time.

Days and weeks of intensive planning and work precede such an event. The premises of the bride's home, where the wedding is held, are white-washed, scrubbed and re-scrubbed and everything is made spic and span for the great day. At the Esh home, for example, seven hundred bushels of potatoes on the barn floor had to be moved in order to provide room for the horses of the guests.

Becky Petersheim Fisher, of Intercourse, aunt of the bride, noted for her skill as a cook and baker, moved to the Esh home Sunday evening. Because the Amish respect the Sabbath, nothing was done before midnight, but promptly at the stroke of twelve, she started mixing yeast and worked all day Monday in preparing "fat pretzels," cakes and other things for the dinner.

"NO TROUBLE AT ALL"

Said John Esh, grandfather of the bride, "It is no trouble at all, because everybody helps. It is really a pleasure, because we like the work and excitement that precede a wedding."

The couple were attended by John and Sarah King, brother and sister of the groom; and by Elizabeth and Josh Esh, brother and sister of the bride. No wine or intoxicating drink was served at the dinner. After the dinner,

a long table was set in the largest room in the house. About seventy of the younger couples sat around this, which was covered with a light luncheon, while their elders crowded close behind, and the entire afternoon was spent in singing the German songs beloved by the Church.

Extra tables were set at night, so that everyone could have supper. Until after midnight the younger element held sway, singing or eating as their choice dictated. While the young people sang, the elders sat apart and discussed crops, church and neighborhood affairs.

ESCAPES TRIP OVER FENCE

“Throw him over the fence,” is as popular a diversion at weddings as ever and still prevails. David King escaped Tuesday because it was his wedding day, but he will get it at the next wedding he attends, if they catch him out of the house. According to custom, a recently married man must be thrown over the fence—any fence will do—in order to be completely married. It is one of the bright spots of the celebration and always attracts a great deal of enthusiasm.

One leaves an Amish wedding with the feeling that they are a people who love their fellowmen and have really learned the true meaning of the word cooperation,—helping one another.