

MENACE OF DIVORCE IN ST. JOSEPH COUNTY

One Out of Every Three Suits Filed in Local Courts is Petition for Dissolution of the Marriage Bonds

Four Out of Every Five Such Petitions Are Instituted by Women and "Cruelty" Is by far the Most Popular Charge

A divorce is a sure thing for attracting attention. In the phrase of Channing Pollock, it is "sure fire boom." A newspaper man knows he has something people will read when he prints the story of a divorce.

Many modern fiction writers display a striking fondness for beginning their novels at the point where they used to end them and the characters lived happily ever after. Running them around the triangle of love and divorce, their stories are finished with a narcotic solution soothing to the reader's nerves and often it is well that the reader be lulled into forgetfulness. Divorces not infrequently figure in the plots of present-day dramas. This tendency has been called a rather unhealthy symptom for the art, but, healthy or unhealthy, it is quite a normal outgrowth of actual conditions. The mirror of art is at least reflecting life accurately, if not altogether wholesomely.

DIVORCES REAL FACTS.

An examination of the dockets in the circuit clerk's office at the St. Joseph county court house is ample proof that divorcees are not merely confined to fiction, but belong to the realm of facts. Divorces are a large factor in modern life and are increasing. Out of approximately 681 cases appearing on the dockets of the St. Joseph county circuit and superior courts during the past six months 269, or more than a third, were divorce suits. Out of all the various other causes wherein men litigate a divorce suit was brought every time two others were initiated. Over half of the cases filed in the records of the St. Joseph county superior court during the past four months were divorce suits, not including suits for separate maintenance.

It is usually understood that to call a lawyer a divorce court lawyer is to cast a reflection upon his professional repute, but as a matter of fact there are few attorneys engaged in general practice who will not accept divorce cases. This, too, is to be expected both as a matter of dollars and cents and as a matter of principle. As a matter of dollars and cents because divorce suits are increasing while most other kinds of actions coming into court are on the wane. But what of principle? The same that would prompt a man to employ a competent physician through a hard spell of sickness ought to prompt him to get a good attorney when he takes such an important step as that of getting a divorce. If a person happens to have a bad barber cut his hair no especial harm is done, but he most certainly wants a first-class surgeon when his leg has to be amputated. Any lawyer might be employed in an attempt to separate a railroad, for instance, from a few hundred dollars or a man from his debtors, but it is necessary that a more skillful counselor be employed in the matter of being separated from one's husband or wife, in order that no mistake be made or ill-timed advice given.

SERIOUS AFFAIR.

After all, a divorce is a most serious affair, if one is to accept the time honored idea that the family relation is the basis of civilized society. This principle has been the basic idea of jurisprudence for thousands of years in every place where civilization advanced far enough to have a system of laws. Records of ancient civilizations show that the founders of practically all considered the family rather than the individual as the unit of society, and the citizen participated in his government not individually but as the representative of a family. This was so in the beginning, though departs from this viewpoint be made now. If a divorce means the dissolution of a family surely then it is not to be thought of lightly, but in the manner against which one Chicago Judge recently complained: "Marriage doesn't mean anything any more," Judge Joseph B. David of the Cook county superior court is quoted as saying. "A divorce is no longer a stigma. It is an asset that seems to attract."

The judge blamed most of the divorces appearing in his court upon the "idle women and women seeking excitement."

WOMEN BRING SUITS.

To put the blame for divorces upon women is at least ungallant on the part of a man, even if he be a judge, though it may be quite a masculine trait. Records in the St. Joseph county clerk's office show that about four out of every five divorce suits are brought into court by the female half of the partnership to be dissolved. Just why this is so would make a long, long story, but a little reflection reveals that such is naturally to be expected.

It is said by persons more familiar with the subject that the female of the species registers conditions more quickly than the male. He even yet may go out to a corner cigar store or bowling alley and forget his troubles, but the woman must hold the front line against all onslaughts.

Then, too, a real cause of action more frequently breaks out in the conduct of the "Mr." than the "Mrs.", but it never would be heard if the "Mrs." didn't come into court and tell the neighbors and the judge. Just as often as not, in the opinion of competent critics, the trouble starts out by the wife falling in some way to exercise her feminine powers, charms and prerogatives. It may come to the surface in the life of either or both, but upon the woman devolves the terrible responsibility of making things at home what they should be.

CAUSES EASY TO FIND.

Such are facts and fancies one may gather from a perusal of the records of current divorce cases in St. Joseph county, but at that the real heart of the

Unchecked Craze for Divorce Will Rock Nation to its Foundation and Turn World Into a Turkish Harem

Views of South Bend Ministers and Lawyers

From close contact with humans at critical moments in their lives ministers of the gospel and counselors at law should be best able to form a worthy opinion upon the subject of divorce and the causes thereof.

Dr. J. N. Greene of the First M. E. church calls its prevalence the symptoms of a deep-seated disease.

"The deepest element of tragedy," Dr. Greene declares, "in the prevalent divorce evil is the complicity with which the evil is commonly viewed. That we are not shocked and aroused by the prevalence of the evil is evidence that we either fail to realize the moral and social effects of the evil, or else are so blinded in our sensibilities that we have no concern for those effects. A divorce case is merely a surface symptom of a deeper-seated disease. The disease is the wreckage of a home, the most sacred institution outside of heaven. That wreckage involves the destruction of domestic felicity and marital affection, which are essential to a stable and righteous society. In the last analysis the divorce question becomes a question of affection and honor between a man and a woman. Where affection and honor are maintained there will be no occasion for divorce. Where these are absent divorce is probable."

"The great problem is that of safeguarding the affections and maintaining honorable relationships between the sexes. Those social practices which trifle with the affections and induce immorality prior to marriage certainly pave the way for domestic unhappiness and divorce after marriage. The law of the harvest applies here. If we insist on sowing the seed we must expect to reap the harvest."

TRYING TO TURN WORLD INTO TURKISH HAREM.

Rev. Alfred Merrill Eells, D. D., of the Westminster Presbyterian church, says:

"The foundation of the church, nation and society is the home. Destroy that and the superstructure will fall. Whether it is the breaking down of moral standards resulting from the war or whether it is the effect of augmenting influences predating that event, yet the fact remains that there are agencies at work trying to turn this world into a Turkish harem. Cheap novels and lax enforcement of law are combining to nullify the sacredness of the family fireside."

"Aside from private morals the effect is deplorable to the nation. The divorce is too easy in the United States. We have 3,000 divorce courts and the United States grants nearly 15,000 divorces a year, while Canada grants only 800 a year. What is the result? Respect for the most sacred of all human institutions is gone and with it goes respect for such things as law, governments and right. If the home is right the nation will be right and the church will be right. Pliny tells us that during the first 500 years of Roman history there were no divorces. Then Rome won its greatest glory. Then came luxury and divorces. And then Rome crumbled and fell. Eighty thousand divorces granted in one year in Paris preceded the worst revolution that ever convulsed France. If you would find the cause of the growth of bolshevism, disregard of public welfare and national unrest look at the fast disappearing sanctity of the family fireside."

"What is the remedy? Only one. The religion of the Christ, who honored the home, must be brought into family life. Divorces must be made so hard that a name can never be erased from a marriage certificate until it is chiseled on a tomb stone. Then when a person realizes that marriage is a life relationship hasty matches will be a thing of the past, a divinely crowned love will predominate and the world will be safe."

Rev. U. S. Davis, D. D., draws similar conclusions to those of Dr. Eells and Dr. Greene.

"The divorce question is important," he says, "because it concerns the home. The home is the first and most important institution. The home is the fountain from which all other institutions flow. From the family have come our schools, our churches, and our civic ideas. In America the family has always been held in the highest regard. In a republic the family must be revered. In our American history certain family names stand out. We mention with pride the family names of Washington, Lee, Adams, Jefferson, Hancock, Phillips and Beecher. These influences that have come out of these families are felt in every phase of our national life. No other nation has exalted the family after the fashion of America."

"THE CURE OF THE EVIL.

"The cure of the divorce evil lies in a revival of a consciousness of the sacredness of the marriage bonds. The Bible teaches that these two shall become one flesh. They are no longer two people, but one. So intimate is the union that a man is ready to forsake father and mother and the old home and cleave unto

matrimonial difficulties are hard to gather from charges and counter charges made in court. It is almost safe to hazard that under present Indiana statutes almost any couple could find cause for divorce in the course of a few years if they had a notion to. "Cruel and inhuman treatment" covers a multitude of sins under current interpretations and might be construed as anything from wood alcohol on the breath to a kick on the shins.

Records of the evidence in another case show that the woman sought divorce from her husband on the grounds of cruel treatment received when she would not assist in the operation of a "blind tiger."

Of an entirely different nature is the grounds on

which one wife seeks divorce when she alleges in the bill that "her husband was green with jealousy and wild with envy." "When I dressed myself up in a becoming but modest manner," she further alleges, "he made insulting remarks about my appearance." The husband in this particular case filed a cross complaint in which he charges his matrimonial difficulties to love of bright lights, silk clothes and dinners on the part of his wife. Another husband had a wife with less refined taste, for he charges after she had been going out nights for some time he asked her he wherefore and she told him "to have a hell of a time."

So the petty stories drag, distorted and grotesque

"Slacker" Romances, High Cost of Living and Liquor Are Among the Prominent Basic Causes for Present Domestic Difficulties.

lots of human nature, for the most part, that destroy the life of families said by historians, philosophers and jurists to be the foundation of civilization from its beginning. Divorces are on the increase. Why? Three causes that might affect the marriage relation appear with renewed force within the last two years, the war and war romances, prohibition, and the high cost of living. Of the number of divorces within the last six months about a dozen alleged intoxication as a contributing cause for divorce. One wife as late as September alleged that her husband had been coming home intoxicated four nights out of the week for the last 20 years.

Not more than a half a dozen appear to have been the result of an army romance too hastily enacted. Indeed there are some divorces asked by couples many of whom had been married as long as 10 years, some as long as 20 years and a few even of 30 years or more standing were sought to be dissolved. Statistics from Washington indicate that divorces sought on the ground of failure to provide have doubled within the last two years. Local records do not show such an increase in this particular, but without doubt the high cost of living has cut an important figure in the divorce courts. One local petitioner alleged: "When I did not give my wife all the money she wanted she would say that she would get someone who would give it to her." This couple were married April 9, 1917, and thereby may hang another story.

AN INTERNATIONAL DRAMA.

Only one divorce affair appearing in local courts in six months made reading matter intrinsically of interest. It is the story of Tekla, Moses and Jacob. The first scene is laid in Russia, where the latter two in their youth were rivals for Tekla's hand. Upon reaching manhood Moses boarded an emigrant ship for Argentina and told Tekla that he would soon send for her. Jacob took a ship for the United States and also told Tekla that he would send for her when he saved up enough money in the land of promise across the sea.

But Moses was the first to send for the waiting girl and she boarded the next ship that sailed for Argentina. Moses was waiting at the dock to meet her and they lived happily—not ever after, but for a little while. For fortune did not shine upon them. They caught a steamer for the U. S. A. and eventually settled in Davenport, Ia. Their little daughter Anita was six years of age, when one evening Tekla met her old friend Jacob and took him home to visit the family and celebrate the meeting of old-time friends. Jacob was taken into the heart of the family and he and Moses went into business together.

SHE FLEES WITH JACOB.

But the crisis came when Jacob's memory of his first love overcame him and he persuaded Tekla to run away with him to South Bend, where soon after their arrival they were arrested and placed in jail. They were soon released, however, when Tekla explained that no minister had performed the ceremony between her and Moses. So after their release she and Jacob were married.

Moses, though, followed them hither and claimed that Tekla was his wife by common law. A local lawyer was employed. He wrote a letter to the Argentine embassy at Washington regarding the common law status in that country. A reply was received to the effect that common law marriages were not recognized in that country. So Tekla was Jacob's legal wife after all. But the divorce comes in at the denouement when Tekla decides that for the sake of her daughter, little Anita, she wants to return to Moses, and so she does when the three return to Davenport.

A story of simple Russian peasants it is, but one full of dramatic force. How different this from the 99 other divorce stories granted on charges classified as "cruel and inhuman treatment" or less.

there are other things in life beside keeping a house tidy and the children from quarreling, L. E. movies, dances, and various other sorts of frivolous amusement. In other words the woman and the man both have failed to remain temperate. It is either all amusement and the lighter things of life or it is a humdrum existence. When one or the other fails to keep pace there exists this incompatibility and back of that there is the lack of patience to adjust their lives so that each will get the most out of this sojourn below while in the company of each other.

FROM A LAWYER'S POINT OF VIEW.

Taking up the legal aspect of the question, George A. Schrock, deputy prosecuting attorney, has the following to say:

"From what I have heard of domestic troubles and the result of investigations into conditions that surround hundreds of homes in the county, I believe that patience is one of the greatest virtues that can be practiced by both husband and wife. The lack of it is probably the direct cause of the incompatibility which exists in so many homes."

"The lack of patience by the husband with the tired wife who has continued through the monotony of her domestic duties for weeks, months and years, and the sudden awakening of the wife that perhaps

he has overlooked the defects in his wife's temperament that he does in his business partner's home life would be all roses—providing the woman would treat her husband with as much respect and courtesy as she would a stranger in her home. This of course applies to those who are incompatible."