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A PICTURE

from the

HEADLINES

by

DANIEL A. LORD, S.J.

THE QUEEN'S WORK

3742 West Pine Blvd.

St. Louis, Mo.

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DIVORCE

A Picture From the Headlines

THIS is a study of divorce as you find it in the daily papers.

Perhaps a correct title for it might be: "Divorce in the Headlines." For the study is made right out of the daily sheets that anyone can pick up and read. In fact most people do read them.

I am using real names, the names of divorced people who made headlines when they terminated their marriages. In the cases of the "unknowns," the people whose divorces were somewhat private or matter for little public notice, I am suppressing names.

Any newspaper reader will remember the divorces of the people whom I name. They were subjects for the reporters, the news photographers, the commentators. The others are perhaps entitled to obscurity. At least I shall act as though they were.

Let's go back to the letter which about two years ago made me think seriously about what divorce was doing to America. It came from a friend in the southwest.

The Letter That Primed Me

"Dear Father: You should have been in my house yesterday when the pretty little fifteen-year-old bride who lives next door

told her mother she was going to divorce the boy she had married a month ago in order to marry someone else.

“Her mother and father were there, heartbroken. They were speaking to each other for the first time since their own divorce, eight years ago.

“The mother begged her daughter to stay with her young husband, at least until she had finished high school. The girl looked at her calmly and said, ‘But, mother, I’m merely doing what you did. Only I am doing it before there are two children to pay for my mistakes.’”

Clippings

I had of course, like all priests, run into this sort of case before. Divorce is too common not to be thrusting itself constantly upon my attention. But this particular incident set me to thinking. And my thinking set me to clipping items about divorce that I noticed in the daily papers. I chucked them into the top drawer of my desk until the thing was bulging. It was a drawer full of tragedy and ugliness, of human failure and sadness, of twisted humor and a ghastly brand of comedy.

Then one day I got the clippings out and grouped them. You are getting the resultant of what I had gathered. Probably you won’t much like it. We don’t enjoy facing national calamities. And divorce is such a calamity, doleful and terrifying. It is national tragedy on a large scale. If it were not sad, it would often be hilarious.

But here it is, often just as I read it in the cold type. It is a summary of divorce and the grim joke it has played on our country.

To Start With . . .

I ruffled through my clippings to start off significantly. Half a hundred incidents offered themselves.

Here is a newspaper picture that terminated a marital battle in the Chicago courts. The young couple had won their divorce. Then they started to fight all over again. Which one of them was going to retain the wedding picture? The divorce-court judge, ever obliging, took the role of Solomon; and while the cameras clicked and the exhusband and exwife smiled broadly, he cut the pictured bride from the pictured groom, severing the bridal picture as he had legally severed the marriage. Cute, eh?

Here's a clipping from *Time*. The divorced wife of General MacArthur is being tormented by Americans demanding to know why she divorced the hero of the Philippines.

Here's a big clipping about Dorothy Thompson and Sinclair Lewis. After solving all the major problems of the nations in their columns and novels, they steer their own marriage onto the rocks, while their child, Michael Lewis, is tossed about between them.

You might even wonder whether to laugh or to cry over this brief clipping, also from

Time. It is headed, "Mother's Helper." "In St. Joseph, Mo., a child applied for a marriage license, explaining, 'I want it for mother and the fellow she's going to marry'." Funny? or sickening?

An Old Argument

Or I might begin conservatively. I might refer to the old argument I met when first I tackled Catholic ethics. If once divorce is granted for any cause at all, the argument ran, then the floodgates are loosed, or, to shift the figure, all marriage is imperiled. People will rush carelessly into marriage if they know it will be easy to rush out again. They won't make the effort necessary to bring marriage to success. If at first marriages are allowed to be broken up for serious reasons, in no time at all such breaks will be permitted for the most frivolous, trivial, and absurd reasons. It is not easy to make a success of marriage. It is a snap to make a failure of it. It is the most natural thing in the world for a man to throw over the old love for a new one, the old, tired wife for the young girl who makes his heart flutter. It is easy to understand the boredom that makes a woman regard her husband with weariness and smile upon some flatterer. Summed up, divorce, once started, will grow into an overwhelming evil. One divorce opens the way to a million divorces. One excuse lays the ground plan for a thousand unimportant pretexts.

When I first met the argument, I treated

it with polite respect. Maybe yes . . . maybe no. Now the newspaper headlines before me prove how tragically true that argument was and is. In fact the argument understated the actual results in American society.

Says Dorothy Dix

We might take a text from Dorothy Dix, who probably has handled more problems of love, marriage, and divorce than has any other woman that ever lived. Here's what she thinks:

"At the bottom of nine tenths of the divorces is the superstitious belief . . . that there is some magic in a decree absolute that will restore youth and beauty and make the [divorced people] . . . lighthearted boys and girls again. Most husbands and wives who break up their homes do not do it because of intolerable wrongs. . . . They do it because they are bored with each other; because they are fed up on the dull round of domesticity; because they are sick and tired of listening to the children's noise and fights; but mainly because they have begun to have a nostalgia for the days when they were sweet-and-twenty. . . .

"They fool themselves into thinking that if they could break that tie that binds them . . . some miracle would make their paunchy figures grow slim, cause wavy locks to appear on those bald spots, and restore their complexions. They would be automatically infused with new pep, and the come-hither look would return to their tired eyes.

Of course no such transformation takes place.

“Of all disillusioning human experiences, divorce is the worst. For it rarely brings to its participants the happiness they had hoped to get. It is only the most callous who can feast and make merry amidst the wreck of the home they have pulled down; and deaf indeed must be the ears that can shut out the sound of little children’s weeping in the night for the father or the mother they have lost.”

Wise woman, Miss Dix. Her experience speaks solemn, frightening warning.

And Also . . .

Divorce is a national expense. We note the clipping that states that a Colorado scientist has calculated that every domestic squabble brought into the courts costs the fighters \$227. That would buy a lot of schooling for one of the children.

Or there’s Max Miller’s article on “Reno,” reprinted in *The Reader’s Digest*. Reno, Miller explains, always refers to its divorce racket as “The One Thing.” But usually it doesn’t refer to it at all. It leaves that for the stranger, the castoff wife, the sporting husband, the “gold digger” who is turning her marriage into money, the disillusioned husband whose wife is yearning for a younger man.

“Other states,” Miller continues, “tried to steal the divorce trade, but Reno had twenty years’ start, and its judges are

'educated.' A New York lawyer can long-distance a reputable lawyer in Reno and ask outright, after stating the case, if the divorce will be granted; and the Reno lawyer can answer immediately yes or no. He knows exactly how the Reno judges will react.

"The 10 oldest law firms in Reno, tied in with the big eastern firms, have more than 90 per cent of the entire trade. The average fee is \$250, but clients are charged in proportion to their wealth.

"Nine out of ten women who come to Reno do not want what they are sent to get. That is why so many of these castoff wives make such helpless fools of themselves."

And he describes their follies in sickening detail.

But Reno goes its merry way with the full sanction of American law. And the columnists note on their fingers this star and that socialite and that prominent person who are being "Reno-vated."

Failures

Also in *The Reader's Digest* is an article on "Genius," by Bruce Bliven. All of us have an inner consciousness that a divorce is a sad confession of failure. A man and a woman just haven't succeeded in making a go of their most important career. They are walking out on a job.

Mr. Bliven however puts the case positively: "[Geniuses] . . . marry early, get

divorces less frequently. . . . Their divorce rate is only one third as high [as those of lesser mentality] . . . indications of successful living.”

It amazes me that we Americans, who are utterly intolerant of failure in any form, are yet blandly patient with the gross failure our Americans are making of the essential career of marriage, homemaking, and parenthood.

The Divorce Racket

The splash announcement on the cover of a cheap magazine struck my eye. It was *Flash* for May, 1941. I picked up the magazine and clipped the leading article. For one hundred dollars, it seems, a man and his wife can fake all the evidence needed to get them a divorce in New York State. The article was explicitly illustrated, a complete object lesson (whatever may have been the editors' intent) that could be followed by any man and wife who were tired of each other and sighing for new loves.

“Divorce racketeers,” declared the article, “will guarantee to provide persons with a divorce if they commit what amounts to compulsory adultery and resort as well to perjury. . . . Divorce-court judges are well aware of this state of affairs but are powerless to take any action.”

The Startling Record

Once you start divorce, who's going to stop it?

Once husbands and wives begin to rush

to the judge to have him cut their marriage in half instead of themselves trying to solve their problems, what's the end?

The following is not headline news, just dull statistics. But they are numbers clicking off our national tragedies.

The United States Government gives the following data:

In 1897 there were 8.8 marriages and 0.5 divorces for every thousand people.

By 1937 the figure for that number of people had jumped to 11 marriages and 1.9 divorces.

The marriages had increased less than 25 per cent. The divorces had leaped almost 300 per cent.

In 1890 there were 33,919 American divorces.

In 1937 there were upward of 250,000 divorces.

The American Magazine for October, 1941, has these amazing figures:

In 1900 there were 8 divorces for every 100 marriages.

In 1940 there were 18 divorces for every 100 marriages.

Divorces or Divorcees?

Statistics are always tricky, and in all honesty we must notice the difference between divorces and divorcees. What I have given is the number and proportion of divorces. I cannot find any record of the actual number of people who divorce and marry again.

As a matter of fact one person is likely to get a divorce, not once, but three or four times. So that while the majority of sober, honorable Americans continue to lead their normal married lives happily and with dignity, these people who rush into and out of marriage are the ones responsible for the statistics' looking so bad.

Then too after divorce some good people feel themselves bound by the law of Christ and of nature and do not remarry. The fact that their divorced partners do remarry keeps the level tragically high.

Yet whether we take the actual number of divorces or the number of people being divorced, the facts are still terrifying and the story of broken marriages one of the ugliest in American life.

Dashing In

No man in his right mind believes that a man and a woman can take one swift look at each other and feel Cupid's arrow binging them in the left pulmonary, dash off to wake up a sleepy-eyed justice of the peace, pledge lifelong vows in alcoholic voices—and mean anything by it.

But since the matter of getting a divorce is very simple, as we shall see, my headlines show that that is exactly what thousands of moderns are doing. They spend less time picking a partner for marriage than they spend picking a horse in the third at Pimlico.

Here is a newspaper case of a girl

thirteen years old and a boy fourteen years old traveling fifty-six miles on a bike in the hope of obtaining an easy marriage. They were quite indignant when the police brought them back. Youngsters see; youngsters do.

Here's a posed picture of a Kansas City night-club singer who is starting divorce proceedings against a man whom, she admits, she married after a few hours' acquaintance and a few drinks. The man bragged that the marriage meant nothing to him; he'd been drunk when it took place. So their marriage had lasted the sum total of twelve days. Then a benign judge called the whole thing off. I wonder if they would have rushed into marriage like that if they hadn't known that in order to break up that marriage all they would need to do would be to take a casual stroll into a divorce court.

This news clipping reads: "[So-and-so,] . . . veteran actress, married [Whosis] . . . in a chartered air liner as it flew over Las Vegas."

Maybe the two involved had known each other for thirty of the thirty-seven years to which they confessed. Maybe the plan was just a symbol of crazy speed.

This clipping refers to the woman as a socialite. She married a has-been actor recently let out of an unsuccessful marriage. They were married "during an automobile ride that ended with a marriage on borrowed money and with a blue wooden wedding ring." All the high dignity of a

solemn contract is certainly preserved most meticulously in this case. Or am I wrong?

This daughter of a famous musical family "eloped to Reno with Private [Whatshis-name]. . . . She had divorced her husband last year, and she soon was parted from her present groom, who was tossed into the guardhouse for being AWOL." Evidently the Army is not so considerate toward soldiers who make swift fools of themselves as were the parents of the girl.

No wonder that throughout the headlines I found recurrent hints of legislation to to make swift marriages and bargain-counter divorces more and more difficult. Can it be that someday we will have the states requiring something very like the banns required in the Catholic Church? Maybe we are all thinking with a little dread of the easy-come, easy-go attitude toward modern marriage.

How Often?

The frequency with which people dash into and out of marriage leaves the reader a little dizzy.

Here's a man listed as the Hamburger King. He divorced his fourth wife, whom he had married on the day after he divorced his third wife.

Walter Winchell notes that a famous male singer and his fourth wife "are being adult about it." Correct. Children would have better sense and morals.

A woman listed as "the wealthy Lucy

Cotton Thomas Ament Hann Magrew" is being married for the second time to her fifth husband.

An opera singer gets a publicity break when she is photoed as she returns from her divorce from her fourth husband.

Just to show you that it isn't always the moneyed folk. . . . here's a Los Angeles policeman divorcing his fifth wife, while that wife regretfully confesses that the divorce is only her fourth.

What You Can Do With Money

Then there is this big handful of clippings about Tommy Manville, usually referred to as the asbestos heir—clippings that only go to show you what you can do with marriage and divorce in this country if you have the money to spread around. He divorces his fifth wife. His fourth wife jumps into the limelight to contest his title to greatness as she announces her own new marriage, though she has been married again and divorced again in the interval since she left Manville. Then here's the death notice of Manville's mother. She divorced the young man's father way back in 1909. Her son had at least precedent for his actions.

One society woman is photographed proudly holding the hand of husband number five. Another leaves the divorce court accompanied by reporters; it is her fourth divorce. "I'm going to get married right away. I just love marriage," she proclaims, while the flashbulbs pop.

This particular man forgot the technicalities of the game. He married two wives simultaneously instead of successively. Up to that time he had done pretty well, with a record of seven successive marriages and divorces.

In the book "Boy and Girl Tramps of the Road" a Chicago University research author told how many of the child derelicts were the offspring of divorced parents. He listed the number of times some of the parents had been married — seven, nine, eleven times. His all-time high however was the mother who was known to have been divorced twenty-three times.

That is what can happen right here in America.

And to the Same Person

Talk about the man caught in the revolving door! Are you aware of the way that people rush in and out of marriage with the same person? It's a kind of childish performance, a sort of now-we're-married-and-now-we're-not affair. And it is fairly common.

Here's an account of a singer who divorced her husband and then remarried him five days later.

Here's a Chicago couple who had been divorced three times and each time had promptly married each other again.

Here's a fairly common case: a woman getting her second divorce from the same man.

But sometimes the story of crazy indecision gets a twist. This woman has divorced the same husband twice. She visits a fortuneteller who warns her that she will marry a blond. "Well," she sighs, resignedly, "I suppose that's my former husband once more. He's the only blond I know!" Fate! And fatuous!

All Set for the Next

One thing that rather knocks a conservative between the eyes is the calm way in which the next marriage is all arranged before the last one has been legally terminated.

A Broadway columnist quotes a sad little remark he overheard in a night club: "I've got her consent and her father's, but thus far I haven't been able to get my wife's."

The theatrical—or at least the highly publicized motion-picture world—specializes in this overlapping of marriages. The columnists and the gossip writers are always marrying off the married actors and actresses, while according to the supposed laws of the land they are still much married to an alive, if not kicking, partner.

And no one seems to think it nauseating.

Thus Sheilah Grahame announces, as of June 25, 1941, from Hollywood: "Joan Perry will shortly marry the big boss of a big studio whose wife is now in Reno getting the divorce." Do we send the lucky girl flowers? And what are we to send the still extant wife?

International News Service gets a quiver when "Alice Duckworth, daughter of the socially prominent John Hays Hammond, admitted today that she and the orchestra leader Benny Goodman plan to marry as soon as she can obtain a divorce. To speed the severance of her matrimonial ties . . . the socialite is considering heading for Reno."

"If we were only free," sighed Lana Turner and Tony Martin to Sheilah Grahame, "we would wed." Regrettably there was at the time some silly technicality that still bound Lana to Artie Shaw and Tony to Alice Faye. But time remedies all things, even inconvenient ties.

Beverly Paterno is bracketed in brief fame with Tommy Manville as his next-in-order. Her lawyer scoffs for the newspapers: "Why she's not even divorced yet, and that will take plenty of time." Ah, time! time! bane of lawyers and of lovers!

In and Out and Round About

Louella Parsons makes her column purr when she announces that Peggy Ann Kent and Don Wilson, radio announcer, "will march to the altar." (I kept wondering where these divorced couples find all the altars they march to; usually in the city hall apparently, where altars must be somewhat of an anomaly.)

"Peggy," gushes Louella, "who came to Hollywood after her divorce, confirmed the report today: 'Yes; it's true Don and I will

marry when he gets his final divorce decree. I have never been so happy'."

But then a sour note is struck. She is asked what she thinks her father will say about her marital cavortings.

"'Dad and I haven't been very close of late,' she replied. 'He didn't approve of my marriage to or divorce from Ern Westmore'." (That's the husband just rejected.)

Judging from the way she disapproved of that same husband, dad's first verdict must have had some basis in reason.

This in-and-out-of-matrimony can have its financial side. *Time's* comment on the death of Phil Plant, "who until seven years ago lived in the gossip columnists' show-cases," is instructive. "Tycoon Plant left [to his son, Phil] \$15,000,000. Divorce from Cinemactress Constance Bennett cost him a \$1,000,000 settlement, divorce from Big Game Huntress Edna Dunham a fifth as much, an auto crash with Showgirl Helene Jesmer \$75,000. His third wife survives as his widow."

Hollywood

It is certainly beating the gong to announce the obvious when we link divorces with Hollywood. The fact of the divorces is national news. The publicity is amazingly enough still considered good business.

Now this is not intended to be an attack on the theatrical world. I should be the first to acknowledge actors' and actresses'

great temptations and the instability of their home life, which is not conducive to durable marriage.

What I intend to indicate rather is the facility for divorce that is granted under the American system at present. If the actors and actresses are dragged in as pointed illustrations, that is because they are in the spotlight and serve so aptly to illustrate the conditions surrounding divorce. Their divorces are the most highly publicized. Almost anyone else who wishes to profit by the facility for bargain-counter marriages and divorces does so — though without the newspaper space and the candid and posed pictures accorded Hollywood divorces.

“In Divorce Town”

Film Correspondent John Truesdell frankly heads his column one day, “In Divorce Town.”

“Hollywood,” he writes, in explanation, “is the divorce capital, where a second wedding anniversary is celebrated like a Notre Dame victory.”

Is there in that statement the implication that the divorces which dot motion-picture careers are almost as frequent as the victories of the conquering Irish?

Jimmie Fidler makes a comfortable living out of the marital hits and strike-outs of movietown.

“Hollywood stars,” he says, “whose marriages survive five years should be awarded service stripes.”

Walter Winchell supplements and explains: "Love seems to be great for the films but not for the film people. They're so interested in their own careers, they haven't the time and energy to make a success of another career—marriage."

In passing, be it noted that almost any considerate and sympathetic judge will release from marriage a star, male or female, who finds that matrimony interferes with his or her work before the cameras . . . or back of a saxophone . . . or on the nether side of the footlights . . . or as half of a dance team.

But Walter Winchell finds it news when Nancy Kelly is "reported near a breakdown because of her divorce plans." Most of them seem to celebrate with toasts and parties.

Low Comedy

What a lot of fun you can have playing tag in and out of American courts was illustrated by a minor comedienne named Judy Canova. She rushed to Hawaii for a holiday, and while she was there she married a young corporal whom apparently she had just met. She got a great burst of publicity for that . . . though no perceptible improvement in her acting ability or film roles. Hardly a month later she was back in the States and dashing into court again—for a divorce. More pictures, more publicity.

Yet one of the columnists notes: "She is supposed to be so ashamed of her recent

Honolulu elopement and quick verdict to dump it that she won't even discuss it with her chums."

She talked it all over with a judge though, and he knew just how she felt and sent her off with her marriage washed right off her hands.

Mad Merry-Go-Round

The merry-go-round of Hollywood marriage is too crazy for a normal man to ride. Comedians like Mischa Auer remarry on the day after their divorce decrees become final. Heather Angel is divorced from Ralph Forbes, who has been divorced from Ruth Chatterton. Helen Vinson divorces Fred Perry because he interrupted her sleep by yelling and slamming doors. Gail Patrick's husband causes her great—and divorce-productive — mental anguish. (They had been married in the slot-machine and dance-hall environs of Tijuana.)

Penny Singleton is the devoted wife, Blondie, on the screen; in real life she divorces and marries again. Lana Turner's marriage to Artie Shaw lasts four and a half months. Brenda Marshall terminates a marriage with Richard Gaines and marries William Holden. Charles Chaplin, of the older school, for a time keeps his marriages and divorces a titillating secret and then "conforms" with his last marriage, the pictures and headlines vying with war news. The whole study becomes involved news. The whole studio becomes involved when Gloria Dickson, actress, divorces Perc

Westmore, makeup expert, and marries Ralph Murphy, director. What? no stage-hands?

The marriages and divorces of Alice Faye rate an organ recital of "Hearts and Flowers." She divorces Tony Martin and marries Phil Harris south of the Rio Grande. But the Mexican wedding is not satisfactory to stuffy old Uncle Sam, who is unexpectedly the spoilsport. A columnist finds the fair Alice (once a Catholic) looking around for a church in which to rewed the recently divorced Harris. Another film correspondent, named Othman, sighs, ah so gently: "Yesterday we called on an actress named Alice Faye, who's in love with her husband. In two more months the law will let her live with him." And we can all smile once more on Uncle Sam, the old meanie!

And On and On

Anne Shirley and John Payne, briefly known as the perfect couple (there is usually one a year—for about a year), head for separation. Ann Sothern and Roger Pryor call theirs a "trial separation." Priscilla Lane is said to have "called it a day—after a day."

Liberty writes up the brave renunciation by which Joe Schenck bids farewell to his wife, Norma Talmadge, in words that fairly drip with emotion. Norma marries George Jessel. That soon melts. And George marries, to the amusement of the corre-

spondents, a youngster who should have been in high school. Even Judy Garland accepts as her first mate the shopworn husband of Martha Raye—and soon joins the army of the divorced.

Occasionally you find a minor wail rising from Hollywood. The film writer Ann Marsters reports that “Bette Davis and other screen stars lament Hollywood’s persistence in challenging the divorce-hating people of the nation with an unbroken series of phony marriages, rapid-fire break-ups, and a cavorting of publicity-mad youngsters.”

How convenient if the blame could all be put on the underlings! But it’s right in the big-money bracket that divorce in Hollywood is a matter of course. Bing Crosby, faithful to one wife, and Don Ameche, with only one marriage, are the startling exceptions.

Big Names

It is not however the divorces themselves that are so important. The importance lies in the fact that under the American divorce system all the marriages and all the divorces are quite legal. With the present arrangements nothing could be done to stop them. Our laws positively encourage the maddest of the mad things which Hollywood does to marriage.

Then comes the long list of the “big names” across the country.

Former Mayor Walker of New York breaks up a first marriage. Then the girl for whom he broke it up breaks up his second marriage.

Katharine Brush, whose syndicated column, "Out of My Mind," and whose sophisticated novels of modern manners are guides for thousands of the young, once wrote in her column: "They consider you quaint at Miami Beach if you haven't been divorced at least twice." Well the lady herself is listed in this clipping as "heading for a swift divorce." Let's be fashionable at all costs.

Nordhoff of the sea stories is mentioned in *Time* as divorcing the little brown woman in Tahiti and at the age of fifty-four marrying a divorcée of thirty.

The creator of Tarzan can't keep his wife out of the jungle of the divorce courts.

Among the famous names I found in the newspapers in connection with divorces of the past two years are Roosevelt, McAdoo, Astor, Vanderbilt, Duke, Biddle, Cooper Hewitt, Rogers, McCormick. The list could be continued indefinitely. Joan Biddle by the way rates some sort of medal; she enters her fifth marriage; three of the former ones were contracted within six months.

Big Purses

Whether the wealthy get more divorces than do the poor or the middle class is perhaps a question. It should be one's guess that comfortable livings should help

make marriages happy, homes durable, love more lasting. Whatever the answer to that, a high-bracket income and a divorce unite to make a wonderful headline story.

The five-and-ten heiress is almost stale news to the divorce reporters.

I read that a woman was left a million dollars and that she celebrated with a divorce.

Husbands named in my clippings manage to pay divorce settlements of \$50,000, \$175,000, \$1,000,000. Sad that all that money couldn't have been used to buy permanency and happiness in marriage.

Here's a very wealthy heiress, of an age when she should be in boarding school, marrying a playboy. A few days later she announces that she finds the marriage merely a Class-B picture, so she divorces him on the grounds that she dislikes his tattooing.

Once on a time a title of nobility was shield for dignity and reverence. Now it is a bugle calling all reporters to the divorce proceedings.

I find among my clippings news of a duchess, a countess, a baroness, and . . . several women called ladies. Ah yes; one must not forget the daughter of the "White Rajah," who wed and swiftly divorced the man of her dreams—and nightmares—a pork-and-beans wrestler.

Old Fools

Youngsters? Again it would be some comfort to be able to blame the folly of youth. But what about the old-timers who come into court on crutches? Better late than never, they seem to argue.

Here's a man eighty years old, divorcing a woman fifty years old. This flapper of seventy-six gets a decree from her bridegroom of eighty-six because he deceived her; he said he was only eighty, that he had six thousand dollars instead of five thousand, and that he wouldn't insist on her being buried with him if she preferred to be buried with her former husband.

A husband of seventy discovers after his marriage that his bride of sixty-three is just an old "gold digger." Here are two giddy young couples: the first seventy-nine and seventy-six respectively, the second seventy-six and seventy-five respectively.

How can one refrain from saying, "No fool like an old fool"? One can't and in fact one won't.

Here's Why

Now let's see why people get divorces.

As one reads the reasons that are considered sufficient for the obtaining of a divorce in America, one begins to realize that the main reason is this: because one of the parties to the contract wants it. The old moralists were right. Once divorce was permitted for grave and serious reasons, men and women started to offer a thou-

sand nonsensical pretexts that to them appeared entirely valid. It is natural enough that when a man gets his exercise by beating his wife she might be expected to seek safety in separate maintenance. If a husband finds that his wife is slipping a bit of arsenic into his soup, he might rightly hope to bar her from his bed and board.

But nowadays divorces seem to be granted chiefly for "mental cruelty." And that can be just about anything that a lawyer can trump up and make convincing. Or does he have to bother to make it sound convincing?

I present you with the reasons for divorces granted, as I found them listed in the newspapers. Read 'em and laugh. And then read 'em and—if you love the future of America—weep.

Reasons Enough

Here they are:

She took an hour and a half to make up her face.

He asked her to live in a trailer.

He paid more attention to his automobile than he did to her.

He worked nights and thus spoiled her social life.

He was interested in Adolf Hitler (this before we were in the war).

He stunted when he was driving the family car.

He was a vegetarian and upset her diet.

She gave more time to her pet animals than she did to him. (In that connection note the man whose wife brought her pet monkey to bed with her.)

Because he was of English ancestry and she of Italian, he gloated over her.

He came to breakfast dressed in long underwear.

He insisted on telling jokes in bed.

He shot craps and brought home friends who shot craps.

She served him spinach almost every night.

Once he tossed a clock at her and said her face would stop it.

Once at the country club he pushed her and embarrassed her before her friends.

He took setting-up exercises until he drove her mad. "I married a gymnasium, not a man."

When she made a bad play at bridge, he threw a deck of cards at her.

When he doodled with a pencil, he wrote other women's names.

"He was not subtle in his comments on my singing."

She got chicken pox while they were on their honeymoon.

He neglected her to play with model trains.

She made him nervous by drumming with her fingers on the table.

She was fonder of her canary than she was of him.

He disliked desserts and grew angry when she served them.

She woke him by hitting him with a pillow.

He told her he was a big executive; after their marriage she found out he was a soda jerker.

She had him shadowed by three ghosts.

He threw a glass of water in her face because his shirts were not back from the laundry.

She bought a gentleman friend a set of false teeth.

Small Causes

I gleaned this bit of advice from a most unexpected source. Dr. Maurice Udell of the Illinois Association of Chiropodists advised men and women to care for their feet. Healthy feet, he maintained, made for pleasant dispositions. And if the dispositions were cheerful, divorce was remote. To prove his point, he quoted Superior Judge Rudolph Desort:

“Cruelty charges are almost always based upon hundreds of petty domestic annoyances, which are primarily caused by the grouchiness and bickering of the husband and the wife.”

The doctor however was not too hopeful in his statistics. If happy marriages depend upon sound feet, what chance for Chicago? Said the doctor: "Seventy per cent of Chicagoans have foot troubles."

But whether the troubles originate in head, heart, or feet, some kind judge will call them sufficient to be classed under that capacious reason "mental cruelty."

Reporters' Holiday

Time was when the newspapers covered divorces with a merciful curtain of silence. Then in the days of yellow journalism they played up all the moist and fetid bits of scandal. Now many a reporter plays them for the laughs.

A couple are breaking their sacred promises; a home is going to smash; the institution of marriage, essential for the future of the race, is being razed. But let's hit the humorous angle. And let's hit it with a bang.

It's done in a hundred ways. For instance the reporter writes it as if the wife were relating an amusing story:

"I looked in the mirror and saw a couple making love. I thought it was very funny, and I laughed. Then I stopped. . . . It was my husband."

Or the headline packs a pun and a punch.

"Romance Goes Fritz When Wife Jails Mr. Fritz."

If the trial has something unusual about it, let's say the husband and the wife both bowl, it makes a grand piece of humorous writing. Who knows? The reporter may be noticed and tapped for gagman on a radio comedian's hour.

"Mr. [Somebody] . . . won a strike-and-spare divorce today. She decided she could spare her husband because all he does is strike her. And he strikes her because she makes more strikes than he does on the bowling alley. She will bowl singles from now on."

Or the thing can be worked into a slapstick comedy.

"Too many wives halted the honeymoon of [James Glump] . . . Today he sings, 'If I had the wings of an angel, over these prison walls I would fly.' He took one wife on a honeymoon without bothering to divorce her predecessor. He remembered to divorce the ones before this, but this time he just forgot. Ruth, the new wife, who wasn't a wife but only a gal going on a honeymoon, passed out with a dull thud. Too bad. But [Glump] . . . will honeymoon in a cell."

Of course innumerable jokes are based on divorce complications. Former husbands are introduced to their exwives by well-meaning friends. At dinner parties the wife-before-last finds herself seated beside the wife-of-the-minute, and daggers are tossed at five paces. The possibilities of mix-ups are innumerable.

And the dramatic and musical-comedy situations! Jones finds he is not really married to his bride because his final decree isn't final. Jane thinks she is married to Smith, but he knows she isn't, because that state doesn't recognize a Mexican divorce. The honeymoon is about to begin, and wife number three turns up with back alimony charges, and the curtain falls as husband is torn away to the city jail.

Well once on a time any divorce was a tragedy. It was a sign of collapse and failure. Now it's the basis of great good humor, plenty of laughs, and the swing of the slapstick.

I give it up. Is my sense of humor atrophied? Or should I think these divorce jokes terribly, terribly funny?

The Proper Dose

One class of divorces should, I think, be fitted into a special category. I've a sheaf of them among the clippings before me. Could we title them "What Did You Expect" divorces?

Men marry women about whom they know everything and then get divorces because the women turn out to be exactly what the men knew they were. Women marry no-account men and then, though the women knew the men were no-accounts, ask the judge to call the whole thing off because the men turn out to be the no-accounts that everyone, brides especially, knew them to be.

Here's a big newspaper cut of a burlesque strip teaser. She did five shows a day in a cheap theater. The judge granted her a divorce. Reason? When she got home, tired from her day's work, her husband wanted her to dance for him.

Here's a publicity seeker named Elaine Barrie, who finally tracked down John Barrymore. Barrymore had for years made his fondness for the bottle the basis of his humor on stage and radio. But the lady who tracked him down went to court because he turned out to be exactly what for the past decade he had bragged he was.

Ethel Merman is a night-club and musical-comedy singer of some fame. After marrying her, her husband sues for divorce because "I can't stand the night-club life." Where did he expect a night-club singer to spend her evenings? At home, milking the cows?

Gypsy Rose Lee, notorious burlesque queen, for years dances in theaters famous for their indecent skits and jokes. Yet she asks for a divorce from her husband because in 1938 he used "abusive and obscene language." What kind was used by the audiences at Minsky's in the days when she "stripped" there?

But here is what comes close to being a classic. It is from the Chicago Daily News of October 20, 1941.

"Mrs. [So-and-so] . . . was awarded a divorce decree by Judge [Blank] . . . after she testified that she paid for her husband's

first divorce, their subsequent marriage and honeymoon, a new car and furnishings for a home, and then he deserted her." She hired a bargain-counter husband to get his first divorce for her and then was surprised that he left her, as he had left spouse number one.

But they all got their divorces. Can you understand why?

Tragic Children

When we come to the whole tragedy of the children of divorce, we should properly melt with pity.

The country was briefly shocked when a year or so ago *Life* showed the ghastly picture of a little girl tearing herself from her recently divorced mother and throwing herself into the arms of the father she loved. But the court awarded her to her mother, and she had to be pried loose from her father's arms.

Little attention was paid however to the sequel. A few weeks later the picture was reprinted in reduced size. With it was a letter. The child had died, and the doctors said the cause was a broken heart, nothing else. Her heart had literally been torn apart when her father and her mother wrenched their marriage—and their child between them.

No Parents, Not Four

The Saturday Evening Post some years ago ran a fact story called, as far as I remember the title, "I Am the Child of

Four Parents." It told how this child of divorced parents was competed for by both mother and father, and how each struggled to win her away from the other, enlisting the aid of the new partners they had married.

Shortly after the article appeared, I met a youngster in a boarding high school who mentioned that her parents were divorced and that each had remarried.

"Ah," I commented, quoting the title of the article, "you are the child of four parents."

The girl's lip curled.

"I am the child of no parents. Maybe the girl who wrote that article—I read it—was wanted by all four of them. I'm wanted by none. Both my parents now have children by the second marriages. So I don't belong any more. I remind them of the first marriage. My mother thinks I'm like my dad, and she dislikes me. My dad thinks I'm like my mother, and he despises me. And the new partners hate to see me come; they think I'll take a little of the affection of my parents from the children of these new marriages. So I haven't four parents. I haven't a parent in the world."

That is the true story. Recently it was retold in novel form in "Divided by Two."

Blows at the Children

Boarding schools shelter many of the children who have been tossed out of their homes by warring parents, flung into a

divorce court, and—the battle between the parents over—left without any home to go to. Perhaps for a time both parents, to hurt each other, tried to win the child. As a rule they ended with no affection for or interest in the child, who was the visible proof of their failure in marriage.

Here are just a few of the ghastly newspaper stories.

“Two little girls are taken from a divorcée and given to their father. Said one of the little girls: ‘Mother told us she never wanted to see us again.’”

Here’s a photograph of an eighteen-months-old baby brought to a Catholic orphanage. Her parents are college people. Each of the parents is fighting to get her. For the interval the baby has been taken by court order from that atmosphere of poisonous adult hate and given to the sisters.

Another picture shows a mother clinging to her two youngsters. She has finally forced the father to pay seven dollars a week for their maintenance.

This pictures a wife, her face twisted in agony, as her little baby regards her with wonder and alarm. The father is suing for divorce to marry another woman. Yes; the other woman is in court too. She is not weeping. Leave that for the wife and the child.

Walter Winchell writes: “Barbara Bennett’s chums say she is completely broken

about their children she had to give up to Morton Downey. She wakes in the middle of the night and sobs. The deal, they say, was for her to have them six months and Morton to ditto."

The mother cries. But what Walter Winchell is trying to catch is the agony of the children tossed between their parents.

No Reason at All

The divorce of today that is going to astound the calm men of the future is the one that simply has no reason at all. Two people just decide to call it a day. As the cute little saying goes, they mean to remain "just good friends." They walk out on each other. The judge pats them on the head and hands them a little paper that leaves them free from all responsibility. And they shake hands, or even kiss, to the tune "Let's March Out on Matrimony."

You'd not expect to find under this newspaper picture of two laughing people the caption saying they are bent on a divorce. But they are, and they actually got it some days later. Right now the man's hand rests affectionately on the woman's arm; she leans forward to talk more intimately to him. The text continues: "[So-and-so] . . . and his wife laughed gaily over some amusing incident as they met yesterday in an attorney's office, to which the wife was summoned to meet a divorce suit filed by her husband."

And still smiling, possibly even arm in arm, they'll go into court, get their divorce,

and walk out "still the best of friends." You tell me what it means. I give it up.

"Let's Stay Friends"

The New Yorker carried the Profile of Lillian Hellman, author, among other works, of "The Little Foxes" and "The Watch on the Rhine." Hers is another classic of modern marriage.

Once on a time she was married to Arthur Kober, now largely of Hollywood. "Divorce," runs the account, "ended the marriage in 1932, but it did not affect Kober's attachment for Miss Hellman."

No indeed. He constantly visits her to ask her advice on everything he does, even on the apartment he means to rent.

"When Kober eventually decided to remarry last year"—this the climax—"he brought his fiancée for Lillian to see, in the most natural way in the world; and Miss Hellman was so pleased with the prospective Mrs. Kober that she stood up with the bride and groom at the wedding as matron of honor."

Can you take it? Or does the thought of a wife's standing up at the wedding of her husband to another woman strike you as something the Arabs might have refused to swallow?

But we come back to Tommy Manville, who seems to illustrate perfectly all that you can get away with under American law. *Time* writes up his latest marital escape thus:

“Old Sweet Song: Bonita Francine Edwards Manville, 22, after 17 days packed her things and said good-bye to Tommy, who saw her off to Reno on the train, in the presence of faithful photographers and newsmen. Sighed Manville: ‘I don’t know why she’s leaving me.’ Declared the bride: ‘I think he’s wonderful.’ Terms for the settlement were not discussed.”

So her reason for seeking a divorce is that she thinks her husband is wonderful.

I actually found a case where the woman obtained a divorce because her husband had been too good to her.

Alimony

If we wanted to, we could spend a lot of time on that great by-product of divorce, alimony. The daily papers in most big cities run regular news stories on “alimony row,” the cells occupied by husbands who cannot or will not pay their alimony. Maybe you thought that the infamous debtors’ prison went out of date with Dickens. Don’t fool yourself. It flourishes, thanks to divorce, all over the country—probably even in your own home town.

Quite the easiest way for a publicity-hungry woman to get her picture in the paper is to appear in court and demand that exhubby pay her back alimony.

Yet the clippings often tell of exhusbands who pay fat alimonies to their exwives now married to someone else. Husbands

out of work are hounded by their wives, who left them to take jobs.

One story—it could be amusing if it wasn't so sinister—tells of a woman who dragged the wrong husband into court to sue for alimony. Only when she saw him under a strong light did she realize her mistake. She knew her ex- so slightly that she mistook another man for him. The newspapers thought it awfully funny.

Then we have the pretty picture of husbands' suing wives for alimony. The reputed husband of Mae West thought he was entitled to \$1,000 a month from her fat earnings. An English member of parliament, very fashionable and la-de-da, showed Americans that they can be pikers when he sued his wife to have his alimony raised to \$12,000 a year.

Even the women of America have come to have their doubts about the whole alimony business. One of the big women's magazines asked its readers what they thought of alimony, and the women couldn't get together at all.

“Should women under thirty get alimony when there are no children?” The vote was no by two to one. “Should women over thirty get alimony when there are no children?” The vote was yes, but only by three to two. “Is jail the verdict for men who can afford to pay alimony but don't?” The vote was yes only by the slight margin of eleven to nine.

Alimony as a Racket

This much is growing constantly clearer: For many an unscrupulous woman marriage has become under our American system a plain racket and a get-rich-quick-and-easy scheme. She marries a well-to-do man, gets a divorce on the most trivial grounds, and with the alimony allotted to her is set up for life.

I think it was *The New Yorker* that ran this cartoon, of which I remember at least the spirit:

A light-weight-looking woman is talking to the divorce lawyer.

"Which would you prefer?" he asks. "You'll do well with a divorce, but I know a lot of women who are leading the life of Riley on separate maintenance."

And Christ?

Well there you have a bit of the sordid story. It's a grim, dirty, unfunny, often tragic picture of divorce in America. Perhaps though it makes you understand a little more clearly why Jesus Christ took the stand He did.

When the Savior came to earth, divorce was practiced just about as freely as it is today. It was wrecking the home. It was destroying family life. It was tossing the children out to the wolves of the cities. And Christ, with that blend of human and divine wisdom, saw that there was just one course: no concessions to divorce. Any mitigation of the law was a fatal blow to

home and family. Divorce made all marriage ridiculous. It simply blew up the home. It was parent to endless misery, human instability, and ruined characters.

Christ knew why divorce had been granted by Moses: "Because of the hardness of your hearts," He told the people of his day. But even they had turned it into a racket. So all that was over in His law. No more concessions. No more granting of reasons which would be stretched until they covered any whim or momentary annoyance or swiftly born "yen" for some new light of love.

Christ branded remarriage after divorce simply as adultery and forbade to His followers divorce with remarriage.

His contemporaries in swift protest cried out that if this was His law it were better for a man not to marry. But He still stuck to His command.

Christ knew human nature too well to permit any exceptions. He legislated for the good of humanity. Individuals might have to suffer. Their sufferings were less than the wreckage that divorce brought to the entire human race.

Undercutting

So that was the law as the Catholic Church always understood it. For very serious reasons separation might be permitted. Christ had indicated such a reason when He mentioned adultery. Remar-

riage however was adultery, and that was all there was to it.

But bit by bit this Christian country with the tacit and often expressed approval of many a so-called Christian minister undercut and chipped away the law of Christ. First divorce was granted for adultery, and remarriage was made possible for the innocent person. Then divorce was granted for cruelty that took the form of beating. Then for desertion. And finally for all the crazy reasons we have mentioned — and crazier ones. Next the guilty person might remarry after a divorce granted on the grounds of adultery. “Mental cruelty” supplanted or supplemented physical cruelty. Desertion came to mean one person’s moving into the apartment next door because he preferred the southern exposure.

And the mad chaos of our divorce situation has resulted.

Christ knew just that would happen if His law was disregarded. Catholic moralists have never deviated from their position. But the “reformers” were sure divorce was kind and gentle and humane . . . though it has resulted in hell for the children, the collapse of countless homes, and a land in which the average marriage lasts only five years, not long enough for the oldest baby to reach the age of reason.

That Tragic Story

That average looks a little less terrible when you recall that the minority of the married population can through careless

marriages, quick divorces, and breathless remarriage bring the average down so low.

There are still in the majority American homes in which husbands and wives live together in happy devotion to their children, giving them the love and lifelong training that God and nature intended they should give.

Yet the possibility of snap marriages and snappier divorces makes this tragic fact remain: Five is the number of years the average marriage holds together.

The Betrayal of the Selfish

We cannot bring this discussion to a conclusion without paying tribute to the thousands and thousands of happy marriages in America and the splendid loyalty that characterizes the majority of American husbands and wives. We know of their lovely homes. We have met their charming, wholesome, well-bred, and well-educated children.

Yet here is the other situation that cannot be ignored. And even though there are good homes, we cannot blink at the fact that divorce in America has become a sinister joke or a stark tragedy.

We simply cannot stand passively by while for any sort of caprice traitors to marriage can and do play hob with the institution which is the fountain of the nation's future.

Christ is once more proved by the facts of the case absolutely right in the stand

He took: No divorce; separation only for some extraordinary reason—and then without remarriage.

In view of the way that divorce has sliced and hacked at our national life, the Catholic Church again manifested herself as the friend of the home, of the family, of the child, and of the future of the race. She was, not cruel, but kind and patriotic when she outlawed divorce with remarriage and demanded that men and women make a success of the solemn contract they entered.

It is time we stopped giving headlines to the only people in the world who seem to profit by the failures they make of their jobs. We despise all other failures; let's not act as if it were smart or clever or fashionable to make a failure of just about the most important natural job given to a man and a woman, the job of making a home, collaborating with God in the creation of life and the safeguarding of the whole future of the nation.

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