

### "MY VIEWS"

A Running Record of Individual Opinion by a Quiet Observer.

Editor Times: There is one subject that never grows old. That is, "the evils of our divorce laws."

Now, before we go any further, I want to say that the evil is not in our divorce laws any more than the crime of larceny grows out of the statutes on that subject.

Our divorce laws were made by the brainiest men we could scare up. They are the result of hundreds of years of research, and the experience of our legislators, many of whom have tried the law themselves. They are the epitome of wisdom, as all laws ought to be (this is not slurring the legislators, either.)

"The evils of our divorce laws" is a mine that has been worked by the press and pulpit for ages. It turns out about the same kind of nuggets year in and year out. Whenever there is a scarcity of news a reporter is sent over to the court house to dig up the number of divorce suits granted or filed within a given time. Usually this is accompanied by extracts from some of the most salacious petitions—all good reading matter. Then there is the moral lesson drawn by the editor, which is a real mental rest to write. The conclusion is always the same: Something wrong with our divorce laws.

About ever so often the ministers of the gospel, as a sort of holiday for themselves, and as a treat for the congregation will deliver a stirring sermon on "The Evils of Our Divorce Laws." These sermons are always well received, because the congregation feels "this isn't meant for me."

I believe that marriage is a sacred institution and that divorce is a godsend. That doesn't sound just right.

Under our laws, when a foreigner comes to this country, he must declare his intention to become a citizen; then he must wait five years or more. After that, he is tried, as you might say, and if he is found worthy he is permitted to vote and help make divorce laws. Why does it take so long for him to become a citizen? That he may make himself acquainted with our laws and our plan of government. Then, this government wants the time to satisfy itself that our friend is worthy to become a citizen. It is a good theory, anyhow.

But, on the other hand, now, "looky."

Gladys meets Harold down at the restaurant about 11 o'clock p. m. for the first time. The chances are there are a couple of other idiots in the bunch. They destroy a quantity of beer or champagne; then they will begin to talk about marriage—that is the chosen subject for idiots and champagne. Harold will dare Gladys to get married; Gladys is gamey and won't take a dare.

Then, the next morning before Harold and Gladys become duly sober, we are able to read in the paper in big head lines, about a "pretty little romance;" "A Marriage as the Result of a Dare."

Maybe one couple will bet the other they will be married first. There is a rush for the clerk's office. Then we have two crimes committed instead of only one, two marriages that are bound to result in divorce.

The papers give a half column to the "jolly little romance." Everybody reads it because it is good stuff.

In a few weeks or months two petitions for divorce are filed. Then the howl is made in the press that our divorce laws are rotten.

Instead of a marriage license, Harold and his man friend should have been given sixty days in jail, and the girls sent home, if they had homes; and if they had none—well, I wouldn't know what to do with them. A marriage like one of these ought to be annulled by the judge the next morning without taking a bit of evidence.

The trouble is not with the divorce laws, but with the marriage laws. I was born in the country and a divorce was so rare a thing that it caused almost as much comment as a lynching.

You see, it was usually like this: Tom and "Sary" were born, if not on the same section, in the same township and range. They attended the same school; at noon they played "button, button, button, who's got the button?" and when Tom got it he gave it to Sary.

This was the first open declaration of love. When snow came, Tom washed Sary's face in it. Sary laughed and tried to wash Tom's. He invariably let her. This was a mutual acknowledgment of the divine passion. Tom carried her books for her to the corner where he turned south and she went on east.

Finally one night at spelling school or prayer meeting he won the Carnegie medal for heroism by asking Sary if he might "see her home." After that it was smooth sailing.

Later on the usual thing happened—they were married. Tom knew

Sary and Sary knew Tom—and there was never any divorce.

Too many marriages are "pot-luck" transactions. There is about the same chance of their turning out right as there is in drawing the big prize in a lottery in which you are not a stockholder.

This talk against the divorce evil; this advocating "make divorces hard to get," gives me that wab, tired feeling. Some people seem to think that divorces are like a contagious disease—that they are "catching," and if something isn't done to stop it, you and I are liable to take down with it.

Then there are some people also who think that it is a crime to get a divorce and that the Bertillon method ought to be brought into vogue.

Of course there are times when a divorce is granted on perjured testimony, but the only difference it makes is, the wrong party secured the divorce.

If a man fools a woman into believing that he is one of the few chosen ones, and he turns out to be a good-for-nothing loafer, and won't work to support his wife, she ought to be given a divorce.

And yet "non-support" is no legal grounds for a divorce. The law tells a woman that if her husband is too lazy to work and won't support her, she will have to take her medicine and support him, or words to that effect.

The only way for a woman to get rid of that kind of a man is to get him in range some time when she is splitting kindling wood and let the axe slip.

The idea of making a woman live with a drunken brute; making it hard for her to get a divorce; making it a matter of such expense that she cannot afford it; all seems to me to be utterly devoid of good sense.

When a man has a wife who thinks that the chief duty of a married woman is to dress up and go to parties and "who loves her husband dearly, but another man twice as well," I can see no reason in asking him to live with her.

The main trouble about divorces is the unnecessary notoriety. Nineteen out of twenty are secured without any opposition. There ought to be nothing in the petitions to attract the attention of the public. But enterprising attorneys can't resist working in harrowing details. Just why they do it, I cannot understand, unless it is for the sake of the free advertising they get or an aversion to seeing their stenographers idle. Every divorce petition is rubbered over by the reporters and, if there is sufficient nasty slop in it, it appears that evening and the next morning in the papers.

There are things that happen in every family if they were paraded before the public would make the marital relations of the whole world look like a dead failure. What is the use of charging drunkenness, infidelity, desertion and cruel and inhuman treatment all in a petition and going in to the harrowing details of each when any one of them is good? There is no occasion for it except the anticipated column wrap up in the papers. You will notice that by way of appreciation for the "good story" on the part of the reporter, the name of the enterprising lawyer is usually given.

The other day I read almost a column in a Portland paper, taken from a petition just filed, where a drunken father came home in a perfectly awful condition; tried to make the 2-year-old infant drink whiskey from a bottle and when the heroic mother objected, the father promptly knocked her down with a club, beat her into insensibility, tore the hair from her scalp, then choked her until she was as black in the face as a Stetson hat. After that, he spent the rest of the time until breakfast was ready in kicking, cursing and calling her vile names, to-wit: Then there followed something the papers just had to leave out.

At breakfast he told her that the coffee tasted like it had been doctored with something to cure the liquor habit, and that her tea was just sweetened wind. He told her that the only redeeming feature about her biscuits was that there was no stomach strong enough to throw them up. After breakfast, instead of giving \$4 for household expenses and kissing her good-bye, as a loving and provident husband ought, he squirted tobacco juice in her ear.

And she had been suffering these indignities for years. The husband promptly accepted service, waived time, and the case was advanced on the docket, and she had her divorce in twenty-four hours. All of which was right and proper. But why all that stuff?

I do not mean to say that the above is exactly literal, but it will remind you of something you have read. It is hard enough to get a divorce, but it is too easy to get married.

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