

PORTLAND, OREGON, SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 9, 1910

WILL WOMAN END THE MARRIAGE TIE?

World-Wide Increase in Divorces, With Woman Most Resolutely Returning to Independent Existence



THROUGHOUT the world divorce is increasing. Recent statistics of Europe and America prove it. And women are the ones who are responsible for the larger portion of the increase.

Moralists, jurists, sociologists—all seem powerless to stop it. None who pretend to know anything approaching an expert knowledge of the subject, profess to see the end of the movement away from the time-honored standard that a marriage shall bind until death does their part, although every class of critics has some remedy of its own.

The one thing that is indisputable is that divorces are more and more numerous, and that the women are, more and more numerously, the applicants.

Is the time drawing near when mar-

riage, as mankind has known it throughout the ages, is doomed to disappear, with woman severing the tie as a thing too irksome to be borne under the new dispensation of labor, which makes her independent of a husband's support?

For years the United States has had to bear the odium of most lightly regarding the sacred institution of marriage, of most laxly affording opportunities—nay, of most lavishly proffering invitations—for divorce.

But Europe's figures are now showing a similar tendency, even within the boundaries of domestic, home-loving France. And ever and always, the wives are conspicuous by their presence as petitioners in the divorce courts.

WHETHER or not they are justified in claiming their freedom is a question wholly subordinate to the great, the startling fact that they are apparently hastening toward a unanimous conclusion to endure no more in marriage than pleases them, be it trivial or grave.

More than ample evidence has been adduced in the world's divorce courts to prove that the patient Griselda of wifedom has plenty of reason for quitting the man she has promised to love, honor and obey. But the inexorable statistics show, especially in the United States, that husbands are as likely, perhaps even more likely, to struggle on to the last ditch of marital misery before demanding emancipation through the medium of the law.

It may be that, with the universal crash of wedlock resounding in the horrified ears of modern civilization, the whole moral fabric, founded in the union of one man with one woman only, shall begin to sway and topple in the very climax of material advancement, evoking a new ruin, a new chaos of society.

Or, again, it may happen that the nations will take alarm and the whole level of morality feel an uplift under the stress of alarm lest the chaos be at hand.

France, which has led the peoples in national treason to the maintenance of the human race, is the latest to start back, appalled at the condition of wedlock and particularly at the state of affairs among the very poor who constitute so great a proportion of any population.

During the twenty years between 1888 and 1908 the working population of France has more than doubled the number of its divorces. It is that segment of the French people who can take advantage of the legal privilege of suing as paupers, something which they take to like ducks to water, especially as the average expenses for the "bourgeois" divorce amount to \$400.

From 2009 divorces to 4204 within twenty years constitutes a rise far more alarming there than elsewhere, because France possesses a population more nearly stationary than does any other country, and the proportion of divorces to marriages is more nearly representative of the attitude of the people.

Yet the investigation which the disclosure of the figures promptly inaugurated showed that the larger number of divorces was, to some extent, due to an increase in the number of marriages. To be plain about it, marriage with many young couples in the larger cities there seems to operate like some vaccination that doesn't take. The poor girl who, a couple of decades ago, would have simply lived with the man who happened to please her is more likely now to insist on enjoying the dignity and decency of a married woman. But her innate tendency to be a mere light o' love is by no means altered.

The newly blessed pair of them start house-keeping—or continue it—as though they were on the same basis as used to obtain. Within a few months quarrels as trivial or jealousies as well founded bring the bride into the divorce court, suing at the expense of the state, with the bride-

groom disgusted enough to make the parting a mere matter of collusion. The girl is madame, with a wedding ring to show for her respectability, and the proprieties have drawn the veil of decency over another liaison.

The women usually have one of two reasons in seeking their freedom. One is the laziness of the husband, who has imagined that, in taking a wife, he was securing a source of permanent income that he wouldn't have to work for. The other is that the women themselves have no morals to speak of and prefer to be entirely free from conjugal reproaches.

It is complete divorce that is nowadays applied for, thus showing that the respect for the marriage tie, permitting legal separation only, without the right of remarriage, has deteriorated to a marked degree.

The revelations that have come out in France are but one local phase of the problem which set all Europe to examining its conscience, with discoveries of shames which scarcely a single nation can deny.

While the anxious analyses of French marriage and its weakness were in progress, and while Great Britain's divorce commission was taking testimony under popular pressure for

some change of the laws which would give the English poor divorce facilities somewhat like those existing across the channel, inquiries were instituted throughout Europe, covering the general subject.

There is no legal divorce in Italy, which might be termed the marital South Carolina of Europe, but within thirty years the number of legal separations has doubled.

Austria, which permits both separation and divorce, has about doubled its divorces and nearly doubled its separations.

In Holland the separations have increased to triple the number of a generation ago, while the complete divorces are three and one-half times what they were.

In Norway the separations have doubled, while the divorces have been multiplied by five.

In Belgium the separations have gone up 60 per cent, but the full-fledged divorces have been quintupled, as in Norway.

The relation of divorces to marriages is now so high that all Europe is anxious over the change. Switzerland has the highest proportion, four divorces being recorded for every 100 marriages. The percentages of France and Greece are somewhat less, but manifest a steady trend

upward. In Roumania the percentage is 2 1/2; in Denmark, 2; in Prussia and Sweden, 1 per cent each; in England, 1/2 of 1 per cent, with strong popular agitation for increased divorce facilities and much evidence to show that the small number of divorces is due mainly to the expense and difficulty of procuring them.

The general continental inquiry showed that the legal status of the married woman, in both Switzerland and France, was a factor in her demand for independent status. In Ireland, as in Russia, powerful religious influences go so far to preserve the sanctity of the marriage tie that the percentage of divorces is trivial, the primitive condition of the Russian populace also modifying the tendency toward any revolt against marital unhappiness.

Almost everywhere the majority of the applicants for divorce are women, notwithstanding the fact that the law generally provides for reconciliation wherever it is possible. The average of the applicants is well represented in the two great capitals—Paris and Berlin. In Paris the women represent 56 per cent of the applicants; in Berlin they constitute 60 per cent.

A marked influence in the preservation of marriage proves to be the presence of children; and here, again, Paris and Berlin afford typical instances. In the French capital there are four times as many divorces secured by childless

(CONTINUED ON INSIDE PAGE.)