

PORTLAND, OREGON, SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 29, 1911

THE DOCTOR and the DIVORCE

What 3000 Physicians Have to Say on The Hidden Causes for Dissolving the Marriage Tie

BY MAJORITIES which, in some instances approached the unanimous, the answers received from 3000 American physicians questioned on the real causes for divorce, hidden usually behind the legal ones alleged, have declared that—

The great mass of divorces are due to marriages that were improper in the first place, and to those which develop unnatural conditions later.

Dread of child-bearing and aberrations of sex constitute the actual, although unnamed, causes where statutory grounds are not alleged.

The existence of aberrant conditions ought to be grounds for divorce; and

Education in such subjects will, to a great extent, overcome the evils of improper marriages.

With these truly startling opinions, the outgrowth of his intimate observation of family life in the United States, the



E. De Forest Leach, of Moundsville, W. Va., a leader in the Divorce Reform Movement.

physician has, like Daniel, come to judgment for the first time since the question of divorce grew into the acute problem it now is in modern social conditions.

They are a more than grave commentary on a chapter of American life not previously revealed and, by many, not even suspected.

IN DESULTORY fashion, as one sensational aspect after another of national divorce scandal has been thrust upon the people, the views of some individual physicians have been heard. But the sober, reflective judgment of the profession at large, although the doctor is commonly known to share with the clergyman the secrets of every household, has not been expressed upon the vital causes lying back of the increasing number of pairs who are parted by the law.

The endeavor to obtain the information and

opinions embraced in the surprising digest that has been so briefly summarized was undertaken by E. De Forest Leach, a lawyer, of Moundsville, W. Va., president of the National Divorce Reform Association.

The association, Mr. Leach has stated, is the outgrowth of the national congress on uniform divorce laws in Washington and Philadelphia in 1906. He was among the members of the congress who contended that any attempt to remedy the evils of the existing system by enacting uniform divorce laws must be worse than foolish until the law could be framed in the light of data, well established, concerning the causes in which divorces originate. These data he undertook recently to secure, by calling into the court of public opinion the men of the profession who are sometimes summoned, as experts, by courts of law when deciding difficult cases of divorce.

He was convinced that, behind the usual legal grounds alleged, there must be some hydra-headed evil wrecking lives that, by every rule



of divorce, should have been ordinarily and happily. They presented to his the vast, unsuspected, actually unknown variety of the non-legal causes for divorce; he insisted that, if he could ascertain their nature, some remedies could be devised. He reviews his action and its results with an impressive directness:

"As an attorney in general practice I soon came to the conclusion that a very small proportion of the divorces granted were desired primarily because of the commission of some statutory matrimonial offense. I should say that, if all the facts were known, not more than one case in ten would be found to be of that character.

"Not infrequently the lawyer is consulted in order to ascertain the quickest and easiest way to dissolve a matrimonial alliance which has become intolerable, regardless of the commission of statutory offenses. Indeed, it is doubtful whether a simple violation of the law has as much to do in causing domestic infelicity as have many other things. But even when a statutory offense has been committed there is always a reason.

DEEP STUDY REQUIRED

"It is these conditions, which inspire a desire for a dissolution of the marriage, that lie at the bottom of the divorce question, and they must be studied in an unprejudiced manner before any material progress can be attained in even understanding this class of social phenomena. It is not enough when a husband leaves a virtuous wife to consort with bad women, or when a wife deserts a respectable husband for the embraces of some Beau Brummel, to say that they are 'devilish' or 'moral degenerates.' Witches used to be considered accomplices of the devil, and religious fanatics as the incarnation of the Holy Ghost. We know better today. There was a reason then, just as there is a reason now, but people did not understand it. The only excuse, it seems, that has ever been needed to lay the responsibility for an act upon God, or the devil is to have the cause outside of the range of our own information.

"With a desire to either prove the error of my own views or to ratify them I prepared a letter, which I sent to 3000 physicians. These letters were addressed to some of the leading physicians in the United States, professors in medical institutions, authors of medical works and to a much larger number of general practitioners. I asked four questions.

"My first inquiry was: 'What are the principal causes for divorce? Court records show unfaithfulness, desertion, etc. But why these? Are they not the results of unnatural marital conditions?'

"I received in reply to these letters a much larger number of answers than I expected. Eighty-nine per cent of those who replied said that the statutory grounds were, in their opinion, not the primary causes for divorce. The causes agreed upon may be generally expressed as being 'improper marriages and unnatural marital conditions.' These conditions, it was stated, are often pathological, and the results of ignorance, indiscretion and incorrect modes of living. The other 11 per cent did not answer the question, or replied that they did not desire to express an opinion.

"My second inquiry was: 'To what extent do sexual aberrations, dread of child-bearing, impotency and disease enter into the formation of a legal ground for divorce where they are not statutory grounds?'

EDUCATION THE CURE

"Seventy-five per cent said they are grounds for divorce in very many cases; 19 per cent thought not, though many admitted that they had had no experience upon which to base their opinion; 6 per cent said that they thought they had very little to do with causing divorce.

"My third inquiry was: 'Would education in sex subjects overcome the evils of improper marriages?'

"Ninety-seven per cent thought that education in these subjects would, to a great extent, overcome the evils of improper marriages. It must not be overlooked, however, that these physicians consider that the best cure for the evil of improper marriages is immediate divorce, so that the matter of education, instead of always removing the condition which causes the desire for a separation, would hasten it, but without the usual accompanying evil results which are inevitable where two persons attempt to live together under such conditions. Nineteen per cent did not seem to be so certain, for they qualified their answers; 3 per cent thought that education would have very little effect.

"My fourth inquiry was: 'Would you recommend that the existence of pathological and psychopathical states, such as accompany or create abnormal sexual conditions, be made grounds for divorce? That is, adjusting the laws so that a victim of such circumstances might be able to obtain a divorce without committing a crime—a matrimonial offense—as is now usually required?'

"Ninety-two per cent recommended that the existence of pathological and psychopathical

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