

Why It's Fashionable Now To Go To Paris For A Divorce

An "Insult" Is Enough to Give a Decree, Any Period of Residence Will Do and Secrecy Is Assured



Mrs. Rita Lydig, Another Paris Divorcee. This Noted Painting of Her by Boldini Helped to Establish Her as a Parisian Resident.



The Main Street of Reno, Nevada, Whose Crudities Lead Our Fashionables to Choose Paris as a Divorce Centre.

It is a significant fact that some of the most fashionable women in New York society have recently gone to Paris, France, for their divorces, rather than to Reno, Nevada, or some other popular centre of the American divorce industry.

During the past few months Mrs. Ogden L. Mills, daughter of Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, and Mrs. Leonard Thomas, the noted beauty, have obtained divorces with remarkable secrecy in the French capital. A few months before that it was the distinguished Mrs. "Phil" Lydig who obtained her freedom in the same city.

In the early years of the war the equally distinguished Mrs. Clarence Mackay, now Mrs. Joseph A. Blake, divorced Mr. Mackay from the vantage ground of a Paris residence. She appears to have been a pioneer in the movement among the smart set to secure matrimonial relief from the French courts.

Other names could be added to the list, but the four women mentioned represent in the highest degree the beauty, brains, wealth, smartness, distinction, cleverness and originality of New York society. Their example sufficiently proves the statement that there is a tendency in the fashionable set to go to Paris for divorce, rather than to Reno or any other American resort.

Shall we see Paris entirely supplant Reno as the home of easy and pleasant divorces? Social authorities say that more women will still go to Reno, but the smartest will prefer Paris. A divorce originating in the latter place will have the cachet of supreme elegance and distinction.

Investigation has proved that French laws offer attractions to those seeking easy divorce fully as great as those of Nevada—in some respects greater. The most important point about the French divorce law is that the judge may consider any period as establishing a legal residence for the petitioner, whereas Nevada requires a residence of six months.

The French judge may decide that a woman who has been in France for a week, or even for a day, has acquired a legal residence enabling her to sue for divorce. It is not believed that such a decision has been given, but it is possible in principle. The point is left entirely to the wisdom of the judge.

It is not necessary for the parties to be citizens of France, for the French code lays down as a general principle that foreigners resident in France shall enjoy the same benefit and protection from French laws as citizens of the country.

Service of notice to appear and defend a suit for divorce may be made by publication in the newspapers if the judge decides that it is the only reasonable procedure.

After the first filing of a divorce complaint the judge issues a "requete en conciliation," which is a demand that the parties shall appear before him and endeavor to settle their differences with his assistance. If they fail to respond or fail to agree the suit proceeds.

The testimony may be taken by deposition if the judge so orders, thus insuring perfect secrecy and the minimum of distress and discomfort to a woman plaintiff. If the judge is satisfied that the plaintiff is entitled to a divorce, he grants an interlocutory judgment, as in England and in some American States. This is for six months, at the end of which time it may be made absolute. The judgment is promulgated so quietly that in several cases of American applicants it has escaped public knowledge for many months after it was given.

The grounds for divorce in France are not dissimilar to those of Nevada, where "cruelty" is listed as a cause and has been construed by judges to cover such offenses as speaking unsympathetically to a wife or not speaking to her often enough.

The serious grounds of divorce in France are infidelity and conviction of an infamous crime. The lighter grounds are classed together under Article 231 of the

French Civil Code as "excesses, cruelties and grave injuries." The French expression "injure graves," which is roughly translated as "grave injuries," covers moral and physical injuries, abusive language and, in fact, nearly every kind and degree of injury. It would cover that vague complaint, "incompatibility," which has often been accepted as a ground for divorce in American courts.

French judges have interpreted the provisions of their code as covering a wide variety of acts. Gambling habits on the part of a husband and recklessly accusing a wife of infidelity have been construed as ground for divorce. "Les mots grossiers"—"gross words"—are held to be sufficient cause.

A "mutual divorce" may be granted by the French courts where each party brings similar charges against the other and offers proof. In a case where the defendant offers no defence, the divorce is pronounced with quietness and dispatch.

A singular advantage appears to be offered to complaining wives in Article 234 of the French Civil Code. There it is stated that the judge will go to the home of the complainant if she is unable to appear. This appeals very strongly to refined American women, who dislike having to appear in a dusty old court thronged with impertinent lawyers and rather vulgar litigants.

In seeking a divorce in Paris most fashionable women would undoubtedly consider that city more attractive than Reno or, perhaps, any town in America. The boulevards of Paris, with their endless theatres and restaurants, appear more fascinating to these fair expatriates than the simple delights of Main street, Reno, with its one cabaret, its shooting galleries, boot-black parlors, its motion picture shows and its forlorn bars.

The historic Rue de la Paix, with its splendid shops, once considered the most expensive in the world, but now considerably surpassed in this respect by Fifth avenue, offers consolations to these refugees awaiting relief from the "cruelties" of their husbands.

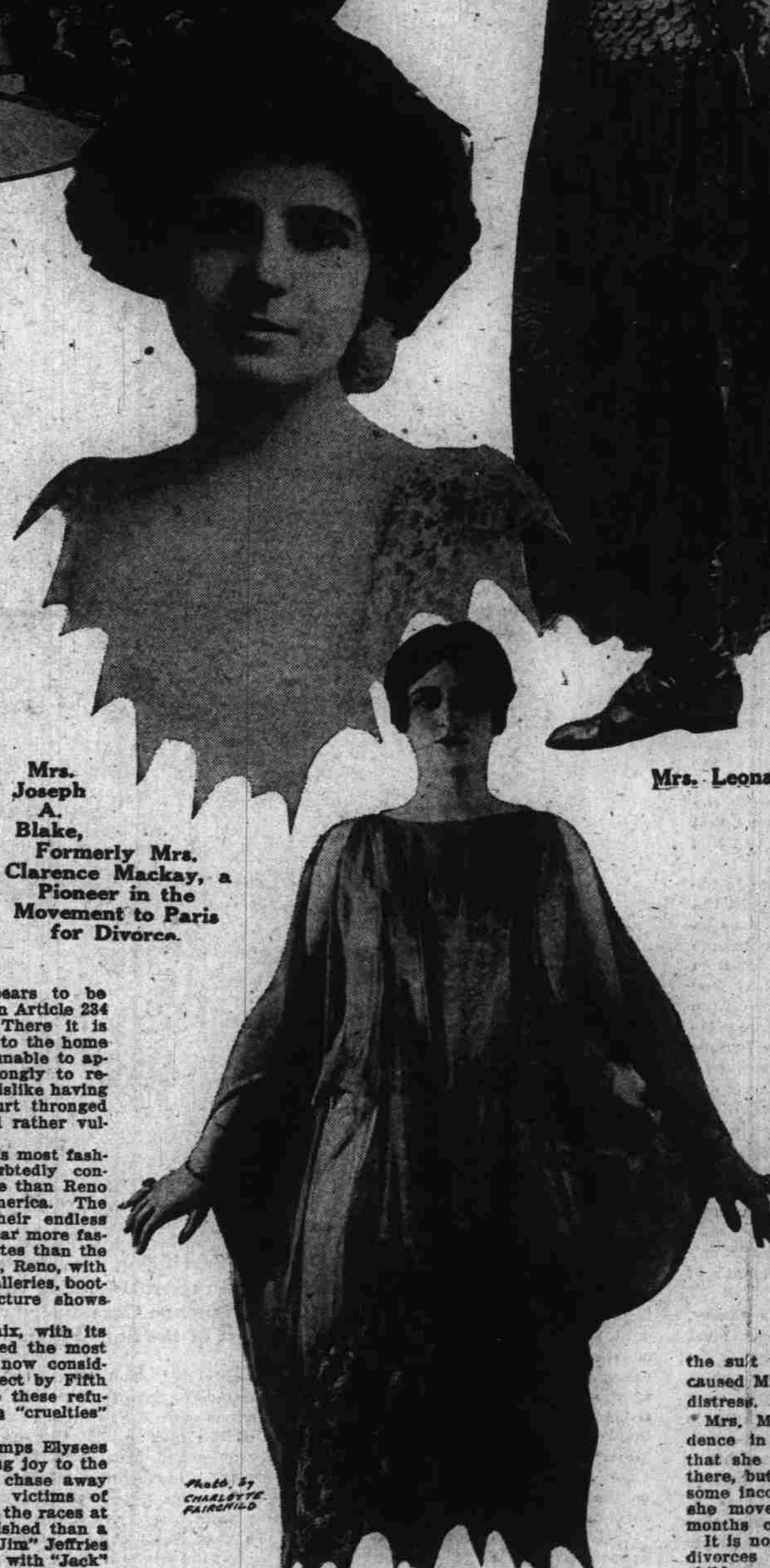
Drives in the beautiful Champs Elysees and the Bois de Boulogne bring joy to the heart in the Springtime and chase away sorrow from these delicate victims of masculine brutality. A trip to the races at Longchamps is more distinguished than a ride to the roadhouse where "Jim" Jeffries trained for his historic conflict with "Jack" Johnson.

One of the most interesting of these recent Paris divorcees is that obtained by Mrs. Ogden Livingston Mills, Junior, formerly Margaret Rutherford, who is a daughter of Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt by a previous marriage. Mrs. Mills is a great beauty, of very distinguished type, with fine features and a statuesque figure. She was only married in 1911 to Mr. Mills, a grandson of the multi-millionaire, D. O. Mills, and a son of Mrs. Ogden Mills, who is noted for her exclusiveness in New York society.

Young Mrs. Mills went to Paris only in March, and in May she admitted that she had obtained a divorce. She declined "to give details, because her mother, Mrs. Vanderbilt, might not like it," and would not give the name of her lawyer. For a time it was impossible to ascertain in what court she had sought her divorce, on what ground she had asked it, or any of the facts that are necessarily made public in America.

Young Mrs. Mills was brought up in France, lived there for many years, has

Mrs. Joseph A. Blake, Formerly Mrs. Clarence Mackay, a Pioneer in the Movement to Paris for Divorce.



Young Mrs. Ogden L. Mills, Daughter of Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Who Has Obtained a Paris Divorce Nobody Knows How, When or Why.

spent a large part of every year there and was married from the Chateau de Quesnay, her stepfather's residence, near Paris. There is, therefore, ground for calling her a resident of France. On the other hand, her husband, Ogden L. Mills, appears to be a resident of America, for he was until recently a State Senator in the New York Legislature, and has since then been acting as treasurer of the Republican County Committee in New York.

Even more surprising was the divorce of Mrs. Leonard Thomas, who was the beautiful Blanche Oelrichs, from her husband, who inherited his wealth from the great Drexel banking firm of Philadelphia. In April Mrs. Thomas admitted she had obtained a divorce in Paris and made this statement:

"Yes, it is true we are divorced. But the divorce was granted many, many months ago."

American society had known that the Thomases were living apart, but did not learn for months that a divorce had been granted.

Mrs. Leonard Thomas, the Lovely Society Woman, Poet and Suffragist, Who Obtained a Divorce in Paris "Many Months" Before New York Heard of It.

The divorce obtained in Paris by Mrs. Joseph A. Blake, formerly Mrs. Clarence Mackay, appears to have served as a fruitful hint to other American women desiring freedom. When Mrs. Mackay first became estranged from her multi-millionaire husband in America she was threatened with all kinds of unpleasant complications. Mrs. Catherine Ketchum Blake instituted a \$1,000,000 damage suit against Mrs. Mackay for alienating the affections of Mrs. Blake's husband, Dr. Joseph A. Blake, the famous surgeon. Although the suit was withdrawn the proceedings caused Mrs. Mackay much annoyance and distress.

Mrs. Mackay then established a residence in Maine and society understood that she was going to sue for a divorce there, but this course evidently presented some inconveniences. Quite unexpectedly she moved to Paris, and within a few months obtained her divorce there.

It is not to be expected that all French divorces will pass without question by children, heirs and other persons concerned. Mrs. Frank J. Gould (who was the actress, Edith Kelly) has already raised the question. She has brought suit for divorce in America against her husband, despite the fact that he had obtained a divorce in France.

Mrs. Gould asks her divorce in this country on the ground that she and her husband were not domiciled in France when the divorce was obtained, and that it was stated in the decree that her husband's domicile was Tarrytown, N. Y. Consequently, she alleges, the French courts could not have had jurisdiction.

When inquiry was made of a prominent New York lawyer who has had much experience with French law, as to the validity of divorces obtained by American citizens in France, he said: "It is impossible to make a general and dependable statement on that point. I understand that if a French divorce has fulfilled the essential conditions required by the New York courts it will be held as valid in New York as one obtained in any other American State."