

Mystery of the Queer Divorce Mess of Our Duchess Consuelo

Why Is the Duke's Latest Offense So Shocking That It Made Her Seek the Freedom She Shrank from Asking During 12 Years of Separation



Crowherst, in Surrey, the Beautiful Old Place Which the Duchess Restored at Her Own Expense and Where She and the Duke Spent Their Recent Brief Period of Reconciliation.

LONDON, June 26. SOCIETY is intensely curious to know what it is that has caused the American Duchess of Marlborough after all these years to prosecute her divorce suit against her defaulting husband so relentlessly. Although the Duchess's unhappy differences with the Duke have been a matter of common knowledge for many years there is no doubt that some entirely new cause of disagreement between them which is hidden from the world has arisen within less than a year.

The chief known facts are that the Duke and Duchess lived apart for twelve years—from 1907 to 1919, that the Duchess in that time never attempted to secure a legal divorce, that they became reconciled for one month in 1919, that the Duke then left her saying that it was impossible to live with her and that the Duchess after that began a suit for absolute divorce, which she is prosecuting with the most unflinching determination.

What happened in that short month that angered the Duchess more than anything the Duke had ever done before? What was it that caused her to seek the divorce she had not asked in twelve years? In some quarters it has been assumed that the Duchess wishes to marry again. For that purpose, of course, she would need an absolute divorce. It would be rather surprising if the Duchess after years of quarrelling with her husband and barely six months after an attempt at reconciliation should wish to try the experiment again with another man, but women have done more surprising things. The Duchess has not revealed a marked preference for any individual, but several of the most brilliant men in England and France are among her devoted friends.

Under the English divorce law a wife in order to obtain an absolute divorce must prove infidelity, together with desertion or cruelty, whereas the husband need only prove infidelity. For the purpose of proving desertion it is customary for the wife to ask the court for a decree of restitution of conjugal rights. The decree orders the husband to return to his wife within a certain time—usually within fourteen days. If he fails to do so, this becomes proof that he has deserted his wife.

The co-respondent was not named in ad-

vance of the suit, but of course an absolute divorce could not be obtained without one. In reply to this suit the Duke announced that he would oppose the divorce, a somewhat unusual course, as it has become customary among husbands of high social position to allow their wives to divorce them without opposition.

It has been learned, however, that the Duke's course in opposing the divorce is in accordance with the Duchess's wishes and appears to have been followed by him to oblige her or else to have been forced upon him by her lawyers.

Strange to say, a defended divorce suit is absolutely necessary in order that the Duchess may maintain her position at court, which she values highly. Queen Mary has determined that morality, simplicity and frugality shall distinguish her court more than ever. She has just given orders that no divorcee shall be received at court unless she can show that the divorce was granted in open court in her favor, that both parties were represented and that custody of the children was granted to the wife.

So strict will be the court rules that the Lord Chamberlain has announced that in most cases divorcees will save themselves trouble by not applying for presentation at all. This last admonition would not apply to a woman like the Duchess of Marlborough, who is already highly respected at court, but she cannot be allowed to disregard the entire rule.

It has been further ordered that women appearing at court shall not wear head feathers, long trains or ostentatious displays of jewelry.

It is clear now that the Duke's defence against his wife's suit is necessary in order that the Duchess may maintain her position, but it remains a mystery why she considered it necessary to bring the suit at all. She could easily have separated from her husband quietly and lived apart as they had done for many years and have excited hardly any comment.

It is possible to reveal some curious facts that have a bearing on this mystery. When the Duchess asked for her restitution decree she stated that she had serious disagreements with the Duke early in married life which made it impossible for them to live together.

They separated in 1907 under private articles of separation, which gave Blenheim Palace to the Duke, left her in undivided possession of Sunderland House, London, which she had just built, and specified arrangements concerning the two children.

In November, 1919, when this agreement expired, the Duke and Duchess met to discuss the situation. He suggested that they should try living together again, to which

she agreed. Her sympathies for him were excited by his patriotism in putting Blenheim Palace Park under cultivation for war reasons. They spent the period of reconciliation, an odd sort of late honeymoon, at Crowherst Place, in Surrey, a lovely old house which the Duchess had restored and renovated with extraordinary skill and expenditure of money.

They began to live together on November 27, and on December 15 the Duke went away without a word of warning and sent this letter to the Duchess:

"Blenheim, Woodstock.
"My Dear Consuelo:
"We have tried our best to mend the past and start life afresh, but I fear that in the long period of our separation, now upwards of twelve years, we have grown too far apart to live happily together again. I appreciate all you have tried to do during our reunion, but I am now convinced it is impossible. Believe me,
"Yours,
"SUNNY."

To this unfeeling letter the Duchess replied:

"Dear Sunny—I have received your letter. I wish you had spoken to me instead of writing. It seems a pity now that we ever came together again only for everything to end like this. It is useless to say more. I must go away and rest for a while.
"Yours,
"CONSUELO."

Later she wrote to him as follows:
"Dear Sunny—While I have been away I have thought over everything and you, too, have had time to reflect, so I am writing to ask you to reconsider your decision not to return to me. If you will do so, I can assure you nothing on my part will be wanting to try and make you happy.
"Yours,
"CONSUELO."

To this the Duke replied, brusquely, as follows:

"My Dear Consuelo—I have received your letter of the 21st, written on your return from the Continent. As I wrote to you in December, when we parted, I am convinced that it is impossible for us to live happily together."

Some curious inferences may be drawn from this brief correspondence. Probably most Americans have supposed that the Duchess dismissed the Duke from her

home because of his repeated misconduct. From the correspondence, however, it is plain that after their reconciliation it was the Duke who went away because he simply could not endure the Duchess, although he tried rather hard to do so. From the tone of the correspondence it is inferred that the original disagreement must have been of a similar character.

The Duchess, whose proud nature is well



The Sad Face of the Duchess, From Her Latest Photograph, Taken Since Her Last Separation from the Duke.

The Duchess in the State Robes and Coronet of Her Rank, Which She Can Never Wear Again.

Blenheim Palace, One of the Great Historic Houses of England, Which the American Duchess Can Never Occupy Again.



The Duke of Marlborough, Who Left His American Wife After Her Repeated Efforts at Reconciliation.

known, condescended very deeply in the opinion of her friends when she urged the Duke to return to her after their second parting. The Duke rejected her loving overture with abrupt, almost contemptuous harshness.

The proud, sensitive Duchess was deeply angered at the insolence of a husband who owed much to her and who had never shown any return for all the benefits received but cruelty, insults and unfaithfulness. Her anger at this latest exhibition of heartlessness by the Duke is believed to be largely responsible for the determination with which she is prosecuting her divorce suit.

According to this view, she wishes to punish him. Under a divorce decree she could enforce severer terms on the Duke than under a private agreement.

But anger on the Duchess's side and heartlessness on the Duke's would be of no effect in securing her divorce. For this latter purpose she must prove his infidelity. The acts of which she complains must have been committed either during their reconciliation or since then. Any acts committed before that time would, according to English law, be condoned by the Duchess when she resumed living with the Duke and could not be the basis of a divorce suit.

At the time of the original separation of the pair there were widespread reports, even repeated in print, that the Duchess was offended by the attentions of the Duke to a distinguished society woman noted for her beauty and fascination. These reports arose perhaps as much as anything from the almost universal admiration which this famed beauty received from the most highly placed princes and noblemen in Europe.

Society knows that the separation was in large measure due to the utterly heartless, selfish and cynical conduct of the Duke within a few years of their marriage, which occurred in 1895. It is generally understood that the Duchess's father, W. K. Vanderbilt, set aside a fortune of \$10,000,000 for the joint use of the couple and the support of their family, protecting it by many legal restrictions.

Those who are familiar with the Duchess's life say that the affronts offered by the Duke at the time of the brief reconciliation and since then have been of a most intolerable character, but in advance of the suit nobody ventured to mention names.

The intimation has been made that the Duke, after trying married life anew with the Duchess for a short while deliberately sought the society of a former companion. This would have been a most outrageous affront to the Duchess, meaning that after mature consideration and experiment he had no longer any possible doubt that he preferred the society of another person to hers.

It is even probable that he shamelessly paraded his indifference to his wife during the brief period when she was loyally endeavoring to display the true spirit of wifely love and to make their reconciliation a genuine one. It would surprise no one if the Duke alleged that he believed his wife wished a reconciliation merely for the sake of dignity, respectability and position, and that she was willing to allow him to enjoy perfect freedom and to amuse himself just as he pleased without comment or interference on her part. Such cynical conceptions of domestic life are of course not uncommon among the European aristocracy.