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ALL ABOUT THE PASTIME OF DIVORCE

Divorce, which is derived from the Latin word divertere, to go apart, and may be either an occasional experiment, as in the case of the ordinary citizen, or a hobby, as with Mr. Nat Goodwin, Mr. Robert Fitzsimmons, and Mr. De Wolf Hopper, is best described as the privilege accorded to the losing player (in the game of matrimony) to buy another stack of chips and start in all over again. It is an ingenious invention by which the resolute man may enjoy all the advantages of being a Mormon elder, without having plays written about him by Harriet Ford and Harvey O'Higgins. The word divorce is in many ways the most popular in the language, and it is by virtue of constantly repeating it to himself, like a magic charm, that the fastidious man is enabled to bear up, when first confronted by his wife's relations.

Divorce, in its earliest stages, was a crude thing. Prehistoric Man conducted his divorces, as he did his marriages, with the fat end of a stone bludgeon. The only way in which the divorce ceremony differed from the marriage ceremony was that in the former case the plaintiff hit harder.

The idea of the remarriage of a divorcee was repugnant to him, and he endeavored to render such a thing out of the question.

It was under the Ancient Romans that Divorce, considered as a fine art, reached its highest point. The astute husbands and wives of that epoch saw their way to doing themselves a bit of good by means of it. There is no doubt that the Romans gave divorce-presents, probably in the shape of fish-slices, egg-holders, plate-warmers and all those things which, when taken round the corner to the local pawnbroker (/avusicidus/), could be exchanged for solid and satisfactory cash (/denarii/). The Ancient Roman, therefore, got his unfortunate friends as it were, coming and going, and may be said to have known a bit.

In modern times Divorce varies greatly according to the country in which it takes place. In England for instance, it is so rare that, when it happens, the newspapers devote most of their middle page to a report of the proceedings. But as a matter of fact, divorce in England is mostly confined to the theatre. If the first act of an English play is laid either in the morning-room of Maltravers Park or in the drawing-room of Lady Beevor's town-house in Grosvenor Square, you can he pretty sure that somebody's divorce is going to be the motive of it.

It is assumed — in England, at any rate — that the United States leads the world in the matter of divorce: and it will probably be a severe blow to our patriots to learn that

this is not the case. Even at the risk of inflaming Messrs. Goodwin, Fitzsimmons, and Hopper to renewed efforts, we must state the truth — that Japan makes America look like a timid novice in this particular branch of industry. In Japan there are twenty-two divorces per thousand inhabitants, while in the United States there are a mere eight per thousand. It is but a melancholy consolation that the next competitor in order, Switzerland, only scores three.

This is the sort of revelation which takes all the heart out of an energetic and persevering people. The reason is not far to seek. It lies in the fact that, while certain States are doing all that can be expected of them — we take off our hat to Washington, where there are eleven separate and distinct grounds for divorce — others are simply loafing. In South Carolina, for instance, divorce is actually not permitted, and in many states it cannot he obtained for such perfectly adequate causes as teasing the Siberian eel-spaniel, omitting to bring home candy, putting ice in the claret, wearing a straw-hat before June the fifteenth, reading the novels of Harold Bell Wright, using a last season's automobile, revoking at Bridge, and appearing in public in tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles. Naturally the Japanese, a race which pulls together as one man in every patriotic movement, is way ahead of the United States.

But, even under existing conditions, with every obstacle placed in the way of divorce, it is astonishing that it is not more common. When we look about us and see how uniformly repulsive our fellow human-beings are, it seems extraordinary that only eight out of every thousand of them take the sensible course of breaking away from one another forever. The reason is that, in this country, the expense of divorce is so great. The male aspirant is faced with the prospect of having to part not only from his wife, which he could endure cheerfully, but from a considerable portion of his hard-earned doubloons in the shape of alimony. Judges, as a class, display, in the matter of arranging alimony, that reckless generosity which is only found in men who are giving away somebody else's money. It is getting so that divorce, instead of being the pastime of the people, has degenerated into a relaxation for the idle rich.

Alimony in Japan is a mere matter of yen — a yen being about a thousandth part of a dollar. With a reasonable amount of luck, your Japanese can get divorced half a dozen times a year for about what it would cost him in New York to tip the head-waiter of a second-rate cabaret for getting him a table twenty-seven feet from the dancing-floor and directly behind a pillar.