

DIVORCE WAVE OVER NATION GROWING STRONGER

Year 1920 Broke All Records, but 1921 Starts With Pace That Promises to Establish New High Mark

CAREFUL surveys of the divorce records of 1920 throughout the chief States of the Union have been made by THE NEW YORK HERALD'S correspondents in the leading cities. The accompanying symposium that resulted is of especial interest at this time because the divorce evil is attracting the attention of all clergy, not only in the United States but abroad, and of students of psychology the world over. The surveys show that laxity both of laws and their administration contributes greatly to the increase of divorces in several States. An interesting development and one that has caused the records to swell since 1918 is the dissolution of many of the so-called slacker marriages, the husbands, now that the war is over, being anxious to be free.

THE nation's divorce story for 1920 is one of broken records as well as severed ties—a social evil grown into a pressing national peril in the minds of many whose opinions carry weight. Statistics from all parts of the country show not only an enormous increase in divorce cases last year, but indicate that 1921 is starting off at a pace which means still more new records if it is maintained throughout the twelve months.

The tremendous and continuing growth of the divorce evil, coming as it did in the face of determined fights conducted through recognized agencies in various States, leads some observers to take a gloomy outlook, bringing out opinions to the effect that we are well advanced in an age of trial marriages that can result only in the early crumbling of our social system and consequent fall of the nation. Others while seeing grave danger see also a good fighting chance and are urging on a campaign of reform; and these more hopeful students of the situation appear to be in the majority. There are still others who take only the most optimistic view, regarding the soaring of divorce records only as a post-war inflation that will flatten out along with other abnormal records when the country returns to normalcy.

Judges, Clergymen and Legislators Urging Curb on Divorce Evil

Judges, lawyers, clergymen, legislators and welfare workers attest the gravity of the situation in urging reform measures and striving to arouse a greater appreciation on the part of the people of the sanctity of the marriage bond. Delving into court records fails to disclose what might be termed the main cause of increased divorces. Many separate inducements are found at work in each case. Furthermore, the charges upon which divorce cases are based cannot always be taken as true indices. Unlike New York, where the statutory offence is the only valid ground for divorce, most States grant divorces on a number of grounds, and those seeking divorce often make out their case on charges which carry the least stigma regardless of the real cause of their differences.

Nevertheless there are some clearly defined major, if not main, factors to be found among the contributing causes of the amazing increase in divorces. These factors, which are to be found in the observations of Judges, court recorders and others in close touch with divorce proceedings, include the laxity of law and its administration, making divorces easy to get in many States, a growing tendency of young folk to "wed in haste," failure on the part of parents to exercise a proper oversight in the matter of their children's associates, a free and easy public mind, which seems to hold the marriage vows lightly, and consequently attaches little moral weight to the divorce.

The "jazzing wife" is coming into increasing prominence, according to some statisticians, while the "unrest" of husbands, a condition attributed to recent war service, is scarcely less conspicuous. But of all the factors that can be traced directly to the war the "slacker marriage" figures most prominently. From every source comes comment on the large number of such marriages that are now being dissolved.

The "marrying parson" and the "divorce lawyer" come in for a large measure of censure, and in many instances marriages by Judges, justices of the peace and such officials are frowned upon as lacking in solemnity.

The palm for breaking divorce records goes to Seattle. Reno has bowed to the coast city not only in point of number of divorces granted in the last year—Reno was beaten two to one or better—but in popularity as a haven for those seeking freedom from marital responsibilities and woes. All other things being equal, Seattle offers the added advantage of being big enough for the divorce hunter to hide in while his case is going through the mill.

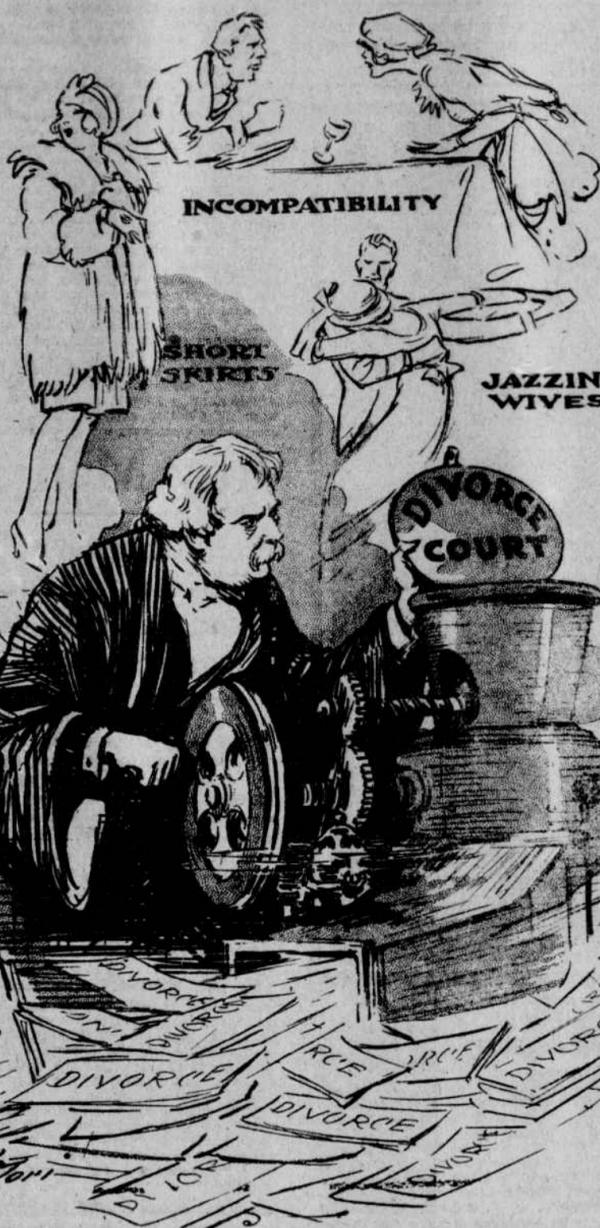
"Reno of the South" Name Now Being Given Atlanta

Atlanta comes into prominence as the "Reno of the South" and shares this distinction with Savannah, where the courts, when put to it, can turn out divorce cases at the rate of one a minute.

But, while admitting their notoriety, none of these cities enjoys its fame as a divorce centre, and measures have been introduced in the various State legislatures which will relieve them of their undesired distinction.

In New York city there were approximately 500 more divorces granted in 1920 than in the preceding year. There were 288 more divorce suits started and 358 more decrees granted than in 1919. Added to this increase in divorces should be the decrease in 216 undefended divorce cases in Manhattan which were referred to the trial term of the Supreme Court for trial in 1920 because the special terms were overcrowded. The outcome of these 216 cases has not been tabulated, but, judging from precedent, it is safe to assume that more than 150 of them resulted in verdicts for the plaintiffs.

That the up-State regions are keeping pace with the metropolis is evident from Buffalo's report that Erie county divorces, annulments and separations show a 20 per cent. increase over last year. Garrett V. Laughlin, clerk of special term, Supreme Court, attributes the increase largely to "jazzing wives" and slacker weddings, although he makes "wily" husbands share the blame.



Seattle and Atlanta New Rivals for Reno—Countrywide Survey Shows Startling Conditions

This does not mean that one set of jurors is kept busy on such cases. There are always three panels of jurors, the various plaintiffs passing quickly before them with their

serted twice a month for two months notice of the filing of the suit.

There are nine separate grounds for divorce in Georgia, only one of them being discretionary with the jury to find whether proper grounds have been shown. This is cruel treatment. The law grants to the jury the right to say whether or not an action complained of constitutes cruel treatment. Herein lies the loophole for the quick severing of the marriage ties in Georgia. Cruel treatment may consist of a husband slapping the face of his wife, of his remaining away from home at night longer than he should, of speaking harshly and sharply or even of refusing to give her as much money for spending purposes as she thinks she is entitled to. It is solely for the jury to determine whether or not the treatment complained of is cruel.

Savannah and Chatham county import a great number of divorce cases. This is caused by the fact that South Carolina, an adjoining State, has no divorce laws at all. The result is that a great many men and women seeking separations come to Savannah, acquire a citizenship in a year and seven months, later secure a divorce.

In such legislative measures as are under consideration in Georgia, Nevada, Washington and other States where "Hences," old, new or prospective, exist, those who hold hope of reform through or by the aid of woman suffrage may see their theories put to a definite and decisive test. As to the effects of prohibition, most observers incline to the belief that the time is not yet ripe for its full influence to be felt.

Coming back to New York's neighbors, New Jersey reports that while specific figures are not available there has been an enormous increase in divorce cases in the last few years, and that divorce suits at present outnumber all other litigations combined in the Jersey courts.

Pennsylvania also reports remarkable increases. In Philadelphia 3,012 divorces suits were started and 1,960 granted in 1920, setting a new record. In 1919 the number of divorces granted was 1,311.

Sudden Jump in Pittsburgh Comes After Five Years of Steady Increase

A comparison of the number of divorces granted and refused during the last five years in Allegheny county, of which Pittsburgh is the shire town, shows that the sudden increase in divorces in 1919 continued through the year 1920, the increase of last year being almost 25 per cent., which is considerably greater than that of the year before. The figures of the number of divorce actions filed during the last three years indicate, however, that this year's figures for divorces granted and refused will not be greatly in excess of last year's.

These figures also show that, as in the past, about 40 per cent. of the divorce actions filed are not carried out to the end, reconciliations and failures to prosecute cases decreasing the number of divorces granted to that extent. The figures on divorces granted and refused were:

	1920.	1919.	1918.	1917.	1916.
Granted	1,269	952	755	794	725
Refused	62	27	34	25	46

Actions filed were: In 1920, 2,048; in 1919, 2,049; in 1918, 1,248.

Two hundred and sixty-five divorce decrees, of which 93 were final decrees, were granted in Delaware during the year 1920, constituting a new divorce record for that State. The highest previous year was 1919, when 226 final and decrees nisi were granted. Most of these decrees were authorized during the May, 1920, term of the Upper Court in Wilmington. Listed on the court calendar for January, 1921, were 67 petitions to be heard for decrees nisi and 54 petitions for final decrees to be given trial. Except in cases based on statutory grounds or bigamy charges, one of the parties must be a bona fide resident of Delaware for at least two years next preceding the commencement of the action.

Detroit was one of the record breakers, with 3,715 divorces granted in 1920, an increase of 700 over 1919. The county courts in Des Moines, Iowa, also set a new record, turning out 736 divorce decrees out of 1,038 petitions. Unheard cases listed at present are sufficient to indicate another record in 1921.

Baltimore is one of the few important cities where the number of divorces in 1920 was less than in 1919. A total of 1,649 decrees granted is a decrease of six as compared with the figures for the preceding year. These include absolute and partial divorces and annulments. About eighty per cent. of the divorces are absolute. Statutory offence and abandonment are the only grounds upon which absolute divorces is granted in Maryland.

Portland, Ore., Has Decrease, as Returns for 1920 Show

Portland, Ore., reporting for Multnomah county, is another city to record a decrease. There the falling off was approximately 27 per cent. as compared with the 1919 figures. In 1920 1,323 divorces were granted, as against 1,759 in 1919, the banner year. In 1918 there were only 1,125 cases filed and in 1917 1,042 cases.

Toledo, Ohio, also reports a slight decrease in 1920, when 1,047 petitions came before the courts. Divorces in 1919, however, showed a decided increase over preceding years.

Washtenaw county, Michigan, of which Ann Arbor is the shire town, is still another to report a slight decrease. Eighty-seven divorces were granted in 1920 out of 114 petitions, as against 99 granted out of 123 applications in 1919.

Swinging back to the high record column we come to Virginia admitting a new record, but with figures for the year 1920 incomplete. In 1919 there were 4,556 divorces granted in the State, as against 4,798 in 1918. In Norfolk the divorce figures for 1920 nearly double those of 1918. The number of divorces last year was 323, of which 241 were to whites. In 1918 there were 227 decrees, of which 114 were to whites, 84 to negroes and 29 to couples with no color stated.

There is a movement under way to have the Legislature of Virginia enact laws that will prohibit the remarriage of divorced persons.

In Wheeling, W. Va., ninety-three divorces were granted in 1920, an increase of only

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558 pending at the opening of 1920, and 315 of them were disposed of during the year, leaving 672 on the waiting list for this year, as against 771 divorce petitions on the list for 1919, of which number 213 were disposed of during 1919, leaving 558 pending for 1920. The divorce report for three years is as follows:

	1920.	1919.	1918.
Pending at opening of year	558	365	390
Total entered for year	429	406	278
Finished for year	315	213	308

The increase in divorces in Providence, R. I., in the last four years is shown in the following table:

	Applications	Decrees
	Filed.	Granted.
1920	1,326	962
1919	1,176	718
1918	814	501
1917	820	554

Of the divorce petitions granted those uncontested were: In 1920, 885; in 1919, 605; in 1918, 414; in 1917, 512.

Taking up again the possible influence of prohibition on divorces, a jump to Duluth, Minn., the largest city in the country to vote dry independent of a State, we find that with the exception of the year 1915 the number of divorces has been increasing for eight years. Duluth and St. Louis county, of which it is the shire town, have been dry since June, 1917. Last year 270 divorces were granted, as compared to 257 in 1918, 243 in 1917, 219 in 1916, 194 in 1915, 204 in 1914 and 191 in 1913.

Atlanta's new title of the "Reno of the South" gives more than a hint of the divorce situation in Georgia—another State which went dry long before national prohibition was adopted. It is the State laws of Georgia rather than prohibition that attract most interest in connection with the divorce evil. Through the leniency of the laws and the sympathy shown, especially by Atlanta jurors, toward those seeking freedom from matrimonial bonds few who go to court there are denied. Last year 880 divorces were granted, as compared with 700 in the preceding year, while the court dockets now indicate that 1921 will be another record year.

The efforts made by Judges and others before the Georgia Legislature have been in the direction of preventing hasty marriages, to make it obligatory to publish the banns and to see to it that a certain period of time elapses before the announcing of the intention to wed and the actual ceremony.

Georgia's story may be continued best by taking up the situation in Savannah, where the courts hear divorce cases sometimes at the rate of one a minute. In round numbers there were more than 900 divorce hearings in Chatham County Superior Court during 1920. This is the highest number ever heard in one year, but it will probably be surpassed by 1921. There are four terms of the Superior Court of Chatham county and there is an average of 175 uncontested divorce cases at each term. There are very few contested cases, the whole number being heard in a day's sitting of the court.

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Seattle Outstrips Reno As the Divorce Centre

Special Correspondence of THE NEW YORK HERALD.
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SEATTLE, Feb. 26.

WITH the cessation of wartime shipbuilding Seattle has become a port for Broken Hearts, if sociological students with a bent for statistics are to be believed. Records in the county building here show that Seattle has outstripped Reno and leads the nation as a refuge for those seeking an easy divorce, or a divorce easy, in the matter of divorces Seattle, in fact, has beaten Reno more than two to one—2,480 to 991, to be exact.

If there is a divorce "colony" in Seattle investigation fails to show where it is. Seattle, the Superior Court justices say, is too big to have such a colony. Outsiders come here, mingle six months with the permanent residents to establish legal residence and go hence with their decrees, their presence unnoticed, their identity lost in the shuffle.

The number of divorces has grown amazingly in the last five years. Several years ago divorces outstripped marriages and have continued to surmount them in numbers. It is impossible to figure just how much revenue the city derives from this new and thriving industry. One thing is certain, it provides a livelihood for a number of professional witnesses, "marrying

persons" and lawyers who specialize in divorce cases, and of course the money spent by the "interested parties" during their six months' residence amounts to something. The future of this new industry depends largely on the action of the State Legislature, at present in session, with the machinery set for tightening up on the business of getting an easy divorce.

Hasty marriages, lack of control by parents, lax laws, motion pictures, ease with which a decree can be obtained and lack of solemnity in marriages are but a few of the causes to which the Seattle divorce record is attributed. In the hundreds of divorce cases tried before him in the last decade Justice King Dykman of the King county Superior Court has presided in only one contested action where both persons were professing Christians and actual churchgoers.

Laxity of Administration Given as the Main Cause

"Present conditions," he says, "have been brought about by the laxity of our divorce laws and their administration, in which respects we lead, perhaps, any other State or civilized country."

"When they cut lawyers' fees in divorce cases and no longer allow the childless wife alimony then watch the bottom fall out of our divorce court," said a Seattle citizen who admitted that his two divorces cost him \$2,500.

In more than one instance decrees have been granted to persons who took a chance, not waiting until they had lived here the re-

quired six months. Discovery and prosecution have followed in some cases of this sort. In two cases recently the court nullified the divorce decrees and the contracting parties found themselves with husbands and wives in duplicate. It also was found that witnesses had given false testimony for a consideration.

Presiding Justice Ronald interrupted the default divorce proceedings in the Superior Courts recently to say:

Judge Gives Full Warning To Seekers of Decrees

"King county is becoming a convenient ground for people looking for divorce. From now on I shall have to be absolutely convinced that the bona fide place of residence is here before granting decrees."

Judge Ronald's view is shared by all members of the King county bench. The notoriety Seattle has gained from the divorce situation is not relished here. A recent crusade against the divorce evil disclosed the fact that Seattle is the record holder of the country. Records for the last few weeks show the number of applications is still increasing.

Clergy and laity, bench and bar are voicing their condemnation of divorce in principle and in practice. "America's black spot is the divorce court," said the Rev. Dr. Mark A. Matthews. "America's disease is divorce. There are several reasons for the increase:

"First—Loose marriages. Marriages are hastily contracted. Insufficient time in courtship. A marriage for convenience is

stories. Frequently the Judge will direct a verdict for the plaintiff and the foreman will sign it without any consultation with the other jurors.

It has been figured out that divorce cases are heard in Savannah at the rate of more than one a minute during the rush hours of the court.

It is now possible to secure an absolute divorce in Chatham county in seven months. This is just one month more than the time required in Reno. There are four terms of the Superior Court. If a divorce case is filed at the March term, for instance, and personal service is at once perfected, the appearance term is the March term. A hearing can be had and a first verdict rendered at the June term and a second verdict and final decree can be obtained at the October term. Under the Georgia law two separate juries have to hear the evidence and find in favor of a divorce.

How Divorce Proceedings May Be Speeded Up in Georgia Courts

A year's citizenship in Georgia is required to have an applicant for divorce have any standing in court and six months residence in the county in which the action is brought. The courts in the counties with sufficient business to warrant frequent terms grant divorces more quickly than they can be secured in the less populated counties. For instance, a litigant in Chatham county, with Savannah the county seat, or Fulton, with Atlanta the county seat, can get two verdicts and a decree in seven months, as has been shown, but in a county where there are but two terms of court a year it requires eighteen months. The result is that the busy court centres are a haven to which those seeking divorces flock. Time can be saved by living in a big county for six months and then starting proceedings.

In case the defendant in a divorce proceeding is a non-resident of Savannah an additional month is required to perfect service by publication. There must be in-

a curse. The woman who marries just to have a meal ticket is a blot on society. There is but one ground for matrimony, and that is holy, perfect, God-bathed love. The divorce problem should be solved before marriage, not after.

"Second—Lack of parental confidence. Parents have not the confidence of their children. Domestic discipline is gone. Parents do not investigate their children's associates. We have saved more than one girl from marrying the wrong man by bringing the man before us and having him reveal the fact that he had a wife and child in some other State. Parents ought to do such investigating. We have too many scrub sons-in-law. But parents are to blame if their daughters marry scrubs. No girl should marry a man to reform him. It can't be done.

Divorce Lawyers a Menace And Courts Act Loosely

"Third—The lawyers and the courts are to blame. The divorce lawyers are a menace to society. Courts try the cases loosely. The State is supposed to be represented at every divorce trial by the prosecuting attorney, but his appearance, interest and participation in the trial are a farce. Judges and justices of the peace have no moral right to perform marriage ceremonies. They take away all of the spiritual and serious impressions when they present only the legal side of the contract.

"Fourth—The women are to blame for the increase of divorces, because they will not state the facts in their complaints."