

And Now They Must Take Their Hubbies Along

French Court's New Ruling That Makes It Less Easy and Pleasant for American Society Women to Get Divorces in Paris



The divorce ring which the Parisian jewelers find always in good demand with their American customers.



The former Mrs. Preston Gibson, who found a brand new husband while in Paris to get her divorce from Mr. Gibson.

It is no longer the easy and pleasant matter it has long been for the American fashionable society woman to secure a divorce in Paris.

Until a few days ago all that was necessary for her to do was to slip quietly across the ocean, establish a residence in the French capital and settle down there for the six months which the law required before she could go into court and present her reasons for being rid of her husband.

The six months' residence was regarded in the light of an advantage rather than a drawback to the securing of a divorce in Paris. The time could be so enjoyably spent—in tasting the delights of the boulevards, in selecting a trousseau for another marriage, and perhaps even in choosing a brand new husband.

The woman who had the money and leisure to seek a divorce in this way was shielded from the inquisitiveness of newspaper reporters and photographers who might have followed her about if she had remained in America to get her divorce, and also from the importunities of her gossiping friends.

So little publicity was involved that very often a woman was able to secure a divorce without society's having the least suspicion that she contemplated leaving her husband until she came sailing back to New York with her decree in her trunk—and occasionally a new love mate at her side.

Still another—and one of the greatest—advantages lay in the fact that the Parisian divorce seeker had no reason to be annoyed by the propinquity of the husband from whom she was anxious to be parted. There need be no interruption of his business or pleasure just because his wedded life was to be brought to a sudden end.

Since the French laws required the presence of only the plaintiff in a divorce suit, the husband could stay at his desk in New York and concentrate his attention on piling up enough money to meet any possible alimony charges.

But this state of affairs, so delightful to the woman who wanted a divorce with a minimum of effort and unpleasant publicity, has come to an end.

The French laws have been changed so that now both parties to a divorce action must have resided in the country for at least six months before the action is begun. Only such a period of residence by both husband and wife will enable either of them to demand a divorce and obtain the court's consent to what the French law rather ironically terms formal "reconciliation" sessions.

This puts an end forever to the easy divorce that has heretofore been possible for women with the money and leisure for a trip to Paris and a stay of eight or nine months there. And there is corresponding gloom among a large number of fashionable women who have been planning to get rid of their husbands via the Paris route.

Within the last few years it has become a frequent occurrence for a wife to cross the Atlantic carrying a statement bearing her husband's signature before a notary to the effect that he had no intention of resuming marital relations. After living in France for six months a brief explanation of the reasons for which she sought divorce and the presentation of this statement from her husband were all that was necessary to secure a decree in short order.

But all this is now a thing of the past. The American wife who wants a Parisian divorce must take hubby along to live, if not with her,

at least in the same country with her for a few months.

Business in New York and other cities of the United States can no longer go on as usual while a wife frolics on the boulevard, selecting a new trousseau and considering the choice of another husband while waiting for the obliging French courts to issue her a decree.

France, so broad-minded and lenient in many other respects, has long been viewing with alarm the amazing influx of American divorce seekers. It has resented having Paris made a haven for easy divorce—a convenient substitute for the notorious city of Reno.

And now as a result of this feeling the courts have decided that it defeats the purpose of the law

Mrs. James T. Terry, one of the lucky Americans who got divorces before new ruling



Mr. and Mrs. James V. Converse, who will have to settle down for a few months in Paris together if they decide to get a divorce there.

to have only one party to the action resident in the country when a decree is asked for.

The French law is very insistent that no divorce shall be granted until every effort has been made to reconcile the quarrelling husband and wife and make them live in harmony. This explains the formal "reconciliation" sessions which look so like a joke to most American seekers for a divorce.

Mrs. Preston Gibson, Mrs. James T. Terry, Mrs. Owen Root, Mrs. Eugene V. R. Thayer, Mrs. Langdon Harris and numerous other well-known American women who have lately obtained their divorces in Paris are congratulating themselves that they acted before the disagreeable new ruling went into effect.

Scores of other unhappy wives who have been planning an enjoyable summer in Paris for the purpose of having their matrimonial bonds severed are as keenly disappointed. They will have to make new plans unless they can devise some way of inducing their husbands to shut up their desks and go along, too.

If the hubbies refuse—and it is quite likely that most of them will—the wives will be forced to fall back

on Reno that old standby of the mis-mated. And this is not at all a pleasant retrospect.

In the first place, a divorce can hardly be secured in Reno without a great deal of publicity. Other objections to the Nevada city lie in the remoteness from the centers of wealth and fashion and the fact that its hotels, restaurants and apartment houses have much to be desired by women accustomed to the luxuries of life in New York, London, Paris and Newport.

There are three grounds for divorce in France—adultery, conviction of a felony and cruelty. Both physical violence and mental anguish are accepted under the heading of cruelty. Neither party to a divorce is allowed to remarry in France within 10 months, because of the question of custody and sustenance for the children.

"The whole divorce situation in France, from the American viewpoint, is an abuse and a scandal," says an American lawyer practicing in Paris. "There is no suggestion of Reno in the attitude of the French courts, but French judges are not aware of the advantage that is being taken of them by Americans who are procuring divorces."

"These divorces are generally of no value in the United States, but Americans obtain them and they may hold until their validity is contested. Any kind of rope of sand will hold until it's pulled."

At the ministry of justice the

suggestion that Paris is becoming a second Reno for American divorcees is not well received.

M. Lemertieux, first assistant to Minister of Justice Barthou, has pointed out that France is a liberal country regarding divorces, having been the first continental country to grant them to foreigners under the law of 1884. He thinks that possibly Paris was being visited for this purpose, just as Fiume was such a resort for Italians because of the lack of a divorce law in Italy.

M. Wells, director of civil affairs at the ministry of justice, does not think it logical that France should be looked upon in the United States as a country where divorces can be easily obtained, since there are fewer legal grounds for divorce in France than in America.

Generally speaking, France grants divorces to foreigners if their own country permits divorces. Judges during the last few years have been taking a more lenient view toward applications for divorce by foreigners. Previously the applicants usually were notified that they should apply for divorces in their own countries.

H. E. Barrault, a French advocate, who has made inquiries into the number of divorces granted to Americans in French courts, does not think it as large as is generally believed. He argues that the divorcees mostly are prominent rich persons, which accounts for the great publicity given in the American press.

This gives the appearance of a much larger number of divorces, he says, than are really obtained, because of the fact that practically all of them are striking personalities, who merely find Paris a more pleasant place to live than some American cities where divorces would be as easily obtained.

The French advocate may be right in thinking that the number of American women seeking divorce in Paris is not as large as is generally believed. But, as an examination of the newspaper files will reveal, it is certainly a large one and in recent years has been growing steadily larger and larger.

Mrs. Philip M. Lydig was one of

the first prominent American women to go to Paris for her divorce. The decree she received there from Major Lydig is the one that now prevents her marrying the Rev. Percy Stickney Grant with the sanction of the Protestant Episcopal church.

A large apartment house in one of the most exclusive sections of Paris has been known for several years as the "Divorce Nest," because it is filled from one year's end to the other with a succession of wealthy American women, there to seek freedom from their husbands.

Although rentals in this apartment building are rather above the ordinary, the rich Americans who tenant it do not object, for it is luxuriously appointed and the service is of the best.

Another advantage possessed by the "Divorce Nest" is the fact that leases may be cancelled on one day's notice. This has proved a great convenience on several occasions when one of the divorce seekers suddenly changed her mind and decided to return to her husband.

Among the American women who have recently had this for their home while seeking their divorces are the Countess de Maupas, a sister of the new Mrs. Reggy Vanderbilt, Mrs. James T. Terry and Mrs. Langdon Harris.

The De Maupas divorce, by the way, was one of the spiciest the Paris courts have seen in a long time. In a letter introduced at the trial the count said to his wife:

"I have the profoundest contempt for you. I aspire to the time when we shall have nothing in common."

To this the countess replied: "Life with you is no longer possible. You disgust me."

Although the recent ruling of the French courts may result in fewer American divorces being secured in Paris, there is small prospect of there being any immediate decrease in the divorce rate here. The rapidity with which it is increasing is a cause of grave concern to statesmen and religious leaders.

"Something must be done to stop this easy divorce," says Rev. Dr. Joseph P. McComas, a New York clergyman. "One thing that would help would be to make marriage more difficult—difficult to get to, and difficult to have the money performed."

There is much merit in the old English custom of publishing the banns and having them read from the pulpits on Sunday mornings.