

The New York Idea of Marriage and Divorce

Langdon Mitchell, the Playwright, Bishop Greer and Felix Adler Discuss the Matrimonial Views and Practises of Society

"New York is bounded on the North, South, East, and West by the State of Divorce."

"Nothing is final in Nature, not even Death," quotes the clergyman from his sermon. "If death is not final, why should marriage be final? * * * Oh, yes, an excellent sermon. * * * All New York was there and all New York went away happy."

"What are divorces among friends?"

"A woman should marry when she has the whim and leave the rest to the divorce court."

"People like us should meet on equal terms," says Mrs. Karslake, speaking of divorced women. "If people like us don't meet there would be no society."

"American girls marry for nothing and divorce for nothing, because you are nothing."

"You American girls are fine talkers," says the Englishman. "You talk and talk, but there's nothing here, (pointing to his heart). I once knew an American girl. She was the nicest kind of a—boy. These American marriages for title have been in bad odor in England lately. * * * Marriage in England means three things—Honor, obedience, and three children."

"I stop at 'obedience,'" remarks the American woman."

"The judiciary have mixed this thing (marriage and divorce) up so we can't tell we're married until we're divorced."

New York.—"The New York Idea" has been a much-discussed play. People have wanted to know why Mr. Langdon Mitchell, leveling his satire at divorce, was at pains to describe it as a New York idea.

"I chose New York for my title because New York is the greatest of American cities and reflects American life," Mr. Mitchell explained. "The play might have been called 'The Chicago Idea' or 'The Philadelphia Idea' just as well. I suppose. The most explicit title would probably be 'The American Idea.'"

"In other words," remarked the reporter, "you used the words New York to mean America, just as we say 'Paris' when we mean France, or 'London' when we think of 'England'?"

"Precisely."

"Why do you assume the attitude you do on the divorce question?"

The author settled back in his chair as if to weigh his words. Mr. Mitchell is anything but a flippant young man of the town. His urbane manner and an almost imperceptible impression of reserve at once recall his father, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, the noted physician, and himself a famous author.

"Mrs. Fiske suggested several years ago," he said, gravely, "that I write a play with divorce as the theme."

"Would not such a play be serious?"

"If there were children in a drama of divorce it would be a great tragedy. I decided, however, that my play should be a comedy."

"Acting, I suppose, on the principle that ridicule is the most dangerous of weapons," suggested a representative of the New York Times.

"No. There is a great drama in the divorce question, if treated as a serious problem. I should like to write such a play. My decision was reached, however, to make my play a comedy."

"It has been suggested that your methods resemble those of Bernard Shaw. Did you have his work in mind?"

"Any resemblance to Mr. Shaw's plays in 'The New York Idea' is quite unconscious, I assure you," Mr. Mitchell replied. "I know Mr. Shaw, having met him in London while I was living there. He was very kind to me when my first play was produced in England. I have never been a student of his plays, though. I can almost say I have not seen performances of them. Of course, I make a round of the theaters every season, but I go away into the country to write my plays."

Life as the Author Sees It.

"Then your criticisms of modern conditions merely reflect life as you see it?"

"Marriages based on affection, loyalty, and a sense of duty are not affected by the satire and rebuke in my play. Nearly all married people have quarrels. Where the husband and wife have a sense of loyalty and obligation they pass an unpleasant day or so and then are good friends again. With people like Cynthia and John Karslake, on the other hand, a divorce is the first thing that suggests itself—the easy, the usual end of a quarrel in married life.

"Who is to blame for such a condition? The law makes marriage a civil contract; divorces are easy to obtain. The church may place a ban on divorce. Why does not that keep husband and wife out of the divorce court? Can it be that the people I am criticizing have ceased to be guided by the church?"

"Mrs. Parsons recently suggested marriages on probation," suggested the reporter. "Is such a system possible?"

"When we come right down to it," Mr. Mitchell replied, "do not some marriages amount to precisely that?"

"The real trouble and the blame," continued Mr. Mitchell, "lies deeper than the foolish husbands and wives I have sought to typify in Mr. and Mrs. Karslake. The people I really aim at are the fathers and mothers of such husbands and wives. Why do they not teach their children that

marriage is a solemn thing, not to be entered into lightly and carelessly cast aside? These parents are the guilty ones. Careless, indifferent, apathetic, or worse, they allow their children to marry without telling them what married life means, much less teaching them that a husband and wife must be steadfast and are not to rush off to the divorce court at a whim or after every quarrel. Is it amazing to think that the girls of such parents look on marriage merely as a matter of clothes, church, parson and orange blossoms, and know nothing of the obligations that come after?

Blame the Parents.

"The parents of such girls should be punished. I read the other day that a state in the west had passed a law directing that girls under 14 years of age should not be allowed on the streets at night. Does the law punish the girl? No. It directs that the parents pay a fine of five dollars every time the girl is found on the streets after dark. We should have such a law here. It places the blame where it belongs—on the parents."

"In the third act of 'The New York Idea,'" remarked the reporter, "the Englishman criticizes the American girl and says that American girls who have married foreigners of title are in rather bad odor in Europe. Was that comment prompted by recent events in England and France?"

"No," Mr. Mitchell replied. "It was suggested months ago, while I was writing the play. I read an article in the Fortnightly Review in which some one had prepared a table showing 100 marriages of American girls and 100 marriages of young women from Austria-Hungary to Englishmen of title. The American girls, according to the article, were mothers of 50 children and the wives from Austria-Hungary of 300 children. That means an average of two American wives to one child and three children for every wife from Austria-Hungary."

The reporter mentioned the character of Rev. Mathew Phillimore in the play and his remarks which seemed to excuse divorce.

The Inscrutable Minister.

"I meant that to hit hard," replied Mr. Mitchell. "I aimed the blow at the inscrutable minister, the man who twists his words to suit the likes and dislikes of the people in his congregation."

"You mean the clergyman who compromises at every point?"

"That's what I mean, precisely—the compromising clergyman. No one has a more sincere admiration than I for the true clergyman—Phillips Brooks, for example, a man I knew well; or Bishop Doane, who has just said exactly what he thinks about divorce, no matter who is hurt; or a man like my old master at St. Paul's Academy in Concord, N. H., Dr. Coit. I have known him to walk into a saloon and up to the bar, take an ex-St. Paul's boy by the arm and lead him away as though he were a little child."

"I don't mean such men, but the preachers who twist and turn their words to suit the occasion. I believe that many of the people who see 'The New York Idea' will recognize the type and will agree with me. I want to hit such preachers hard."

Before the chat ended a passing reference was made to the address on the English and American drama, delivered at Harvard by Henry Arthur Jones, the English playwright.

"I think Mr. Jones is wrong in some ways," remarked Mr. Mitchell. "The American drama is in a better condition than the English stage. There the people are very conservative; here they are openminded. We really recognized Bernard Shaw first, and his success on the English stage is largely a reflection of his vogue in America. The drama is a minor interest to an Englishman, and when anything happens to him he stays away from the theater. When anything happens to the American he goes to the theater more than ever. Americans love the theater."

Bishop Greer's Opinion.

Rev. David H. Greer, bishop

coadjutor of the diocese of New York, when told of Mr. Mitchell's views on the divorce question, said that in his opinion the prevalence of divorce was not due to the indifference of parents or the lack of instruction to those about to marry, but was a manifestation of the moral irresponsibility of the day.

"I doubt if the lesson Mr. Mitchell outlines can be taught in the way he has chosen," Bishop Greer said. "I am not even certain that it does young people any good to teach them all that married life means—its sufferings and sacrifices. They know well enough what marriage is when they get into it."

"The problem of divorce seems to lie deeper than that. It rests in the lack of moral responsibility among our people. With the class we are discussing, morals are a question of convention. The desire to be considered moral is sometimes based on a wish to be thought respectable, or on some similar ambition or motive. Such conventions always depend on public opinion, and public opinion is as variable as a weather-cock."

"The attitude toward marriage and divorce, which we are discussing, is a sign of the day, of lives based on the habit of living for the hour or the day—in a word, the attitude of irresponsibility. So far as morals are concerned, the people seem to be drifting, to lack strong convictions. Perhaps it may be traced to the modern spirit of agnosticism. It is one manifestation of many of this spirit in modern life."

"Such as corruption in political or moral life?" suggested the reporter.

"The spirit makes itself felt in many ways," Bishop Greer replied. "It is frequently seen in the tendency to let well enough alone, and to accept life as it is."

Moral Irresponsibility.

"Then this moral irresponsibility is a disease?"

"Yes, it is a disease; a malignant disease that should be cut out."

"What is the remedy for this disease, so far as it concerns divorce?"

"There must be some remedy," Bishop Greer replied, after a moment of thoughtful silence. "The law can help, the church can help, and the newspapers can help. It is all a matter of public opinion, of making people realize their responsibilities."

"Do not believe for a moment that I am pessimistic," he hastened to add. "On the contrary, I am optimistic."

Felix Adler, professor of political and social ethics at Columbia university, expressed the opinion that the responsibility for divorces lay not with the lack of instruction of those contracting marriage, but in the view of parents that marriage is a means to obtain felicity and comfort, rather than an institution having for one of its important objects the preservation of society.

"Mr. Mitchell has skinned a subject," said Prof. Adler, "which, to be thoroughly discussed, would require all the reflection of a work on philosophy. I should be inclined to go beyond the people in the divorce courts and beyond the neglect of the parents to inform their children regarding the duties and obligations of marriage, and to say the blame lay in the absence of thought and mature consideration of the marriage relation in the parents themselves."

"Marriage should not be considered, as is sometimes the case, merely for the felicity and comfort which the relation affords. Marriage is an institution for the perpetuation of the best spiritual element in our race. A child needs the protection, the spiritual influence, and the material guidance of the home long after infancy is passed. We see in nature the mountains, the rocks, the rivers. They are permanent. We face a condition in which the most precious thing of all life—is ever in danger of extinction. It is the preservation of this most precious thing that should be the source of thought and study by those who live in the marriage relation. The blessed felicity of marriage is a result, not the motive, of marriage."

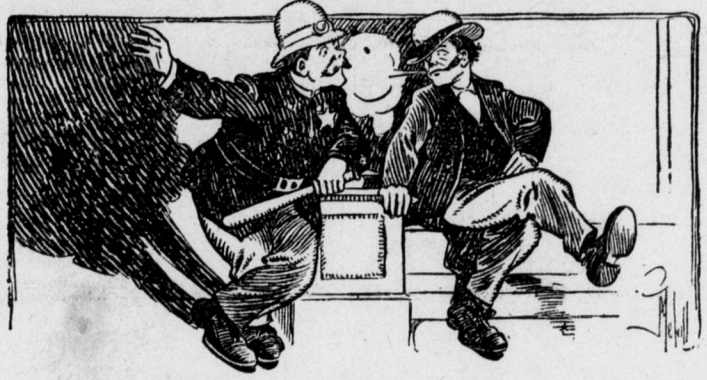
"Is the ignorance with which young people approach marriage due to a lack of frankness on the part of the parents?"

"I would hardly say that," Prof. Adler replied. "A New England woman asked me recently whether she should tell her young daughter everything about married life before her wedding."

"I was of the opinion that it would not be for the best. The mother should tell her daughter certain things, but if she learned everything there would be danger that the baldness of the narrative would neutralize the beneficial object of the lesson. The time would come in the young wife's life when she would give serious thought to the question. At such a time, other elements of married life—of affection, pride, loyalty, and the



HE TALKS OF POLICE METHODS.



"I Can See You Lookin' Wise an' Measurin' th' Tracks in th' Mud with a Fut-Rule."

wa-ys iv po-lis day-tictives, an' I don't want ye fr to be botherin' me with ye-er fool questions. Ye'd ha-ave thim all brought in, an' ye'd ixamine thim an' ma-ake thim prove they was n't th' wans, an' sift it down till ye'd got it bechune a few iv thim. Thim mebbe ye'd la-and ye-er ma-an through some wan tellin' on him so's to keep r-right with ye, or mebbe some felly on th' outside w'u'd tip it off to ye so's ye'd give him a little more shovin'. Oho! they's lots iv wa-ys iv gettin' at th' fac's without tra-acin' a cr-rime up. That used to be th' of way, but 't is out iv date. 'First find out who did it an' thim arrist him,' was th' of rule, but now 't is, 'First arrist ye-er ma-an, an' thim find if he's th' wan, or if he knows the wan ye wa-ant.' Iv coorse they's ex-cptions, but this is th' reg'lar wa-ay."

"And what would be the next thing for me to do?" asked the youth, somewhat distressed by having his ideals thus ruthlessly shattered.

"Ye sh'u'd throw out ye-er chist, puff on a big see-gar, an' say, 'T was a ha-ard job, but I done it.'"

"Is that all?" asked Horatio.

"Oho! is that all?" repeated Policeman Flynn. "If ye cu'd see th' time some iv th' day-tictives puts in doin' it, ye'd sa-ay 't is enough."

Policeman Flynn, it is hardly necessary to say, looks with some contempt on the average police detective, believing that he is a man who gets most of the glory, while the patrolman does most of the work, but that perhaps is natural in a man who is a patrolman from choice.

"Still, a man may do work in his

"Ye wa-ant me fr to help ye to be a day-tictive?" said Policeman Flynn to him one day. "M-m-m, well—drawin' his hand over his chin in the old familiar way—"I'll tell ye what I'll do fr ye. I'll give ye th' po-lis ixamination an' see how ye come out. 'T is not ye-er pla-an fr to star-art in as a patrolman, iv coorse?"

"Oh, no," answered the youth. "I feel that my talents are above that."

"'T is what I supposed," said Policeman Flynn. "Th' woods is full iv la-ads like you. Some iv thim wa-ants to be presidint iv a r-railroad, some iv thim wa-ants to be editor iv a news-pa-aper, some iv thim wa-ants to be gin'ral manager iv anny ol' business that's big enough, but most iv them wa-ants to be day-tictives. Anny way ye put it, they can do better than th' fellyes that's doin' th' wor-ck now. But 't is a shtrange thing to me that th' min that's makin' na-ames fr thim-selves at th' top is never th' wans that star-tered in up there. Did ye iver think iv that?"

"No-o, I can't say that I did," replied the youth.

"Iv coorse not," said Policeman Flynn, "an' ye w'u'd n't think th' r-rule was fr ye if ye did. 'T is not necessary in ye-er ca-ase. Ye're too sma-art. Well, mebbe so. We'll try it on. Ivery la-ad that wants to be a day-tictive has to be ixamined, an' I'll put a few questions to ye. Sup-pose ye was in cha-arge iv th' day-tictive wor-ck an' a big burgary was committed, what w'u'd ye do?"

"I'd look for a clue," answered Horatio, promptly and confidently.

"I can see ye doin' it," asserted Policeman Flynn with a chuckle. "I can see ye goin' through th' pla-ace, an' lookin' wise, an' gettin' down on ye-er knees fr to ixamine a bit iv mud through a magnifyin'-glass, an' thim goin' out an' measurin' th' tracks in th' mud with a fut-rule. I can hear ye saying, 'This gr-reat crime was committed by a ma-an with a large fut an' a nail shtickin' out iv wan shoe. 'T is only necessary now fr to find th' shoe an' arrist th' ma-an.' Oho! ye'd ma-ake a gr-reat day-tictive, fr sure."

"Is not that what you'd do?" asked Horatio.

"I'm not ta-alkin' iv what I'd do," returned Policeman Flynn. "I'm ta-alkin' iv what th' gr-reat day-tictive does. If ye was a r-real day-tictive an' had this wor-ck fr to do, ye'd go to th' pla-ace an' luk wise, an' thim ye'd go back an' order th' dhrag-net put out. Ivery ma-an that cu'd ha-ave done it an' lots that cu'd n't w'u'd be brought in an'—"

"Arrested?" interrupted Horatio.

"Fr sure," replied Policeman Flynn. "But what right would you have to arrest people against whom you had no evidence?"

"Who's ta-alkin' iv rights?" retorted Policeman Flynn. "I'm ta-alkin' iv th'



"Ye Sh'u'd Throw Out Ye'er Chist, Puff on a Big Seegar an' Say, 'T was a Ha-ard Job, But I Done It.'"

own way, I suppose," suggested Horatio, after a moment of thought.

"Fr sure," answered Policeman Flynn, "but 't is a ha-arder wa-ay."

"An' if he does a really good piece of work he gets his reward?"

"R-right ye are."

"What is it usually?"

"M-m-m, well," returned Policeman Flynn, thoughtfully, "that all day-pins. Sometimes 't is wan thing, an' sometimes 't is another. Sometimes 't is promotion, an' sometimes 't is not. D' ye ray-mimber th' time I wint down th' chute an' arristed a gang in th' cellar?"

"Yes, indeed. Did you get a reward for that?"

"I did."

"What was it?"

"I was docked th' price iv th' coat I rooned goin' down th' chute."

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Rivals.

Gunner—Why are those ships acting so queerly out there in the bay?

Guy—I don't know. They are sister ships, though.

Gunner—Well, that accounts for it.

Guy—Accounts for what?

Gunner—Why, I bet they are flirting with that big man-o'-war over there.—Chicago Daily News.

Her Prerogative.

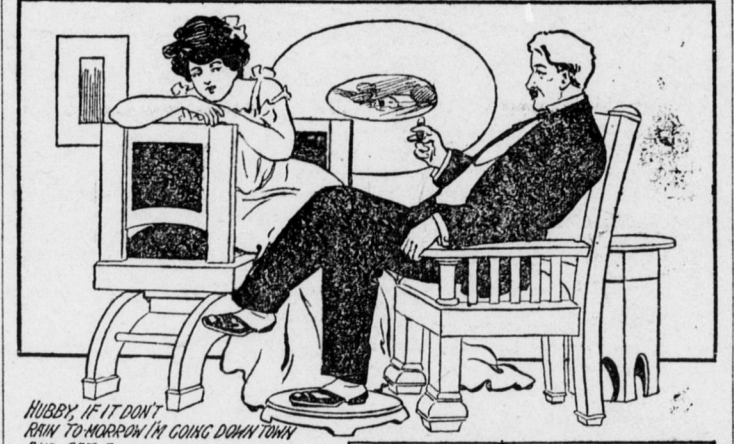
"No, I will never be a public speaker."

"It is easy enough."

"I wish you would tell me how."

"You should practice making speeches to your wife when you are alone together."

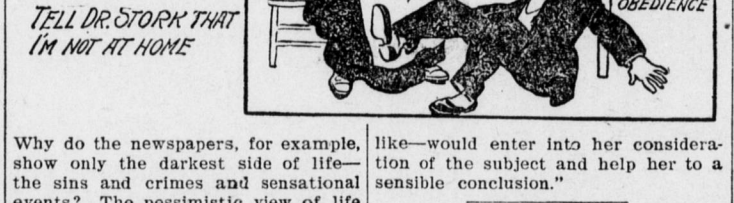
"You don't know my wife."—Houston Post.



"HURRY, IF IT DON'T RAIN TOMORROW I'M GOING DOWN TOWN AND GET A DIVORCE."



"ALL THEY CARE FOR IS DRESS."



"TELL DR. STORK THAT I'M NOT AT HOME."

Why do the newspapers, for example, show only the darkest side of life—the sins and crimes and sensational events? The pessimistic view of life always reminds me of the story of a boy from a country town, who was brought to New York by his father on his first visit. He had heard much of Broadway, and his father took him to see the street, its buildings, shops, and crowds passing along the sidewalks.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked the father when the trip had ended.

"The boy was clearly disappointed. 'All the people are lame,' he replied.

"Some questioning was required to find out exactly what the boy meant. It appeared that there was a lame man in the village where the boy had lived all his life. The boy remembered him distinctly, he was so strange, so different from the others. As he walked along Broadway he saw a dozen lame men. He remembered them rather than the hundreds of people who were sound. So it is with our pessimists. They can see only the lame men."

Blood Poisoning from Thorn.

William Bamber, a farm laborer, pricked his finger with a thorn while planting a hedge at Allston, near Preston, England. Septic Poisoning set in, and Bamber died.

Subordination.

Who can tell why it is that in madhouses the idea of subordination is very seldom to be found? Bedlam is inhabited only by gods, kings, poets and philosophers.

Western Progress.

Formerly the Kansas farmer was known by his hickory shirt. He is now recognized by the honk of his motor car.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Japanese Engagement Symbol.

The Japanese lover, instead of an engagement ring may give his future bride a piece of beautiful silk, to be worn as a sash.