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The Problem of divorce in Switzerland

According to statistics which have just been published, there have been, in Switzerland, since 1945, about 70,000 children deprived of family-life as a result of the divorce of their parents.

Moreover, at the end of 1960 there were about 90,000 divorcees in Switzerland, about two-thirds of whom were women. These few facts suffice to show that, in Switzerland, the problem of divorce is rather acute.

The same statistics showed in a rather naïve manner that the divorces were by no means most frequent in modest milieux. This goes without saying, and sociologists have observed that the higher the standard of living, the greater the number of divorces. In the Western World, it is in countries which, like the U.S.A., Sweden or Switzerland, have reached a very high standard of living, that the greatest number of divorces are recorded.

Profound moral considerations on "the corrupting influence of money" and other similar commonplace observations are here perfectly useless; what counts is that the phenomenon of divorce *exists* in Switzerland and elsewhere.

Some view divorce as a degradation of morals, while the prudent sociologist simply speaks of an evolution.

On the other hand, in a society founded on monogamy, with the education of children largely incumbent on their parents, nobody will deny that divorce presents social dangers: the education of some children may be neglected and they may therefore become socially unadapted. In a lesser measure, there is a danger for those who divorce, for sooner or later, they may become, to a certain extent, psychologically or morally unbalanced.

This being the case, if the family is to remain, in spite of other possibilities, the nucleus of society, it is important to keep the divorce rate as low as possible. And

this, precisely, is the aim of a certain number of Swiss associations—in particular, of the Foundation Pro Familia. These societies are not trying to restrict or do away with the legal means of breaking up marriage contracts. They realize that to forbid or even legally ignore divorce is not a solution to the problem.

Divorce is nothing but the result of an already broken marriage, and when there is no longer a real conjugal union it is useless to refuse husband and wife the right to recognize their separation legally by a divorce.

Instead of envisaging legal means of preventing divorce, the teachers and sociologists of Pro Familia are therefore more interested in finding remedies for the *causes* of divorce.

The fundamental cause of divorce, as Pro Familia points out, is the lack of preparation for marriage, and there should, therefore, be courses for engaged couples.

Just as the young man and the young girl are at length taught the profession that is later on to become their living, they should be prepared for their matrimonial duties and social responsibilities.

True, there are already in Switzerland some offices that specialize in this preparation for marriage, but they are as yet too few, and, for this reason the Canton of Berne, for example, has recently trained forty teachers in this special field. Moreover, the aim is to co-ordinate the efforts of the various organisations devoted to the preparation of the young, and to put at the disposal of these organizations the financial and technical means which would enable them to fulfil their task still better.

Certain sociologists also think that one should restore to marriage its original value: that of a contract. This, in opposition to a certain type of romanced literature which lends to marriage unreal and poetic aspects. The influence, on the minds of the young, of the publicity given to the marriages and divorces of film-stars and other celebrities of all kinds should be, as it were, counteracted by thorough and objective information on the various rosy and less rosy aspects of marriage and divorce.

This is particularly necessary in countries with a high economic standard, for in such countries people get married at an earlier age than they did a few years ago and may therefore be less fit to assume certain responsibilities.

It is evident that a more thorough preparation may discourage some of the young from marriage, for a while, and for many it may lose in poetry. But the main thing is that it gains in solidity. It is this solidity in marriage which is the social aim of those who wish to cut down, as much as possible, the number of divorces in Switzerland.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

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