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1925

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DIVORCES IN CANADA, 1925.

(With supplementary notes on Jurisdiction in Divorce in Canada and on the Divorce Act of 1925.)

Statistics of divorces, secured from the authorities of six provinces where divorces are granted by the courts and from the Dominion statutes for Ontario and Quebec, and compiled by the General Statistics Branch of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, show an increase of 8 in the number of divorces granted in Canada during 1925 over the previous year. A total of 551 divorces were granted during the calendar year 1925, as compared with 543 during the calendar year 1924 - an increase of 1.5 p.c. The 1925 total is 3 greater than the largest number previously recorded in any one year (1921).

The increase in divorces granted from 1916 to 1921 has been ascribed to the unsettling psychological effects of the war period and the long separations of men from their wives, combined with the new facilities for obtaining divorce, provided by a decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which enabled the courts of Alberta and Saskatchewan to grant divorces. Decreases in the totals in 1922 and 1923 appeared to indicate a decline in divorces which might be ascribed to the war-time conditions, but the comparatively large increase in 1924 and 1925, six years after the Armistice, must evidently be attributed to the greater ease with which decrees may now be obtained and, possibly, to a more lenient view of such proceedings on the part of the community. It may be remarked, however, that any attempt to attribute increases or decreases throughout the Dominion to any particular cause must be very approximate, since Table 1, following, shows the fluctuations in the various provinces to be quite irregular.

The number of divorces granted during 1925, by provinces, (Table 1) was 150 in British Columbia, 121 in Ontario, 101 in Alberta, 79 in Manitoba, 42 in Saskatchewan, 30 in Nova Scotia, 15 in New Brunswick, 13 in Quebec and none in Prince Edward Island, where, indeed, only one divorce has been granted since Confederation.

The largest increases in divorces granted during the year were in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, in both of which the 1925 figures showed increases of 14 over 1924. Ontario and Manitoba showed respective increases of 7 and 2. In Quebec and New Brunswick the numbers of divorces granted in 1925 were the same as in the previous year, while Alberta and Nova Scotia recorded decreases of 17 and 12 respectively. In addition to the total increases or decreases by provinces, attention may also be drawn to the larger number of decrees granted to husbands in Ontario and British Columbia, to wives in Saskatchewan, and to the smaller number granted to husbands in Nova Scotia and to wives in Alberta. (See Table 2).

The Sex of Applicants for Divorces.- It will be soon that, in the common division of divorce statistics into those granted to husbands and to wives, the 1925 figures indicate a change from the preceding year and a recurrence of the condition which has marked statistics of divorce in Canada as different from those of other countries - a preponderance of divorces granted to husbands rather than to wives. In 1922 and 1923, divorces granted to husbands in Canada formed respectively 58 and 53.5 p.c. of the total number granted. In 1924, this percentage dropped to 48.8 p.c. while in 1925 it formed 50.6 p.c. of the total number granted. The change in relative proportions in 1924 may be accounted for by the recent demand for equal rights for either sex in divorce proceedings. A comparison of Canadian divorce statistics with those of New Zealand and of the United States in this respect shows that the decrees granted in New Zealand are distributed fairly evenly between the sexes (although in 1924 the number granted to wives was 425 out of a total of 768 or 55.3 p.c.), while in the United States, since 1889, the proportion between decrees granted to husbands and to wives has been approximately 1 to 2 respectively.

(A possible indication of the grounds of petitions and decrees may be had from statistics of divorce in New Zealand, where a proportionately larger number of divorces were granted in 1924 to husbands on grounds of adultery, while a preponderance of decrees based on separation were granted to wives. The numbers of divorces granted on grounds of desertion form about 30 p.c. of the total numbers granted to each sex. In the United States, however, 48 p.c. of the divorces granted to wives are on grounds of cruelty, while 44 p.c. of those to husbands are on grounds of desertion. In the latter country, as in New Zealand, a correspondingly larger proportion of decrees are granted to husbands on grounds of adultery than to wives.)

Divorces Granted in United States to Persons Married in Canada.- A fact which throws considerable new light on the divorce situation in Canada is found in the Marriage and Divorce Bulletin of the United States Bureau of the Census. The statistics of this publication indicate the surprisingly large extent to which divorces are granted in that country to persons married in Canada. Thus, in 1922, no fewer than 1,368 divorce decrees were granted to couples married in Canada, a number more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ times as large as the total number granted in Canada in the same year. This number also formed 36.2 p.c. of the number of divorces granted in United States during the year to couples married in foreign countries, while, at the same time, the percentage of the Canadian-born population to the total foreign-born amounted to only 8.1 p.c. The Bulletin goes on to say, "It is possible that many Canadians acquire a residence in the United States for the sole purpose of obtaining divorce because in general, divorce laws are more liberal in the United States than in Canada". Of the 1,368 divorces granted to couples who had been married in Canada, no fewer than 462 were granted by the courts of the State of Michigan, while 135 were granted in the State of Washington and 128 in California.

May 12, 1925./KHH.

I. DIVORCES GRANTED IN CANADA, 1913 - 1925.

(Final Decrees).

Year	Ont.	Que.	Alta.	Sask.	Man.	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick	British Columbia	Total for Canada
1913	20	4	4	1	6	-	4	20	60
1914	18	7	4	2	2	10	12	15	70
1915	10	3	3	1	1	13	6	16	53
1916	18	1	1	2	2	14	11	18	67
1917	10	4	2	1	-	8	6	23	54
1918	10	2	2	1	-	24	10	65	114
1919	49	4	36	3	88	36	13	147	376
1920	91	9	65	26	42	45	15	136	429
1921	101	9	84	50	122	41	13	128	548
1922	90	6	129	37	97	35	12	138	544
1923	106	11	87	41	81	22	19	139	505
1924	114	13	118	28	77	42	15	136	543
1925	121	13	101	42	79	30	15	150	551

Note: In Prince Edward Island, only one divorce was granted between 1868 and 1925; this was granted in 1913.

II. DIVORCES GRANTED IN CANADA 1923 - 1925, BY
PROVINCES AND SEX OF PLAINTIFF.

(Final Decrees).

Provinces	To Husbands			To Wives			Total		
	1923	1924	1925	1923	1924	1925	1923	1924	1925
Prince Edward Island	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nova Scotia	14	20	13	8	22	17	22	42	30
New Brunswick	10	7	9	9	8	6	19	15	15
Quebec	4	5	4	7	8	9	11	13	13
Ontario	45	49	61	60	65	60	105	114	121
Manitoba	49	35	36	32	42	43	81	77	79
Saskatchewan	25	22	27	16	6	15	41	28	42
Alberta	58	65	58	29	53	43	87	118	101
British Columbia	65	62	71	74	74	79	139	136	150
Canada.....	270	265	279	235	278	272	505	543	551

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES.

In Table 3 are added comparative figures of divorces and marriages in England and Wales, Australia, New Zealand and Canada for the years 1916 to 1923 or 1924. The percentage of divorces to marriages, taking place in the same year, as here given, is seen in the case of England and Wales to have increased during these years from 0.35 p.c. to 0.77 p.c.; in Australia from 1.53 p.c. to 3.25 p.c.; in New Zealand from 2.41 p.c. to 5.17 p.c. and in Canada from 0.1 p.c. to 0.8 p.c. Similar figures for the United States, where, of course, the total number of divorces is unusually large owing to the comparative ease with which they may be obtained, show increases from 27,919 in 1887 to 42,937 in 1896, 72,062 in 1906, 112,036 in 1916, 148,815 in 1922 and 165,226 in 1923. The percentage of divorces to marriages increased from 10.8 to 13.5 during the years 1916 to 1923, divorces alone during this period increasing by 47 p.c. (In 1923 as in 1922, divorces granted to women in United States constituted 68 p.c. of the total granted.).

III. NUMBER OF MARRIAGES AND DIVORCES IN ENGLAND AND WALES, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND CANADA IN RECENT YEARS.

Year	England and Wales		Australia		New Zealand		Canada	
	No. of Marr- riages	No. of Divor- ces	No. of Marr- riages	No. of Div- orces	No. of Marr- riages	No. of Div- orces	No. of Marr- riages	No. of Div- orces
1916	279,846	990	40,289	617	8,213	198	65,000	1/ 67
1917	258,855	703	33,666	652	6,417	221	60,000	1/ 54
1918	287,163	1,111	33,141	697	6,227	203	55,000	1/ 114
1919	369,411	1,654	40,540	891	9,519	337	70,000	1/ 376
1920	379,658	3,090	51,552	1,069	12,175	471	80,931	429
1921	320,852	3,522	46,869	1,405	10,635	513	69,732	548
1922	299,524	2,588	44,731	1,270	9,556	523	64,420	544
1923	292,408	2,667	44,541	1,448	10,070	524	66,463	505
1924	296,416	2,286	45,869	-	10,259	530	68,000	1/ 543
1925	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	551

1/ Estimated.

JURISDICTION IN DIVORCE IN CANADA.

English Legislation-

It was not until 1857, when the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was passed in England, that a right to divorce in that country was created. Divorce as we now understand it had formerly the significance of judicial separation. By this Act of 1857 the Court of Divorce and Matrimonial Causes was created and all jurisdiction in matrimonial matters, formerly exercised by the Ecclesiastical Courts, was transferred to it by the Act.

The divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 had no force in the colonies of British North America before Confederation except in those colonies where such legislation had been enacted.

Canada.-

By Sec.91 of the British North America Act (26), the Dominion Parliament was granted jurisdiction over the matter of marriage and divorce, while by Sec.92 (12) Provincial Legislatures were empowered to legislate upon the solemnization of marriage in their respective provinces.

The Dominion Parliament, however, from 1867 until 1924, had passed no Act granting the right to obtain divorce nor had any court with jurisdiction in divorce matters been created in the Dominion or in any province by Dominion Legislation. (See accompanying synopsis of the Divorce Act, 1925). Matrimonial relief may, however, be obtained, and granted under authority of the B.N.A. Act, by petition to the Dominion Parliament through the Divorce Committee of the Senate.

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.-

By Sec.129 of the B.N.A.Act, all laws in force in Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and all courts, etc. were to continue to exist in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick after Confederation. The provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, therefore, having enacted legislation respecting divorce and possessing courts exercising jurisdiction over such matters before Confederation and having continued to exercise jurisdiction through courts of Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, are now in the same position as they were then. A court was established in Nova Scotia under C.126 of the Revised Statutes (third series) of Nova Scotia, 1864, as the Court of Marriage and Divorce, the name of which was changed by C.13 of the statutes of 1866 to the Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes. The Court of Divorce and Matrimonial Causes in New Brunswick was likewise set up by an Act passed in 1860 (an Act to amend the Law relating to Divorce and Matrimonial Causes). (See R.S.,N.B., 1903, C.115).

Prince Edward Island.-

In Prince Edward Island a court having jurisdiction in divorce was constituted by an Act of 1835 (5 Wm.IV,C.10). This law has not been repealed since that time, but the power vested in the Governor and Executive Council has never been exercised. Persons living in Prince Edward Island, who are desirous of seeking dissolution of marriage, until the establishment of a court such as that provided for by the legislation of 1835, must do so by petition to the Dominion Parliament.

British Columbia.-

The colony of British Columbia acquired jurisdiction in matrimonial causes following a proclamation of the Governor giving force in the province to the civil and criminal law of England as

it existed on Nov.19, 1858. The province has continued to exercise jurisdiction over divorce through the courts established before Confederation. (See Rev.Statutes of B.C.,1924,C.75).

Manitoba.-

The divorce law of England, as it existed on July 15, 1870, was introduced into Manitoba by an Act of the Dominion Parliament, 51 Vict.,C.33. The court of King's Bench of Manitoba has the same jurisdiction in divorce as the courts have in England under the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, 1857.

Alberta and Saskatchewan.-

The Dominion Parliament, by 49 Vict.C.25, enacted that the laws of England as existing on July 15, 1870 should be in force in the Northwest Territories. In 1918 the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Alberta held that the effect of the above Act and of legislation passed creating the province was to make the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 and amendments up to July 15, 1870 apply to the province of Alberta. This decision was confirmed on appeal to the Imperial Privy Council. Subsequent judgments by the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal held that the English law as it existed on July 15, 1870 had force in the province and that the rights conferred under it might be enforced by the Court of King's Bench. The provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, therefore, are in the same position in the matter of jurisdiction over divorce.

Ontario and Quebec.-

In Ontario and Quebec it is considered that the courts have no jurisdiction to entertain an application for divorce and no attempt has been made in Ontario to establish such power. In Quebec the courts have assumed power, not to dissolve but, in some cases, to annul marriage or to entertain petitions for separation. The power to annul a marriage is exercised by the courts of Ontario in certain cases only (see 7 Edw.VII, C.23; R.S.O.1914,C.148; 9 Geo.V, C.35). Persons seeking divorce in Ontario and Quebec, therefore, (as well as in Prince Edward Island) must do so by petition to the Dominion Parliament.

THE DIVORCE ACT, 1925.

The Dominion Parliament by C.41 of the statutes of 1925, added a new and important provision to the Canadian law respecting divorce. The law in force until the passage of the Divorce Act, in so far as it concerned causes for divorce proceedings, has provided that, while a husband may obtain a divorce on grounds of adultery, it is necessary for a wife to prove both adultery and desertion. This anomaly has been removed, sed.2 of the Divorce Act stating "In any court having jurisdiction to grant divorce a vinculo matrimonii any wife may commence an action praying that her marriage may be dissolved on the ground that her husband has since the celebration thereof been guilty of adultery". The granting of a divorce in such cases, of course, is dependent on sufficient evidence that the wife has not been an accessory to or connived at such adultery or that the action is not prosecuted in collusion with the husband or the woman with whom he is alleged to have committed adultery. In addition "the court shall not be bound to pronounce such decree if it finds that the wife during the marriage has been guilty of adultery or.....of unreasonable delay or of cruelty towards the husband or of having deserted or wilfully separated herself from the husband before the adultery complained of and without reasonable excuse, or of such wilful neglect or misconduct as has conduced to the adultery".



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