
Notes on Exchanges and Legal Scrap Book.

AMERICAN MARRIAGE LAW.—There are thirty-eight States in the American Union, and in no two are the laws of marriage and divorce alike. Even as regards the age at which marriage is legal they differ—some fixing the old absurd English limits of fourteen and twelve, while in others the husband must be twenty-one and the wife eighteen. In New Hampshire, Ohio, and Indiana, first cousins may not marry; in Nevada and Washington the same rule exists. The people of Vermont must be credited with peculiar, not to say morbid, tastes, for their Legislature has passed a solemn Act prohibiting a man from marrying his mother-in-law. In France such a statute would throw a charm around the forbidden fruit, on the principle that induced a witty and profane French lady, drinking a glass of deliciously cool water on a hot day, to say, "Oh, if this were only a sin!" In three or four Western States marriage with a Chinaman or a person of Chinese blood is illegal, while corresponding restrictions attach in most of the Southern States to alliance with black blood, even when it is attenuated, as in the veins of an octoroon. In Pennsylvania and Tennessee there is special legislation following in the lines of the "leading case" of Enoch Arden. If a man or woman is deserted, and believes that the deserting wife or husband is dead, he or she may legally marry again, and no prosecution for bigamy can follow; but, oddly enough, the first husband returning may reclaim his wife or let her alone—the same option being extended to a recurrent wife. Mr. H. A. Smith, who has collected these and other curiosities of American law, adds on this point: "Supposing a woman to have a penchant for men with migratory instincts abnormally developed, she might well have as many husbands as the Samaritan, and all of them lawful, without any assistance from Death, and then might, after all, return to her first choice. The family relationships arising in such a case would give fine scope for the ingenuity of the cornerman conundrum-inventor of negro minstrelsy." In addition to diversity in the laws of marriage, there are infinite varieties of divorce. In South Carolina alone is marriage indissoluble. In North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee the law is much the same as in England at the present day. In other States desertion for five, three or in some places for two years, will suffice for a final severance of the matrimonial chain. In Florida a man, or for the matter of that, a woman, must be very careful, for the "mere habit of violent temper" will justify a decree. "Habitual drunkenness," defined in different ways, is in many States a valid plea; and conviction of a serious offence is also sufficient. In Wisconsin and Nebraska, if a husband or wife is for any reason detained for three years in a State prison, the marriage is *ipso facto* dissolved. Failure to support a wife in a proper manner is a cause for divorce in about a dozen States; in California and Dakota "wilful neglect" is enough; in Missouri and Wyoming "vagrancy" is sufficient. In three States if the husband or wife join the Shakers, the other party is free. It will be seen, therefore, that if the Canadians fall captive to the charms of American women, they have large liberty of choice as to the kind of marriage