

*Divorce Jurisdiction*

As everyone knows, the exchequer court is for most, if not all, of the rest of its functions a circuit court. That makes it possible for it to sit in various parts of Canada. To make sure that if this bill passes the exchequer court would not sit within the provinces of Quebec or Newfoundland when hearing divorce cases, there is a section in the bill which provides that the Exchequer Court of Canada, in dealing with divorce cases, would do it only here at the city of Ottawa. In other words, Mr. Speaker, there is clearly no change so far as the basis of divorce is concerned. There is no change so far as the accessibility of a divorce court to citizens in those two provinces is concerned. The only difference is the place where these people would go who are faced with what they feel to be the unfortunate necessity of seeking a divorce.

I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that on former occasions there has been strong criticism of this bill by some hon. members, and on one or two occasions we have had a vote and it has been defeated. There has not been much change in the make-up of this house since the last vote, and I do not suppose that one should expect a radical enough change in opinion that on this occasion the bill would pass. However, I hope that by continuing to bring this measure before the house, sufficient attention and consideration will be given to it so that, one of these days, a way will be found to deal with divorces which is less reprehensible and less offensive to all of us than the manner in which we are now doing it.

I suggest that if there are those who feel that the procedure here suggested, of referring divorces to the Exchequer Court of Canada, is not a satisfactory one, an obligation and responsibility rests upon them either to stand in their places and say that they are satisfied with doing it here in the House of Commons, or to suggest some other way.

It is not often that when a member moves second reading of his own bill he suggests to other hon. members a procedure other than that of simply voting for it. But, knowing how hon. members feel about this question of divorce, I would not feel at all badly if someone were to move, as an amendment to my motion for second reading, that the bill be not now read a second time but that the subject matter thereof be referred to a committee. It would indicate at least some progress if an amendment of that kind were moved and carried, because it would make it possible for us to go into this matter in detail, and to have a thorough discussion as

to what would be the best way of solving a problem which, I am sure, is felt deeply by all of us.

This is not a question of where we stand on divorce, or whether we approve of it. As a matter of fact, no one really approves of divorce. There are some in the house who feel that under no circumstances should it be entertained. There are others who disapprove of it just as much, but who face the fact that there are situations where there seems to be no alternative.

And so I say I would welcome the reference of this bill, or even the subject matter of it, to a committee so that it might be discussed fully. I am not going to offer any such amendment. I could not, in any case. And let me make it clear at once that I have not done what was done by the government the other day; I have not arranged for one of my colleagues to move an amendment to my own bill. But if anyone who is interested in the matter feels that that is a suggestion worthy of consideration, let me say to him that I would not object to that procedure. In other words this is not an issue of the kind one wants to see resolved in line with his way of thinking, and his way only. Rather I believe I am doing a service to parliament in bringing before hon. members of the house a suggestion dealing with a problem which concerns all of us. I hope it will be looked upon in that spirit, and that we will consider whether on the one hand the bill should be passed and consideration of divorces referred to the Exchequer Court of Canada or, if that is not acceptable to the house, at least that its subject matter should be referred to a committee so that serious consideration may be given to this problem.

Hon. members will recall that at the close of the last session I gave the house some statistics as to the amount of time we had spent considering divorce cases. All told, the aggregate of time so spent has been considerable. However, when it is divided among the number of divorces we deal with it amounts to only a few seconds for each divorce put through this parliamentary divorce mill.

Hon. members will recall that I have given a picture of the tremendous pile of printing involved, so that if one stacked up all the copies of divorce bills and evidence prepared for us, and for members in the other place, it would make a pile considerably higher than the peace tower. Add to that the fact that these cases involve matters that surely are not the business our constituents sent us here to deal with, and I am sure it is