

PSYCHOLOGY

# Eloppements May Succeed

## Runaway Couples May Find Happiness Almost As Often As Those With Traditional Rites; Blackmail Fails

By MARJORIE VAN de WATER

"GIN Marriage" laws, preventing elopement and hasty weddings, are popular means of attempting to stem the tide of divorce and unhappy marriages in the United States.

Actually, drunks and thrill seekers are a small fraction of the numbers of those who wed in secret. Although this particular type of matrimonial escapade has a very small chance of leading to anything but disaster, elopements as a whole turn out rather well.

Where laws requiring a wait for marriage licenses are not in effect, elopements are very popular. In Elkton, Maryland, for example, the swift and convenient arrangement of marriages is the leading industry.

The runaway couple may drive up to any of a number of peaceful little old houses on a quiet, tree-lined village street where is visible the sign "Minister, Marriage License." Actually, the marriage license is not obtainable there, and perhaps not the minister either. Instead, there is a sort of master of ceremonies. For a sum of money, he makes all arrangements. The marriage license clerk is located and brought to his office, no matter what the hour of the day or night: Appointment with the minister is arranged; witnesses are provided if necessary. This accommodating person drives the couple on the needful trips about the town in his car and takes care of all fees in his capacity of a super-best man.

### Wait Their Turn

At the minister's, the couple probably finds others before them, so that they must wait their turn, but the telephoning has helped. Soon they are shown into the parlor, the service is read quickly, the certificate ornamented with lilies-of-the-valley design is filled out, and they are ushered out man and wife as the next couple comes in.

It is possible also in Elkton to find a minister who tells you that he is "independent." He arranges his own weddings and does not charge the customary fee for this service. But marriages are only a sideline with him; he is an

antique dealer who specializes in fragile old American glass.

Los Angeles County, California, home of the movie colony, is another place very familiar with elopements, and they also know unhappy marriages. There, Dr. Paul Popenoe, director of the Institute of Family Relations, has made a particular study of elopements—738 of them—taking place not only in California but in many parts of the United States. The Institute was founded to study what science can do to save human lives from emotional disaster.

Runaway and secret marriages are successful for 48 out of each hundred couples studied by Dr. Popenoe.

Does this look to you like a good showing or a bad one? Here is what Dr. Popenoe comments:

"If they were all in Los Angeles County the showing would be good enough, for more than half of all the marriages in this county end in the divorce court," he said. "But they are not even confined to California (where one marriage out of every three is terminated by divorce); they are to a large extent representative of conditions throughout the United States."

### Educated

Since the eloping couples studied were all educated people known to students in Dr. Popenoe's college classes, he prefers to compare the figures with those for divorces among educated, white, Americans. These showed that 58 out of each hundred such marriages are happy. Yet this figure is not quite right, either, because these couples had been married for at least five years. In five years some unhappy ones had already disappeared from the group by early divorce.

"The true figure," Dr. Popenoe believes, "would be considerably less and might justify the conclusion that the record of happiness in elopements of this group is not more than ten per cent. lower than the average."

When you consider all the difficulties faced by these young people, this record is really not bad at all.

The kind of wedding ceremony can-

not be blamed when the marriage turns out badly, Dr. Popenoe concludes.

All sorts of reasons lead to runaway marriages. It seemed to Dr. Popenoe that each couple had a new motive for preferring secret nuptials. Yet he was able to group them into five general brackets. First, there are still the classic elopements of the ladder-to-the-window type in which the objection of stern parents is the principal reason for the elopement. Publicity is another cause for runaway marriages. Couples elope either to avoid publicity or perhaps, as with some Hollywood matches, to seek it. Another contributing factor is economy; couples want to avoid the expense of a big wedding. In a few cases, the elopement is a parallel to the shotgun marriage; it is a "shotgun elopement." Finally, a miscellaneous grouping includes the "gin marriages" and those embarked on for a thrill; or impulsively, to spite some other person.

### Parental Objection Blamed

Not quite half of all elopements are caused by the opposition of parents, but parental objection is still the most powerful single cause of runaway marriages.

And usually the parents are wrong, Dr. Popenoe found. In fact, it might be said that even when they are right they are wrong.

"Even in cases where parental opposition seems abundantly justified, the results sometimes seem to be satisfactory to those most closely concerned," he said.

He tells the story of a young girl living amid sordid surroundings in a small mining town, dominated by parents who were quarreling continually with each other. When a visiting baseball team came to play the local boys, she met some of the visitors. Within a few hours she eloped with the third-baseman.

"The parents might well have objected to the plan, particularly as the stranger was a Roman Catholic and the girl herself a Protestant," Dr. Popenoe comments. "But the experiment has been remarkably successful—the husband is a hard worker and the wife is a good home-maker. They are both wholly devoted to their home and their two children."

In another case, parental objection was even more inevitable. This girl ran away to marry her own uncle—the relatives

could hardly be expected to approve of that! But the married couple lived together very happily (although childless) until the wife's death a quarter of a century later.

Another girl was allowed no boy friends. When the mother rented a room in their house, she selected a man who was twice the girl's age, thinking this would be fairly safe. But one day the roomer and daughter eloped. They were making plans for a honeymoon when an auditor for the new husband's company arrived in town and found him a thousand dollars short in his accounts. The girl's grandfather made up the shortage, but the bridegroom was out of a job. Next day his car was "repossessed."

### One-Way Trip

The bride's family called a council to decide how the family name could be protected from further revelations. As a result they made up a fund and bought two one-way railroad tickets to a city 1500 miles away.

In the distant city, the newlyweds proceeded to "live happily ever after!"

But parents are so seldom right. Dr. Popenoe admits regretfully that his study shows them up in a most unfavorable light as stubborn, possessive and selfish. In many cases where failure did result from an elopement, it was obvious that the parents caused the failure and that a little cooperation on their part would have made it a success.

Parents object to a girl's marriage because they want her earnings. Sometimes they merely want to keep the girl—or the boy—at home. Dr. Popenoe tells of two youngsters who were attending a university a thousand miles from home.

"In the man's senior year they married, saying nothing about it. Each continued to receive an allowance and they lived together very comfortably on this joint bank account, which would not have been sent to either one had the respective parents suspected the marriage.

"The couple now have two children of their own in college; their married life has been ideal even though its start was clouded by deceit, but neither set of parents has ever accepted the situation emotionally."

Some mothers want college educations or professional careers for their daughters. One even went to college with her daughter and roomed with her for three years. She then thought that her Julia was properly started toward spinsterhood and a musical career. But she had



### AN INDUSTRY

*In the quiet streets of Elkton, Maryland, signs show where hurried marriages can be arranged.*

scarcely left town when Julia met a young man and within a week Julia was married. This marriage was a tragedy, for the bridegroom was as little prepared for married life as Julia was, educationally, economically, and emotionally.

Those who wish for a quiet wedding may hope for a peaceful marriage, it seems from Dr. Popenoe's figures. The elopers who wanted to avoid publicity have a sixty-per-cent. record of happiness. This group includes many school teachers who feared dismissal if the fact of their marriage became known. Students have a similar motive in concealing their marriage until after graduation.

### Poor But Proud

Here is another story in the record that is probably repeated many times over throughout the country during depression times. The husband was a man poor but proud. The wife had a job, but he had none. He didn't want folks to know that his wife had to work for a living. They were secretly married and the secret was kept for six years.

At the end of the six years, he was still proud and still poor but Mother Nature forced his hand. The wedding was announced and then the stork. The couple is very happy. It just goes to show that you never can tell.

Miss D. had had one church wedding. It was a huge affair and the talk of the town for weeks. But despite all the

satin and lace, the rites and the sanctions, tragedy followed. Within a few months, it was discovered that the bridegroom was insane and the marriage was annulled. When, in a short time, she decided to wed again, the thought of another round of showers, and teas, another set of invitations, was overwhelming. She and her fiance just ran off and after nine years are still very happy.

### Eloppments Are Cheap

Eloppments are cheaper. This is a good sound reason for running away, as is witnessed by the highest score for happy marriages. More than six out of each ten elopements embarked upon to save money turn out successfully, Dr. Popenoe's figures reveal.

One girl received a check for five hundred dollars from her aunt to cover the expenses of the wedding. The young couple were told that any amount saved out of this might be kept as a wedding gift. The couple who, it is suspected, are from Aberdeen, conferred:

Eloppment, \$5.

Balance on hand, \$495.

But sometimes such schemes backfire. Dr. Popenoe tells of such a case.

"The family planned an elaborate and expensive ceremony. To avoid this, the young couple eloped. When they returned and found how much this wedding meant to the female relatives all around, they could not bring themselves to break the news, so they went ahead and had a second ceremony—the main

performance, under the big tent, so to speak."

Dr. Popenoe found in his records a number of stories in which the parents on both sides insisted on a big wedding but differed strongly as to how it should be held or who should be invited. Elopement was a wise solution.

There are shotgun elopements, too. These are few in number and not likely to be successful. Probably they were never intended to be—the idea was not to make a home together, but merely to go through a form that would protect the girl and the child that was coming. Divorce and marriage are planned simultaneously in such cases.

In several instances the situation was manufactured by the bride-to-be as a means of trapping her man or of taking him away from a rival. Occasionally, she makes a pretense which is really a form of blackmail.

One unhappy bridegroom, when he asked friends to congratulate him on his surprise marriage, received the information that his bride had tried the same trick on half a dozen others all of whom were sophisticated or callous enough to refuse the bait.

"Perhaps some of them turn out well," Dr. Popenoe says of the blackmail marriages. "But all of which I have any knowledge have been failures, though some of them lasted for a lifetime."

Last, and neither least nor most numerous, are the thrill elopements and the truly called gin marriages. Of them Dr. Popenoe says:

"One would not expect much from them, and the statistics show that they do not disappoint expectation. Several married on the impulse of the moment, merely to spite someone else. Fortunately, state laws requiring a few days notice before a license is issued, are being more and more widely adopted and will largely do away with this particular type of matrimonial escapade."

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