
Advice to the “Newly Married Lady” **1808**

Excerpted from Samuel K. Jennings, *The Married Lady’s Companion, Or Poor Man’s Friend*, 2nd edition (New York, 1808).

According its “Advertisement,” The Married Lady’s Companion, Or Poor Man’s Friend was written primarily to provide medical advice “for the poor, and such other families as cannot conveniently obtain the aid of physicians.” Indeed, the bulk of the book supplied women with medical knowledge regarding reproduction and childcare. A significant section of the book, however, advised “newly married” women on how to foster a successful relationship with their husbands. One such section is excerpted below. —D. Voelker

INTRODUCTION

Madam,

You have happily allied yourself to the man for whom you leave your father’s house, for whom you cheerfully forsake all the world besides. With him, as your protector and bosom friend, you promise yourself many endearing pleasures. You perceive that “Innocence, candor, sincerity, heroism and piety, express themselves with grace ineffable in every attitude, in every feature of the man you love.”* You are therefore highly concerned how you may secure an equal share, and a permanent continuance of his affection and esteem. On this point turns your future happiness or misery. Mutual love and tenderness properly preserved, secures to you the greatest earthly blessing. In proportion to the want or loss of these, you are miserable for life.

Although this consideration very much concerns your husband as well as yourself, yet I must be permitted to assure you, that you are most deeply interested. His engagements as a man, will necessarily keep up his attention. He will have frequent occasion to mix with agreeable and interesting company. His acquaintance will be extended, his amusements multiplied. He of course will have an asylum, should home become tiresome or disagreeable. But your house is your only refuge, your husband your only companion. Should he abandon you, solitude, anxiety and tears, must be your unhappy lot. You cannot fly for amusement to the race ground, to the chase, to the card table, or to the tavern. You cannot look out for a gallant, to whom you may impart your slighted love. You must either languish in bitterness, or learn to compose your feelings, by stoical indifference.

PROPER CONDUCT OF THE WIFE TOWARDS HER HUSBAND

1. As it is your great wish and interest to enjoy much of your husband’s company and conversation, it will be important to acquaint yourself with his temper, his inclination, and his manner, that you may render your house, your person and your disposition quite agreeable to him. By observing with accuracy, and guarding your words and actions with prudence, you may quickly succeed according to your wishes.

* St. Pierre

2. Here perhaps you ask, why so much pains necessary on my part? . . . But under present circumstances, it is your interest to adapt yourself to your husband, whatever may be his peculiarities. Again, nature has made man the stronger, the consent of mankind has given him superiority over his wife, his inclination is, to claim his natural and acquired rights. . . .

3. In obedience then to this precept of the gospel [“Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord”], to the laws of custom and of nature, you ought to cultivate a cheerful and happy submission.

WIFE OUGHT NOT TO APPEAR IN THE HUSBAND’S BUSINESS. . . .

Men and women appear to best advantage each in their own proper station. . . . If it were to save appearances only, the husband at least to *seem* to be the head. And therefore if you are determined to rule him, adopt the following plan. “When any article of property is to be bought or sold, take him aside, teach him the price to be given or received, point out the kind of payment, the time to be paid, &c. &c. let the whole business be properly adjusted, and then let the poor fellow go forward and seem to act like a man.”

THE SURE WAY OF HAPPINESS IN THE MARRIED STATE

The great point for securing happiness in the married state, is, to be mutually accommodating. The parties should look over one another’s faults, and contemplate one another’s excellencies. We all have defects, and it is much better to dwell on your own faults, than on those of your husband.

ONE WORD IN FAVOUR OF ECONOMY

Strict adherence to the conduct recommended in the former chapters, is highly important. But I must inform you, that good economy and judicious house-wifery must also be added, or your happiness can by no means be complete. It affords a dismal prospect to a man who wishes to make a living, to find a double and triple quantity of every article of family consumption necessary to meet his wife’s regulations and management.

Discussion Questions:

1. How did Jennings describe the appropriate roles for a wife?
2. Why, according to Jennings, was the marriage relationship more important to the wife than to the husband? What other reasons for this difference did he leave unspoken?
3. What evidence did Jennings cite to support his claims regarding women’s roles?
4. Why do you suppose that the author of this book included this sort of advice alongside medical information for wives and mothers?



This electronic text is © 2006 David J. Voelker. Permission is granted to reproduce this text freely for educational, non-commercial purposes only. All users must retain this notice and cite <http://www.historytools.org>.