

Name: _____ Class: _____

“Advice to the ‘Newly Married Lady’”

By Samuel K. Jennings
1808

*Samuel K. Jennings (1771–1854) was the first president of Asbury College, a medical doctor, and Methodist preacher. “Advice to the ‘Newly Married Lady’” was written as part of a compilation from the volume *The Married Lady’s Companion, Or Poor Man’s Friend* which was meant to provide medical advice for poor women in rural areas without access to a doctor. Maintaining a successful relationship with a woman’s husband made up a significant portion of the series alongside knowledge of reproduction and childcare. Think about the following questions as you read through this excerpt: How have the roles of women and men changed over time? How have we defined the roles of men and women?*

INTRODUCTION

[1] Madam,

You have happily allied¹ 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 friend², you promise yourself many endearing pleasures. You perceive that “Innocence, candor, sincerity, heroism and piety³, 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.



“Kiss Me and You’ll Kiss the Lasses” by Lilly Martin Spencer is in the public domain.

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 asylum⁴, 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 stoical⁵ indifference.

1. **Ally (verb):** to connect, unite or join
2. A “bosom friend” is an old term for a close and dear friend
3. **Piety (noun):** the quality of being religious

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.

[5] 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 precept⁶ 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.⁷ 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 judicious⁸ 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.

4. **Asylum** (*noun*): a place of rest and refuge
5. **Stoical** (*adjective*): showing no emotion
6. **Precept** (*noun*): a general rule intended to regulate behavior or thought
7. &c. is an abbreviation of et cetera (etc.)
8. **Judicious** (*adjective*): having, showing, or done with good judgment or sense

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Summarize the central ideas of the passage in no more than two sentences.

2. PART A: As it is used in Paragraph 1, the word “ineffable” most closely means:

- A. overwhelming
- B. shameful
- C. beautiful
- D. worrisome

3. PART B: Which phrase provides the best clue to the meaning of the word “ineffable”?

- A. “your protector and bosom friend”
- B. “every feature of the man you love”
- C. “highly concerned”
- D. “future happiness or misery”

4. PART A: What statement best summarizes the argument the author makes in order to convince women to “adapt [themselves] to [their] husband”?

- A. Life is more enjoyable without conflict, so it’s best to be accommodating.
- B. Because the husband has more power and connections, it is in the woman’s best interest to align herself with him in order to acquire the most social capital.
- C. Women are generally less educated and should therefore follow their husband’s advice.
- D. Without her husband, a woman would lead a life of total misery.

5. PART B: Which sentence best supports the answer to Part A?

- A. “Mutual love and tenderness properly preserved, secures to you the greatest earthly blessing.”
- B. “He will have frequent occasion to mix with agreeable and interesting company. His acquaintance will be extended, his amusements multiplied.”
- C. “Should he abandon you, solitude, anxiety and tears, must be your unhappy lot.”
- D. “The great point for securing happiness in the married state, is, to be mutually accommodating.”

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. According to the author, why was the marriage relationship more important to the wife and the husband? Do you agree?
2. Jennings published this excerpt alongside a medical guide for wives and mothers in poor communities. What reason could he have had for this?
3. In general, do you agree with Jennings that it is best to focus on another person's excellencies rather than his/her faults? What purpose does this line of advice serve?
4. How do you think this advice would differ if the author was a woman? What if it were written today?
5. How do we define the roles of men and women, and how has this changed over time? Use evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.