

Rules for Husbands and Wives

(1830)

Mathew Carey

Introduction

As you read this selection, think about the different opinions about women's roles in the home, the family, and society in general. How have those roles changed over time?

Questions to Consider

1. Explain Carey's view of gender relations in the early nineteenth century.
2. Does Carey's view about this issue reflect the majority opinion of his time?
3. Do you think that applying Carey's rules to nineteenth-century marriage would have changed the family power structure? Explain your answer.
4. Would these rules be acceptable in today's society? Why or why not?

Source

Having seen various sets of maxims for the conduct of married life, which have appeared to me to contain some very injudicious items, degrading to wives, sinking them below the rank they ought to occupy, and reducing them in some degree to the level of mere housekeepers, and believing them radically erroneous, I annex a set which appear more rational and just than most of those which I have seen:

1. A good husband will always regard his wife as his equal; treat her with kindness, respect and attention; and never address her with an air of authority, as if she were, as some husbands appear to regard their wives, a mere housekeeper.
2. He will never interfere in her domestic concerns, hiring servants, &c.
3. He will always keep her liberally supplied with money for furnishing his table in a style proportioned to his means, and for the purchase of dress suitable to her station in life.
4. He will cheerfully and promptly comply with all her reasonable requests, when it can be done, without loss, or great inconvenience.
5. He will never allow himself to lose his temper towards her, by indifferent cookery, or irregularity in the hours of meals, or any other mismanagement of her servants, knowing the difficulty of making them do their duty.
6. If she have prudence and good sense, he will consult her on all great operations, involving the risque of ruin, or serious injury in case of failure. Many a man has been rescued from destruction by the wise counsels of his wife. Many a foolish husband has most seriously injured himself and

family by the rejection of the advice of his wife, fearing, lest, if he followed it, he would be regarded as ruled by her! A husband can never procure a counsellor more deeply interested in his welfare than his wife.

7. If distressed, or embarrassed in his circumstances, he will communicate his situation to her with candour, that she may bear his difficulties in mind, in her expenditures. Women sometimes, believing their husband's circumstances to be far better than they really are, expend money which cannot well be afforded, and which, if they knew their real situation, they would shrink from expending.

1. A good wife will always receive her husband with smiles,—leave nothing undone to render home agreeable—and gratefully reciprocate his kindness and attention.

2. She will study to discover means to gratify his inclinations, in regard to food and cookery; in the management of her family; in her dress, manners and deportment.

3. She will never attempt to rule, or appear to rule her husband. Such conduct degrades husbands—and wives always partake largely of the degradation of their husbands.

4. She will, in every thing reasonable, comply with his wishes—and, as far as possible, anticipate them.

5. She will avoid all altercations or arguments leading to ill-humour—and more especially before company.

6. She will never attempt to interfere in his business, unless he ask her advice or counsel, and will never attempt to control him in the management of it.

Should differences arise between husband and wife, the contest ought to be, not who will display the most spirit, but who will make the first advances. There is scarcely a more prolific source of unhappiness in the married state, than this "spirit," the legitimate offspring of pride and want of feeling.

Perhaps the whole art of happiness in the married state, might be compressed into these two maxims—"Bear and forbear"—and "let the husband treat his wife, and the wife treat her husband with as much respect and attention, as he would a strange lady, and she a strange gentleman." And surely this is not an extravagant requisition.