

## OUR HUSBANDS.



“MEN are kittle cattle,” so the old saw tells us, and truly enough, as many an irritated wife will declare. They must be driven in such a way that they never take in that they are doing anything but following their own sweet will. Husbands need more art to bring up than mothers, children, brothers, sisters and lovers put together; and it is important for every young woman, directly she becomes engaged, to set herself to master that art. It is from the moment of her engagement that the girl's duties

become those of the wife. From that time she belongs to the man, and he to her, and such a thing as the breaking of the tie that binds them together ought not to enter the thoughts of either of them.

It is of the utmost importance that before people marry they should know each other thoroughly, but this knowledge of each other should be acquired before the promise is given, the solemnity of which is second only to that of the marriage vow. No girl is bound to accept or refuse an offer directly it is made her. She can always ask for the time to consider which the man has, in all probability, allowed himself before he made his proposal. This is not so romantic, of course, as the novelesque mode of proceeding—

“Angelina, my darling!” “Edwin, my own, own love!” and a rushing into each other's arms; but when the love between the two has not been tested through the whole volume of vicissitudes which precede the last chapter of the novel, it is often the wisest course. In the conventual system the monk or nun serves a long novitiate before taking the final vows; this corresponds with the engagement. And, just as it is better for the monk or nun who finds he has “no vocation” to withdraw at the last moment from the life to which he had meant to pledge himself, so it is better for the girl who has discovered she cannot love the man to whom she is engaged, to tell him so, the very hour before the wedding, rather than perpetuate the fraud of giving him herself without her heart, and preparing lifelong misery for them both. But an engagement that is finally broken off is a very deplorable thing, extremely bad for the girl, and unfair on the man she is ultimately to marry. Therefore, I would recommend, in all cases where the woman is not quite sure of the state of her own feelings, or does not know the man better than it is possible to do through simply meeting him in society, that, before an actual engagement is entered into, there should be a time of probation, such as in the conventual system always precedes the novitiate; a period when the door is left wide open for the retreat of either party, before it is closed by betrothal.

During this period of probation it would be of the greatest advantage for the man and woman to become acquainted with each other's relations, and learn to know each other in the home life. This is where the true test is to be found, of what sort of husband or wife a person will prove. The good daughter and sister, the good son and brother, are not likely to be found greatly wanting in the closer relation of marriage. It is, I believe, somewhere the custom for young people (duly chaperoned, of course) to travel in each other's company before the final knot is tied. The plan has always struck me as excellent, for it is under the influence of unusual circumstances, small annoyances, unlimited opportunities for selfishness or the reverse, and continued demands for decision, tact and adaptability, that character comes out.

Having by some such means become thoroughly acquainted with each other, and having arrived at the

conclusion that they are suited to spend their lives together, the couple become engaged, and from this time the girl—the man too, of course, but my concern at present is with the girls—should devote herself to preparing for her married life. When Lady Burton became engaged to the great African explorer, then a poor man, she took lessons in all sorts of household avocations; sewing, cooking, and dairy-work, to which, with life in the desert in prospect, she added the management of horses and other like accomplishments, which she anticipated might make her of greater service to her husband in the unusual existence she was to lead with him. And very useful did all these acquirements prove in after days when the time came for putting in practice what it would have been then too late to learn. Perhaps more valuable yet was that part of her preparation for married life, which consisted of days set apart for especial prayer.

In so awful a thing—I use the word advisedly—as marriage, on which hang results on the one hand so appalling, on the other of such untold blessedness, for two lives at least, and in all probability for many more, the most earnest prayer, the most solemn thoughts, are surely demanded of us.

“A married woman's life is a life of sacrifice,” a young wife once said to me. “If one loves”—as, it may be added, the speaker herself did, in her union with an excellent and devoted husband—“it is a happy sacrifice.”

The words are worth laying to heart, for unless it is in the spirit of self-sacrifice that a woman enters the married state, she can never fulfil aright its high obligations, and it is almost certain that she has before her a period of disappointment, if not of disillusionment. Poor Edwin is not perfect—though, of course, Angelina is!—and however well she has known him beforehand, there are many traits in his character which only come out after marriage. Nobody requires to have the point explained to them of the picture entitled “The End of the Honeymoon,” where a young man and a young woman are seen sitting on either side of a tree with their backs to each other, each more or less absorbed in a book, with an expression on their faces in sufficient contrast to that of happy lovers.

Perhaps the honeymoon was partly to be thanked for that. I have always thought that if a young married couple were to go straight into the new home, so that the wife could begin its interests, its duties, its occupations at once, there would be saved not only a good deal of money, very useful for the new household, but a good deal of force frittered away on sight-seeing and railway journeys, and a certain amount of disillusionment would be avoided.

But, be that as it may, the settling down into life together must be a process a little difficult—let Angelina not forget this—for both of them.

“The first year of married life is always trying,” said another wife to me—her case was that of a rarely ideal marriage, with perfect devotion on both sides, that has now stood the test of many years. It is in the way that year is spent, the amount of success with which the bride and bridegroom adapt themselves to each other, that the blessedness of the succeeding years depends.

Now, it is a great thing to come to any crisis prepared for it; and, before the door is absolutely closed behind her and him by the marriage, it is well for the future wife to be quite clear in her own mind what she is going to do with her husband when she has him. How is she going to bring him up? She probably knows very well the sort of influence she wishes to have with him; the question is mainly how is she to exercise that influence? How is she to get any influence over him at all?

Well, one hardly needs to tell her that this must be done by the heart. He must do what she wants him to do, become what she wants him to be, because he loves her so. Therefore at the outset the main point for her is to be very lovable. On what makes a woman lovable from a surface point of view, I have written in “The Art of Bringing Up

Lovers"; the roots which lie below the surface, and from which the flowers spring, have been touched on in "Our Brothers and Sisters," so I need only speak of the new elements that come into play in the new conditions of married life.

What is utterly new in this relationship is the absolute oneness of husband and wife. On this everything else is founded. The vows are spoken, and now, come what may, these two of yesterday are to-day one until death do them part. A perfect loyalty is then a wife's first duty. Hard as the counsel may seem, I do believe that no married woman should in any case, except that of consulting a doctor, physical, mental or spiritual, concerning some disease which needs treatment, and is of a kind beyond her own power to grapple with, take a third person into her confidence about her husband. It is a good solid foundation-stone for a man's trust in his wife to be certain that no word is ever said by her about him that she would be sorry for him to overhear.

There is One, indeed, to whom the wife may speak, may pour out every difficulty, every sorrow and fear, without reserve, and He will help her much more than any gossiping friend or sympathetic sister, even than any loving mother, when His aid and counsel are asked.

From this fact of an absolute union it further comes that all a husband's interests are his wife's own. She is bound to further them in every way she can, and proofs enough exist of the wonders a capable woman who puts her mind into it may do to help on her husband in almost any profession. His relations, too, must be accepted as her own, though, considering how invariably men marry girls the extreme opposite of their own sisters, and the peculiarly critical attitude of mind existing in mothers towards their sons' wives, this is not always easy. His friends must be hers, and, to make them so, she should be willing to put herself out as much as needs be to offer them hospitality.

It is rather tiresome, of course, for poor Angelina when she gets a telegram at 6 p.m., "Bringing Smith and Jones back to dinner," when there are just four chops and the remains of the gooseberry tart ordered for herself and Edwin, and Jane is not in the sweetest of tempers, after the day's washing. But if Angelina has used her time of betrothal aright, there are a dozen little dishes she knows how to make up in a hurry. There are packets of condensed soup in the store-room, and tinned apricots which need hardly any cooking, and, though it will be really her duty to give Edwin a little laughing scolding for his inconsideration in not allowing her to do them both more justice as hosts by giving her longer warning, this evening, *after* he has dined and when he is softened, she buckles to and meets the trio with a smile to take "pot-luck," as Edwin invited them.

[N.B.—By pot-luck men always understand cold beef, which they imagine (a) costs nothing, and (b) is always to be found in any larder.]

Of one thing Angelina should be very careful, and that is to lose none of the charms she exercised before her marriage, after it. "If you want to keep your husband's affection, never wear a shawl," was the advice given in the "Answers to Inquiries" column of a certain paper. Still more perilous would it be to come down to breakfast with fringe in curlers, and in the same category of Dangerous Wear must be included slipshod shoes, maculate collars, and that justly termed "depressing" attire, shabby finery. A wife should always be as neat and trim as a man-of-war, if she does not want her husband to lapse into carpet slippers, coat unchanged for dinner and a habit of smoking in the drawing-room. Little courtesies, too, should never be omitted. Angelina must not relax her own attentions, now that Edwin has been taken into everyday use, lest Edwin should forget those small civilities he was wont to render in the days of his courting, either of which would be a thousand pities. It is these minutiae that form the bloom of life, so often carelessly rubbed off after marriage, but worth more trouble than it really involves to preserve.

Little squabbles, however desirable in lovers—though I personally have always failed to see the beauty or the humour of lovers' quarrels—are to be avoided at all costs

after marriage. That desperate habit of nagging grows upon a woman all too easily, as does the habit of snubbing upon a man. Both habits are ugly, undignified, and work the precisely opposite of blessing both him who gives and him who takes. Angelina should never lay herself open by silly, unreasonable, or petulant remarks to the snub which, if Edwin gives it, places the relations between them on a lower level. A man is seldom tempted to be rude to a sensible, self-controlled woman, and two of the first qualities a wife should aim at are those of sense and self-control. These two characteristics are among the foundation qualifications for the main function of the home-maker, *as wife*, mother, mistress, hostess—the creation of an atmosphere. She is so placed that the whole household will take its tone from her, and it is her bounden duty—shall I not say her splendid privilege?—to fill her house, morally as well as physically, with sunshine and fresh air.

Sunshine, taking always the hopeful view of things, never attaching to tragic trifles undue importance, turning into a jest, where it is possible, the annoyances, the petty disappointments than occur. It really is just as easy to laugh as to grumble, when one has got into the habit of it, and oh, the blessing to a house when that is the tone which the woman at the head of it takes! Domestic troubles, troubles with tradespeople, worries with servants, all the tiresome little trials that are usual in the life of a wife, who has not a genius for management—observe, dear Angelina, these troubles arise mainly from your own want of tact or method—should not be poured into poor Edwin's ears when he comes home in the evening, tired with his own day's work, which is, though you hardly believe it, as wearing as yours. You don't want to drive him away from you, as, unless he is an absolute saint, this plan will do, to his club if he is of the upper, to his public-house if of the lower, and to a state of mind sadly unappreciative of the blessings of matrimony if he is of the middle class, and by habit a keeper at home.

If you do not want servants with suppressed irritation written upon their countenances, children given to tears and grumbling on the smallest provocation, and husbands with long faces and short tempers, sacrifice the satisfaction of extracting the due amount of misery from your grievances, and keep your house full of sunshine.

By fresh air I mean outside interests, your husband's own, which, if you are intelligent and sensible, he will be only too glad for you to share, and those interests which you and he should form together, pursuits which tend to the welfare of those around you, that will make you good citizens, good patriots, the centre of light and sweetness that every ideal Christian home must be. Selfishness *à deux*, if ever permissible, is only so to a pair of lovers. The husband and wife take their place in a great scheme of things, where no man liveth to himself, and the sphere of influence circles away into infinity.

Do you think that in advocating such a complete sacrifice of herself I am asking women to place themselves under the heel of men, to reduce themselves to a state of slavery against which our sex has in the last half century successfully raised the standard of revolt? Far from it, indeed! My only apprehension in counselling this absolute devotion on the part of a wife is that she will attain a mastery over her husband which will reverse the position to which an old-fashioned prejudice on my own part inclines, where the man is the head of the two. Directly a wife becomes indispensable to her husband—a state of affairs brought to pass through a laying of herself aside and considering him in everything—the reins are in her hands and not in his. Men are kittle cattle, are they? Well, then, remember it is in their kittleness our power lies. For to be *difficile* means to be unreasonable, changeful or obstinate, and these qualities betray weakness.

If the wife is better-balanced, wider-visioned, more free from selfish aim than her husband, she must in the long run become the leader. Strength cannot but prevail, moral strength most surely. When the influence is once gained, the task of using it will not be difficult, and if the wife wields her power as worthily as she attained it, she will in the end bring up her husband to be as wise, as loving and as unselfish a being as herself.