

CONJUGAL PRECEPTS.

PLUTARCH TO POLLIANUS AND EURYDICE SENDETH GREETING.

Now that the nuptial ceremonies are over, and that the priestess of Ceres has joined you both together in the bands of matrimony according to the custom of the country, I thought a short discourse of this nature might not be either unacceptable or unseasonable, but rather serve as a kind epithalamium to congratulate your happy conjunction; more especially, since there can be nothing more useful in conjugal society than the observance of wise and wholesome precepts, suitable to the harmony of matrimonial converse. For among the variety of musical moods and measures there is one which is called Hippothoros, a sort of composition to the flute and hautboy, made use of to encourage and provoke stallions to cover mares. But philosophy being furnished with many noble and profitable discourses, there is not any one subject that deserves a more serious study than that of wedlock, whereby they who are engaged in a long community of bed and board are more steadfastly united in affection, and made more pliable one to another in humor and condition. To this purpose, having reduced under several short heads and similes some certain instructions and admonitions which you, as tutored up in philosophy, have frequently already heard, I send you the collection as a present, beseeching the Muses so with their presence to assist the Goddess Venus, that the harmony of your mutual society and complacency in domestic diligences may

outcry the melodious concords of lute or harp, while you live united together by reason and philosophy. Therefore it was that the ancients placed the statue of Venus by that of Mercury, to signify that the pleasures of matrimony chiefly consist in the sweetness of conversation. They also set the Graces and Suadela, the Goddess of Eloquence, together, to show that the married couple were to act only by persuasion, and not to use the violences of wrangling and contention.

1. Solon advised that the bride should eat a quince before she entered the nuptial sheets ; intimating thereby, in my opinion, that the man was to expect his first pleasures from the breath and speech of his new-married bed-fellow.

2. In Boeotia it is the custom, when they veil the virgin bride, to set upon her head a chaplet of wild asparagus, which from a thorny stalk affords a most delicious fruit, to let us understand that a new-married woman, discreetly brooking at the beginning the first distastes of marriage restraints, grows yieldingly complaisant at length, and makes conforming wedlock a happiness to each. And indeed such husbands who cannot bear with the little disdains and first froppishness of imprudent youth are like to those that choose the sour grapes and leave to others the ripe delicious clusters. On the other side, those young ladies that take a disdain to their husbands by reason of their first debates and encounters may be well compared to those that patiently endure the sting but fling away the honey.

3. It especially behooves those people who are newly married to avoid the first occasions of discord and dissension ; considering that vessels newly formed are subject to be bruised and put out of shape by many slight accidents, but when the materials come once to be settled and hardened by time, nor fire nor sword will hardly prejudice the solid substance.

4. Fire takes speedy hold of straw or hare's fur, but

soon goes out again, unless fed with an addition of more fuel. Thus that same love, whose flames are nourished only by heat of youth and looser charms of beauty, seldom proves of long continuance or grows to wedlock maturity, unless it have taken a deep root in conformity of manners, and mutual affection be enlivened by the intermixture of souls as well as bodies, while prudence and discretion feed the noble flame.

5. They who bait their hooks with intoxicated drugs with little pains surprise the hungry fish, but then they prove unsavory to the taste and dangerous to eat. Thus women that by the force of charms and philters endeavor to subdue their husbands to the satisfaction of their pleasure become at length the wives of madmen, sots, and fools. For they whom the sorceress Circe had enchanted, being then no better than swine and asses, were no longer able to please or do her service. But she loved Ulysses entirely, whose prudence avoided her venomous intoxications and rendered his conversation highly grateful.

6. They who rather choose to be the mistresses of senseless fools than the obedient wives of wise and sober husbands are like those people that prefer misguidance of the blind before the conduct of them that can see and know the way.

7. They will not believe that Pasiphae, the consort of a prince, could ever be enamored of a bull, and yet themselves are so extravagant as to abandon the society of their husbands, — men of wisdom, temperance, and gravity, — and betake themselves to the bestial embraces of those who are given wholly to riot and debauchery as if they were dogs or goats.

8. Some men, either unable or unwilling to mount themselves into their saddles through infirmity or laziness, teach their horses to fall upon their knees, and in that posture to receive their riders. In like manner there are

some persons who, having married young ladies not less considerable for the nobility of their birth than their wealthy dowries, take little care themselves to improve the advantages of such a splendid conjunction, but with a severe moroseness labor to depress and degrade their wives, proud of the mastery and vaunting in domestic tyranny. Whereas in this case it becomes a man to use the reins of government with as equal regard to the quality and dignity of the woman as to the stature of the horse.

9. We behold the moon then shining with a full and glorious orb, when farthest distant from the sun; but, as she warps back again to meet her illustrious mate, the nearer she makes her approach, the more she is eclipsed until no longer seen. Quite otherwise, a woman ought to display the charms of her virtue and the sweetness of her disposition in her husband's presence, but in his absence to retire to silence and reservedness at home.

10. Nor can we approve the saying of Herodotus, that a woman lays aside her modesty with her shift. For surely then it is that a chaste woman chiefly veils herself with bashfulness, when, in the privacies of matrimonial duties, excess of love and maiden reverence become the secret signals and testimonies of mutual affection.

11. As in musical concords, when the upper strings are so tuned as exactly to accord, the base always gives the tone; so in well-regulated and well-ordered families, all things are carried on with the harmonious consent and agreement of both parties, but the conduct and contrivance chiefly redounds to the reputation and management of the husband.

12. It is a common proverb, that the sun is too strong for the north wind; for the more the wind ruffles and strives to force a man's upper garment from his back, the faster he holds it, and the closer he wraps it about his shoulders. But he who so briskly defended himself from

being plundered by the wind, when once the sun begins to scald the air, all in a dropping sweat is then constrained to throw away not only his flowing garment but his tunic also. This puts us in mind of the practice of most women, who, being limited by their husbands in their extravagances of feasting and superfluities of habit, presently fill the house with noise and uproar; whereas, if they would but suffer themselves to be convinced by reason and soft persuasion, they would of themselves acknowledge their vanity and submit to moderation.

13. Cato ejected a certain Roman out of the senate for kissing his wife in the presence of his daughter. It is true, the punishment was somewhat too severe; but if kissing and colling and hugging in the sight of others be so unseemly, as indeed it is, how much more indecent is it to chide and brawl and maunder one at another while strangers are in company? If lawful familiarity and caresses between man and wife are not to be allowed but in their private retirements, shall the bitter interchanges and loud discoveries of invective and inconsiderate passion be thought an entertainment pleasingly proper for unconcerned and public ears?

14. As there is little or no use to be made of a mirror, though in a frame of gold enchased with all the sparkling variety of the richest gems, unless it render back the true similitude of the image it receives; so is there nothing of profit in a wealthy dowry, unless the conditions, the temper, the humor of the wife be conformable to the natural disposition and inclination of the husband, and he sees the virtues of his own mind exactly represented in hers. Or, if a fair and beautiful mirror that makes a sad and pensive visage look jocund and gay, or a wanton or smiling countenance show pensive and mournful, is therefore presently rejected as of no value; thus may not she be thought an angry, peevish, and importunate woman, that

louts and lowers upon the caresses of a husband, and when he courts the pastime of her affections, entertains him with frumps and taunts, but when she finds him serious in business, allures him then with her unseasonable toyings to pleasure and enjoyment? For the one is an offence of impertinency, the other a contempt of her husband's kindness. But, as geometricians affirm that lines and surfaces are not moved of themselves, but according to the motions of the bodies to which they belong, so it behooves a woman to challenge no peculiar passion or affection as her own, but to share with her husband in business, in his recreations, in his cares, and in his mirth.

15. As they who are offended to see their wives eat and drink freely in their company do but whet their appetites to glut and gormandize in corners by themselves; so they who refuse to frolic in retirement with their wives, or to let them participate of their private pastimes and dalliances, do but instruct them to cater for their own pleasures and delights.

16. The Persian kings, when they contain themselves within the limits of their usual banquets, suffer their married wives to sit down at their tables; but when they once design to indulge the provocations of amorous heats and wine, then they send away their wives, and call for their concubines, their gypsies, and their songstresses, with their lascivious tunes and wanton galliards. Wherein they do well, not thinking it proper to debauch their wives with the tipsy frolics and dissolute extravagances of their intemperance.

If therefore any private person, swayed by the unruly motions of his incontinency, happen at any time to make a trip with a kind she-friend or his wife's chambermaid, it becomes not the wife presently to lower and take pepper in the nose, but rather to believe that it was his respect to

her which made him unwilling she should behold the follies of ebriety and foul intemperance.

17. Princes that be addicted to music increase the number of excellent musicians ; if they be lovers of learning, all men strive to excel in reading and in eloquence ; if given to martial exercises, a military ardor rouses straight the drowsy sloth of all their subjects. Thus husbands effeminately finical only teach their wives to paint and polish themselves with borrowed lustre. The studious of pleasure render them immodest and whorish. On the other side, men of serious, honest, and virtuous conversations make sober, chaste, and prudent wives.

18. A young Lacedaemonian lass, being asked by an acquaintance of hers whether she had yet embraced her husband, made answer, No ; but that he had embraced her. And after this manner, in my opinion, it behooves an honest woman to behave herself toward her husband, never to shun nor to disdain the caresses and dalliances of his amorous inclinations, when he himself begins ; but never herself to offer the first occasion of provocation. For the one savors of impudent harlotry, the other displays a female pride and imperiousness void of conjugal affection.

19. It behooves a woman not to make peculiar and private friendships of her own, but to esteem only her husband's acquaintance and familiars as hers. Now as the Gods are our chiefest and most beneficial friends, it behooves her to worship and adore only those Deities which her husband reputes and reverences for such. But as for quaint opinions and superstitious innovations, let them be exterminated from her outermost threshold. For no sacrifices or services can be acceptable to the Gods, performed by women, as it were, by stealth and in secret, without the knowledge of the husband.

20. Plato asserts those cities to be the most happy and best regulated where these expressions, "This is mine,"

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