

Chapters to Young Men, on How to Win a Wife
Chapter IV – Which Treats of Conceitedness
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Now, William Henry, I know you have been very much delighted with all I have been saying about manliness. You think you are a very fine embodiment of that desirable quality; but my dear fellow, you were never more mistaken in your life. You are very independent, 'tis true; you care for no one's opinion; you do precisely what you see fit, without regard to any person or thing; you conform to nothing, but wait for everything to conform to you; and you think all this is decidedly manly, and are very sure in your heart of hearts that every mother's daughter is in love with you!

Of all *womanly* traits, conceitedness is the most unmanly. It is a very desirable thing to have some self-esteem, but it is desirable previously to have something in yourself worthy your own esteem. Conceitedness lacks the first element of manliness. Manliness consists in being true to noble impulses; conceitedness in being true to selfish ones. Manliness exalts principle above the world; conceitedness exalts self above the world. This is just the difference between them. You think you are very self-reliant; you bend to no one; you stand on your own dignity; and sometimes you do very good things, and things which would be quite a self-denial to many people – but *why* do you do them? From principle; from true delicacy for the feelings of another; from any noble and generous motive? O, no; only to “show your own independence,” to “let people know you have a mind of your own!” In other words, to minister to your own vanity, which is really the most servile and degrading of all unmanly pursuits. Don't you see that it is?

Man goes through a great many stages of development before he arrives at maturity; and the first of these that which commences when he begins to think about young ladies, neckties, and setting up for himself in business, is marked by one of two very striking peculiarities; either the individual is afflicted with extreme bashfulness, cannot hold up his head, and dodges the girls as if they had smallpox, or he is seized with extreme assurance, and hasn't a doubt that he is *the* character of the age. The former affection is quite harmless and soon outgrown, but the latter is very offensive in many of its symptoms, and, though its violence subsides in a few years, traces of the disease often remain in the constitution, and exhibit themselves to a greater or less degree through life.

Now, young men, look out for this disease! It is very dangerous. Keep your mind in a pure and healthy state, by looking out of self, above self, to something higher, nobler. Guard carefully against the very first symptom. One very striking symptom is this: the unfortunate victim labors under the illusion that every young lady has as high an opinion of him as he has of himself; that consequently she is either using all her arts to attract him, or has resigned herself to the romantic fate of dying of a broken heart. A young lady cannot be polite and social, but it is proof positive that she is perfectly delighted with his society; or, if she is reserved and distant, it is certainly to hide the emotion his presence creates! His great anxiety is to find a being worthy of him. Again, he conceives the idea that women are an inferior class of things – which, by the way, is only a corollary from the previous proposition. He condescends to small talk with them; now and then letting off a few profound remarks from the depth of his wisdom, to admonish them. His theory is that they were created as a sort of convenient appendage to his own sex – to amuse leisure hours, flatter vanity, and keep their lordships well bread-and-buttered and shirted. Unfortunate, mistaken, deluded youth! Just let me whisper to you, privately, that all the girls are laughing at you, and making all manner of fun of you, among themselves! As to *marrying* you – pooh! They know very well that you neither understand anything about them nor yourself!

You are of very little consequence in the world – just bear that in mind. Remember that every human being you meet, handsome or ugly, educated or ignorant, distinguished or obscure, is made of pretty much the same material with yourself, and is of as much importance to himself as you are to yourself. If you think yourself about right as you are, it only shows that you know very little of the world, have not a very high ideal of excellence, and until disabused of this idea, are not capable of self progression.

You have just begun life; you are nothing but what you aspire to be. You are not a work of art, all finished off and polished, and set up for admiration. You are so much “raw material,” to be worked up into something. What’s your model? That is the question!

L.