

But like too many another man endowed by mother nature with pre-eminent talents, Howard McKee was falling into dissipated and unprincipled habits. These habits, however, were as yet only incipient, and had not gained the ascendancy over his better nature; and they were either too little known as yet by the public, or else his good humor and brilliant talents so ingratiated him in its favor, that these faults were only too readily overlooked.

He had become acquainted with Nellie Raymond at an evening party, and, pleased with her pleasant, quiet ways, had for some time after sought her company merely for the pleasure which he found in it,—company which he daily found the more pleasant because it payed him little of the flattery which friends were daily sounding in his ears. But gossips soon began to whisper that his attentions meant more than all this; and not a fortnight after Mrs. Grundy had hinted to Mrs. Bundy that young McKee called frequently at the Raymonds', the story had got into private circles that the two were engaged. Strange to say, Miss Nellie did not object to these attentions, but, on the other hand, rather fostered and encouraged the attachment that was springing up between them. She was the last person that one would ever suspect to have been guilty of coquetry, and, knowing, as she did, his character, (for though Howard McKee's faults were many he did not practice dissimulation,) such conduct on her part seems strange, indeed. Perhaps she loved him, though she was not willing to acknowledge it, even to herself, and, like many another girl under similar circumstances, became so dazed by his good qualities as to be blind to his gross faults, until some kind friend pointed them out. But the best of women are oftentimes capricious in matters of this sort, and it will probably be just as well if we attempt no further explanation of Miss Nellie's seeming inconstancy.

Matters however had reached a crisis.

Two days before this upon which our story opens, Miss Nellie had graduated at the academy, and Howard a day later had been granted the privilege of attaching the scholastic suffix, B. A., to his cognomen. Only one exercise now remained at the college, after which the students would be disbanded; the undergraduates for the summer vacation, the graduates to enter upon the more practical duties of life, for which they must now fit themselves by forgetting a large per cent of what they had already learned, and then by learning as much more anew. This exercise was the entertainment of the *Adeptio Literata Societas*. There were two societies in the college—the *Adeptio Literata Societas* and the *Inceptio Literata Societas*. Howard was a member of the former, and had been appointed to deliver the closing oration and valedictory of the entertainment. When our story opens, Howard McKee and Nellie Raymond had returned from a lecture, and were leaning against the railing of the steps in front of Mr. Raymond's commodious residence. Howard's father was a banker, and his son from childhood had been accustomed to every advantage which wealth can bestow. So soon as he should have completed his college course of study, his father had designed that he should spend some years in Europe, after which it was expected that he would settle down to the study and practice of law. Howard had now graduated, and in two days more he would be off on his tour. With what eagerness, then, did he urge the gentle Nellie to accompany him, and make his contemplated visit a delightful wedding tour.

The temptation was strong, but Nellie conquered it, and Howard McKee went home that night sorrowful, angry, crest-fallen, and chagrined. When he started for the lecture his hopes were bright, but now he found himself one of the many who have learned from sad experience that "the course of true love never does run smooth." The high spirited youth,