

VI.

A NEW ENGLAND IDYLL.

ALTHOUGH as a rule people born in Boston need not be born again, the writer of this piquant book* has a pretty tale to tell of the mental and ethical phases of a girl of that habitat. This is not Miss Curtis, who is old, but Olive, who has been sufficiently fed on philosophy to discover somewhere between childhood and young-ladyhood that she is "a potentiality and a conscious personality." Her

* "Miss Curtis." A sketch by Kate Gannett Wells. Boston : Ticknor & Company 1885.

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earlier motto, "Do all I don't want to do," leads to a very wearing "notion of accountability to everybody and everything," but she is presently found writing a composition on the right to go to parties while yet at school. Though reprimanded by her instructors she was unchanged; she "openly declared her belief in the German as preferable, in its effect upon the character, to the study of mathematics or historical dates. Boys were not dangerous, she argued, and there was no harm in accidentally meeting them in the recess; they did not divert the mind from lessons, but acted as stimuli." When it is suggested by the lady principal that she will enjoy life better if she waits till she is older and knows more, Olive retorts: "I don't care to know a great deal. I rather know how to make the most of a little. I want to be happy instead of being ambitious." Miss Curtis is introduced to us as an irritable and irritating spinster of fortune, fond of experimenting on people; once she proposed to invite poor children to her house and leave things about to see if they would steal, a scheme prevented by Olive's brother sending her a cream cake stuffed with red pepper, having a grievance of his own to satisfy. Miss Curtis fixes the remnant of her once disappointed affections on Olive, on whom also are set the dutiful inclinations which perform the part of affections in the breast of a young minister fresh from the neighboring Divinity School. This Rev. Mr. Kimen, who "had become that uncomfortable product of himself, a dead-in-earnest man," was anxious that Olive should "develop properly." (He had no idea what he meant, but the phrase strengthened his desire.) Once, when on their way to church, he ventured to intimate that his sermon might help her. Olive answered—"You think sermons reach us girls! It is partly so, but it is more the 'extempore listening' we do, as Mr. Fordher calls it. Some sentence hits us and off we go on our own thoughts, which are like small shot in the way they take the conceit out of us." And when Mr. Kimen asks the use of ministers, "Use?" she exclaimed. "Why, a real minister, who is better than we are, who is elegant and powerful in his manners, and who has got the soul of the world in him, and can bear the burden of the nations, and take it away like the paschal lamb from wearing out the rest of us,—why, he is like Browning and the Bible put together, and we grow better every minute, and —." She paused, for they were near the church door. Mr. Kimen's church bells never celebrate his nuptials with Olive, the story having indeed other aims than to follow any character to commonplace felicities. It turns out that Miss Curtis had inherited a fortune from her father in a certain village which was aggrieved that the money had not been left to its charities and institutions. The lady, however, proves in the end to be a very good institution to them, with the help of her friend Olive, and the "sketch," as it is modestly called, passes into a pretty and pathetic New England idyll. The village, "Baptism," in the river; the "Candy-pull," and other scenes are described with delicate art. Mrs. Wells has put some terse phrases in the mouths of her select circle which deserve to become proverbial; and indeed she may be fairly congratulated on the truth and beauty of this her first venture in the field of imaginative art.