COUSIN WILLIAM.

In a stately red house, in one of the villages of New England, lived the heroine of our story. She had every advantage of rank and wealth, for her father was a deacon of the church, and owned sheep, and oxen, and exceeding much substance. There was an appearance of respectability and opulence about all the demesnes. The house stood almost concealed amid a forest of apple trees, in spring blushing with blossoms, and in autumn golden with fruit. And near by might be seen the garden, surrounded by a red picket fence, enclosing all sorts of magnificence. There, in autumn, might be seen abundant squash vines, which seemed puzzled for room where to bestow themselves; and bright golden squashes, and full-orbed yellow pumpkins, looking as satisfied as the evening sun when he has just had his face washed in a shower, and is sinking soberly to bed. There were superannuated seed cucumbers, enjoying the pleasures of a contemplative old age; and Indian corn, nicely done up in green silk, with a specimen tassel hanging at the end of each ear. The beams of the summer sun darted through rows of crimson currants, abounding on bushes by the fence, while a sulky black currant bush sat scowling in one corner, a sort of garden curiosity.

But time would fail us were we to enumerate all the wealth of Deacon Israel Taylor. He himself belonged to that necessary class of beings, who, though remarkable for nothing at all, are very useful in filling up the links of society. Far otherwise was his sister-in-law, Mrs. Abigail

Evetts, who, on the demise of the deacon's wife, had assumed the reins of government in the household.

This lady was of the same opinion that has animated many illustrious philosophers, namely, that the affairs of this world need a great deal of seeing to in order to have them go on prosperously; and although she did not, like them, engage in the supervision of the universe, she made amends by unremitting diligence in the department under her care. In her mind there was an evident necessity that every one should be up and doing: Monday, because it was washing day; Tuesday, because it was ironing day; Wednesday, because it was baking day; Thursday, because to-morrow was Friday; and so on to the end of the week. Then she had the care of reminding all in the house of every thing each was to do from week's end to week's end; and she was so faithful in this respect, that scarcely an original act of volition took place in the family. The poor deacon was reminded when he went out and when he came in, when he sat down and when he rose up, so that an act of omission could only have been committed through sheer malice prepense.

But the supervision of a whole family of children afforded to a lady of her active turn of mind more abundant matter of exertion. To see that their faces were washed, their clothes mended, and their catechism learned; to see that they did not pick the flowers, nor throw stones at the chickens, nor sophisticate the great house dog, was an accumulation of care that devolved almost entirely on Mrs. Abigail, so that, by her own account, she lived and throve by a perpetual miracle.

The eldest of her charge, at the time this story begins, was a girl just arrived at young ladyhood, and her name was Mary. Now we know that people very seldom have stories written about them who have not sylph-like forms, and glorious eyes, or, at least, "a certain inexpressible charm diffused over their whole person." But stories have of late so much abounded that they actually seem to have used up all the eyes, hair, teeth, lips, and forms necessary for a heroine, so that no one can now pretend to find an original collection wherewith to set one forth. These things considered, I regard it as fortunate that my heroine was not a beauty. She looked neither like a sylph, nor an oread, nor a fairy; she had neither l'air distingué nor l'air magnifique, but bore a great resemblance to a real mortal girl, such as you might pass a dozen of without any particular comment--one of those appearances, which, though common as water, may, like that, be colored any way by the associations you connect with it. Accordingly, a faultless taste in dress, a perfect ease and gayety of manner, a constant flow of kindly feeling, seemed in her case to produce all the effect of beauty. Her manners had just dignity enough to repel impertinence without destroying the careless freedom and sprightliness in which she commonly indulged. No person had a merrier run of stories, songs, and village traditions, and all those odds and ends of character which form the materials for animated conversation. She had read, too, every thing she could find: Rollin's History, and Scott's Family Bible, that stood in the glass bookcase in the best room, and an odd volume of Shakspeare, and now and then one of Scott's novels, borrowed from a somewhat literary family in

the neighborhood. She also kept an album to write her thoughts in, and was in a constant habit of cutting out all the pretty poetry from the corners of the newspapers, besides drying forget-me-nots and rosebuds, in memory of different particular friends, with a number of other little sentimental practices to which young ladies of sixteen and thereabout are addicted. She was also endowed with great constructiveness; so that, in these days of ladies' fairs, there was nothing from bellows-needlebooks down to web-footed pincushions to which she could not turn her hand. Her sewing certainly was extraordinary, (we think too little is made of this in the accomplishments of heroines;) her stitching was like rows of pearls, and her cross-stitching was fairy-like; and for sewing over and over, as the village schoolma'am hath it, she had not her equal. And what shall we say of her pies and puddings? They would have converted the most reprobate old bachelor in the world. And then her sweeping and dusting! "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all!"

And now, what do you suppose is coming next? Why, a young gentleman, of course; for about this time comes to settle in the village, and take charge of the academy, a certain William Barton. Now, if you wish to know more particularly who he was, we only wish we could refer you to Mrs. Abigail, who was most accomplished in genealogies and old wifes' fables, and she would have told you that "her gran'ther, Ike Evetts, married a wife who was second cousin to Peter Scranton, who was great uncle to Polly Mosely, whose daughter Mary married William Barton's father, just about the time old 'Squire Peter's house was burned down."

And then would follow an account of the domestic history of all branches of the family since they came over from England. Be that as it may, it is certain that Mrs. Abigail denominated him cousin, and that he came to the deacon's to board; and he had not been there more than a week, and made sundry observations on Miss Mary, before he determined to call her cousin too, which he accomplished in the most natural way in the world.

Mary was at first somewhat afraid of him, because she had heard that he had studied through all that was to be studied in Greek, and Latin, and German too; and she saw a library of books in his room, that made her sigh every time she looked at them, to think how much there was to be learned of which she was ignorant. But all this wore away, and presently they were the best friends in the world. He gave her books to read, and he gave her lessons in French, nothing puzzled by that troublesome verb which must be first conjugated, whether in French, Latin, or English. Then he gave her a deal of good advice about the cultivation of her mind and the formation of her character, all of which was very improving, and tended greatly to consolidate their friendship. But, unfortunately for Mary, William made quite as favorable an impression on the female community generally as he did on her, having distinguished himself on certain public occasions, such as delivering lectures on botany, and also, at the earnest request of the fourth of July committee, pronounced an oration which covered him with glory. He had been known, also, to write poetry, and had a retired and romantic air greatly bewitching to those who read Bulwer's novels. In short, it was morally certain, according to all rules of evidence, that if he had chosen to pay any

lady of the village a dozen visits a week, she would have considered it as her duty to entertain him.

William did visit; for, like many studious people, he found a need for the excitement of society; but, whether it was party or singing school, he walked home with Mary, of course, in as steady and domestic a manner as any man who has been married a twelvemonth. His air in conversing with her was inevitably more confidential than with any other one, and this was cause for envy in many a gentle breast, and an interesting diversity of reports with regard to her manner of treating the young gentleman went forth into the village.

"I wonder Mary Taylor will laugh and joke so much with William Barton in company," said one. "Her manners are altogether too free," said another. "It is evident she has designs upon him," remarked a third. "And she cannot even conceal it," pursued a fourth.

Some sayings of this kind at length reached the ears of Mrs. Abigail, who had the best heart in the world, and was so indignant that it might have done your heart good to see her. Still she thought it showed that "the girl needed advising;" and "she should talk to Mary about the matter."

But she first concluded to advise with William on the subject; and, therefore, after dinner the same day, while he was looking over a treatise on trigonometry or conic sections, she commenced upon him:--

"Our Mary is growing up a fine girl."

William was intent on solving a problem, and only understanding that something had been said, mechanically answered, "Yes."

"A little wild or so," said Mrs. Abigail.

"I know it," said William, fixing his eyes earnestly on E, F, B, C.

"Perhaps you think her a little too talkative and free with you sometimes; you know girls do not always think what they do."

"Certainly," said William, going on with his problem.

"I think you had better speak to her about it," said Mrs. Abigail.

"I think so too," said William, musing over his completed work, till at length he arose, put it in his pocket, and went to school.

O, this unlucky concentrativeness! How many shocking things a man may indorse by the simple habit of saying "Yes" and "No," when he is not hearing what is said to him.

The next morning, when William was gone to the academy, and Mary was washing the breakfast things, Aunt Abigail introduced the subject with

great tact and delicacy by remarking.--

"Mary, I guess you had better be rather less free with William than you have been."

"Free!" said Mary, starting, and nearly dropping the cup from her hand; "why, aunt, what do you mean?"

"Why, Mary, you must not always be around so free in talking with him, at home, and in company, and every where. It won't do." The color started into Mary's cheek, and mounted even to her forehead, as she answered with a dignified air,--

"I have not been too free; I know what is right and proper; I have not been doing any thing that was improper."

Now, when one is going to give advice, it is very troublesome to have its necessity thus called in question; and Mrs. Abigail, who was fond of her own opinion, felt called upon to defend it.

"Why, yes, you have, Mary; every body in the village notices it."

"I don't care what every body in the village says. I shall always do what I think proper," retorted the young lady; "I know Cousin William does not think so."

"Well, I think he does, from some things I have heard him say."

"O aunt! what have you heard him say?" said Mary, nearly upsetting a chair in the eagerness with which she turned to her aunt.

"Mercy on us! you need not knock the house down, Mary. I don't remember exactly about it, only that his way of speaking made me think so."

"O aunt! do tell me what it was, and all about it," said Mary, following her aunt, who went around dusting the furniture.

Mrs. Abigail, like most obstinate people, who feel that they have gone too far, and yet are ashamed to go back, took refuge in an obstinate generalization, and only asserted that she had heard him say things, as if he did not quite like her ways.

This is the most consoling of all methods in which to leave a matter of this kind for a person of active imagination. Of course, in five minutes, Mary had settled in her mind a list of remarks that would have been suited to any of her village companions, as coming from her cousin. All the improbability of the thing vanished in the absorbing consideration of its possibility; and, after a moment's reflection, she pressed her lips together in a very firm way, and remarked that "Mr. Barton would have no occasion to say such things again."

It was very evident, from her heightened color and dignified air, that

her state of mind was very heroical. As for poor Aunt Abigail, she felt sorry she had vexed her, and addressed herself most earnestly to her consolation, remarking, "Mary, I don't suppose William meant any thing. He knows you don't mean any thing wrong."

"Don't mean any thing wrong!" said Mary, indignantly.

"Why, child, he thinks you don't know much about folks and things, and if you have been a little----"

"But I have not been. It was he that talked with me first. It was he that did every thing first. He called me cousin--and he is my cousin."

"No, child, you are mistaken; for you remember his grandfather was----"

"I don't care who his grandfather was; he has no right to think of me as he does."

"Now, Mary, don't go to quarrelling with him; he can't help his thoughts, you know."

"I don't care what he thinks," said Mary, flinging out of the room with tears in her eyes.

Now, when a young lady is in such a state of affliction, the first thing to be done is to sit down and cry for two hours or more, which Mary

accomplished in the most thorough manner; in the mean while making many reflections on the instability of human friendships, and resolving never to trust any one again as long as she lived, and thinking that this was a cold and hollow-hearted world, together with many other things she had read in books, but never realized so forcibly as at present. But what was to be done? Of course she did not wish to speak a word to William again, and wished he did not board there; and finally she put on her bonnet, and determined to go over to her other aunt's in the neighborhood, and spend the day, so that she might not see him at dinner.

But it so happened that Mr. William, on coming home at noon, found himself unaccountably lonesome during school recess for dinner, and hearing where Mary was, determined to call after school at night at her aunt's, and attend her home.

Accordingly, in the afternoon, as Mary was sitting in the parlor with two or three cousins, Mr. William entered.

Mary was so anxious to look just as if nothing was the matter, that she turned away her head, and began to look out of the window just as the young gentleman came up to speak to her. So, after he had twice inquired after her health, she drew up very coolly, and said,--

"Did you speak to me, sir?"

William looked a little surprised at first, but seating himself by her, "To be sure," said he; "and I came to know why you ran away without leaving any message for me?"

"It did not occur to me," said Mary, in the dry tone which, in a lady, means, "I will excuse you from any further conversation, if you please." William felt as if there was something different from common in all this, but thought that perhaps he was mistaken, and so continued:--

"What a pity, now, that you should be so careless of me, when I was so thoughtful of you! I have come all this distance, to see how you do."

"I am sorry to have given you the trouble," said Mary.

"Cousin, are you unwell to-day?" said William.

"No, sir," said Mary, going on with her sewing.

There was something so marked and decisive in all this, that William could scarcely believe his ears. He turned away, and commenced a conversation with a young lady; and Mary, to show that she could talk if she chose, commenced relating a story to her cousins, and presently they were all in a loud laugh.

"Mary has been full of her knickknacks to-day," said her old uncle, joining them.

William looked at her: she never seemed brighter or in better spirits, and he began to think that even Cousin Mary might puzzle a man sometimes.

He turned away, and began a conversation with old Mr. Zachary Coan on the raising of buckwheat--a subject which evidently required profound thought, for he never looked more grave, not to say melancholy.

Mary glanced that way, and was struck with the sad and almost severe expression with which he was listening to the details of Mr. Zachary, and was convinced that he was no more thinking of buckwheat than she was.

"I never thought of hurting his feelings so much," said she, relenting; "after all, he has been very kind to me. But he might have told me about it, and not somebody else." And hereupon she cast another glance towards him.

William was not talking, but sat with his eyes fixed on the snuffer-tray, with an intense gravity of gaze that quite troubled her, and she could not help again blaming herself.

"To be sure! Aunt was right; he could not help his thoughts. I will try to forget it," thought she.

Now, you must not think Mary was sitting still and gazing during this soliloquy. No, she was talking and laughing, apparently the most unconcerned spectator in the room. So passed the evening till the little company broke up.

"I am ready to attend you home," said William, in a tone of cold and almost haughty deference.

"I am obliged to you," said the young lady, in a similar tone, "but I shall stay all night;" then, suddenly changing her tone, she said, "No, I cannot keep it up any longer. I will go home with you, Cousin William."

"Keep up what?" said William, with surprise.

Mary was gone for her bonnet. She came out, took his arm, and walked on a little way.

"You have advised me always to be frank, cousin," said Mary, "and I must and will be; so I shall tell you all, though I dare say it is not according to rule."

"All what?" said William.

"Cousin," said she, not at all regarding what he said, "I was very much vexed this afternoon."

"So I perceived, Mary."

"Well, it is vexatious," she continued, "though, after all, we cannot expect people to think us perfect; but I did not think it quite fair in you not to tell me."

"Tell you what, Mary?"

Here they came to a place where the road turned through a small patch of woods. It was green and shady, and enlivened by a lively chatterbox of a brook. There was a mossy trunk of a tree that had fallen beside it, and made a pretty seat. The moonlight lay in little patches upon it, as it streamed down through the branches of the trees. It was a fairy-looking place, and Mary stopped and sat down, as if to collect her thoughts. After picking up a stick, and playing a moment in the water, she began:--

"After all, cousin, it was very natural in you to say so, if you thought so; though I should not have supposed you would think so."

"Well, I should be glad if I could know what it is," said William, in a tone of patient resignation.

"O, I forgot that I had not told you," said she, pushing back her hat, and speaking like one determined to go through with the thing. "Why,

cousin, I have been told that you spoke of my manners towards yourself as being freer--more--obtrusive than they should be. And now," said she, her eyes flashing, "you see it was not a very easy thing to tell you, but I began with being frank, and I will be so, for the sake of satisfying myself."

To this William simply replied, "Who told you this, Mary?"

"My aunt."

"Did she say I said it to her?"

"Yes; and I do not so much object to your saying it as to your thinking it, for you know I did not force myself on your notice; it was you who sought my acquaintance and won my confidence; and that you, above all others, should think of me in this way!"

"I never did think so, Mary," said William, quietly.

"Nor ever said so?"

"Never. I should think you might have known it, Mary."

"But----" said Mary.

"But," said William, firmly, "Aunt Abigail is certainly mistaken."

"Well, I am glad of it," said Mary, looking relieved, and gazing in the brook. Then looking up with warmth, "and, cousin, you never must think so. I am ardent, and I express myself freely; but I never meant, I am sure I never should mean, any thing more than a sister might say."

"And are you sure you never could, if all my happiness depended on it, Mary?"

She turned and looked up in his face, and saw a look that brought conviction. She rose to go on, and her hand was taken and drawn into the arm of her cousin, and that was the end of the first and the last difficulty that ever arose between them.