WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS,

OR

The Records of an Unfashionable Street.

(Sequel to "My Wife and I.")

A Nov

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CHAPTER VI.

THE SETTLING OF THE WATERS.

It will not be doubted by those who know the ways of family dictators that Mrs. Maria Wouvermans' left Eva's house after her day's visit in a state of the most balmy self satisfaction, as one who has done a good day's work.

"Well, I've been up to Eva's," she said to her sister, as she looked in on returning, "and really it was well I went in. That Mary of hers is getting careless and negligent, just as all old servants do, and I just went over the whole house, and had a plain talk with Mary. She flew up about it, and was impertinent, of course; but I put her down, and I talked plainly to Eva about the way she's beginning with her servants. She's just like you, Nellie, slack and good natured, and needs somebody to keep her up. I told her the way she is beginning—of petting Mary, and fussing up her room with carpet and pictures, and everything, just like any other—wouldn't work. Servants must be kept in their places."

Now, Mrs. Van Arsdel had a spirit of her own; and the off hand, matter of fact manner in which her sister was accustomed to speak of her as no manager touched a vital point. What housekeeper likes to have her capacity to guide a house assailed? Is not that the spot where her glory dwells, if she has any? And it is all the more provoking when such charges are thrown out in perfect good nature, not as designed to offend, but thrown in *par parenthese*, as something everybody would acknowledge, and too evident to require discussion. While proceeding in the main part of a discourse, Mrs. Wouvermans was quite in the habit of these frank side disclosures of her opinion of her sister's management, and for the most part they were submitted to in acquiescent silence, rather than to provoke a controversy; but to be called "slack" to her face without protest or rejoinder was more than she could bear; so Mrs. Van Arsdel spoke up with spirit:

"Maria, you are always talking as if I don't know how to manage servants. All I know is that you are always changing, and I keep mine years and years."

"That's because you let them have their own way," said her sister. "You can keep servants if you don't follow them up, and insist on it that they shall do their duty. Let them run all over you and live like mistresses, and you can keep them. For my part, I like to change—new brooms always sweep clean."

"Well, it's a different thing, Maria—you with your small family, and mine with so many. I'd rather bear anything than a change."

"Oh, well, yes; I suppose there's no help for it, Nellie. Of course I wasn't blaming you, so don't fire up about it. I know you can't make yourself over," said Aunt Maria. This was the tone with which she usually settled discussions with those who differed from her on modes and measures. After all, they could not be like her, so where was the use of talking?

Aunt Maria also had the advantage in all such encounters of a confessed reputation as an excellent manager. Her house was always elegant, always in order. She herself was gifted with a head for details that never failed to keep in mind the smallest item, and a wiry, compact constitution that never knew fatigue. She held the keys of everything in her house, and always turned every key at the right moment. She knew the precise weight, quantity and quality of everything she had in possession, where it was and what it might be used for; and, as she said, could go to anything in her house without a candle, in the darkest night. If her servants did not love, they feared her, and had such a sense of her ever vigilant inspection that they never even tried to evade her. For the least shadow of disobedience she was ready to send them away at a moment's warning, and then go to the intelligence office and enter her name for another, and come home, put on apron and gloves, and manfully and thoroughly sustain the department till they came.

Mrs. Wouvermans, therefore, was celebrated and lauded by all her acquaintances as a perfect housekeeper, and this added sanction and terror to her *pronunciamentos* when she walked the rounds as a police inspector in the houses of her relations.

It is rather amusing to a general looker-on in this odd world of ours to contrast the serene, cheerful good faith with which these constitutionally active individuals go about criticising, and suggesting, right and left, with the dismay and confusion of mind they leave behind them wherever they operate.

They are often what the world calls well-meaning people, animated by a most benevolent spirit, and have no more intention of giving offense than a nettle has of stinging. A large, vigorous, well growing nettle has no consciousness of the stings it leaves in the delicate hands that have been in contact with it. It has simply acted out its innocent and respectable nature as a nettle. But a nettle armed with the power of locomotion on an ambulatory tour, is something the results of which may be fearful to contemplate.

So, after the departure of Aunt Maria our little housekeeper, Eva, was left in a state of considerable nervousness and anxiety, feeling that she had been weighed in the balance of perfection and found wofully wanting. She was conscious, to begin with, that her characteristic virtues as a housekeeper, if she had any, were not entirely in the style of her good relative. She was not by nature statistical, nor given to accounts and figures. She was not sharp and keen in bargains; she was, she felt in her inmost, trembling soul, a poor little mollusk, without a bit of a shell, biding in a cowardly way under a rock and ready at any moment to be eaten up by big fishes. She had felt so happy in her unlimited trust in Mary, who knew more than she did about housekeeping—but she had been convicted by her aunt's cross-questions of having resigned the very signet ring and scepter of her own house into her hands. Did she let Mary go all over the house? Did she put away the washing? Did Eva allow her to open her drawers? Didn't she count her towels and sheets every week, and also her tea-spoons, and keep every drawer and cupboard locked? She ought to. To all these inquiries Eva had no satisfactory response, and began to doubt within herself whether she had begun aright. With sensitive, conscientious people there is always a residum of self-distrust after discussions of the nature we have indicated, however vigorously and skilfully they may have defended their courses at the time.

Eva went over and over in her own mind her self justifications—she told herself that she and her aunt were essentially different people, incapable of understanding each other sympathetically or acting in each other's ways, and that the well-meant, positive dicta of her relative were to be let go for what they were worth, and no more.

Still she looked eagerly and anxiously for the return of her husband, that she might reinforce herself by talking it over with him. Here was a nature so transparent that, before he had been five minutes in the house, he felt that something had gone wrong; but, the dinner bell ringing, he retired at once to make his toilet, and did not open the subject till they were fairly seated at the table.

"Well, come now puss—out with it! Why that anxious brow? What domestic catastrophe? Anything gone wrong with the ivies?"

"Oh, no; the ivies are all right, growing beautifully—it isn't that—"

"Well, then, what is it? It seems there is something."

"Oh, nothing, Harry; only Aunt Maria has been spending the day here."

Eva said this with such a perplexed and woful face that Harry leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"What a blessing it is to have relations," he said; "but I thought, Eva, that you had made up your mind not to care for anything Aunt Maria says?"

"Well, she has been all over the house, surveying and reviewing as if she owned us, and has lectured Mary and got her into hysterics, and talked to me till I am almost bewildered—wondering at everything we mean to do, and wanting us to take her ways and not ours."

"My dearest child, why need you care? Take it as a rain-storm, when you've been caught out without your umbrella. That's all. Or, why can't you simply and firmly tell her that she must not go over your house or direct your servants?"

"Well, you see, that would never do. She would feel so injured and abused. I've only just made up and brought things to going smoothly, and got her pacified about our marriage. There would be another fuss if I should talk that way. Aunt Maria always considered me her girl, and maintains that she is a sort of special guardian to me, and I think it very disagreeable to quarrel with your relations, and get on unpleasant terms with them."

"Well, *I* shall speak to her, Eva, pretty decidedly, if you don't."

"Oh, don't, don't, Harry! She'd never forgive you. No. Let me manage her. I have been managing her all day to keep the peace, to keep her satisfied and pleased; to *let* her advise me to her heart's content, about things where I can take advice. Aunt Maria is a capital judge of linens and cottons, and all sorts of household stuffs, and can tell to a certainty just how much of a thing you'd want, and the price you ought to pay, and the exact place to get it; and I have been contriving to get her opinion on a dozen points where I mean to take it; and I think she has left, on the whole, highly satisfied with her visit, though in the main I don't give in to her a bit about our plans."

"Then why so tragic and tired looking?"

"Oh, well, after all, when Aunt Maria talks, she says a great many things that have such a degree of sense in them that it worries me. Now, there's a good deal of sense in what she said about trusting too much to servants, and being too indulgent. I know mamma's girls used to get spoiled so that they would be perfect tyrants. And yet I cannot for the life of me like Aunt Maria's hard, ungracious way of living with servants, as if they were machines."

"Ah, well, Eva, it's always so. Hard, worldly people always have a good deal of what looks like practical sense on their side, and kindness and unselfishness certainly have their weak points; there's no doubt of that. The Sermon on the Mount is open to a great deal of good hard worldly criticism, and so is every attempt to live up to it practically; but, never mind. We all know that the generous way is the strong way, and the best way, in the long run."

"And then you know, Harry, I haven't the least talent for being hard and sharp," said Eva, "and so I may as well take the advantages of my sort of nature."

"Certainly you may; people never succeed out of their own line."

"Then there's another trouble. I'm afraid Aunt Maria is going to interfere with Alice, as she tried to do with me. She said, that everybody was talking about her intimacy with Jim, and that if I didn't speak to Alice she must."

"Confound that woman," said Harry; "she's an unmitigated old fool! She's as bad as a run away steam engine; somebody ought to seize and lock her up."

"Come, sir, keep a civil tongue about my relations," said Eva, laughing.

"Well, I must let off a little to you, just to lower steam to the limits of Christian moderation."

"Alice isn't so fond of Aunt Maria as I am, and has a high spirit of her own, and I'm afraid it will make a terrible scene if Aunt Maria attacks her, so I suppose I must talk to her myself; but what do you think of Jim, Harry? Is there anything in it, on his part?"

"How can I say? you know just as much as I do and no more, and you are a better judge of human nature than I am."

"Well, would you like it to have Alice take Jim—supposing there were anything?"

"Why, yes, very well, if she wants him."

"But Jim is such a volatile creature—would you want to trust him?"

"He is constant in his affections, which is the main thing. I'm sure his conduct when your father failed showed that; and a sensible, dignified woman like Alice might make a man of him."

"It's odd," said Eva, "that Alice, who is so prudent, and has such a high sense of propriety, seems so very indulgent to Jim. None of his escapades seems to offend her."

"It's the doctrine of counterparts" said Harry: "the steady, sensible nature admires the brilliancy and variety of the volatile one."

"For my part," said Eva, "I can't conceive of Jim's saying anything in serious earnest. The very idea of his being sentimental seems funny—and how can anybody be in love without being sentimental?"

"There are diversities of operation," said Harry. "Jim must make love in his own way, and it will probably be an original one."

"But, really now, do you know?" persisted Eva. "I think Alice might be mated with a man of much higher class than Jim. He is amiable, and bright, and funny, and agreeable. Yet I don't deny but Alice might do better."

"So she might, but the perversity of fate is that the superior man isn't around and Jim is; and, ten to one, if the superior man were in the field, Alice would be perverse enough to choose Jim. And, after all you must confess, give Jim Fellows a fortune of a million or two, a place in Newport, and another on the North River, and even you would call it a brilliant match, and think it a fortunate thing for Alice."

"Oh, dear me, Harry, that's the truth, to be sure. Am I so worldly?"

"No; but ideal heroes are not plentiful, and there are few gems that don't need rich setting. The first questions as to a man are, is he safe, has he no bad habits, is he kind and affectionate in his disposition and capable of constant affection? and, secondly, does the woman feel that sort of love that makes her prefer him even to men that are quite superior? Now, whether Alice feels that way toward Jim remains to be seen. I'm sure I can't tell. Neither can I tell whether Jim has any serious intentions in regard to her. If they were only let alone, and not watched and interfered with, I'm sure the thing would adjust itself in the natural course of things."

"But see here, I must be going to my club, and, now I think of it, I've brought some Paris letters from the girls for you, to pass the evening with."

"You have? Letters from Ida and Caroline? You naughty creature, why didn't you give them to me before?"

"Well, your grave face when I first came in put everything else out of my head; and then came on all this talk; but it's just as well, you'll have them to read while I'm gone."

"Don't stay late, Harry."

late news, and, in short, take an obser-

"No; you may be sure I've no temptation. I'd much rather be here with you watching our own back-log. But, then, I shall see several fellows about articles for the magazine, and get all the ration of our latitude and longitude; so, *au revoir*!"

CHAPTET VII

LETTERS AND AIR-CASTLES.

After Harry went out, Eva arranged the fire, dropped the curtains over the window, drew up an easy chair into a warm corner under the gas-light, and began looking over the outside of her Parisian letters, with that sort of luxurious enjoyment of delay with which one examines the post marks and direction of letters that are valued as a great acquisition. There was one from her sister Ida and one from Harry's cousin Caroline. Ida's was opened first. It was dated from a boarding house in the Rue de Clichy, giving a sort of journalized view of their studies, their medical instructors, their walks and duties in the hospital, all told with an evident and rigorous sense of enjoyment. Eva felt throughout what a strong, cheerful, self-sustained being her sister was, and how fit it was that a person so sufficient to herself, so equable, so healthfully balanced and poised in all her mental and physical conformation, should have undertaken the pioneer work of opening a new profession for women. "I never could do as she does, in the world," was her mental comment, "but I am thankful that she can." And then she cut the envelope of Caroline's letter."

To a certain extent there were the same details in it—Caroline was evidently associated in the same studies, the same plans, but there was missing in the letter the professional enthusiasm, the firmness, the self poise, and calm clearness. There were more bursts of feeling on the pictures in the Louvre than on scientific discoveries; more sensibility to the various æsthetic wonders which Paris opens to an uninitiated guest than to the treasures of anatomy and surgery. With the letters were sent two or three poems, contributions to the magazine—poems full of color and life, of a subdued fire, but with that undertone of sadness which is so common in all female poets. A portion of the letter may explain this:

"You were right, my dear Eva, in saying, in our last interview, that it did not seem to you that I had the kind of character that was adapted to the profession I have chosen. I don't think I have. I am more certain of it from comparing myself from day to day with Ida, who certainly is born and made for it, if ever a woman was. My choice of it has been simply and only for the reason that I must choose something as a means of self-support, and more than that, as a refuge from morbid distresses of mind which made the still monotony of my New England country life intolerable to me. This course presented itself to me as something feasible. I thought it, too, a good and worthy career—one in which one might do one's share of good for the world. But, Eva, I can feel that there is one essential difference between Ida and myself: she is peculiarly self-sustained and sufficient to herself, and I am just the reverse. I am full of vague unrest; I am chased by seasons of high excitement, alternating with deadly languor. Ida has hard work to know what to do with me. You were right in supposing, as you intimate in your letter, that a certain common friend has something to do with this unrest, but you cannot, unless you know my whole history, know how much. There was a time when he and I were all the world to each other—when shall I ever forget that time! I was but seventeen; a young girl, so ignorant of life! I never had seen one like him; he was a whole new revelation to me; he woke up everything there was in me, never to go to sleep again; and then to think of having all this tide and current of feeling checked—frozen. My father overwhelmed him with accusations; every baseness was laid to his charge. I was woman enough to have stood for him against the world if he had come to me. I would have left all and gone to the ends of the earth with him if he had asked me, but he did not. There was only one farewell, self accusing letter, and even that fell into my father's hands and never came to me till after his death. For years I thought myself wantonly trifled with by a man of whose attentions I ought to be ashamed. I was indignant at myself for the love that might have been my glory, for it is my solemn belief that if we had been left alone he would have been saved all those wretched falls, those blind struggles that have marred a life whose purpose is yet so noble.

"When the fates brought us together again in New York, I saw at a glance that whatever may have been the proud, morbid conscientiousness that dictated his long silence, he loved me still;—a woman knows that by an unmistakable instinct. She can *feel* the reality through all disguises. *I know* that man loves me, and yet he does not now in word or deed make the least profession beyond the boundaries of friendship. He is my friend; with entire devotion he is willing to spend and be spent for me—but he will accept nothing from me. I, who would give my life to him willingly—I must do nothing for him!

"Well, it's no use writing. You see now that I am a very unworthy disciple of your sister. She is so calm and philosohical that I cannot tell her all this; but you, dear little Eva, you know the heart of woman, and you have a magic key which unlocks everybody's heart in confidence to you. I seem to see you, in fancy, with good Cousin Harry, sitting cosily in your chimney-corner; your ivies and nasturtiums growing round your sunny windows, and an everlasting summer in your pretty parlors, while the December winds whistle without. Such a life as you two lead, such a home as your home, is worth a thousand 'careers' that dazzle ambition. Send us more letters, journals, of all your pretty, lovely home life, and let me warm myself in the glow of your fireside. Your Cousin,

CARRY.

Eva finished this letter, and then folding it up sat with it in her lap, gazing into the fire, and pondering its contents. If the truth must be told, she was revolving in her young, busy brain, a scheme for restoring Caroline to her lover, and setting them up comfortably at housekeeping on a contiguous street, where she had seen a house to let. In five minutes she had gone through the whole programme—seen the bride at the altar, engaged the house, bought the furniture, and had before her a vision of parlors, of snuggeries and cosy nooks, where Caroline was to preside, and where Bolton was to lounge at his ease, while she and Caroline compared housekeeping accounts. Happy young wives develop an aptitude for match making as naturally as flowers spring in a meadow, and Eva was losing herself in this vision of Alnaschar, when a loud, imperative, sharp bark of a dog at the front door of the house called her back to life and the world.

Now, there are as many varieties to dog-barks as to man talks. There is the common bow wow, which means nothing, only that it is a dog speaking; there is the tumultuous, angry bark, which means attack; the conversational bark, which, of a moonlight night, means gossip; and the imperative, staccato bark which means immediate business. The bark at the front door was of this kind: it was loud and sharp, and with a sort of indignant imperativeness about it, as of one accustomed to be attended to immediately.

Eva flew to the front door and opened it, and there sat Jack, the spoiled darling of Miss Dorcas Vanderheyden and her sister, over the way.

"Why, Jacky! where did you come from?" said Eva. Jacky sat up on his haunches and waved his forepaws in a vigorous manner, as was his way when he desired to be specially ingratiating.

Eva seized him in her arms and carried him into the parlor, thinking that as he had accidentally been shut out for the night, she would domesticate him for a while, and return him to his owners on the morrow. So she placed him on the ottoman in the corner and attempted to caress him, but evidently that was not the purpose he had in view. He sprang down, ran to the door and snuffed, and to the front windows and barked imperiously.

"Why, Jack, what do you want?"

He sprang into a chair and barked out at the Vanderheyden house.

Eva looked at the mantel clock—it wanted a few minutes of ten—without, it was a bright moonlight night.

"I'll run across with him, and see what it is," she said. She was young enough to enjoy something like an adventure. She opened the front door and Jack rushed out, and then stopped to see if she would follow; as she stood a moment he laid hold on the skirt of her dress, as if to pull her along.

"Well, Jacky, I'll go," said Eva. Thereat the creature bounded across the street and up the steps of the opposite house, where he stood waiting. She went up and rang the door bell, which appeared to be what he wanted, as he sat down quite contented on the door-step.

Nobody came. Eva looked up and down the street. "Jacky, we shall have to go back, they are all asleep," she said. But Jacky barked contradiction, sprang nearer to the door, and insisted on being let in.

"Well, if you say so, Jacky, I must ring again," she said, and with that she pulled the door-bell louder, and Jack barked with all his might, and the two succeeded after a few moments in causing a perceptible stir within.

Slowly the door unclosed, and a vision of Miss Dorcas in an old fashioned, broad frilled night-cap peeped out. She was attired in a black water proof cloak, donned hastily over her night gear.

"Oh, Jack, you naughty boy!" she exclaimed, stooping eagerly to the prodigal, who sprang tumuluously into her arms and began licking her face.

"I'm so much obliged to you, Mrs. Henderson," she said to Eva. We went down in the omnibus this afternoon, and we suddenly missed him, the naughty fellow," she said, endeavoring to throw severity into her tones.

Eva related Jack's ruse.

Did you ever!" said Miss Dorcas; "the creature knew that we slept in the back of the house, and he got you to ring our door bell. Jacky, what a naughty fellow you are!"

(Continued on Page 4.)