Chapter V

Society Novels

*Agnes of Sorrento, My Wife and I, Pink and White*

Our *Tyranny* and *We and Our Neighbours* are Mrs. Stowe's Society novels. They deal with the contemporary social problems; the social, political, and religious corruptions. Compared to Mrs. Stowe's antislavery and New England novels, they are her lesser works, yet they have themes which have universal and abiding appeal and in this sense they may be regarded as relevant even today.

1. *Agnes of Sorrento*

Strictly speaking *Agnes of Sorrento: An Historical Novel of the Time of Savonarola,* does not belong to the group of Society novels; it is closer to New England novels than to *My Wife and I, Pink and White* *Tyranny* and *We and Our Neighbours,* three intensely typical society novels, in so far as the style and technique are concerned. However, thematically it is closer to society novels as it deals with the religious and political corruptions in the nineteenth-century Italy. Essentially, *Agnes of Sorrento* is a historical romance set in the
nineteenth-century Italy. It is the celebration of Mrs. Stowe's third trip to Europe in 1860 during which she visited Italy. Undoubtedly, she was very much fascinated and thrilled by Italy.

The Plot

Agnes, a beautiful, young, and devoutly Roman Catholic Christian girl lives in Sorrento with her grandmother, Dame Elsie. Three persons adore and wish to marry her. One, whose suit her grandmother Elsie encourages, is a dull, insensitive, young peasant, Antonio; the second is, Father Il Padre Francesco; and the third is the young cavalier Prince Agostino Sarreli, apparently a Byronic hero. However, eventually Prince Agostino Sarreli succeeds in his suit, though initially Agnes wishes to resign Prince Agostino Sarreli's love for the love of her Saviour.

Important Characters in the Novel

Savonarola, is a fervid, living, piety, the fearless and untiring denunciator of the personal venialities which
defamed the Church through its dignitaries. He is a stern, gloomy, ascetic, emancipated by fasting and prayers, who preaches religion, morality and purification. He is a patriot, as well as a preacher who persists against excommunication. He passes mortal dangers, until he dies the death of a martyr.

Pope Alexander the Sixth, is the worst of the several wicked popes who so corrupted the religion of their times that monks peddled indulgences all over Europe, monasteries were filled with gluttons and sensualists, boys were elevated to episcopal thrones, and sons of popes were made cardinals and princes. The sins and crime of papal and municipal government had become so abhorrent to conscientious Christians, that families left the church, and lived apart in peril of their lives after their estates and fortunes had been confiscated.

The age of Alexander the Sixth has begun to be hideous for its debaucheries, its murders, its disgraceful levities, and its tyranny.

Caesar Borgia and Lucrezia Borgia are depraved sons of Pope Alexander the Sixth. They control Church and State at Rome.
Agnes of Sorrento is a beautiful, young, devout Roman Catholic Christian girl. She is an innocent angelic girl like Eva St. Clare of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Marry Scudder of *The Minister's Wooing*. In her saintly innocence and naturally religious character, she is inclined towards conventual life.

Agostino Sarelli is a scion of a noble family who has been robbed of fortune, family, hope, and all that life hold dear, by the treacherous cruelty of Caesar Borgia.

Sarelli with a hundred men, who have lost houses, lands, friends, through the devilish greed of Caesar Borgia, has taken refuge in the wilderness of the mountains. Ironically, Sarelli and his men are called robbers, precisely because they have escaped from the assembly of true robbers so that they may led honest and clean life. Among Sarelli's men, there are those whose wives and sisters have been forced into Borgia harem, whose children have been tortured before their eyes, whose farest and dearest have been slaughtered in their presence by the men who sit in the seat of the Lord. The degeneration of the Church and the consequent corruption drives Agostino Sarelli against the faith of his fathers.
Dame Elsie, the grandmother of Agnes, loves her granddaughter with a fierce devotion, and fears the approach of any change which may take Agnes from her, and of late she has become worrisome as to how to guide her course of life. As Agnes is beautiful, refined, and dainty, Elsie is almost sure that Agnes may fall prey to some vulture in human form. When Dame Elsie learns that Agostino Sarelli loves her granddaughter, she is very much perturbed and goes to Father II Francesco for confession.

The character of Father II Francesco deserves to be remembered with respect and pity. Earlier, he was gay, dissolve, yong Lorenzo Sfroza. However, due to fervid preaching of Jerome Savonarola a spiritual change occurs in him, and he becomes a reconstructed man, but occasionally the old Lorenzo in him revives. In the confession of Dame Elsie, II Francesco receives a shock and takes upon himself to protect Agnes from Agostino Sarelli and advises Dame Elsie to put Agnes in the convent. He is equally averse to Dame Elsie's plans of marrying Agnes to Antonio, a young peasant. Lorenzo in him falls in love with Agnes, but II Francesco in him refrains him from falling in love with Agnes and thereby committing a sin. The result is that he is a victim of the
inner conflict of mind. He develops a split personality and reduces almost to a mental wreck. He is inconsistently enlightened and superstitious, progressive and reactionary.

Father Antonio, the brother of Dame Elsie, is an artist-monk at the convenl of San Marco in Florence, where religion is devout, poetic, and elevating under the ministrations of Savanorola, whom all his followers adore. It is Father Antonio who resolves the problem by counselling Agnes and brings about union of Agostino Sarelli and Agnes.

Themes in the Novel

After her son, Henry's death Mrs. Stowe is very bitterly against Calvinism which insists that death before "conversion", i.e., "regeneration" is destined to lead to eternal damnation. Henry dies before conversion and hence, according to Calvinism, he is doomed, he cannot escape from the eternal damnation. This conclusion of Calvinism was painful to Mrs. Stowe. Hence, in subconscious she wants to
escape from Calvinism, she wants to find an alternative to Calvinism. Hence she looks towards Roman Catholicism. But she is disappointed to note the rampant corruption in the Roman Catholic Church.

The main theme in the novel is, therefore, corruption in the Roman Catholic Church and crusade against this form of evil. Mrs. Stowe's characters Father Savonarola, Father Antonio and Agostino Sarreli are crusaders against the corruption in the Roman Catholic Church as well as the political system prevalent in Italy at the time of writing of the novel. Mrs. Stowe wants to highlight the virtues of the Roman Catholic Church but she cannot fully rise above her prior prejudices against the Roman Catholic Church and Catholicism.

Another theme is the religion of love. By love even the most intransigent person can be transformed. Agnes in Agnes of Sorrento, like Eva in Uncle Tom's Cabin, Marry Scudder in The Minister's Wooing, Mara in the Pearl of Orr's Island and Dolly in Poganuc People, melts the anger of Agostino Sarreli and brings to an end his revolt against religion.
Technique Used in the Novel

Agnes of Sorrento is an historical romance. It is purported to delineate Italy during the time of Father Savonarola. The novel's setting is Florence in Italy. However, Mrs. Stowe hardly cares for the historical authenticity of the episodes narrated in the novel. She commits chronological lapses. She has been frequently criticized on these counts. Adams remarks,

"It is more restrictedly New England rather than Oldtown Folks; and in its lack of historical perspective it is anything other than what its little page professes 'an historical novel of the time of Savonarola.'"

Agnes of Sorrento is actually the recreation of The Minister's Wooing with Calvinism replaced by Catholicism. In The Minister's Wooing Mary Scudder has three suitors, James Marvyn, Dr. Samuel Hopkins, and Aaron Burr. In Agnes of Sorrento, Agnes also has three suitors, Sarelli Agosto,
Il Padre Francesco, and Antonio. The winners in the suit are James Marvyn and Agosto Sarelli respectively who is irreligious but angelic Mary and Agnes convert them; they are evangels. Again Dr. Hopkins and Il Padre Francesco are clergymen with the difference that Hopkins renounces his suit with the Calvinist spirit of renunciation, with the spirit of "disinterested benevolence" but Francesco renounces his desire fades out of the story under compulsion.

The narrative technique used in the novel is the third-person narrative. The level of the narrative is extradiegetic, the narrator is not one of the characters in the novel.
Reference

2. *Pink and White Tyranny*

*Pink and White Tyranny* is one of the minor works of Mrs. Stowe. It is an attack on the newly rich like Dick Follingsbee, a shoddy upstart. Follingsbee's wife is an unscrupulous social climber who lives for show and pomp taking hint from cheap French novels. She has an illicit love affair with her interior decorator, Charlie Ferrola. Charlie Ferrola embodies that class of males who seem to be designed for decorating the private rooms of ladies. Charlie Ferrola's tastes are so exquisite that it is most difficult thing in the world to keep him out of misery even for a moment. Though his profession is architecture and landscape gardening, in practice, it consists in telling certain rich, sophisticated, fashionable people how they can get rid of their money quickly. He rules despotically in the Follingsbee Halls.

Lillie Ellis, twenty-seven, shopworn flirt is a great admirer of Follingsbee's, dupes the hero John Seymour into marriage. Lillie is a selfish coquet who has lived the life of a petted creature, who likes French novels, who smokes cigarettes, who lacks religious sense, who wants to serve wine on the dinner table, who has no motherly
instinct. When, according to his custom, Seymour invites his mill workers to his birthday party, Lillie, with a view to discouraging this practice, lies about the behaviour of the mill workers and tells Seymour that they have left grease on the sofa and have littered cake and raisins on to the carpet, whereas they have actually conducted themselves in a dignified manner. Lillie advises her husband to dupe his way out of his responsibilities to Claphan and Company, which has failed. Dick Follingsbee also suggests unscrupulous ways of escaping from the responsibilities. Follingsbee and Lillie together make the life of Seymour miserable. He is fed up with his wife but does not divorce her.

The main theme of the novel is ill effect of the hasty marriage and the issue of divorce. Mrs. Stowe cautions against hasty marriages and opposes divorce even if the marriage is miserable like that of Seymour. In the novel Mrs. Stowe is worried about the French influence on American life. The novel is a warning against French frivolity.

Actually, Pink and White Tyranny is less of a novel than domestic lectures.
3. *My Wife and I*

*My Wife and I; OR, Harry Henderson's History* is a novel by Mrs. Stowe which was first serialized from 1870 onwards, in the Christian Union, and later published in a book form in 1871. Among Mrs. Stowe's *Society* novels it is, by far, the best.

"*My Wife and I* gives a picture of contemporary New York journalism with all its dishonesty and moral humbug. The story is told by Harry Henderson, though scenes which he did not witness are reported and letters he never read are given in full. Through him we get Mrs. Stowe's eminently correct, and completely feminine, views on every conceivable subject of a domestic character."

In *My Wife and I*, Harry Henderson, a plain Yankee boy and the narrator, recounts his experiences in three stages; he says:

"So I, Harry Henderson -- a plain Yankee boy from the mountains of
New Hampshire, and at present citizen of New York -- commence my story. My experiences have three stages. First My child-wife, or the experience of Childhood.

Second, My shadow-wife, or the dreamland of the future.

Third, my real wife, when I saw her, how I sought and found her.

"Specially, My Wife and I recounts the rise of the narrator, Harry Henderson, from poverty to affluence and happy mating with a daughter of wealth. The conscientious son of a New Hampshire minister, Harry, knowing he is unworthy of following his father's calling, devotes himself to serious journalism in New York, prospers, finds his Eva Van Arsdel -- a sweet wholesome girl in spite of her worldly family -- and sets up housekeeping."

Actually, My Wife and I is a fictional essay designed to defend woman's right. It is a story of a plain
Yankee boy from the mountains of New Hampshire, who goes to college, adopts literature as a profession in New York; the framework upon which he hangs many discussion on the women question. The book is filled with discussion of a variety of topics, mother's love, college education, marriage for money, christian ideas, doubts about the Bible, the freedom of American girls in public, women in business and politics, the social emancipation of women, the advantage of simple life over fashionable life etc.

It is written in the first person, the narrator is the hero of the story, Harry Henderson himself. He narrates his experiences in three stages, First, under the caption 'My Child-Wife' he narrates his experiences of childhood. Second, under the caption 'My Dream Wife' he describes the characteristics of the wife of his dreamland. Third, under the caption 'My Real Wife' he describes where he saw her, how he sought her, and finally how he finds her.

The chapter on My Child-Wife describes touchingly the unselfish love of a seven year boy, Harry Henderson and his gentle soft spoken, quiet little wife. However, Harry's
brother and sisters are affectionate enough in their way but do not have the least sentiment, each of them has his or her own concerns to look after. Consequently, Harry is a lonesome boy.

On the contrary, Sussie is the only child of her mother. Harry and Sussie meet each other in the school, develop fondness, admiration and love for each other and innocently agree to marry without really understanding what the marriage means. To them marriage means inseparable friendship and everlasting companionship. Harry tells his mind to his mother. There in an amusing conversation between the child and mother.

In the end Sussie succumbs to an epidemic in the area, she dies of scarlet fever. The author's description of this sad event on the mind of Harry is very pathetic and poignant.

Harry's mother's tender care and affection lessens his grief due to Sussie's death. She teaches him how to write. She also teaches him to render all sorts of household services such as are usually performed by girls. Harry grows up under
his mother's creative touch. Gradually she becomes to him a controlling power.

In the second phase he comes in contact with Miss Ellery. He visions that she is his dream wife. He feels all the quality of his dream wife in her. But in the end Miss Ellery marries Bill Marshall. When Harry knows that Miss Ellery is engaged to Bill Marshall, he exclaimed:

"she engaged to Bill Marshall!
-- Why, boys his a fool

"But you see he's rich"
answer his friend.

Eventually Harry's idol fell from its pedestal and his first dream dissolved. Ellery's marriage is to Harry, a great awakening, a coming out of a life of pure ideas and sentiment into one external realities and he feels.

"Woman is by order of nature the conservator of the ideal. Formed
of finer clay, with nicer perception, and refined fiber, she is
the appointed priestess to guard
the poetry of life from sacrilege,
but if she be bribed to betray the
shrine, what hope for us? If the
salt have lost its savor, wherewith
shall it be salted?

("My Wife and I, P. 70")

Under third caption Harry Henderson meets Eva Van
Arsdel, his future wife in New York in Fifth Avenue Stage. He
makes acquaintances with her in a surprisingly unconventional
manner which Mrs. Stowe would not have normally approved. The
immediate confidence given to hero is quite against the
acceptable norms of the contemporary society.

There follows the glimpses of the social life. Mrs.
Stowe's young men and women in the story are unbelievably
good and sound characters.
The Love story of Harry Henderson, the hero, and Eva Van Arsdel gradually progresses. The description of Croquet match, which considerably advances Harry's love affair, is a very fine piece of writing. The setting of the novel is in New York.

Wat Sydney, a very rich man also woos Eva. His suit is strongly favoured by Eva's mother who is enamoured by Sydeny's richness. However, Eva does not oblige her mother and Syd ney. She loves Harry without any reservation. Finally, heavy financial loss incurred by Mr. Van Arsdel, results in the marriage of Eva to Harry.

Important Characters and Themes in the Novel

However, in the love story is interwoven the main concern of Mrs. Stowe in the novel. She gives the glimpses of the contemporary social life, vents out her opinions on various social problems of the day, especially the so called women question which is essentially the question regarding the status of women in the society, their role in the family,
in the society, and in running the government. Mrs. Stowe tries to emphasize the role of woman in all walks of life, various characters in the novel act as the mouthpieces of different conflicting groups.

Caroline, Ida Van Arsdel, Mrs. Cerulean, Audacia Denger's Jim Fellow, Mr. Van Arsdel and Mr. Goldstuck are the important characters in the novel. Through them Mrs. Stowe expresses her view and reaction.

Harry's father, Mr. Henderson, is a poor country minister in the mountains of New Hampshire. The farmers of the vicinity regard him as "about the smartest man in the State". He is naturally impetuous, though magnanimous, hasty tempered and imperious, though conscientious.

Harry's mother unites the most exquisite sensibility with the deepest calm—calm resulting from the habitual communion with the highest and purest source of all rest, the peace that passes all understanding. Jim Fellow is one of the vital characters in the novel. He is presented as one of the wild growths of New York life.
He is kind hearted be he never is witty at the expense of real trouble. He is the creature of the impulses and sens and will be for good or evil according as other use him."

(MW, P.310).

The view against assigning the task of governing to women is expounded through Mr. Van Arsdel thus:

"And now, I'll tell you, Ida, just what I think; you good women are not fit to govern the world, because you do not know, and you oughn't to know, the wickedness that you have got to govern. We men have to know all about the rogues, and the sharpers, and the pick pockets, and the bullies; we have to grow hard and sharp,
and 'cut our eye-teeth', as the saying is, so that in at last we come to not having much faith in anybody. The rule is, pretty much, not to believe anybody that you meet, and to take for granted that every man that you have dealings with will cheat you if he can. That's bad enough, but when it comes to feeling that every woman will cheat you if she can, when women cut their eye-teeth, and get to be sharp, and hard, and tricky, as men are, then I say, Look out for yourself, and deliver me from having anything to do with them.

(MW, P. 261-262)

Harry's cousin, Caroline, is the daughter of Uncle Jacob's brother. She is the only daughter in the family. Uncle Jacob and Caroline's father are brothers of Harry's mother. Harry's mother, Uncle Jacob and Aunt Polly have all
praise for Caroline and the persuade Harry to marry her.
Caroline is Harry's school companion, the leading scholar in every study, always good natured, steady and clear headed.
In school days she was always ready to help Harry when he faltered in translation or the solution of algebraic problem.
There are women, women of high class too, who seem to take a natural and innocent pleasure in the power their sex enables them to excercise over men, and instinctively do a number of things to captivate and charm on of the opposite sex. This power Caroline does not posses; actually she despises it, and receives the admiration and attention which her beauty draws from the opposite with coldness.

When Harry tells Caroline that with her beauty and talent she might be satisfied with a woman's lot in life, Caroline reacts sharply and says:

"A woman's lot, and what that, pray? to sit with folded hands and see life drifting by - to be a mere nullity, and endure to have my good friends pat me on
back and think I am bright and
shining light of contentment
in woman's sphere?"

(My Wife and I, P.102)

She deplores the fact that marriageable girls are
treated as an exhibition for the convenience of men who have
always the upperhand in their choice. She asserts that she
would first have career for herself considering marriage and
tells Harry that he is out of consideration as far as marriage
is concerned, because he is her cousin.

In the introduction to The Illuminati we have an
amusing description of Mrs. Stella Cerulean. She is "a
brilliant woman, beautiful in person, full of genius, full of
enthusiasm and very self confident. She is the most charming
talker and the most fascinating of women.

She has one simple remedy for the reconstruction of
the society about whose immediate application she sees not
the slightest difficulty. It is simply and only to be done
by giving the affairs of the world into the hands of women,
been asserting, in your own way, the rights of women, in short, to do any thing that men do. Well, here comes a woman to your room who takes her rights, practically, and does just what a man would do."

(MWI, 241)

Certainly, Mrs. Stowe's views regarding woman's right do not confirm with extremist views of Miss Audacia Dangereyes nor with those of Stella Cerulean.

The young lady philosopher Miss Ida Van Arsdel represents Mrs. Stowe's views. Miss Ida Van Arsdel opts to remain unmarried throughout her life. She is a good character and says and does very sensible and stimulating things. She embodies Mrs. Stowe's opinions upon the best possibilities for young women. The following extract from the novel reveals Ida's view of life:

"I like hardness and simplicity. I am sick to death of softness and perfumed cushions and ease. We women are sweltered under downbeds, and smothered with luxuries, in our modern day, till all the life dies out of us. I want
to live while I live, and to keep
myself in such trim that I can do
something - and won't pet myself nor
be petted!"

(MWI, 194)

Ida's philosophy of life is further expounded in the
following extract from the novel

"Yes, Mr. Henderson," said Ida,
"Heroism can be in any life that is
a work - life, any life which includes
energy and self denial. But fashionable
life is based on mere love of ease.
All it seeks is pleasurable sensation
and absence of care and trouble, and
it starves this heroic capability;
and that is the reason, as Eva says, why
there is so much repressed unhappiness
in women. It is the hunger of starving
faculties. What are all these girls
and women looking for? Amusement,
excitement. What do they dread more
than anything? Effort, industry,
self-denial. Not one of them read a serious book through—not because they are not able, but it takes an effort, and if there is much thought in them, they skip, to get out of the story. All the education they get in the school lies idle; they do nothing with it, as a general thing.

(M W I, 197)

Mrs. Stowe advocates woman's right to career through Miss Ida Arsdel in the following words:

"Now", said Ida, "all I want is that women should do something; that the lives of girls, from the time they leave school till the time they are married, should not be such a perfect waste as they now are. I do not profess to be certain about any of these theories that I hear, but one thing I do know: we women will bear being made a great deal more self-sustaining and self-
supporting than we have been. We can be more efficient in the world, and we ought to be. I have chosen my way, and mean to keep to it. And my idea is that a woman who really does accomplish a life-work is just like one that cuts the first path through a wood. She makes a way where others can walk!'

(M W I, 239)

Another theme in the novel is the corruption and hypocrisy of the press.

The chapter on HAPS AND MISHA PS beautifully exposes this hypocrisy. How for fear of losing advertisement publishers of newspapers pull up their editors if they write anything against their client is beautifully delineated in this chapter. Harry Henderson is appointed an editor of the Great Democracy published by Messers Goldstick and Co. He writes some editorials for which he is complimented by Mr. Goldstick:

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"That's the kind of thing wanted he said;" a firm moral tone, and steady religious convictions; that pleases the old standard."

(M W I, 144)

Emboldened by this, Harry proceeds to attack a specific abuse in New York administration involving Messrs. Bunkam and Chaffem. Messrs. Goldstick and Co. have intimate connection with Messrs. Bunkam and Chaffem. When Harry hands over the write up to Mrs. Goldstick, he responds,

"We must be little careful, my young friend", said Mr. Goldstick, "how we handle specific matters of this kind; they have extended relations that a young man cannot be expected to appreciate, and I would advise you to confine yourself to abstract moral principles; keep up a high moral standard, sir, if you could expose the corruptions in England it would have
an admirable moral effect, and our general line policy now is down on England."

(M W I , 145)

A few days later Harry's damaging review on a hot, sensous novel published by Sillary and Peacham appears in the Great Democracy. After a day or two Mr. Goldstick comes in the office in a disturbed state of mind, with an open letter in his hand. He flares up:

"What's all this?" he said; "here's Sillery and Peacham, blowing us up for being down on their books, and threatening to take away their advertising from us."

It was a corrupt book, Mr. Goldstick", said I, with firmness,"and the very object you stated to me was to establish a just moral criticism."

"Go to thunder! Young man, "said Mr. Goldstick, in a tone I had never heard before. "Have you no discrimination?"
are you going to blow us up? The
Great Democracy, sir, is a great
moral engine, and the advertising
of this publishing house gives
thousands of dollars yearly towards
its support. It's an understood
thing that Sillery and Peacham's
books are to be treated handsomely"

(M W I, 146)

The Technique Used in the Novel

Despite Mrs. Stowe's disclaimer in the Preface to
My Wife and I that none of the characters in the novel is
designed as a portrait of a really existing individual, it
has been suggested that at least two of the characters are
designed as portraits of really existing individuals.

Some people see in the character of Mrs. Stella
Cerulean, Mrs. Stowe's own sister, Mrs. Hooker, who had
joined the woman suffrage movement and who was its vocal
exponent. However, Mrs. Stowe and most of the friends of
her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, disapproved of this movement.
The delineation of the character of Miss Audacia Dangereyes, enters into the office of Harry Henderson and Jim Fellows, and successfully enforces subscription to her paper The Emancipated Woman, points out to none other than Victoria Claflin Woodhul. With aid of her sister and Stephen P. Andrews she inaugurated Woodhul and Clafling Weekly (1870-76), a journal advocating socialism, woman suffrage, free love, birth control and vegetarianism. It published the scandalous Beecher - Tilton story that resulted in the trial of Henry Ward Beecher. Against this backdrop one may look at the character of Miss Audacia Dangereyes. The description of her interview with the sprightly Jim Fellow is richly humourous and highly entertaining.

In My Wife and I there are letters exchanged among the characters, and therefore the novel may be viewed as an epistolary novel.

The narrative of the novel is the first person narrative, the narrator is Harry Henderson. The level of the narrative is diegetic. The narrator addresses the narratee usually as "reader" and not as "you", and as such the narrative is "distanced narrative" as there is not very intimate relationship between the narrator and narratee.
To conclude, *My Wife and I* is not a great work; though it is full of homely wisdom. In this book, the weightier problems of life are left and the writer drops into delightful discussions upon every day possibilities for good and pleasantness.

"The burning inspiration of the earlier works of the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "glows tenderly now in the evening shadow, her stern opposition to great wrong is softened and sweetened into less intensity in these essays upon social life. So, the pungent sharpness of the green age of the best fruit, is by time, matured and softened, taking an new and delicious favours which are the fitting charm of waning vigor."
References


4. *We and Our Neighbors*

*We and Our Neighbours*; or, the Records of an Unfashionable street, is another minor work of Mrs. Stowe. It is actually a disappointing sequel to *My wife and I*. By writing this Mrs. Stowe fulfills, four years after writing *My wife and I*, her promise to continue the story of Harry and Eva Henderson's married life.

The neighbors are quite interesting but Mrs. Stowe deals them only when remembers the title of the novel. In this novel Mrs. Stowe's primary concern is that profound concern for the Roman Catholic Church which was kindled in her thirteen years before in *Agnes of Sorrento*. Mrs. Stowe now examines the issue as an Episcopalian. The novel has autobiographical overtones. In this novel Eva Van Arsdel, deserting the conventional Episcopal Church of her parents, joins the chapel of Mr. St. John, a New England Puritan, who, later, becomes an Anglican through reaction. After reading Francis de Sales, Thomas A. Kempis and other Roman Catholic writers, Mr. St. John gets inclined towards Roman Catholic Church. On reading St. John's "ritualistic books", Eva and Harry are charmed. Though Eva agrees with Harry, who is still Puritan, that they join Roman Catholic Church,
but nothing comes out of all this because St. John marries Eva's sister Angelique, thereby removing the possibility of his becoming a catholic priest. Now Eva finds an outlet for her religious devotion in the practice of radical Christianity, symbolized by her sensitive and generous treatment of her cook's daughter, Magie, who has been a prostitute and is almost on the verge of reverting to that ignominious profession, when her mother and her Uncle Mike, unlike Eva, keep her sin before her eyes.

In *We and Our Neighbors* the woman question reappears; especially the problem of prostitution. There is much discussion of brothels. Marriage is the theme of the novel.