ALCOTT LOUISA MAY

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT : HER LIFE, LETTERS, AND JOURNALS

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT is universally recognized as the greatest and most popular story-teller for children in her generation. She has known the way to the hearts of young people, not only in her own class, or even country, but in every condition of life, and in many foreign lands. Plato says, "Beware of those who teach fables to children;" and it is impossible to estimate the influence which the popular writer of fiction has over the audience he wins to listen to his tales. The preacher, the teacher, the didactic writer find their audience in hours of strength, with critical faculties all alive, to question their propositions and refute their arguments. The novelist comes to us in the intervals of recreation and relaxation, and by his seductive powers of imagination and sentiment takes possession of the fancy and the heart before judgment and reason are aroused to defend the citadel. It well becomes us, then, who would guard young minds from subtle temptations, to study the character of those works which charm and delight the children.

Of no author can it be more truly said than of Louisa Alcott that her works are a revelation of herself. She rarely sought for the material of her stories in old chronicles, or foreign adventures. Her capital was her own life and experiences and those of others directly about her; and her own well-remembered girlish frolics and fancies were sure to find responsive enjoyment in the minds of other girls.

It is therefore impossible to understand Miss Alcott's works fully without a knowledge of her own life and experiences. By inheritance and education she had rich and peculiar gifts; and her life was one of rare advantages, as well as of trying difficulties. Herself of the most true and frank nature, she has given us the opportunity of knowing her without disguise; and it is thus that I shall try to portray her, showing what influences acted upon her through life, and how faithfully and fully she performed whatever duties circumstances laid upon her. Fortunately I can let her speak mainly for herself.

Miss Alcott revised her journals at different times during her later life, striking out what was too personal for other eyes than her own, and destroying a great deal which would doubtless have proved very interesting.

The small number of letters given will undoubtedly be a disappointment. Miss Alcott wished to have most of her letters destroyed, and her sister respected her wishes. She was not a voluminous correspondent; she did not encourage many intimacies, and she seldom wrote letters except to her family, unless in reference to some purpose she had strongly at heart. Writing was her constant occupation, and she was not tempted to indulge in it as a recreation. Her letters are brief, and strictly to the point, but always characteristic in feeling and expression; and, even at the risk of the repetition of matter contained in her journals or her books, I shall give copious extracts from such as have come into my hands.

E. D. C.

Jamaica Plain, Mass., 1889.

CHAPTER I
GENEALOGY AND PARENTAGE

TO LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

BY HER FATHER

When I remember with what buoyant heart,
Midst war's alarms and woes of civil strife,
In youthful eagerness thou didst depart,
At peril of thy safety, peace, and life,
To nurse the wounded soldier, swathe the dead,–
How piercèd soon by fever's poisoned dart,
And brought unconscious home, with wildered head,
Thou ever since 'mid langour and dull pain,
To conquer fortune, cherish kindred dear,
Hast with grave studies vexed a sprightly brain,
In myriad households kindled love and cheer,
Ne'er from thyself by Fame's loud trump beguiled,
Sounding in this and the farther hemisphere,–
I press thee to my heart as Duty's faithful child.

LOUISA ALCOTT was the second child of Amos Bronson and Abba May Alcott. This name was spelled Alcocke in English history. About 1616 a coat-of-arms was granted to Thomas Alcocke of Silbertoft, in the county of Leicester. The device represents three cocks, emblematic of watchfulness; and the motto is *Semper Vigilans*.

The first of the name appearing in English history is John Alcocke of Beverley, Yorkshire, of whom Fuller gives an account in his Worthies of England.

Thomas and George Alcocke were the first of the name among the settlers in New England. The name is frequently found in the records of Dorchester and Roxbury, and has passed through successive changes to its present form.

The name of Bronson came from Mr. Alcott's maternal grandfather, the sturdy Capt. Amos Bronson of Plymouth, Conn. "His ancestors on both sides had been substantial people of respectable position in England, and were connected with the founders and governors of the chief New England colonies. At the time of Mr. Alcott's birth they had become simple farmers, reaping a scanty living from their small farms in Connecticut."

Amos Bronson Alcott, the father of Louisa, was born Nov. 29, 1799, at the foot of Spindle Hill, in the region called New Connecticut. He has himself given in simple verse the story of his quaint rustic life in his boyhood, and Louisa has reproduced it in her story of "Eli's Education" (in the Spinning-Wheel Stories), which gives a very true account of his youthful life and adventures. He derived his refined, gentle nature from his mother, who had faith in her son, and who lived to see him the accomplished scholar he had vowed to become in his boyhood. Although brought up in these rustic surroundings, his manners were always those of a true gentleman. The name of the

little mountain town afterward became Wolcott, and Louisa records in her journal a pilgrimage made thither in after years.[1]

Louisa Alcott's mother was a daughter of Col. Joseph May of Boston. This family is so well known that it is hardly necessary to repeat its genealogy here.[2] She was a sister of Samuel J. May, for many years pastor of the Unitarian church at Syracuse, who was so tenderly beloved by men of all religious persuasions in his home, and so widely known and respected for his courage and zeal in the Antislavery cause, as well as for his many philanthropic labors.

Mrs. Alcott's mother was Dorothy Sewall, a descendant of that family already distinguished in the annals of the Massachusetts colony, and which has lost nothing of its reputation for ability and virtue in its latest representatives.[3]

Mrs. Alcott inherited in large measure the traits which distinguished her family. She was a woman of large stature, fine physique, and overflowing life. Her temper was as quick and warm as her affections, but she was full of broad unselfish generosity. Her untiring energies were constantly employed, not only for the benefit of her family, but for all around her. She had a fine mind, and if she did not have large opportunities for scholastic instruction, she always enjoyed the benefit of intellectual society and converse with noble minds. She loved expression in writing, and her letters are full of wit and humor, keen criticism, and noble moral sentiments. Marriage with an idealist, who had no means of support, brought her many trials and privations. She bore them heroically, never wavering in affection for her husband or in devotion to her children. If the quick, impatient temper sometimes relieved itself in hasty speech, the action was always large and unselfish.

It will be apparent from Louisa's life that she inherited the traits of both her parents, and that the uncommon powers of mind and heart that distinguished her were not accidental, but the accumulated result of the lives of generations of strong and noble men and women.

She was well born.

Mr. Alcott to Colonel May

Germantown, Nov. 29, 1832.

> Dear Sir,–It is with great pleasure that I announce to you the *birth of a second daughter*. She was born at half-past 12 this morning, on my birthday (33), and is a very fine healthful child, much more so than Anna was at birth,–has a fine foundation for health and energy of character. Abba is very comfortable, and will soon be restored to the discharge of those domestic and maternal duties in which she takes so much delight, and in the performance of which she furnishes so excellent a model for imitation. Those only who have seen her in those relations, much as there is in her general character to admire and esteem, can form a true estimate of her personal worth and uncommon devotion of heart. She was formed for domestic sentiment rather than the gaze and heartlessness of what is falsely called "society." Abba inclines to call the babe *Louisa May*,–a name to her full of every association connected with amiable benevolence and exalted worth. I hope its *present possessor* may rise to equal attainment, and deserve a place in the estimation of society.

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[1] For further particulars of the Alcott genealogy, see "New Connecticut," a poem by A. B. Alcott, published in 1887. I am also indebted to Mr. F. B. Sanborn's valuable paper read at the memorial service at Concord in 1888.

[2] For particulars of the genealogy of the May families, see "A Genealogy of the Descendants of John May," who came from England to Roxbury in America, 1640.

[3] For the Sewall family, see "Drake's History of Boston," or fuller accounts in the Sewall Papers published by the Massachusetts Historical Society.

With Abba's and Anna's and Louisa's regards, allow me to assure you of the sincerity with which I am
Yours,
A. Bronson
Alcott.

The children who lived to maturity were–

Anna Bronson Alcott,

Louisa May Alcott,

Elizabeth Sewall Alcott,

Abba May Alcott

CHAPTER II
CHILDHOOD

TO THE FIRST ROBIN.[4]

Welcome, welcome, little stranger,
Fear no harm, and fear no danger;
We are glad to see you here,
For you sing "Sweet Spring is near."

Now the white snow melts away;
Now the flowers blossom gay:
Come dear bird and build your nest,
For we love our robin best.

Louisa May Alcott.

Concord.

MR. ALCOTT had removed to Germantown, Penn, to take charge of a school, and here Louisa was born, Nov. 29, 1832. She was the second daughter, and was welcomed with the same pride and affection as her elder sister had been. We have this pleasant little glimpse of her when she was hardly a month old, from the pen of one of her mother's friends. Even at that extremely early age love saw the signs of more than usual intelligence, and friends as well as fond parents looked forward to a promising career.

Extract from a Letter by Miss Donaldson

Germantown, Penn., Dec. 16, 1832.

I have a dear little pet in Mrs. Alcott's little Louisa. It is the prettiest, best little thing in the world. You will wonder to hear me call anything so young pretty, but it is really so in an uncommon degree; it has a fair complexion, dark bright eyes, long dark hair, a high forehead, and altogether a countenance of more than usual intelligence.

The mother is such a delightful woman that it is a cordial to my heart whenever I go to see her. I went in to see her for a few moments the evening we received your letter, and I think I never saw her in better spirits; and truly, if goodness and integrity can insure felicity, she deserves to be happy.

The earliest anecdote remembered of Louisa is this: When the family went from Philadelphia to Boston by steamer, the two little girls were nicely dressed in clean nankeen frocks for the voyage; but they had not been long on board before the lively Louisa was missing, and after a long search she was brought up from the engine-room, where her eager curiosity had carried her, and where she was having a beautiful time, with "plenty of dirt."

[4] Written at eight years of age.

The family removed to Boston in 1834, and Mr. Alcott opened his famous school in Masonic Temple. Louisa was too young to attend the school except as an occasional visitor; but she found plenty of interest and amusement for herself in playing on the Common, making friends with every child she met, and on one occasion falling into the Frog Pond. She has given a very lively picture of this period of her life in "Poppy's Pranks," that vivacious young person being a picture of herself, not at all exaggerated.

The family lived successively in Front Street, Cottage Place, and Beach Street during the six succeeding years in Boston. They occasionally passed some weeks at Scituate during the summer, which the children heartily enjoyed.

Mrs. Hawthorne gives a little anecdote which shows how the child's heart was blossoming in this family sunshine: "One morning in Front Street, at the breakfast table, Louisa suddenly broke silence, with a sunny smile saying, 'I love everybody in *dis* whole world.'"

Two children were born during this residence in Boston. Elizabeth was named for Mr. Alcott's assistant in his school,–Miss E. P. Peabody, since so widely known and beloved by all friends of education. A boy was born only to die. The little body was laid reverently away in the lot of Colonel May in the old burial-ground on the Common, and the children were taught to speak with tenderness of their "baby brother."

When Louisa was about seven years old she made a visit to friends in Providence. Miss C. writes of her: "She is a beautiful little girl to look upon, and I love her affectionate manners. I think she is more like her mother than either of the others." As is usually the case, Louisa's journal, which she began at this early age, speaks more fully of her struggles and difficulties than of the bright, sunny moods which made her attractive. A little letter carefully printed and sent home during this visit is preserved. In it she says she is not happy; and she did have one trying experience there, to which she refers in "My Boys." Seeing some poor children who she thought were hungry, she took food from the house without asking permission, and carried it to them, and was afterward very much astonished and grieved at being reprimanded instead of praised for the deed. Miss C. says: "She has had several spells of feeling sad; but a walk or a talk soon dispels all gloom. She was half moody when she wrote her letter; but now she is gay as a lark. She loves to play out of doors, and sometimes she is not inclined to stay in when it is unpleasant." In her sketches of "My Boys" she describes two of her companions here, not forgetting the kindness of the one and the mischievousness of the other.

Although the family were quite comfortable during the time of Mr. Alcott's teaching in Boston, yet the children wearied of their extremely simple diet of plain boiled rice without sugar, and graham meal without butter or molasses. An old friend who could not eat the bountiful rations provided for her at the United States Hotel, used to save her piece of pie or cake for the Alcott children. Louisa often took it home to the others in a bandbox which she brought for the purpose.

This friend was absent in Europe many years, and returned to find the name of Louisa Alcott famous. When she met the authoress on the street she was eagerly greeted. "Why, I did not think you would remember me!" said the old lady. "Do you think I shall ever forget that bandbox?" was the instant reply.

In 1840, Mr. Alcott's school having proved unsuccessful, the family removed to Concord, Mass., and took a cottage which is described in "Little Women" as "Meg's first home," although Anna never lived there after her marriage. It was a pleasant house, with a garden full of trees, and best of all a large barn, in which the children could have free range and act out all the plays with which their little heads were teeming. Of course it was a delightful change from the city for the children, and here they passed two very happy years, for they were too young to understand the cares which pressed upon the hearts of their parents. Life was full of interest. One cold morning they found in the garden a little half-starved bird; and having warmed and fed it, Louisa was inspired to write a pretty poem to "The Robin." The fond mother was so delighted that she said to her, "You will grow up a

Shakspeare!" From the lessons of her father she had formed the habit of writing freely, but this is the first recorded instance of her attempting to express her feelings in verse.

From the influences of such parentage as I have described, the family life in which Louisa was brought up became wholly unique.

If the father had to give up his cherished projects of a school modelled after his ideas, he could at least conduct the education of his own children; and he did so with the most tender devotion. Even when they were infants he took a great deal of personal care of them, and loved to put the little ones to bed and use the "children's hour" to instil into their hearts lessons of love and wisdom. He was full of fun too, and would lie on the floor and frolic with them, making compasses of his long legs with which to draw letters and diagrams. No shade of fear mingled with the children's reverent recognition of his superior spiritual life. So their hearts lay open to him, and he was able to help them in their troubles.

He taught them much by writing; and we have many specimens of their lists of words to be spelled, written, and understood. The lessons at Scituate were often in the garden, and their father always drew their attention to Nature and her beautiful forms and meanings. Little symbolical pictures helped to illustrate his lessons, and he sometimes made drawings himself. Here is an example of lessons. A quaint little picture represents one child playing on a harp, another drawing an arrow. It is inscribed–

FOR LOUISA

1840

Two passions strong divide our life,–
Meek, gentle love, or boisterous strife.

Below the child playing the harp is–

Love, Music,

Concord

Below the shooter is–

Anger, Arrow,

Discord

Another leaflet is–

FOR LOUISA

1840

Louisa loves–

What?

(Softly.)

Fun

Have some then,

Father

says

Christmas Eve, December, 1840

Concordia

FOR ANNA

1840

Beauty or Duty,–

which

loves Anna best?

always required to keep their journals regularly, and although these were open to the inspection of father and mother, they were very frank, and really recorded their struggles and desires. The mother had the habit of writing little notes to the children when she wished to call their attention to any fault or peculiarity. Louisa preserved many of them, headed,–

[*Extracts* from letters from Mother, received during these early years. I preserve them to show the ever tender, watchful help she gave to the child who caused her the most anxiety, yet seemed to be the nearest to her heart till the end.– L. M. A.]

No. 1.–My Dear Little Girl,–Will you accept this doll from me on your seventh birthday? She will be a quiet playmate for my active Louisa for seven years more. Be a kind mamma, and love her for my sake.
Your Mother.

Beach Street, Boston, 1839.

From her Mother

Cottage in Concord.

Dear Daughter,–Your tenth birthday has arrived. May it be a happy one, and on each returning birthday may you feel new strength and resolution to be gentle with sisters, obedient to parents, loving to every one, and happy in yourself.

I give you the pencil-case I promised, for I have observed that you are fond of writing, and wish to encourage the habit.

Go on trying, dear, and each day it will be easier to be and do good. You must help yourself, for the cause of your little troubles is in yourself; and patience and courage age only will make you what mother prays to see you,–her good and happy girl.
Concord, 1843.

Dear Louy,–I enclose a picture for you which I always liked very much, for I imagined that you might be just such an industrious daughter and I such a feeble but loving mother, looking to your labor for my daily bread.

Keep it for my sake and your own, for you and I always liked to be grouped together.

Mother.

The lines I wrote under the picture in my journal:–

TO MOTHER

I hope that soon, dear mother,
You and I may be
In the quiet room my fancy
Has so often made for thee,–

The pleasant, sunny chamber,

The cushioned easy-chair,
The book laid for your reading,
The vase of flowers fair;

The desk beside the window
Where the sun shines warm and bright:
And there in ease and quiet
The promised book you write;

While I sit close beside you,
Content at last to see
That you can rest, dear mother,
And I can cherish thee.

[The dream came true, and for the last ten years of her life Marmee sat in peace, with every wish granted, even to the "grouping together;" for she died in my arms.–L. M. A.]

A passage in Louisa's story of "Little Men" (p. 268) describes one of their childish plays. They "made believe" their minds were little round rooms in which the soul lived, and in which good or bad things were preserved. This play was never forgotten in after life, and the girls often looked into their little rooms for comfort or guidance in trial or temptation.

Louisa was very fond of animals, as is abundantly shown in her stories. She never had the happiness of owning many pets, except cats, and these were the delight of the household. The children played all manner of plays with them, tended them in sickness, buried them with funeral honors, and Louisa has embalmed their memory in the story of "The Seven Black Cats" in "Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag."

Dolls were an equal source of pleasure. The imaginative children hardly recognized them as manufactured articles, but endowed them with life and feeling. Louisa put her dolls through every experience of life; they were fed, educated, punished, rewarded, nursed, and even hung and buried, and then resurrected in her stories. The account of the "Sacrifice of the Dolls" to the exacting Kitty Mouse in "Little Men" delights all children by its mixture of pathetic earnestness and playfulness. It is taken from the experience of another family of children.

Miss Alcott twice says that she never went to any school but her father's; but there were some slight exceptions to this rule. She went a few months to a little district school in Still River Village. This was a genuine old-fashioned school, from which she took the hint of the frolics in "Under the Lilacs." Miss Ford also kept a little school in Mr. Emerson's barn, to which the children went; and Mary Russell had a school, which Louisa attended when eight or nine years old. These circumstances, however, had small influence in her education.

During this period of life in Concord, which was so happy to the children, the mother's heart was full of anxious care. She however entered into all their childish pleasures, and her watchful care over their moral growth is shown by her letters and by Louisa's journals.

The youngest child, Abba May, who was born in the cottage, became the pet of the family and the special care of the oldest sister, Anna.

Louisa's childish journal gives us many hints of this happy life. She revised these journals in later years, adding significant comments which are full of interest. She designed them to have place in her autobiography, which she hoped to write.

From three different sources–her journals, an article written for publication, and a manuscript prepared for a friend,–we give her own account of these childish years. She has not followed the order of events strictly, and it has not been possible, therefore, to avoid all repetition; but they give

the spirit of her early life, and clearly show the kind of education she received from her father and from the circumstances around her.

Sketch of Childhood, by herself

One of my earliest recollections is of playing with books in my father's study,– building houses and bridges of the big dictionaries and diaries, looking at pictures, pretending to read, and scribbling on blank pages whenever pen or pencil could be found. Many of these first attempts at authorship still remain in Bacon's Essays, Plutarch's Lives, and other works of a serious nature, my infant taste being for solid literature, apparently.

On one occasion we built a high tower round baby Lizzie as she sat playing with her toys on the floor, and being attracted by something out-of-doors, forgot our little prisoner. A search was made, and patient baby at last discovered curled up and fast asleep in her dungeon cell, out of which she emerged so rosy and smiling after her nap that we were forgiven for our carelessness.

Another memory is of my fourth birthday, which was celebrated at my father's school-room in Masonic Temple. All the children were there. I wore a crown of flowers, and stood upon a table to dispense cakes to each child as the procession marched past. By some oversight the cakes fell short, and I saw that if I gave away the last one I should have none. As I was queen of the revel, I felt that I ought to have it, and held on to it tightly till my mother said,–

"It is always better to give away than to keep the nice things; so I know my Louy will not let the little friend go without."

The little friend received the dear plummy cake, and I a kiss and my first lesson in the sweetness of self-denial,–a lesson which my dear mother beautifully illustrated all her long and noble life.

Running away was one of the delights of my early days; and I still enjoy sudden flights out of the nest to look about this very interesting world, and then go back to report.

On one of these occasions I passed a varied day with some Irish children, who hospitably shared their cold potatoes, salt-fish, and crusts with me as we revelled in the ash-heaps which then adorned the waste lands where the Albany Depot now stands. A trip to the Common cheered the afternoon, but as dusk set in and my friends deserted me, I felt that home was a nice place after all, and tried to find it. I dimly remember watching a lamp-lighter as I sat to rest on some doorsteps in Bedford Street, where a big dog welcomed me so kindly that I fell asleep with my head pillowed on his curly back, and was found there by the town-crier, whom my distracted parents had sent in search of me. His bell and proclamation of the loss of "a little girl, six years old, in a pink frock, white hat, and new green shoes," woke me up, and a small voice answered out of the darkness,–

"Why, dat's me!"

Being with difficulty torn from my four-footed friend, I was carried to the crier's house, and there feasted sumptuously on bread-and-molasses in a tin plate with the alphabet round it. But my fun ended next day when I was tied to the arm of the sofa to repent at leisure.

I became an Abolitionist at a very early age, but have never been able to decide whether I was made so by seeing the portrait of George Thompson hidden under a

bed in our house during the Garrison riot, and going to comfort "the poor man who had been good to the slaves," or because I was saved from drowning in the Frog Pond some years later by a colored boy. However that may be, the conversion was genuine; and my greatest pride is in the fact that I lived to know the brave men and women who did so much for the cause, and that I had a very small share in the war which put an end to a great wrong.

Another recollection of her childhood was of a "contraband" hidden in the oven, which must have made her sense of the horrors of slavery very keen.

I never went to school except to my father or such governesses as from time to time came into the family. Schools then were not what they are now; so we had lessons each morning in the study. And very happy hours they were to us, for my father taught in the wise way which unfolds what lies in the child's nature, as a flower blooms, rather than crammed it, like a Strasburg goose, with more than it could digest. I never liked arithmetic nor grammar, and dodged those branches on all occasions; but reading, writing, composition, history, and geography I enjoyed, as well as the stories read to us with a skill peculiarly his own.

"Pilgrim's Progress," Krummacher's "Parables," Miss Edgeworth, and the best of the dear old fairy tales made the reading hour the pleasantest of our day. On Sundays we had a simple service of Bible stories, hymns, and conversation about the state of our little consciences and the conduct of our childish lives which never will be forgotten.

Walks each morning round the Common while in the city, and long tramps over hill and dale when our home was in the country, were a part of our education, as well as every sort of housework,–for which I have always been very grateful, since such knowledge makes one independent in these days of domestic tribulation with the "help" who are too often only hindrances.

Needle-work began early, and at ten my skilful sister made a linen shirt beautifully; while at twelve I set up as a doll's dressmaker, with my sign out and wonderful models in my window. All the children employed me, and my turbans were the rage at one time, to the great dismay of the neighbors' hens, who were hotly hunted down, that I might tweak out their downiest feathers to adorn the dolls' headgear.

Active exercise was my delight, from the time when a child of six I drove my hoop round the Common without stopping, to the days when I did my twenty miles in five hours and went to a party in the evening.

I always thought I must have been a deer or a horse in some former state, because it was such a joy to run. No boy could be my friend till I had beaten him in a race, and no girl if she refused to climb trees, leap fences, and be a tomboy.

My wise mother, anxious to give me a strong body to support a lively brain, turned me loose in the country and let me run wild, learning of Nature what no books can teach, and being led,–as those who truly love her seldom fail to be,–

"Through Nature up to Nature's God."

I remember running over the hills just at dawn one summer morning, and pausing to rest in the silent woods, saw, through an arch of trees, the sun rise over river, hill, and wide green meadows as I never saw it before.

Something born of the lovely hour, a happy mood, and the unfolding aspirations of a child's soul seemed to bring me very near to God; and in the hush of that morning hour I always felt that I "got religion," as the phrase goes. A new and vital sense of His presence, tender and sustaining as a father's arms, came to me then, never to change through forty years of life's vicissitudes, but to grow stronger for the sharp discipline of poverty and pain, sorrow and success.

Those Concord days were the happiest of my life, for we had charming playmates in the little Emersons, Channings, Hawthornes, and Goodwins, with the illustrious parents and their friends to enjoy our pranks and share our excursions.

Plays in the barn were a favorite amusement, and we dramatized the fairy tales in great style. Our giant came tumbling off a loft when Jack cut down the squash-vine running up a ladder to represent the immortal bean. Cinderella rolled away in a vast pumpkin, and a long black pudding was lowered by invisible hands to fasten itself on the nose of the woman who wasted her three wishes.

Pilgrims journeyed over the hill with scrip and staff and cockle-shells in their hats; fairies held their pretty revels among the whispering birches, and strawberry parties in the rustic arbor were honored by poets and philosophers, who fed us on their wit and wisdom while the little maids served more mortal food.

CHAPTER III
FRUITLANDS

MY KINGDOM

A little kingdom I possess,
Where thoughts and feelings dwell,
And very hard I find the task
Of governing it well;
For passion tempts and troubles me,
A wayward will misleads,
And selfishness its shadow casts
On all my words and deeds.

How can I learn to rule myself,
To be the child I should,
Honest and brave, nor ever tire
Of trying to be good?
How can I keep a sunny soul
To shine along life's way?
How can I tune my little heart
To sweetly sing all day?

Dear Father, help me with the love
That casteth out my fear,
Teach me to lean on thee, and feel
That thou art very near,
That no temptation is unseen,
No childish grief too small,
Since thou, with patience infinite,
Doth soothe and comfort all.

I do not ask for any crown
But that which all may win,
Nor seek to conquer any world
Except the one within.
Be thou my guide until I find,
Led by a tender hand,
Thy happy kingdom in *myself*,
And dare to take command.

IN 1842 Mr. Alcott went to England. His mind was very much exercised at this time with plans for organized social life on a higher plane, and he found like-minded friends in England who gave him sympathy and encouragement. He had for some years advocated a strictly vegetarian diet, to which his family consented from deference to him; consequently the children never tasted meat

till they came to maturity. On his return from England he was accompanied by friends who were ready to unite with him in the practical realization of their social theories. Mr. Lane resided for some months in the Alcott family at Concord, and gave instruction to the children. Although he does not appear to have won their hearts, they yet reaped much intellectual advantage from his lessons, as he was an accomplished scholar.

In 1843 this company of enthusiasts secured a farm in the town of Harvard, near Concord, which with trusting hope they named Fruitlands. Mrs. Alcott did not share in all the peculiar ideas of her husband and his friends, but she was so utterly devoted to him that she was ready to help him in carrying out his plans, however little they commended themselves to her better judgment.

She alludes very briefly to the experiment in her diary, for the experience was too bitter to dwell upon. She could not relieve her feelings by bringing out the comic side, as her daughter did. Louisa's account of this colony, as given in her story called "Transcendental Wild Oats," is very close to the facts; and the mingling of pathos and humor, the reverence and ridicule with which she alternately treats the personages and the notions of those engaged in the scheme, make a rich and delightful tale. It was written many years later, and gives the picture as she looked back upon it, the absurdities coming out in strong relief, while she sees also the grand, misty outlines of the high thoughts so poorly realized. This story was published in the "Independent," Dec. 8, 1873, and may now be found in her collected works ("Silver Pitchers," p. 79).

Fortunately we have also her journal written at the time, which shows what education the experience of this strange life brought to the child of ten or eleven years old.

The following extract from Mr. Emerson proves that this plan of life looked fair and pleasing to his eye, although he was never tempted to join in it. He was evidently not unconscious of the inadequacy of the means adopted to the end proposed, but he rejoiced in any endeavor after high ideal life.

July, 8, 1843.

Journal.– The sun and the evening sky do not look calmer than Alcott and his family at Fruitlands. They seemed to have arrived at the fact,–to have got rid of the show, and so to be serene. Their manners and behavior in the house and in the field were those of superior men,–of men at rest. What had they to conceal? What had they to exhibit? And it seemed so high an attainment that I thought–as often before, so now more, because they had a fit home, or the picture was fitly framed–that these men ought to be maintained in their place by the country for its culture.

Young men and young maidens, old men and women, should visit them and be inspired. I think there is as much merit in beautiful manners as in hard work. I will not prejudge them successful. They look well in July; we will see them in December. I know they are better for themselves than as partners. One can easily see that they have yet to settle several things. Their saying that things are clear, and they sane, does not make them so. If they will in very deed be lovers, and not selfish; if they will serve the town of Harvard, and make their neighbors feel them as benefactors wherever they touch them,–they are as safe as the sun.[5]

[5] Emerson in Concord. By Edward Waldo Emerson.

Early Diary kept at Fruitlands, 1843

Ten Years Old

September 1st.– I rose at five and had my bath. I love cold water! Then we had our singing-lesson with Mr. Lane. After breakfast I washed dishes, and ran on the hill till nine, and had some thoughts,–it was so beautiful up there. Did my lessons,–wrote and spelt and did sums; and Mr. Lane read a story, "The Judicious Father": How a rich girl told a poor girl not to look over the fence at the flowers, and was cross to her because she was unhappy. The father heard her do it, and made the girls change clothes. The poor one was glad to do it, and he told her to keep them. But the rich one was very sad; for she had to wear the old ones a week, and after that she was good to shabby girls. I liked it very much, and I shall be kind to poor people.

Father asked us what was God's noblest work. Anna said *men*, but I said *babies*. Men are often bad; babies never are. We had a long talk, and I felt better after it, and *cleared up*.

We had bread and fruit for dinner. I read and walked and played till supper-time. We sung in the evening. As I went to bed the moon came up very brightly and looked at me. I felt sad because I have been cross to-day, and did not mind Mother. I cried, and then I felt better, and said that piece from Mrs. Sigourney, "I must not tease my mother." I get to sleep saying poetry,–I know a great deal.

Thursday, 14th.– Mr. Parker Pillsbury came, and we talked about the poor slaves. I had a music lesson with Miss F. I hate her, she is so fussy. I ran in the wind and played be a horse, and had a lovely time in the woods with Anna and Lizzie. We were fairies, and made gowns and paper wings. I "flied" the highest of all. In the evening they talked about travelling. I thought about Father going to England, and said this piece of poetry I found in Byron's poems:–

> "When I left thy shores, O Naxos,
> Not a tear in sorrow fell;
> Not a sigh or faltered accent
> Told my bosom's struggling swell."

It rained when I went to bed, and made a pretty noise on the roof.

Sunday, 24th.– Father and Mr. Lane have gone to N. H. to preach. It was very lovely… Anna and I got supper. In the eve I read "Vicar of Wakefield." I was cross to-day, and I cried when I went to bed. I made good resolutions, and felt better in my heart. If I only *kept* all I make, I should be the best girl in the world. But I don't, and so am very bad.

[Poor little sinner! *She says the same at fifty.*– L. M. A.]

October 8th.– When I woke up, the first thought I got was, "It's Mother's birthday: I must be very good." I ran and wished her a happy birthday, and gave her my kiss. After breakfast we gave her our presents. I had a moss cross and a piece of poetry for her.

We did not have any school, and played in the woods and got red leaves. In the evening we danced and sung, and I read a story about "Contentment." I wish I was rich, I was good, and we were all a happy family this day.

Thursday, 12th.– After lessons I ironed. We all went to the barn and husked corn. It was good fun. We worked till eight o'clock and had lamps. Mr. Russell came. Mother and Lizzie are going to Boston. I shall be very lonely without dear little Betty, and no one will be as good to me as mother. I read in Plutarch. I made a verse about sunset:–

Softly doth the sun descend
To his couch behind the hill,
Then, oh, then, I love to sit
On mossy banks beside the rill.

Anna thought it was very fine; but I didn't like it very well.

Friday, Nov. 2nd.– Anna and I did the work. In the evening Mr. Lane asked us, "What is man?" These were our answers: A human being; an animal with a mind; a creature; a body; a soul and a mind. After a long talk we went to bed very tired.

[No wonder, after doing the work and worrying their little wits with such lessons.–L. M. A.]

A sample of the vegetarian wafers we used at Fruitlands:–

Vegetable diet and sweet repose. Animal food and nightmare.	Pluck your body from the orchard; do not snatch it from the shamble.		Without flesh diet there could be no blood-shedding war.
	Apollo eats no flesh and has no beard; his voice is melody itself.	Snuff is no less snuff though accepted from a gold box.	

Tuesday, 20th.– I rose at five, and after breakfast washed the dishes, and then helped mother work. Miss F. is gone, and Anna in Boston with Cousin Louisa. I took care of Abby (May) in the afternoon. In the evening I made some pretty things for my dolly. Father and Mr. L. had a talk, and father asked us if *we* saw any reason for us to separate. Mother wanted to, she is so tired. I like it, but not the school part or Mr. L.

Eleven years old. *Thursday, 29th.*– It was Father's and my birthday. We had some nice presents. We played in the snow before school. Mother read "Rosamond" when we sewed. Father asked us in the eve what fault troubled us most. I said my bad temper.

I told mother I liked to have her write in my book. She said she would put in more, and she wrote this to help me:–

Dear Louy,–Your handwriting improves very fast. Take pains and do not be in a hurry. I like to have you make observations about our conversations and your own thoughts. It helps you to express them and to understand your little self. Remember, dear girl, that a diary should be an epitome of your life. May it be a record of pure thought and good actions, then you will indeed be the precious child of your loving mother.

December 10th.– I did my lessons, and walked in the afternoon. Father read to us in dear Pilgrim's Progress. Mr. L. was in Boston, and we were glad. In the eve father and mother and Anna and I had a long talk. I was very unhappy, and we all cried. Anna and I cried in bed, and I prayed God to keep us all together.

[Little Lu began early to feel the family cares and peculiar trials.–L. M. A.]

I liked the verses Christian sung and will put them in:–

"This place has been our second stage,
Here we have heard and seen
Those good things that from age to age
To others hid have been.

"They move me for to watch and pray,
To strive to be sincere,
To take my cross up day by day,
And serve the Lord with fear."

[The appropriateness of the song at this time was much greater than the child saw. She never forgot this experience, and her little cross began to grow heavier from this hour.–L. M. A.]

Concord, *Sunday*.–We all went into the woods to get moss for the *arbor* Father is making for *Mr. Emerson*. I miss Anna so much. I made two verses for her:–

TO ANNA

Sister, dear, when you are lonely,
Longing for your distant home,
And the images of loved ones
Warmly to your heart shall come,
Then, mid tender thoughts and fancies,
Let one fond voice say to thee,
"Ever when your heart is heavy,
Anna, dear, then think of me."

Think how we two have together
Journeyed onward day by day,
Joys and sorrows ever sharing,
While the swift years roll away.
Then may all the sunny hours
Of our youth rise up to thee,
And when your heart is light and happy,
Anna, dear, then think of me.

[Poetry began to flow about this time in a thin but copious stream.–L. M. A.]

Wednesday.– Read Martin Luther. A long letter from Anna. She sends me a picture of Jenny Lind, the great singer. She must be a happy girl. I should like to be famous as she is. Anna is very happy; and I don't miss her as much as I shall by and by in the winter.

I wrote in my Imagination Book, and enjoyed it very much. Life is pleasanter than it used to be, and I don't care about dying any more. Had a splendid run, and got a box of cones to burn. Sat and heard the pines sing a long time. Read Miss

Bremer's "Home" in the eve. Had good dreams, and woke now and then to think, and watch the moon. I had a pleasant time with my mind, for it was happy.

[Moods began early.–L. M. A.]

January, 1845, Friday.– Did my lessons, and in the p. m. mother read "Kenilworth" to us while we sewed. It is splendid! I got angry and called Anna mean. Father told me to look out the word in the Dic., and it meant "base," "contemptible." I was so ashamed to have called my dear sister that, and I cried over my bad tongue and temper.

We have had a lovely day. All the trees were covered with ice, and it shone like diamonds or fairy palaces. I made a piece of poetry about winter:–

The stormy winter's come at last,
With snow and rain and bitter blast;
Ponds and brooks are frozen o'er,
We cannot sail there any more.

The little birds are flown away
To warmer climes than ours;
They'll come no more till gentle May
Calls them back with flowers.

Oh, then the darling birds will sing
From their neat nests in the trees.
All creatures wake to welcome Spring,
And flowers dance in the breeze.

With patience wait till winter is o'er,
And all lovely things return;
Of every season try the more
Some knowledge or virtue to learn.

[A moral is tacked on even to the early poems.–L. M. A.]

I read "Philothea,"[6] by Mrs. Child. I found this that I liked in it. Plato said:–

"When I hear a note of music I can at once strike its chord. Even as surely is there everlasting harmony between the soul of man and the invisible forms of creation. If there were no innocent hearts there would be no white lilies… I often think flowers are the angel's alphabet whereby they write on hills and fields mysterious and beautiful lessons for us to feel and learn."

[Well done, twelve-year-old! Plato, the father's delight, had a charm for the little girl also.–L. M. A.]

Wednesday.– I am so cross I wish I had never been born.

Thursday.– Read the "Heart of Mid-Lothian," and had a very happy day. Miss Ford gave us a botany lesson in the woods. I am always good there. In the evening Miss Ford told us about the bones in our bodies, and how they get out of order. I must be careful of mine, I climb and jump and run so much.

[6] "Philothea" was the delight of girls. The young Alcotts made a dramatic version of it, which they acted under the trees. Louisa made a magnificent Aspasia, which was a part much to her fancy. Mrs. Child was a very dear friend of Mrs. Alcott, and her daughters knew her well.

I found this note from dear mother in my journal:–

My dearest Louy,–I often peep into your diary, hoping to see some record of more happy days. "Hope, and keep busy," dear daughter, and in all perplexity or trouble come freely to your
Mother.

Dear Mother,–You *shall* see more happy days, and I *will* come to you with my worries, for you are the best woman in the world.
L. M. A.

A Sample of our Lessons

"What virtues do you wish more of?" asks Mr. L.
I answer:–

Patience,	Love,	Silence,
Obedience,	Generosity,	Perseverance,
Industry,	Respect,	Self-denial.

"What vices less of?"

Idleness,	Wilfulness,	Vanity,
Impatience,	Impudence,	Pride,
Selfishness,	Activity,	Love of cats.

Mr. L. L

Socrates. Alcibiades

How can you get what you need? By trying.
How do you try? By resolution and perseverance.
How gain love? By gentleness.
What is gentleness? Kindness, patience, and care for other people's feelings.
Who has it? Father and Anna.
Who means to have it? Louisa, if she can.
[She never got it.–L. M. A.]
Write a sentence about anything. "I hope it will rain; the garden needs it."
What are the elements of *hope*? Expectation, desire, faith.
What are the elements in *wish*? Desire.
What is the difference between faith and hope? "Faith can believe without seeing; hope is not sure, but tries to have faith when it desires."

No. 3

What are the most valuable kinds of self-denial? Appetite, temper.
How is self-denial of temper known? If I control my temper, I am respectful and gentle, and every one sees it.

What is the result of this self-denial? Every one loves me, and I am happy.

Why use self-denial? For the good of myself and others.

How shall we learn this self-denial? By resolving, and then trying *hard.*

What then do you mean to do? To resolve and try.

[Here the record of these lessons ends, and poor little Alcibiades went to work and tried till fifty, but without any very great success, in spite of all the help Socrates and Plato gave her.–L. M. A.]

Tuesday.– More people coming to live with us; I wish we could be together, and no one else. I don't see who is to clothe and feed us all, when we are so poor now. I was very dismal, and then went to walk and made a poem.

DESPONDENCY

Silent and sad,
When all are glad,
And the earth is dressed in flowers;
When the gay birds sing
Till the forests ring,
As they rest in woodland bowers.

Oh, why these tears,
And these idle fears
For what may come to-morrow?
The birds find food
From God so good,
And the flowers know no sorrow.

If He clothes these
And the leafy trees,
Will He not cherish thee?
Why doubt His care;
It is everywhere,
Though the way we may not see.

Then why be sad
When all are glad,
And the world is full of flowers?
With the gay birds sing,
Make life all Spring,
And smile through the darkest hours.

Louisa Alcott grew up so naturally in a healthy religious atmosphere that she breathed and worked in it without analysis or question. She had not suffered from ecclesiastical tyranny or sectarian bigotry, and needed not to expend any time or strength in combating them. She does not appear to have suffered from doubt or questioning, but to have gone on her way fighting all the real evils that were presented to her, trusting in a sure power of right, and confident of victory.

Concord, *Thursday.*– I had an early run in the woods before the dew was off the grass. The moss was like velvet, and as I ran under the arches of yellow and red leaves I sang for joy, my heart was so bright and the world so beautiful. I stopped at the end of the walk and saw the sunshine out over the wide "Virginia meadows."

It seemed like going through a dark life or grave into heaven beyond. A very strange and solemn feeling came over me as I stood there, with no sound but the rustle of the pines, no one near me, and the sun so glorious, as for me alone. It seemed as if I *felt* God as I never did before, and I prayed in my heart that I might keep that happy sense of nearness all my life.

[I have, for I most sincerely think that the little girl "got religion" that day in the wood when dear mother Nature led her to God.–L. M. A., 1885.]

One of Louisa's strongest desires at this time was for a room of her own, where she might have the solitude she craved to dream her dreams and work out her fancies. These sweet little notes and an extract from her journal show how this desire was felt and gratified.

Dearest Mother,–I have tried to be more contented, and I think I have been more so. I have been thinking about my little room, which I suppose I never shall have. I should want to be there about all the time, and I should go there and sing and think.

But I'll be contented
With what I have got;
Of folly repented,
Then sweet is my lot.

From your trying daughter,

Louy.

My dear Louisa,–Your note gave me so much delight that I cannot close my eyes without first thanking you, dear, for making me so happy, and blessing God who gave you this tender love for your mother.

I have observed all day your patience with baby, your obedience to me, and your kindness to all.

Go on "trying," my child; God will give you strength and courage, and help you fill each day with words and deeds of love. I shall lay this on your pillow, put a warm kiss on your lips, and say a little prayer over you in your sleep.
Mother.

My Louy,–I was grieved at your selfish behavior this morning, but also greatly pleased to find you bore so meekly Father's reproof for it. That is the way, dear; if you find you are wrong, take the discipline sweetly, and do so no more. It is not to be expected that children should always do right; but oh, how lovely to see a child penitent and patient when the passion is over.

I thought a little prayer as I looked at you, and said in my heart, "Dear God, sustain my child in this moment of trial, that no hasty word, no cruel look, no angry action may add to her fault." And you were helped. I know that you will have a happy

day after the storm and the gentle shower; keep quiet, read, walk, but do not talk much till all is peace again.
Mother.
Hillside, Concord.

Dear,–I am glad you put your heart in the right place; for I am sure all true strength comes from above. Continue to feel that God is *near* you, dear child, and He never will forsake you in a weak moment. Write me always when you feel that I can help you; for, though God is near, Mother never forgets you, and your refuge is her arms.

Patience, dear, will give us content, if nothing else. Be assured the little room you long for will come, if it is necessary to your peace and well-being. Till then try to be happy with the good things you have. They are many,–more perhaps than we deserve, after our frequent complaints and discontent.

Be cheerful, my Louy, and all will be gayer for your laugh, and all good and lovely things will be given to you when you deserve them.

I am a busy woman, but never can forget the calls of my children.
Mother.

Dearest,–I am sure you have lived very near to God *to-day*, you have been so good and happy. Let each day be like this, and life will become a sweet song for you and all who love you,–none so much as your
Mother.

Thirteen Years Old

Hillside.

March, 1846.– I have at last got the little room I have wanted so long, and am very happy about it. It does me good to be alone, and Mother has made it very pretty and neat for me. My work-basket and desk are by the window, and my closet is full of dried herbs that smell very nice. The door that opens into the garden will be very pretty in summer, and I can run off to the woods when I like.

I have made a plan for my life, as I am in my teens and no more a child. I am old for my age, and don't care much for girl's things. People think I'm wild and queer; but Mother understands and helps me. I have not told any one about my plan; but I'm going to *be* good. I've made so many resolutions, and written sad notes, and cried over my sins, and it doesn't seem to do any good! Now I'm going to *work really*, for I feel a true desire to improve, and be a help and comfort, not a care and sorrow, to my dear mother.

Fifteen Years Old

Sunday, Oct. 9, 1847.– I have been reading to-day Bettine's correspondence with Goethe.

She calls herself a child, and writes about the lovely things she saw and heard, and felt and did. I liked it much.

> [First taste of Goethe. Three years later R. W. E. gave me "Wilhelm Meister," and from that day Goethe has been my chief idol.–L. M. A., 1885.]

The experiment at Fruitlands was (outwardly) an utter failure, and had exhausted Mr. Alcott's resources of mind, body, and estate. Louisa has not exaggerated the collapse which followed. But the brave, loving mother could not give way to despondency, for she had her young to care for. After a few days Mr. Alcott rose from his despair, and listened to her counsel. They lived a short time at Still River, and then returned to Concord; but not to the happy little cottage.

Mr. Alcott sought such work as he could find to do with his hands; but it was scanty and insufficient. Mrs. Alcott subdued her proud heart to the necessity of seeking help from friends. They had a few rooms in the house of a kind neighbor, who welcomed them to her house, in addition to her own large family; and there they struggled with the poverty which Louisa for the first time fully realized.

Yet her journal says little of the hardships they endured, but is full of her mental and moral struggles. It was characteristic of this family that they never were conquered by their surroundings. Mr. Alcott might retire into sad and silent musing, Mrs. Alcott's warm, quick temper, might burst out into flame, the children might be quarrelsome or noisy; but their ideal of life always remained high, fresh, and ennobling. Their souls always "knew their destiny divine," and believed that they would find fitting expression in life some time. "Chill penury" could not repress "their noble rage," nor freeze "the genial current" of their souls.

The children escaped from the privations of daily life into a world of romance, and in the plays in the old barn revelled in luxury and splendor. This dramatic tendency was very strong in Louisa, and she never outgrew it. It took various shapes and colors, and at one time threatened to dominate her life.

The education of the children was certainly desultory and insufficient; but it was inspiring, and brought out their powers. They learned to feel and to think justly, and to express their thoughts and feelings freely and forcibly, if they did not know well the rules of grammar and rhetoric. Mr. Alcott always loved the study of language, and became a master of it; while Mrs. Alcott had a rich and well-chosen vocabulary, gained from the intelligent companions of her youth and the best literature, which she read freely. Mr. Alcott made great use of the study of language in his teaching, and often employed the definition of a word to convey a lesson or a rebuke. The children were encouraged, and even required, to keep their journals regularly, and to write letters. Their efforts at poetry or the drama were not laughed at, but treasured by their parents as indications of progress. Mr. Alcott's records of his own theory and practice in the education of children are full of valuable suggestion, and much yet remains buried in his journals. The girls had full freedom to act out their natures, with little fear of ridicule or criticism. An innate sense of dignity and modesty kept them from abusing this liberty; and perhaps nowhere in the world could it have been more safely indulged than in the simple life of Concord, whose very atmosphere seemed then filled with a spiritual presence which made life free, pure, and serene.

Louisa gives this interesting anecdote of their life at that time:–

> People wondered at our frolics, but enjoyed them, and droll stories are still told of the adventures of those days. Mr. Emerson and Margaret Fuller were visiting my parents one afternoon, and the conversation having turned to the ever interesting subject of education, Miss Fuller said:–
>
> "Well, Mr. Alcott, you have been able to carry out your methods in your own family, and I should like to see your model children."
>
> She did in a few moments, for as the guests stood on the door-steps a wild uproar approached, and round the corner of the house came a wheelbarrow holding baby May arrayed as a queen; I was the horse, bitted and bridled, and driven by my

elder sister Anna; while Lizzie played dog, and barked as loud as her gentle voice permitted.

All were shouting and wild with fun, which, however, came to a sudden end as we espied the stately group before us; for my foot tripped, and down we all went in a laughing heap; while my mother put a climax to the joke by saying, with a dramatic wave of the hand,–

"Here are the model children, Miss Fuller."

They were undoubtedly very satisfactory to Miss Fuller, who partook largely of the educational views of that time, and who loved to tell anecdotes of this family. One of the sisters writes in her diary: "She *said* prayers; but I think my resolutions to be good are prayers."

In 1841 Colonel May, Mrs. Alcott's father, died and left her a small amount of property. Mrs. Alcott decided to purchase with this a house in Concord, and the addition of five hundred dollars from Mr. Emerson, who was always the good Providence of the family, enabled her in 1845 to buy the place in Concord known as Hillside. This house is on the road to Lexington, about one third of a mile from Mr. Emerson's home. It was afterward occupied by Mr. Hawthorne.

In this house the girlish life of Louisa was passed, which she has represented so fully in "Little Women," and of which she speaks in her journal as the happiest time of her life. Yet she was not unmindful of the anxiety of her parents; and the determined purpose to retrieve the fortunes of the family and to give to her mother the comfort and ease which she had never known in her married life became the constant motive of her conduct. It is in the light of this purpose alone that her character and her subsequent career can be fully understood. She naturally thought of teaching as her work, and had for a short time a little school in the barn for Mr. Emerson's children and others.

It was indeed a great comfort to be sure of the house over their heads, but there were still six mouths to be fed, six bodies to be clothed, and four young, eager minds to be educated. Concord offered very little opportunity for such work as either Mr. or Mrs. Alcott could do, and at last even the mother's brave heart broke down. She was painfully anxious about the support of her household. A friend passing through Concord called upon her, and Mrs. Alcott could not hide the traces of tears on her face. "Abby Alcott, what does this mean?" said the visitor, with determined kindness. The poor mother opened her heart to her friend, and told the story of their privations and sufferings.

"Come to Boston, and I will find you employment," said the friend.

The family removed to Boston in 1848, and Mrs. Alcott became a visitor to the poor in the employ of one or more benevolent societies, and finally kept an intelligence office. Her whole heart went into her work; and the children, as well as the mother, learned many valuable lessons from it. Her reports of her work are said to have been very interesting, and full of valuable suggestion.

Mr. Alcott began to hold conversations in West Street. He attracted a small circle of thoughtful men and women about him, who delighted in the height of his aspirations and the originality of his thoughts. It was congenial occupation for him, and thus added to the happiness of the family, though very little to its pecuniary resources. His price of admission was small, and he freely invited any one who would enjoy the meetings although unable to pay for them. He was a great and helpful influence to young minds. Besides the morally pure and spiritually elevated atmosphere of thought to which they were introduced by him, they found a great intellectual advantage in the acquaintance with ancient poets and philosophers, into whose life he had entered sympathetically. His peculiar theories of temperament and diet never failed to call out discussion and opposition. One of my earliest recollections of Louisa is on one of these occasions, when he was emphasizing his doctrine that a vegetable diet would produce unruffled sweetness of temper and disposition. I heard a voice behind me saying to her neighbor: "I don't know about that. I've never eaten any meat, and I'm awful cross and irritable very often."

On her fourteenth birthday her mother wrote her the following poem, with a present of a pen. It was a prophetic gift, and well used by the receiver.

Oh, may this pen your muse inspire,
When wrapt in pure poetic fire,
To write some sweet, some thrilling verse;
A song of love or sorrow's lay,
Or duty's clear but tedious way
In brighter hope rehearse.
Oh, let your strain be soft and high,
Of crosses here, of crowns beyond the sky;
Truth guide your pen, inspire your theme,
And from each note joy's music stream.

[Original, I think. I have tried to obey.–L. M. A., 1885.]

In a sketch written for a friend, Louisa gives this account of the parents' influence on the children:–

> When cautious friends asked mother how she dared to have such outcasts among her girls, she always answered, with an expression of confidence which did much to keep us safe, "I can trust my daughters, and this is the best way to teach them how to shun these sins and comfort these sorrows. They cannot escape the knowledge of them; better gain this under their father's roof and their mother's care, and so be protected by these experiences when their turn comes to face the world and its temptations." Once we carried our breakfast to a starving family; once lent our whole dinner to a neighbor suddenly taken unprepared by distinguished guests. Another time, one snowy Saturday night, when our wood was very low, a poor child came to beg a little, as the baby was sick and the father on a spree with all his wages. My mother hesitated at first, as we also had a baby. Very cold weather was upon us, and a Sunday to be got through before more wood could be had. My father said, "Give half our stock, and trust in Providence; the weather will moderate, or wood will come." Mother laughed, and answered in her cheery way, "Well, their need is greater than ours, and if our half gives out we can go to bed and tell stories." So a generous half went to the poor neighbor, and a little later in the eve, while the storm still raged and we were about to cover our fire to keep it, a knock came, and a farmer who usually supplied us appeared, saying anxiously, "I started for Boston with a load of wood, but it drifts so I want to go home. Wouldn't you like to have me drop the wood here; it would accommodate me, and you needn't hurry about paying for it." "Yes," said Father; and as the man went off he turned to Mother with a look that much impressed us children with his gifts as a seer, "Didn't I tell you wood would come if the weather did not moderate?" Mother's motto was "Hope, and keep busy," and one of her sayings, "Cast your bread upon the waters, and after many days it will come back buttered."

CHAPTER IV
THE SENTIMENTAL PERIOD

A SONG FROM THE SUDS

Queen of my tub, I merrily sing,
While the white foam rises high,
And sturdily wash, and rinse, and wring,
And fasten the clothes to dry;
Then out in the free fresh air they swing,
Under the sunny sky.

I wish we could wash from our hearts and our souls
The stains of the week away,
And let water and air by their magic make
Ourselves as pure as they;
Then on the earth there would be indeed
A glorious washing-day!

Along the path of a useful life
Will heart's-ease ever bloom;
The busy mind has no time to think
Of sorrow, or care, or gloom;
And anxious thoughts may be swept away
As we busily wield a broom.

I am glad a task to me is given
To labor at day by day;
For it brings me health, and strength, and hope,
And I cheerfully learn to say,–
"Head, you may think; heart, you may feel;
But hand, you shall work alway!"

THE period of free, happy childhood was necessarily short, and at about the age of fifteen Louisa Alcott began to feel the pressure of thoughts and duties which made life a more solemn matter. In spite of the overflowing fun which appears in her books, her nature was very serious, and she could not cast aside care lightly. So many varying tendencies existed in her character that she must have struggled with many doubts and questions before finding the true path. But she always kept the pole-star of right strictly in view, and never failed in truth to that duty which seemed to her nearest and most imperative. If she erred in judgment, she did not err in conscientious fidelity.

Her mother's rules for her guidance were–

Rule yourself.
Love your neighbor.
Do the duty which lies nearest you.

She never lost sight of these instructions.

I will introduce this period in her own words, as written later for the use of a friend.

> My romantic period began at fifteen, when I fell to writing poetry, keeping a heart-journal, and wandering by moonlight instead of sleeping quietly. About that time, in browsing over Mr. Emerson's library, I found Goethe's "Correspondence with a Child," and at once was fired with a desire to be a Bettine, making my father's friend my Goethe. So I wrote letters to him, but never sent them; sat in a tall cherry-tree at midnight, singing to the moon till the owls scared me to bed; left wild flowers on the doorstep of my "Master," and sung Mignon's song under his window in very bad German.
>
> Not till many years later did I tell *my* Goethe of this early romance and the part he played in it. He was much amused, and begged for his letters, kindly saying he felt honored to be so worshipped. The letters were burnt long ago, but Emerson remained my "Master" while he lived, doing more for me,–as for many another,–than he knew, by the simple beauty of his life, the truth and wisdom of his books, the example of a great, good man, untempted and unspoiled by the world which he made better while in it, and left richer and nobler when he went.
>
> The trials of life began about this time, and happy childhood ended. One of the most memorable days of my life is a certain gloomy November afternoon, when we had been holding a family council as to ways and means. In summer we lived much as the birds did, on our fruit and bread and milk; the sun was our fire, the sky our roof, and Nature's plenty made us forget that such a thing as poverty existed.

In 1850 she heads her diary "The Sentimental Period." She was then seventeen years old, but her diary gives no hint of the sentimental notions that often fill the heads of young girls at that period. The experiences of Jo with her charming young neighbor in "Little Women" do not represent hers at all.

One bit of romance was suggested by Goethe's "Correspondence with a Child." It may be difficult for readers of to-day to understand the fascination which this book exercised upon young minds of the last generation, yet it is certain that it led more than one young girl to form an ideal attachment to a man far older than herself, but full of nobility and intellectual greatness. Theodore Parker said of letters addressed to him by a young New Hampshire girl, "They are as good as Bettine's without the lies." This mingling of idealism and hero-worship was strongly characteristic of that transcendental period when women, having little solid education and less industrial employment, were full of noble aspirations and longings for fuller and freer life, which must find expression in some way.

The young woman of to-day, wearing waterproof and india-rubber boots, skating, driving, and bicycling, studying chemistry in the laboratory, exhibiting her pictures in open competition, adopting a profession without opposition, and living single without fear of reproach, has less time for fancies and more regard for facts.

Miss Alcott was safe in choosing her idol. Worship of Emerson could only refine and elevate her thoughts, and her intimate acquaintance with his beautiful home chastened her idolatry into pure reverent friendship which never failed her. She kept her worship to herself, and never sent him the letters in which she poured out the longings and raptures which filled her girlish heart.

Her diary, which was revised by herself in later years, tells the story of this period quite fully. The details may seem trifling, but they help to illustrate this important formative period of her life.

Journal

THE SENTIMENTAL PERIOD

Boston, *May, 1850.*– So long a time has passed since I kept a journal that I hardly know how to begin. Since coming to the city I don't seem to have thought much, for the bustle and dirt and change send all lovely images and restful feelings away. Among my hills and woods I had fine free times alone, and though my thoughts were silly, I daresay, they helped to keep me happy and good. I see now what Nature did for me, and my "romantic tastes," as people called that love of solitude and out-of-door life, taught me much.

This summer, like the last, we shall spend in a large house (Uncle May's, Atkinson Street), with many comforts about us which we shall enjoy, and in the autumn I hope I shall have something to show that the time has not been wasted. Seventeen years have I lived, and yet so little do I know, and so much remains to be done before I begin to be what I desire,–a truly good and useful woman.

In looking over our journals, Father says, "Anna's is about other people, Louisa's about herself." That is true, for I don't *talk* about myself; yet must always think of the wilful, moody girl I try to manage, and in my journal I write of her to see how she gets on. Anna is so good she need not take care of herself, and can enjoy other people. If I look in my glass, I try to keep down vanity about my long hair, my well-shaped head, and my good nose. In the street I try not to covet fine things. My quick tongue is always getting me into trouble, and my moodiness makes it hard to be cheerful when I think how poor we are, how much worry it is to live, and how many things I long to do I never can.

So every day is a battle, and I'm so tired I don't want to live; only it's cowardly to die till you have done something.

I can't talk to any one but Mother about my troubles, and she has so many now to bear I try not to add any more. I know God is always ready to hear, but heaven's so far away in the city, and I so heavy I can't fly up to find Him.

FAITH

Written in the diary

Oh, when the heart is full of fears
And the way seems dim to heaven,
When the sorrow and the care of years
Peace from the heart has driven,–
Then, through the mist of falling tears,
Look up and be forgiven.

Forgiven for the lack of faith

That made all dark to thee,
Let conscience o'er thy wayward soul
Have fullest mastery:
Hope on, fight on, and thou shalt win
A noble victory.

Though thou art weary and forlorn,
Let not thy heart's peace go;
Though the riches of this world are gone,
And thy lot is care and woe,
Faint not, but journey hourly on:
True wealth is not below.

Through all the darkness still look up:
Let virtue be thy guide;
Take thy draught from sorrow's cup,
Yet trustfully abide;
Let not temptation vanquish thee,
And the Father will provide.

[We had small-pox in the family this summer, caught from some poor immigrants whom mother took into our garden and fed one day. We girls had it lightly, but Father and Mother were very ill, and we had a curious time of exile, danger, and trouble. No doctors, and all got well.–L. M. A.]

July, 1850.–Anna is gone to L. after the varioloid. She is to help Mrs. – with her baby. I had to take A.'s school of twenty in Canton Street. I like it better than I thought, though it's very hard to be patient with the children sometimes. They seem happy, and learn fast; so I am encouraged, though at first it was very hard, and I missed Anna so much I used to cry over my dinner and be very blue. I guess this is the teaching I need; for as a *school-marm* I must behave myself and guard my tongue and temper carefully, and set an example of sweet manners.

I found one of mother's notes in my journal, so like those she used to write me when she had more time. It always encourages me; and I wish some one would write as helpfully to her, for she needs cheering up with all the care she has. I often think what a hard life she has had since she married,–so full of wandering and all sorts of worry! so different from her early easy days, the youngest and most petted of her family. I think she is a very brave, good woman; and my dream is to have a lovely, quiet home for her, with no debts or troubles to burden her. But I'm afraid she will be in heaven before I can do it. Anna, too, she is feeble and homesick, and I miss her dreadfully; for she is my conscience, always true and just and good. She must have a good time in a nice little home of her own some day, as we often plan. But waiting is so *hard*!

August, 1850.–School is hard work, and I feel as though I should like to run away from it. But my children get on; so I travel up every day, and do my best.

I get very little time to write or think; for my working days have begun, and when school is over Anna wants me; so I have no quiet. I think a little solitude every day is good for me. In the quiet I see my faults, and try to mend them; but, deary me, I don't get on at all.

> I used to imagine my mind a room in confusion, and I was to put it in order; so I swept out useless thoughts and dusted foolish fancies away, and furnished it with good resolutions and began again. But cobwebs get in. I'm not a good housekeeper, and never get my room in nice order. I once wrote a poem about it when I was fourteen, and called it "My Little Kingdom." It is still hard to rule it, and always will be I think.
>
> Reading Miss Bremer and Hawthorne. The "Scarlet Letter" is my favorite. Mother likes Miss B. better, as more wholesome. I fancy "lurid" things, if true and strong also.
>
> Anna wants to be an actress, and so do I. We could make plenty of money perhaps, and it is a very gay life. Mother says we are too young, and must wait. A. acts often splendidly. I like tragic plays, and shall be a Siddons if I can. We get up fine ones, and make harps, castles, armor, dresses, water-falls, and thunder, and have great fun.

It was at this period of her life that she was violently attacked by a mania for the stage, and the greater part of her leisure time was given to writing and enacting dramas. Her older sister, Anna, had the same taste, and assisted her in carrying out all her plans. A family of great talent with whom they were intimate joined with them, and their mother always allowed them to have all the private theatricals they wished to perform.

Some of these early plays are preserved in manuscripts as she wrote them. They are written in stilted, melodramatic style, full of highstrung sentiments of loyalty, honor and devotion, with the most improbable incidents and violent devices, and without a touch of common life or the slightest flavor of humor. The idea of self-sacrifice always comes into them; but they are thoroughly girlish. It is so that girls dream and feel before they know life at all. Their hearts are full of vague, restless longings, and they seek some vent for the repressed energies of their natures away from the prosaic realities of the present. While Louisa sat sewing the tedious seams of her daily task what a relief it was to let her imagination run riot among the wildest and most exciting scenes. Of course she had a "Bandit's Bride" among her plays. "The Captive of Castile; or, The Moorish Maiden's Vow," is preserved entire, and is a good specimen of these girlish efforts. It is full of surprises and concealments, and the denouement is as unnatural as could well be imagined. The dialogue is often bright and forcible, and the sentiments always lofty, and we have no doubt it seemed very grand to the youthful audience. It is taken from her reading, with no touch of her own life in it. This is not the same play described with such a ludicrous finale in "Little Women," although the heroine bears the same favorite name of Zara. Her own early amusement was, however, fully in her mind when she wrote that scene, which is true to fact.

A friend and relative of the family living in Roxbury, Dr. Windship, was much interested in the development of Louisa's dramatic talent. The girls always enjoyed delightful visits at his house. He tried to help the young dramatist to public success, and writes to her mother:–

> I have offered to Mr. Barry of the Boston Theatre Louisa's "Prima Donnas." He is very much pleased with it just as it is, and will bring it out this season in good style. He thinks it will have a fine run.

Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Wood consented to take the principal characters. But from some difficulty in the arrangements "The Rival Prima Donnas" was not produced. One great pleasure was gained, however, as Mr. Barry gave her a free pass to the theatre, which proved a source of constant refreshment and delight.

Of course Louisa was eager to go on to the stage herself. She had indeed extraordinary dramatic power, and could at any time quickly transform herself into Hamlet, and recite a scene with tragic effect. But the careful mother knew better than the girl the trials and dangers of the profession, and dissuaded her from it. She also knew how little such youthful facility of expression indicates the power

which will make a great actress. Louisa has reproduced her dramatic experience in "Work," which gives a picture faithful in spirit and in many of its details to this phase of her life. She here indicates a knowledge of her own limitation of talent. "Christie's gala" was a part quite after her own heart.

A farce, called "Nat Batchelor's Pleasure Trip; or, The Trials of a Good-natured Man," was brought out at the Howard Athenaeum. The papers of the day said of it: "It is a creditable first attempt at dramatic composition, and received frequent applause." Another critic says: "It proved a full success." This performance, however, took place in 1860,–a later period than that of which I am now speaking.

An incident which occurred at this representation probably suggested scenes which recur in "Work" and other of Miss Alcott's stories.

> Quite a hit was made by a little girl, a Miss Jones, who, having to speak but a few lines, spoke them so well that upon her exit she received the rare compliment of an enthusiastic recall from the audience, despite the fact that "some necessary question of the play was then to be considered." For the time being she certainly was the sensation of the piece.

Miss Alcott had in Dr. Windship a kind and judicious helper in her dramatic undertakings, with whom she kept up a correspondence under the names of Beaumont and Fletcher.

In 1851 Louisa had an experience which she has reproduced in her story called "How I Went Out to Service." Her mother's work among the poor of Boston led to her being applied to for employment, and at one time she kept a regular intelligence office. A gentleman came to her seeking a companion for his aged father and sister, who was to do only light work, and to be treated with the greatest respect and kindness. As Mrs. Alcott did not readily think of any who would fill the place, the impulsive Louisa suggested, "Why couldn't I go, Mother?" She went, and had two months of disappointment and painful experience which she never forgot. She wrote out the story which was published later, called "How I Went Out to Service."

The story has an important lesson for those who condemn severely young girls who prefer the more independent life of the factory or shop to what is considered the safety and comfort of service in families. If a girl like Louisa Alcott, belonging to a well-known, highly esteemed family, and herself commanding respect by her abilities and character, could be treated with such indignity by a family in which no one would have feared to place her, how much may not a poor unfriended girl be called upon to endure!

Journal

> 1851.–We went to a meeting, and heard splendid speaking from Phillips, Channing, and others. People were much excited, and cheered "Shadrack and liberty," groaned for "Webster and slavery," and made a great noise. I felt ready to do anything,–fight or work, hoot or cry,–and laid plans to free Simms. I shall be horribly ashamed of my country if this thing happens and the slave is taken back.
>
> [He was.–L. M. A.]
>
> 1852.–*High Street, Boston.*– After the small-pox summer, we went to a house in High Street. Mother opened an intelligence office, which grew out of her city missionary work and a desire to find places for good girls. It was not fit work for her, but it paid; and she always did what came to her in the way of duty or charity, and let pride, taste, and comfort suffer for love's sake.
>
> Anna and I taught; Lizzie was our little housekeeper,–our angel in a cellar kitchen; May went to school; father wrote and talked when he could get classes or conversations. Our poor little home had much love and happiness in it, and was a

shelter for lost girls, abused wives, friendless children, and weak or wicked men. Father and Mother had no money to give, but gave them time, sympathy, help; and if blessings would make them rich, they would be millionnaires. This is practical Christianity.

My first story was printed, and $5 paid for it. It was written in Concord when I was sixteen. Great rubbish! Read it aloud to sisters, and when they praised it, not knowing the author, I proudly announced her name.

Made a resolution to read fewer novels, and those only of the best. List of books I like:–

Carlyle's French Revolution and Miscellanies.
Hero and Hero-Worship.
Goethe's poems, plays, and novels.
Plutarch's Lives.
Madame Guion.
Paradise Lost and Comus.
Schiller's Plays.
Madame de Staël.
Bettine.
Louis XIV.
Jane Eyre.
Hypatia.
Philothea.
Uncle Tom's Cabin.
Emerson's Poems.

In "Little Women" (p. 174), she has told a story which has usually been supposed to represent her first success in literature; but she has transferred the incident from her sister to her own representative, Jo. It was the quiet Anna who had secretly written a story and fastened it inside of a newspaper. She read it to her mother and sisters, as described in the book, and was very much delighted with their approbation and astonishment.

1853.–In January I started a little school,–E. W., W. A., two L's, two H's,–about a dozen in our parlor. In May, when my school closed, I went to L. as second girl. I needed the change, could do the wash, and was glad to earn my $2 a week. Home in October with $34 for my wages. After two days' rest, began school again with ten children. Anna went to Syracuse to teach; Father to the West to try his luck,–so poor, so hopeful, so serene. God be with him! Mother had several boarders, and May got on well at school. Betty was still the home bird, and had a little romance with C.

Pleasant letters from Father and Anna. A hard year. Summer distasteful and lonely; winter tiresome with school and people I didn't like. I miss Anna, my one bosom friend and comforter.

1854.–*Pinckney Street.*– I have neglected my journal for months, so must write it up. School for me month after month. Mother busy with boarders and sewing. Father doing as well as a philosopher can in a money-loving world. Anna at S.

I earned a good deal by sewing in the evening when my day's work was done.

In February Father came home. Paid his way, but no more. A dramatic scene when he arrived in the night. We were waked by hearing the bell. Mother flew down, crying "My husband!" We rushed after, and five white figures embraced the half-frozen wanderer who came in hungry, tired, cold, and disappointed, but smiling

bravely and as serene as ever. We fed and warmed and brooded over him, longing to ask if he had made any money; but no one did till little May said, after he had told all the pleasant things, "Well, did people pay you?" Then, with a queer look, he opened his pocket-book and showed one dollar, saying with a smile that made our eyes fill, "Only that! My overcoat was stolen, and I had to buy a shawl. Many promises were not kept, and travelling is costly; but I have opened the way, and another year shall do better."

I shall never forget how beautifully Mother answered him, though the dear, hopeful soul had built much on his success; but with a beaming face she kissed him, saying, "I call that doing *very well*. Since you are safely home, dear, we don't ask anything more."

Anna and I choked down our tears, and took a little lesson in real love which we never forgot, nor the look that the tired man and the tender woman gave one another. It was half tragic and comic, for Father was very dirty and sleepy, and Mother in a big nightcap and funny old jacket.

[I began to see the strong contrasts and the fun and follies in every-day life about this time.–L. M. A.]

Anna came home in March. Kept our school all summer. I got "Flower Fables" ready to print.

Louisa also tried service with a relative in the country for a short time, but teaching, sewing, and writing were her principal occupations during this residence in Boston.

These seven years, from Louisa's sixteenth to her twenty-third year, might be called an apprenticeship to life. She tried various paths, and learned to know herself and the world about her, although she was not even yet certain of success in the way which finally opened before her and led her so successfully to the accomplishment of her life-purpose. She tried teaching, without satisfaction to herself or perhaps to others. The kind of education she had herself received fitted her admirably to understand and influence children, but not to carry on the routine of a school. Sewing was her resource when nothing else offered, but it is almost pitiful to think of her as confined to such work when great powers were lying dormant in her mind. Still, Margaret Fuller said that a year of enforced quiet in the country devoted mainly to sewing was very useful to her, since she reviewed and examined the treasures laid up in her memory; and doubtless Louisa Alcott thought out many a story which afterward delighted the world while her fingers busily plied the needle. Yet it was a great deliverance when she first found that the products of her brain would bring in the needed money for family support.

L. in Boston to A. in Syracuse

Thursday, 27th.

Dearest Nan,–I was so glad to hear from you, and hear that all were well.

I am grubbing away as usual, trying to get money enough to buy Mother a nice warm shawl. I have eleven dollars, all my own earnings,–five for a story, and four for the pile of sewing I did for the ladies of Dr. Gray's society, to give him as a present.

… I got a crimson ribbon for a bonnet for May, and I took my straw and fixed it nicely with some little duds I had. Her old one has haunted me all winter, and I want her to look neat. She is so graceful and pretty and loves beauty so much, it is hard for her to be poor and wear other people's ugly things. You and I have learned not to mind *much*; but when I think of her I long to dash out and buy the finest hat

the limited sum of ten dollars can procure. She says so sweetly in one of her letters: "It is hard sometimes to see other people have so many nice things and I so few; but I try not to be envious, but contented with my poor clothes, and cheerful about it." I hope the little dear will like the bonnet and the frills I made her and some bows I fixed over from bright ribbons L. W. threw away. I get half my rarities from her rag-bag, and she doesn't know her own rags when fixed over. I hope I shall live to see the dear child in silk and lace, with plenty of pictures and "bottles of cream," Europe, and all she longs for.

For our good little Betty, who is wearing all the old gowns we left, I shall soon be able to buy a new one, and send it with my blessing to the cheerful saint. She writes me the funniest notes, and tries to keep the old folks warm and make the lonely house in the snowbanks cosey and bright.

To Father I shall send new neckties and some paper; then he will be happy, and can keep on with the beloved diaries though the heavens fall.

Don't laugh at my plans; I'll carry them out, if I go to service to do it. Seeing so much money flying about, I long to honestly get a little and make my dear family more comfortable. I feel weak-minded when I think of all they need and the little I can do.

Now about you: Keep the money you have earned by so many tears and sacrifices, and clothe yourself; for it makes me mad to know that my good little lass is going round in shabby things, and being looked down upon by people who are not worthy to touch her patched shoes or the hem of her ragged old gowns. Make yourself tidy, and if any is left over send it to Mother; for there are always many things needed at home, though they won't tell us. I only wish I too by any amount of weeping and homesickness could earn as much. But my mite won't come amiss; and if tears can add to its value, I've shed my quart,–first, over the book not coming out; for that was a sad blow, and I waited so long it was dreadful when my castle in the air came tumbling about my ears. Pride made me laugh in public; but I wailed in private, and no one knew it. The folks at home think I rather enjoyed it, for I wrote a jolly letter. But my visit was spoiled; and now I'm digging away for dear life, that I may not have come entirely in vain. I didn't mean to groan about it; but my lass and I must tell some one our trials, and so it becomes easy to confide in one another. I never let Mother know how unhappy you were in S. till Uncle wrote.

My doings are not much this week. I sent a little tale to the "Gazette," and Clapp asked H. W. if five dollars would be enough. Cousin H. said yes, and gave it to me, with kind words and a nice parcel of paper, saying in his funny way, "Now, Lu, the door is open, go in and win." So I shall try to do it. Then cousin L. W. said Mr. B. had got my play, and told her that if Mrs. B. liked it as well, it must be clever, and if it didn't cost too much, he would bring it out by and by. Say nothing about it yet. Dr. W. tells me Mr. F. is very sick; so the farce cannot be acted yet. But the Doctor is set on its coming out, and we have fun about it. H. W. takes me often to the theatre when L. is done with me. I read to her all the p. m. often, as she is poorly, and in that way I pay my debt to them.

I'm writing another story for Clapp. I want more fives, and mean to have them too.

Uncle wrote that you were Dr. W.'s pet teacher, and every one loved you dearly. But if you are not well, don't stay. Come home, and be cuddled by your old *Lu.*

CHAPTER V
AUTHORSHIP

OUR ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

Sitting patient in the shadow
Till the blessed light shall come,
A serene and saintly presence
Sanctifies our troubled home.
Earthly joys and hopes and sorrows
Break like ripples on the strand
Of the deep and solemn river,
Where her willing feet now stand.

O my sister, passing from me
Out of human care and strife,
Leave me as a gift those virtues
Which have beautified your life.
Dear, bequeath me that great patience
Which has power to sustain
A cheerful, uncomplaining spirit
In its prison-house of pain.

Give me–for I need it sorely–
Of that courage, wise and sweet,
Which has made the path of duty
Green beneath your willing feet.
Give me that unselfish nature
That with charity divine
Can pardon wrong for love's dear sake,–
Meek heart, forgive me mine!

Thus our parting daily loseth
Something of its bitter pain,
And while learning this hard lesson
My great loss becomes my gain;
For the touch of grief will render
My wild nature more serene,
Give to life new aspirations,
A new trust in the unseen.

Henceforth safe across the river
I shall see forevermore
A beloved household spirit
Waiting for me on the shore;

Hope and faith, born of my sorrow,
Guardian angels shall become;
And the sister gone before me
By their hands shall lead me home.

WHEN only twenty-two years old Miss Alcott began her career of authorship by launching a little flower bark, which floated gaily on the stream. She had always written poems, plays, and stories for her own and her friends' pleasure, and now she gathered up some tales she had written for Mr. Emerson's daughter, and published them under the name of "Flower Fables." She received the small amount of thirty-two dollars for the book; but it gave her the great satisfaction of having earned it by work that she loved, and which she could do well. She began to have applications for stories from the papers; but as yet sewing and teaching paid better than writing. While she sewed her brain was busy with plans of poems, plays, and tales, which she made use of at a later period.

The following letter to her mother shows how closely she associated her with this early success:–

20 Pinckney Street, Boston, Dec. 25, 1854.
(With "Flower Fables,")

Dear Mother, – Into your Christmas stocking I have put my "first-born," knowing that you will accept it with all its faults (for grandmothers are always kind), and look upon it merely as an earnest of what I may yet do; for, with so much to cheer me on, I hope to pass in time from fairies and fables to men and realities.

Whatever beauty or poetry is to be found in my little book is owing to your interest in and encouragement of all my efforts from the first to the last; and if ever I do anything to be proud of, my greatest happiness will be that I can thank you for that, as I may do for all the good there is in me; and I shall be content to write if it gives you pleasure.

Jo is fussing about;
My lamp is going out.

To dear mother, with many kind wishes for a happy New Year and merry Christmas.

I am ever your loving daughter
Louy.

This letter shows that she had already begun to see that she must study not only fairies and fancies, but men and realities; and she now began to observe life, not in books, but as it went on around her. In the intense excitement of the anti-slavery struggles of that period she might well learn how full of dramatic situations and the elements of both tragedy and comedy real human life is. She says: "I began to see the strong contrasts and fun and frolic in every day life about this time." She also considered her reading, and tried to make it more thorough and profitable; and she did not "waste even *ink* on poems and fancies," but planned stories, that everything might help toward her great object of earning support for her family.

In June, 1855, Miss Alcott went to Walpole, N. H., where she had a free life among the hills for a few months. It must have been a great refreshment to her after the winter's work in the city. In July the family followed her thither, and occupied a small house. The country life and joy soon began to find expression, and she wrote a little story called "King Goldenrod," which she says "ought to be fresh and true," as written at that beautiful time and place. But this pleasant country life was for a short season only; and in chill November she set out for the city, with brave heart and scanty outfit,

to seek her fortune once more. While still continuing to sew as a means of livelihood, she began to try a great variety of literary ventures. She wrote notices of books for the papers, and at one time got five dollars for a story, besides twelve dollars for sewing. The following year the publishers began to find out the value of her work, and to call for more stories. Even her poems were accepted. Little Nell was then the favorite heroine of Dickens, and Louisa's poem on that subject was published in the "Courier." Although she at first enjoyed the beautiful scenery of Walpole, she found the dull little town did not offer her the opportunities for work that she needed; and leaving her family there, she came down to Boston to seek her fortune, and went to the well-known boarding-house of Mrs. David Reed on Chauncey Street. The happy home which she had here during the winter is represented as Mrs. Kirke's house in "Little Women," and Jo's garret is the sky-parlor in which she lived and wrote. She had a rich winter, hearing many of the finest lectures, and enjoying her free pass to the theatre. One of her greatest helps, however, was the friendship of Theodore Parker, who took great interest in her struggles, and wisely strengthened and encouraged her. She loved to go to his Sunday evening receptions, and sit quietly watching the varied company who collected there; and a word or pressure of the hand from her host was enough to cheer her for the whole week. She has gratefully recorded this influence in her sketch of Mr. Power in "Work;" but she has not given to that delineation the striking personality of her subject which we should have expected of her. She then perhaps looked up to him too much to take note of the rich elements of wit and humor in his nature, and has painted him wholly seriously, and with a colorless brush.

Journal

Twenty-two Years Old

Pinckney Street, Boston, *Jan.* 1, 1855.–The principal event of the winter is the appearance of my book "Flower Fables." An edition of sixteen hundred. It has sold very well, and people seem to like it. I feel quite proud that the little tales that I wrote for Ellen E. when I was sixteen should now bring money and fame.

I will put in some of the notices as "varieties." Mothers are always foolish over their first-born.

Miss Wealthy Stevens paid for the book, and I received $32.

[A pleasing contrast to the receipts of six months only in 1886, being $8000 for the sale of books, and no new one; but I was prouder over the $32 than the $8000.–L. M. A., 1886.]

April, 1855.–I am in the garret with my papers round me, and a pile of apples to eat while I write my journal, plan stories, and enjoy the patter of rain on the roof, in peace and quiet.

[Jo in the garret.–L. M. A.]

Being behindhand, as usual, I'll make note of the main events up to date, for I don't waste ink in poetry and pages of rubbish now. I've begun to *live*, and have no time for sentimental musing.

In October I began my school; Father talked, Mother looked after her boarders, and tried to help everybody. Anna was in Syracuse teaching Mrs. S–'s children.

My book came out; and people began to think that topsey-turvey Louisa would amount to something after all, since she could do so well as housemaid, teacher, seamstress, and story-teller. Perhaps she may.

In February I wrote a story for which C. paid $5, and asked for more.

In March I wrote a farce for W. Warren, and Dr. W. offered it to him; but W. W. was too busy.

Also began another tale, but found little time to work on it, with school, sewing, and house-work. My winter's earnings are,–

School, one quarter	$50
Sewing	$50
Stories	$20

if I am ever paid.

A busy and a pleasant winter, because, though hard at times, I do seem to be getting on a little; and that encourages me.

Have heard Lowell and Hedge lecture, acted in plays, and thanks to our rag-money and good cousin H., have been to the theatre several times,–always my great joy.

Summer plans are yet unsettled. Father wants to go to England: not a wise idea, I think. We shall probably stay here, and A. and I go into the country as governesses. It's a queer way to live, but dramatic, and I rather like it; for we never know what is to come next. We are real "Micawbers," and always "ready for a spring."

I have planned another Christmas book, and hope to be able to write it.

1855.–Cousin L. W. asks me to pass the summer at Walpole with her. If I can get no teaching, I shall go; for I long for the hills, and can write my fairy tales there.

I delivered my burlesque lecture on "Woman, and Her Position; by Oronthy Bluggage," last evening at Deacon G.'s. Had a merry time, and was asked by Mr. W. to do it at H. for money. Read "Hamlet" at our club,–my favorite play. Saw Mrs. W. H. Smith about the farce; says she will do it at her benefit.

May.– Father went to C. to talk with Mr. Emerson about the England trip. I am to go to Walpole. I have made my own gowns, and had money enough to fit up the girls. So glad to be independent.

[I wonder if $40 fitted up the whole family. Perhaps so, as my wardrobe was made up of old clothes from cousins and friends.–L. M. A.]

Walpole, N. H., *June, 1855*.–Pleasant journey and a kind welcome. Lovely place, high among the hills. So glad to run and skip in the woods and up the splendid ravine. Shall write here, I know.

Helped cousin L. in her garden; and the smell of the fresh earth and the touch of green leaves did me good.

Mr. T. came and praised my first book, so I felt much inspired to go and do another. I remember him at Scituate years ago, when he was a young ship-builder and I a curly-haired hoyden of five or six.

Up at five, and had a lovely run in the ravine, seeing the woods wake. Planned a little tale which ought to be fresh and true, as it came at that hour and place,–"King Goldenrod." Have lively days,–writing in a. m., driving in p. m., and fun in eve. My visit is doing me much good.

July, 1855.– Read "Hyperion." On the 16th the family came to live in Mr. W.'s house rent free. No better plan offered, and we were all tired of the city. Here Father can have a garden; Mother can rest and be near her good niece; the children have freedom and fine air; and A. and I can go from here to our teaching, wherever it may be.

Busy and happy times as we settle in the little house in the lane near by my dear ravine,–plays, picnics, pleasant people, and good neighbors. Fanny Kemble came up, Mrs. Kirkland and others, and Dr. Bellows is the gayest of the gay. We acted the "Jacobite," "Rivals," and "Bonnycastles," to an audience of a hundred, and were noticed in the Boston papers. H. T. was our manager, and Dr. B., D. D., our dramatic director. Anna was the star, her acting being really very fine. I did "Mrs. Malaprop," "Widow Pottle," and the old ladies.

Finished fairy book in September. Anna had an offer from Dr. Wilbur of Syracuse to teach at the great idiot asylum. She disliked it, but decided to go. Poor dear! so beauty-loving, timid, and tender. It is a hard trial; but she is so self-sacrificing she tries to like it because it is duty.

October.– A. to Syracuse. May illustrated my book, and tales called "Christmas Elves." Better than "Flower Fables." Now I must try to sell it.

[Innocent Louisa, to think that a Christmas book could be sold in October.–L. M. A.]

November.– Decided to seek my fortune; so, with my little trunk of home-made clothes, $20 earned by stories sent to the "Gazette," and my MSS., I set forth with Mother's blessing one rainy day in the dullest month in the year.

[My birth-month; always to be a memorable one.–L. M. A.]

Found it too late to do anything with the book, so put it away and tried for teaching, sewing, or any honest work. Won't go home to sit idle while I have a head and pair of hands.

December.– H. and L. W. very kind, and my dear cousins the Sewalls take me in. I sew for Mollie and others, and write stories. C. gave me books to notice. Heard Thackeray. Anxious times; Anna very home-sick. Walpole very cold and dull now the summer butterflies have gone. Got $5 for a tale and $12 for sewing; sent home a Christmas-box to cheer the dear souls in the snow-banks.

January, 1856.– C. paid $6 for "A Sister's Trial," gave me more books to notice, and wants more tales.

[Should think he would at that price.–L. M. A.]

Sewed for L. W. Sewall and others. Mr. J. M. Field took my farce to Mobile to bring out; Mr. Barry of the Boston Theatre has the play.

Heard Curtis lecture. Began a book for summer,–"Beach Bubbles." Mr. F. of the "Courier" printed a poem of mine on "Little Nell." Got $10 for "Bertha," and saw great yellow placards stuck up announcing it. Acted at the W.'s.

March.– Got $10 for "Genevieve." Prices go up, as people like the tales and ask who wrote them. Finished "Twelve Bubbles." Sewed a great deal, and got very tired; one job for Mr. G. of a dozen pillow-cases, one dozen sheets, six fine cambric neckties, and two dozen handkerchiefs, at which I had to work all one night to get them done, as they were a gift to him. I got only $4.

Sewing won't make my fortune; but I can plan my stories while I work, and then scribble 'em down on Sundays.

Poem on "Little Paul;" Curtis's lecture on "Dickens" made it go well. Hear Emerson on "England."

May.– Anna came on her way home, sick and worn out; the work was too much for her. We had some happy days visiting about. Could not dispose of B. B. in book form, but C. took them for his paper. Mr. Field died, so the farce fell through there. Altered the play for Mrs. Barrow to bring out next winter.

June, 1856.– Home, to find dear Betty very ill with scarlet-fever caught from some poor children Mother nursed when they fell sick, living over a cellar where pigs had been kept. The landlord (a deacon) would not clean the place till Mother threatened to sue him for allowing a nuisance. Too late to save two of the poor babies or Lizzie and May from the fever.

[L. never recovered, but died of it two years later.–L. M. A.]

An anxious time. I nursed, did house-work, and wrote a story a month through the summer.

Dr. Bellows and Father had Sunday eve conversations.

October.– Pleasant letters from Father, who went on a tour to N. Y., Philadelphia, and Boston.

Made plans to go to Boston for the winter, as there is nothing to do here, and there I can support myself and help the family. C. offers 10 dollars a month, and perhaps more. L. W., M. S., and others, have plenty of sewing; the play *may* come out, and Mrs. R. will give me a sky-parlor for $3 a week, with fire and board. I sew for her also.

If I can get A. L. to governess I shall be all right.

I was born with a boy's spirit under my bib and tucker. I *can't wait* when I *can work*; so I took my little talent in my hand and forced the world again, braver than before and wiser for my failures.

[Jo in N. Y.–L. M. A.]

I don't often pray in words; but when I set out that day with all my worldly goods in the little old trunk, my own earnings ($25) in my pocket, and much hope and resolution in my soul, my heart was very full, and I said to the Lord, "Help us all, and keep us for one another," as I never said it before, while I looked back at the dear faces watching me, so full of love and hope and faith.

Journal

Boston, *November, 1856. Mrs. David Reed's.*– I find my little room up in the attic very cosey, and a house full of boarders very amusing to study. Mrs. Reed very kind. Fly round and take C. his stories. Go to see Mrs. L. about A. Don't want me. A blow, but I cheer up and hunt for sewing. Go to hear Parker, and he does me good. Asks me to come Sunday evenings to his house. I did go there, and met Phillips, Garrison, Hedge, and other great men, and sit in my corner weekly, staring and enjoying myself.

When I went Mr. Parker said, "God bless you, Louisa; come again;" and the grasp of his hand gave me courage to face another anxious week.

November 3d.– Wrote all the morning. In the p. m. went to see the Sumner reception as he comes home after the Brooks affair. I saw him pass up Beacon Street, pale and feeble, but smiling and bowing. I rushed to Hancock Street, and was in time to see him bring his proud old mother to the window when the crowd gave three cheers for her. I cheered too, and was very much excited. Mr. Parker met him somewhere before the ceremony began, and the above P. cheered like a boy; and Sumner laughed and nodded as his friend pranced and shouted, bareheaded and beaming.

My kind cousin, L. W., got tickets for a course of lectures on "Italian Literature," and seeing my old cloak sent me a new one, with other needful and

pretty things such as girls love to have. I shall never forget how kind she has always been to me.

November 5th.– Went with H. W. to see Manager Barry about the everlasting play which is always coming out but never comes. We went all over the great new theatre, and I danced a jig on the immense stage. Mr. B. was very kind, and gave me a pass to come whenever I liked. This was such richness I didn't care if the play was burnt on the spot, and went home full of joy. In the eve I saw La Grange as Norma, and felt as if I knew all about that place. Quite stage-struck, and imagined myself in her place, with white robes and oak-leaf crown.

November 6th.– Sewed happily on my job of twelve sheets for H. W., and put lots of good will into the work after his kindness to me.

Walked to Roxbury to see cousin Dr. W. about the play and tell the fine news. Rode home in the new cars, and found them very nice.

In the eve went to teach at Warren Street Chapel Charity School. I'll help as I am helped, if I can. Mother says no one so poor he can't do a little for some one poorer yet.

Sunday.– Heard Parker on "Individuality of Character," and liked it much. In the eve I went to his house. Mrs. Howe was there, and Sumner and others. I sat in my usual corner, but Mr. P. came up and said, in that cordial way of his, "Well, child, how goes it?" "Pretty well, sir." "That's brave;" and with his warm hand-shake he went on, leaving me both proud and happy, though I have my trials. He is like a great fire where all can come and be warmed and comforted. Bless him!

Had a talk at tea about him, and fought for him when W. R. said he was not a Christian. He is my *sort*; for though he may lack reverence for other people's God, he works bravely for his own, and turns his back on no one who needs help, as some of the pious do.

Monday, 14th.– May came full of expectation and joy to visit good aunt B. and study drawing. We walked about and had a good home talk, then my girl went off to Auntie's to begin what I hope will be a pleasant and profitable winter. She needs help to develop her talent, and I can't give it to her.

Went to see Forrest as Othello. It is funny to see how attentive all the once cool gentlemen are to Miss Alcott now she has a pass to the new theatre.

November 29th.– My birthday. Felt forlorn so far from home. Wrote all day. Seem to be getting on slowly, so should be contented. To a little party at the B.'s in the eve. May looked very pretty, and seemed to be a favorite. The boys teased me about being an authoress, and I said I'd be famous yet. Will if I can, but something else may be better for me.

Found a pretty pin from Father and a nice letter when I got home. Mr. H. brought them with letters from Mother and Betty, so I went to bed happy.

December.– Busy with Christmas and New Year's tales. Heard a good lecture by E. P. Whipple on "Courage." Thought I needed it, being rather tired of living like a spider;–spinning my brains out for money.

Wrote a story, "The Cross on the Church Tower," suggested by the tower before my window.

Called on Mrs. L., and she asked me to come and teach A. for three hours each day. Just what I wanted; and the children's welcome was very pretty and comforting to "Our Olly," as they call me.

Now board is all safe, and something over for home, if stories and sewing fail. I don't do much, but can send little comforts to Mother and Betty, and keep May neat.

December 18th.– Begin with A. L., in Beacon Street. I taught C. when we lived in High Street, A. in Pinckney Street, and now Al.; so I seem to be an institution and a success, since I can start the boy, teach one girl, and take care of the little invalid. It is hard work, but I can do it; and am glad to sit in a large, fine room part of each day, after my sky-parlor, which has nothing pretty in it, and only the gray tower and blue sky outside as I sit at the window writing. I love luxury, but freedom and independence better.

To her Father, written from Mrs. Reed's

Boston, Nov. 29, 1856.

Dearest Father,–Your little parcel was very welcome to me as I sat alone in my room, with snow falling fast outside, and a few tears in (for birthdays are dismal times to me); and the fine letter, the pretty gift, and, most of all, the loving thought so kindly taken for your old absent daughter, made the cold, dark day as warm and bright as summer to me.

And now, with the birthday pin upon my bosom, many thanks on my lips, and a whole heart full of love for its giver, I will tell you a little about my doings, stupid as they will seem after your own grand proceedings. How I wish I could be with you, enjoying what I have always longed for,–fine people, fine amusements, and fine books. But as I can't, I am glad you are; for I love to see your name first among the lecturers, to hear it kindly spoken of in papers and inquired about by good people here,–to say nothing of the delight and pride I take in seeing you at last filling the place you are so fitted for, and which you have waited for so long and patiently. If the New Yorkers raise a statue to the modern Plato, it will be a wise and highly creditable action.

I am very well and very happy. Things go smoothly, and I think I shall come out right, and prove that though an *Alcott* I *can* support myself. I like the independent feeling; and though not an easy life, it is a free one, and I enjoy it. I can't do much with my hands; so I will make a battering-ram of my head and make a way through this rough-and-tumble world. I have very pleasant lectures to amuse my evenings,–Professor Gajani on "Italian Reformers," the Mercantile Library course, Whipple, Beecher, and others, and, best of all, a free pass at the Boston Theatre. I saw Mr. Barry, and he gave it to me with many kind speeches, and promises to bring out the play very soon. I hope he will.

My farce is in the hands of Mrs. W. H. Smith, who acts at Laura Keene's theatre in New York. She took it, saying she would bring it out there. If you see or hear anything about it, let me know. I want something doing. My mornings are spent in writing. C. takes one a month, and I am to see Mr. B., who may take some of my wares.

In the afternoons I walk and visit my hundred relations, who are all kind and friendly, and seem interested in our various successes.

Sunday evenings I go to Parker's parlor, and there meet Phillips, Garrison, Scherb, Sanborn, and many other pleasant people. All talk, and I sit in a corner listening, and wishing a certain placid gray-haired gentleman was there talking too. Mrs. Parker calls on me, reads my stories, and is very good to me. Theodore asks

Louisa "how her worthy parents do," and is otherwise very friendly to the large, bashful girl who adorns his parlor steadily.

Abby is preparing for a busy and, I hope, a profitable winter. She has music lessons already, French and drawing in store, and, if her eyes hold out, will keep her word and become what none of us can be, "an accomplished Alcott." Now, dear Father, I shall hope to hear from you occasionally, and will gladly answer all epistles from the Plato whose parlor parish is becoming quite famous. I got the "Tribune," but not the letter, and shall look it up. I have been meaning to write, but did not know where you were.

Good-by, and a happy birthday from your ever loving child,
Louisa.

Journal

Twenty-four Years Old

January, 1857.– Had my first new silk dress from good little L. W.,–very fine; and I felt as if all the Hancocks and Quincys beheld me as I went to two parties in it on New Year's eve.

A busy, happy month,–taught, wrote, sewed, read aloud to the "little mother," and went often to the theatre; heard good lectures; and enjoyed my Parker evenings very much.

Father came to see me on his way home; little money; had had a good time, and was asked to come again. Why don't rich people who enjoy his talk pay for it? Philosophers are always poor, and too modest to pass round their own hats.

Sent by him a good bundle to the poor Forlornites among the ten-foot drifts in W.

February.– Ran home as a valentine on the 14th.

March.– Have several irons in the fire now, and try to keep 'em all hot.

April.– May did a crayon head of Mother with Mrs. Murdock; very good likeness. All of us as proud as peacocks of our "little Raphael."

Heard Mrs. Butler read; very fine.

May.– Left the L.'s with my thirty-three dollars, glad to rest. May went home with her picture, happy in her winter's work and success.

Father had three talks at W. F. Channing's. Good company,–Emerson, Mrs. Howe, and the rest.

Saw young Booth in Brutus, and liked him better than his father; went about and rested after my labors; glad to be with Father, who enjoyed Boston and friends.

Home on the 10th, passing Sunday at the Emerson's. I have done what I planned,–supported myself, written eight stories, taught four months, earned a hundred dollars, and sent money home.

June.– All happy together. My dear Nan was with me, and we had good times. Betty was feeble, but seemed to cheer up for a time. The long, cold, lonely winter has been too hard for the frail creature, and we are all anxious about her. I fear she may slip away; for she never seemed to care much for this world beyond home.

So gradually the day seemed to be coming to which Louisa had long looked forward. She found that she could be independent, could help her family, and even indulge some of her own tastes.

About this time Miss Alcott mentions a young friend who died in her arms, and speaks of going to console the sister in her loneliness. This shows how warmly her heart beat for others while her head was so busy with her ambitious plans. She speaks also of the hint of a new story called "The Cost of an Idea." She never lost sight of this plan, but did not carry it out. Her father's life and character were in her mind, and she longed to portray the conflict between his high ideal and the practical difficulties of his life; but it was an impossible subject. The Fruitlands episode was told in "Transcendental Wild Oats," and his early life in "Elis's Education." But although her admiration and affection for him are abundantly shown in her journals, she never perhaps understood him so thoroughly that she could adequately portray his personality; neither could she do justice to all related to him without trenching upon the privacy due to sacred feelings.

A great shadow fell over Louisa's heart and life from the increasing illness of her dear younger sister Elizabeth. This young girl was tenderly beloved by all the family, and was indeed as pure, refined, and holy as she is represented as Beth in "Little Women." Her decay was very gradual, and she was so patient and sweet that the sad time of anxiety was a very precious one in remembrance.

This sickness added to the pecuniary burdens of the family, and eight years afterward Louisa paid the bill of the physician who attended her sister.

In October, 1857, the family removed again to Concord, and Louisa remained at home to assist in the care of the beloved invalid. They lived a few months in a part of a house which they hired until the Orchard House, which they had bought, was ready for them. Here the dear sister's life came to a close.

This was the first break in the household, and the mother's heart never fully recovered from it. Louisa accepted death with strong, sweet wisdom. It never seemed to have any terror for her.

In July they took possession of the Orchard House, which was hereafter the permanent residence of the family. This was a picturesque old house on the side of a hill, with an orchard of apple-trees. It was not far from Mr. Emerson's, and within walking distance of the village, yet very quiet and rural. Mr. Alcott had his library, and was always very happy there; but Louisa's heart never clung to it.

The engagement of the elder sister was a very exciting event to Louisa, who did not like having the old sisterly relation broken in upon; but everything was so genuine and true in the love of the newly betrothed pair that she could not help accepting the change as a blessing to her sister and taking the new brother into her heart. The entries in her journal show that the picture she has drawn in "Little Women" of this noble man is from life, and not exaggerated.

Louisa went to Boston for a visit, and again had hopes of going on to the stage; but an accident prevented it; and she returned to Concord and her writing, working off her disappointment in a story called "Only an Actress."

Among her experiences at this time was an offer of marriage, about which she consulted her mother, telling her that she did not care for the lover very much. The wise mother saved her from the impulse to self-sacrifice, which might have led her to accept a position which would have given help to the family.

Although this was not the only instance of offers of marriage, more or less advantageous, made to her, Louisa had no inclination toward matrimony. Her heart was bound up in her family, and she could hardly contemplate her own interests as separate from theirs. She loved activity, freedom, and independence. She could not cherish illusions tenderly; and she always said that she got tired of everybody, and felt sure that she should of her husband if she married. She never wished to make her heroines marry, and the love story is the part of her books for which she cared least. She yielded to the desire of the public, who will not accept life without a recognition of this great joy in it. Still it must be acknowledged that she has sometimes painted very sweet and natural love scenes, although more often in quaint and homely guise than in the fashion of ancient romance. "King of Clubs and Queen

of Hearts" is very prettily told; and "Mrs. Todger's Teapot" is true to that quiet, earnest affection which does not pass away with youth.

The writing went on, and she received five, six, or ten dollars apiece for her stories; but she did not yet venture to give up the sewing and teaching, which was still the sure reliance.

Her younger sister now began to exercise her talent, and illustrated a little book of Louisa's called "Christmas Elves," which she says is better than "Flower Fables."

Journal

Read Charlotte Bronté's life. A very interesting, but sad one. So full of talent; and after working long, just as success, love, and happiness come, she dies.

Wonder if I shall ever be famous enough for people to care to read my story and struggles. I can't be a C. B., but I may do a little something yet.

July.– Grandma Alcott came to visit us. A sweet old lady; and I am glad to know her, and see where Father got his nature. Eighty-four; yet very smart, industrious, and wise. A house needs a grandma in it.

As we sat talking over Father's boyhood, I never realized so plainly before how much he has done for himself. His early life sounded like a pretty old romance, and Mother added the love passages.

I got a hint for a story; and some day will do it, and call it "The Cost of an Idea." Spindle Hill, Temple School, Fruitlands, Boston, and Concord, would make fine chapters. The trials and triumphs of the Pathetic Family would make a capital book; may I live to do it.

August.– A sad, anxious month. Betty worse; Mother takes her to the seashore. Father decides to go back to Concord; he is never happy far from Emerson, the one true friend who loves and understands and helps him.

September.– An old house near R. W. E.'s is bought with Mother's money, and we propose to move. Mother in Boston with poor Betty, who is failing fast. Anna and I have a hard time breaking up.

October.– Move to Concord. Take half a house in town till spring, when the old one is to be made ready.

Find dear Betty a shadow, but sweet and patient always. Fit up a nice room for her, and hope home and love and care may keep her.

People kind and friendly, and the old place looks pleasant, though I never want to live in it.

November.– Father goes West, taking Grandma home. We settle down to our winter, whatever it is to be. Lizzie seems better, and we have some plays. Sanborn's school makes things lively, and we act a good deal.

Twenty-five this month. I feel my quarter of a century rather heavy on my shoulders just now. I lead two lives. One seems gay with plays, etc., the other very sad,–in Betty's room; for though she wishes us to act, and loves to see us get ready, the shadow is there, and Mother and I see it. Betty loves to have me with her; and I am with her at night, for Mother needs rest. Betty says she feels "strong" when I am near. So glad to be of use.

December.– Some fine plays for charity.

January, 1858.– Lizzie much worse; Dr. G. says there is no hope. A hard thing to hear; but if she is only to suffer, I pray she may go soon. She was glad to know she was to "get well," as she called it, and we tried to bear it bravely for her

sake. We gave up plays; Father came home; and Anna took the housekeeping, so that Mother and I could devote ourselves to her. Sad, quiet days in her room, and strange nights keeping up the fire and watching the dear little shadow try to wile away the long sleepless hours without troubling me. She sews, reads, sings softly, and lies looking at the fire,–so sweet and patient and so worn, my heart is broken to see the change. I wrote some lines one night on "Our Angel in the House."

[Jo and Beth.–L. M. A.]

February.– A mild month; Betty very comfortable, and we hope a little.

Dear Betty is slipping away, and every hour is too precious to waste, so I'll keep my lamentations over Nan's [affairs] till this duty is over.

Lizzie makes little things, and drops them out of windows to the school-children, smiling to see their surprise. In the night she tells me to be Mrs. Gamp, when I give her her lunch, and tries to be gay that I may keep up. Dear little saint! I shall be better all my life for these sad hours with you.

March 14th.– My dear Beth died at three this morning, after two years of patient pain. Last week she put her work away, saying the needle was "too heavy," and having given us her few possessions, made ready for the parting in her own simple, quiet way. For two days she suffered much, begging for ether, though its effect was gone. Tuesday she lay in Father's arms, and called us round her, smiling contentedly as she said, "All here!" I think she bid us good-by then, as she held our hands and kissed us tenderly. Saturday she slept, and at midnight became unconscious, quietly breathing her life away till three; then, with one last look of the beautiful eyes, she was gone.

A curious thing happened, and I will tell it here, for Dr. G. said it was a fact. A few moments after the last breath came, as Mother and I sat silently watching the shadow fall on the dear little face, I saw a light mist rise from the body, and float up and vanish in the air. Mother's eyes followed mine, and when I said, "What did you see?" she described the same light mist. Dr. G. said it was the life departing visibly.

For the last time we dressed her in her usual cap and gown, and laid her on her bed,–at rest at last. What she had suffered was seen in the face; for at twenty-three she looked like a woman of forty, so worn was she, and all her pretty hair gone.

On Monday Dr. Huntington read the Chapel service, and we sang her favorite hymn. Mr. Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Sanborn, and John Pratt, carried her out of the old home to the new one at Sleepy Hollow chosen by herself. So the first break comes, and I know what death means,–a liberator for her, a teacher for us.

April.– Came to occupy one wing of Hawthorne's house (once ours) while the new one was being repaired. Father, Mother, and I kept house together; May being in Boston, Anna at Pratt Farm, and, for the first time, Lizzie absent. I don't miss her as I expected to do, for she seems nearer and dearer than before; and I am glad to know she is safe from pain and age in some world where her innocent soul must be happy.

Death never seemed terrible to me, and now is beautiful; so I cannot fear it, but find it friendly and wonderful.

May.– A lonely month with all the girls gone, and Father and Mother absorbed in the old house, which I don't care about, not liking Concord.

On the 7th of April, Anna came walking in to tell us she was engaged to John Pratt; so another sister is gone. J. is a model son and brother,–a true man,–full of fine possibilities, but so modest one does not see it at once. He is handsome, healthy, and happy; just home from the West, and so full of love he is pleasant to look at.

I moaned in private over my great loss, and said I'd never forgive J. for taking Anna from me; but I shall if he makes her happy, and turn to little May for my comfort.

[Now that John is dead, I can truly say we all had cause to bless the day he came into the family; for we gained a son and brother, and Anna the best husband ever known.

For ten years he made her home a little heaven of love and peace; and when he died he left her the legacy of a beautiful life, and an honest name to his little sons.–L. M. A., 1873.]

June.– The girls came home, and I went to visit L. W. in Boston. Saw Charlotte Cushman, and had a stage-struck fit. Dr. W. asked Barry to let me act at his theatre, and he agreed. I was to do Widow Pottle, as the dress was a good disguise and I knew the part well. It was all a secret, and I had hopes of trying a new life; the old one being so changed now, I felt as if I must find interest in something absorbing. But Mr. B. broke his leg, so I had to give it up; and when it was known, the dear, respectable relations were horrified at the idea. I'll try again by-and-by, and see if I have the gift. Perhaps it is acting, not writing, I'm meant for. Nature must have a vent somehow.

July.– Went into the new house and began to settle. Father is happy; Mother glad to be at rest; Anna is in bliss with her gentle John; and May busy over her pictures. I have plans simmering, but must sweep and dust and wash my dish-pans a while longer till I see my way.

Worked off my stage fever in writing a story, and felt better; also a moral tale, and got twenty-five dollars, which pieced up our summer gowns and bonnets all round. The inside of my head can at least cover the outside.

August.– Much company to see the new house. All seem to be glad that the wandering family is anchored at last. We won't move again for twenty years if I can help it. The old people need an abiding place; and now that death and love have taken two of us away, I can, I hope, soon manage to care for the remaining four.

The weeklies will all take stories; and I can simmer novels while I do my housework, so see my way to a little money, and perhaps more by-and-by if I ever make a hit.

Probably owing to the excitement of grief for her sister's death, and sympathy in Anna's happy betrothal, Louisa became in October more discouraged than she had ever been, and went to Boston in search of work. As she walked over the mill dam the running stream brought the thought of the River of Death, which would end all troubles. It was but a momentary impulse, and the brave young heart rallied to the thought, "There is work for me, and I'll have it!" Her journal narrates how Mr. Parker helped her through this period of anxiety. She was all ready to go to Lancaster, to hard drudgery at sewing, when her old place as governess was again offered to her, and her own support was assured.

October.– Went to Boston on my usual hunt for employment, as I am not needed at home and seem to be the only bread-winner just now.

My fit of despair was soon over, for it seemed so cowardly to run away before the battle was over I couldn't do it. So I said firmly, "There *is* work for me, and I'll have it," and went home resolved to take Fate by the throat and shake a living out of her.

Sunday Mr. Parker preached a sermon on "Laborious Young Women." Just what I needed; for it said: "Trust your fellow-beings, and let them help you. Don't be too proud to ask, and accept the humblest work till you can find the task you want."

"I will," said I, and went to Mr. P.'s. He was out; but I told Mrs. P. my wants, and she kindly said Theodore and Hannah would be sure to have something for me. As I went home I met Mrs. L., who had not wanted me, as Alice went to school. She asked if I was engaged, and said A. did not do well, and she thought perhaps they would like me back. I was rejoiced, and went home feeling that the tide had begun to turn. Next day came Miss H. S. to offer me a place at the Girls' Reform School at Lancaster, to sew ten hours a day, make and mend. I said I'd go, as I could do anything with a needle; but added, if Mrs. L. wants me I'd rather do that.

"Of course you had. Take it if it comes, and if not, try my work." I promised and waited. That eve, when my bag was packed and all was ready for Lancaster, came a note from Mrs. L. offering the old salary and the old place. I sang for joy, and next day early posted off to Miss S. She was glad and shook hands, saying, "It was a test, my dear, and you stood it. When I told Mr. P. that you would go, he said, 'That is a true girl; Louisa will succeed.'"

I was very proud and happy; for these things are tests of character as well as courage, and I covet the respect of such true people as Mr. P. and Miss S.

So away to my little girl with a bright heart! for with tales, and sewing for Mary, which pays my board, there I am fixed for the winter and my cares over. Thank the Lord!

She now found publishers eager for her stories, and went on writing for them. She was encouraged by E. P. Whipple's praise of "Mark Field's Mistake," and by earning thirty dollars, most of which she sent home.

Journal

Earned thirty dollars; sent twenty home. Heard Curtis, Parker, Higginson, and Mrs. Dall lecture. See Booth's Hamlet, and my ideal done at last.

My twenty-sixth birthday on the 29th. Some sweet letters from home, and a ring of A.'s and J.'s hair as a peace-offering. A quiet day, with many thoughts and memories.

The past year has brought us the first death and betrothal,–two events that change my life. I can see that these experiences have taken a deep hold, and changed or developed me. Lizzie helps me spiritually, and a little success makes me more self-reliant. Now that Mother is too tired to be wearied with my moods, I have to manage them alone, and am learning that work of head and hand is my salvation when disappointment or weariness burden and darken my soul.

In my sorrow I think I instinctively came nearer to God, and found comfort in the knowledge that he was sure to help when nothing else could.

A great grief has taught me more than any minister, and when feeling most alone I find refuge in the Almighty Friend. If this is experiencing religion I have done it; but I think it is only the lesson one must learn as it comes, and I am glad to know it.

After my fit of despair I seem to be braver and more cheerful, and grub away with a good heart. Hope it will last, for I need all the courage and comfort I can get.

I feel as if I could write better now,–more truly of things I have felt and therefore *know*. I hope I shall yet do my great book, for that seems to be my work, and I am growing up to it. I even think of trying the "Atlantic." There 's ambition

for you! I'm sure some of the stories are very flat. If Mr. L. takes the one Father carried to him, I shall think I can do something.

December.– Father started on his tour West full of hope. Dear man! How happy he will be if people will only listen to and *pay* for his wisdom.

May came to B. and stayed with me while she took drawing lessons. Christmas at home. Write an Indian story.

January, 1859.–Send a parcel home to Marmee and Nan.

Mother very ill. Home to nurse her for a week. Wonder if I ought not to be a nurse, as I seem to have a gift for it. Lizzie, L. W., and Mother all say so; and I like it. If I couldn't write or act I'd try it. May yet. $21 from L.; $15 home.

Some day I'll do my best, and get well paid for it.

[$3,000 for a short serial in 1876. True prophet.–L. M. A.]

Wrote a sequel to "Mark Field." Had a queer time over it, getting up at night to write it, being too full to sleep.

March.– "Mark" was a success, and much praised. So I found the divine afflatus did descend. Busy life teaching, writing, sewing, getting all I can from lectures, books, and good people. Life is my college. May I graduate well, and earn some honors!

April.– May went home after a happy winter at the School of Design, where she did finely, and was pronounced full of promise. Mr. T. said good things of her, and we were very proud. No doubt now what she is to be, if we can only keep her along.

I went home also, being done with A., who went out of town early. Won't teach any more if I can help it; don't like it; and if I can get writing enough can do much better.

I have done more than I hoped. Supported myself, helped May, and sent something home. Not borrowed a penny, and had only five dollars given me. So my third campaign ends well.

May.– Took care of L. W., who was ill. Walked from C. to B. one day, twenty miles, in five hours, and went to a party in the evening. Not very tired. Well done for a vegetable production!

June.– Took two children to board and teach. A busy month, as Anna was in B.

September.– Great State Encampment here. Town full of soldiers, with military fuss and feathers. I like a camp, and long for a war, to see how it all seems. I can't fight, but I can nurse.

[Prophetic again.–L. M. A.]

October, 1859.–May did a fine copy of Emerson's Endymion[7] for me.

Mother sixty. God bless the dear, brave woman!

Good news of Parker in Florence,–my beloved minister and friend. To him and R. W. E. I owe much of my education. May I be a worthy pupil of such men!

November.– Hurrah! My story was accepted; and Lowell asked if it was not a translation from the German, it was so unlike most tales. I felt much set up, and my fifty dollars will be very happy money. People seem to think it a great thing to get into the "Atlantic;" but I've not been pegging away all these years in vain, and may yet have books and publishers and a fortune of my own. Success has gone to my head, and I wander a little. Twenty-seven years old, and very happy.

[7] A fine bas-relief owned by Mr. Emerson.

The Harper's Ferry tragedy makes this a memorable month. Glad I have lived to see the Antislavery movement and this last heroic act in it. Wish I could do my part in it.

December, 1859.–The execution of Saint John the Just took place on the second. A meeting at the hall, and all Concord was there. Emerson, Thoreau, Father, and Sanborn spoke, and all were full of reverence and admiration for the martyr.

I made some verses on it, and sent them to the "Liberator."

A sickness of Mrs. Alcott through which she nursed her makes Louisa question whether nursing is not her true vocation. She had an opportunity to try it later.

Much interest attaches to this period of Louisa's work, when she dashed off sensational stories as fast as they were wanted, from the account which she has given of it in "Little Women." She has concentrated into one short period there the work and the feelings of a much longer time. She certainly did let her fancy run riot in these tales, and they were as sensational as the penny papers desired. She had a passion for wild, adventurous life, and even for lurid passion and melodramatic action, which she could indulge to the utmost in these stories. Louisa was always a creature of moods; and it was a great relief to work off certain feelings by the safe vent of imaginary persons and scenes in a story. She had no one to guide or criticise her; and the fact that these gambols of fancy brought the much-needed money, and were, as she truly called them, "pot boilers," certainly did not discourage her from indulging in them. She is probably right in calling most of them "trash and rubbish," for she was yet an unformed girl, and had not studied herself or life very deeply; but her own severe condemnation of them in "Little Women" might give a false idea. The stories are never coarse or immoral. They give a lurid, unnatural picture of life, but sin is not made captivating or immorality attractive. There is often a severe moral enforced. They did not give poison to her readers, only over-seasoned unnatural food, which might destroy the relish for wholesome mental nourishment.

We are inclined to ask, What did Louisa herself get out of this wild, Walpurgis-Night ride among ghosts and goblins, letting her fancy run riot, and indulging every mood as it rose? Did it not give her the dash and freedom in writing which we find in all her books, a command of language, and a recognition of the glow and force of life? She finds life no mere commonplace drudgery, but full of great possibilities. Did it not also give her an interest in all the wild fancies and dreams of girls, all the longing for adventure of boys, and make her hopeful even of the veriest young scamps that they would work off the turbulent energies of youth safely if activities were wisely provided for them?

No writer for children ever was so fully recognized as understanding them. They never felt that she stood on a pinnacle of wisdom to censure them, but came right down into their midst to work and play with them, and at the same time to show them the path out of the tangled thickets, and to help them to see light in their gloomiest despair.

Yet she unquestionably recognized that she was not doing the best work of which she was capable; and she looked forward still to the books she was to write, as well as the fortune she was to make. She did not like any reference to these sensational stories in after life, although she sometimes re-used plots or incidents in them; and she was very unwilling to have them republished.

Boston Bulletin,–Ninth Issue

Sunday Eve, November, 1858.

My blessed Nan,–Having finished my story, I can refresh my soul by a scribble to you, though I have nothing to tell of much interest.

Mrs. L. is to pay me my "celery" each month, as she likes to settle all bills in that way; so yesterday she put $20.85 into my willing hands, and gave me Saturday

p. m. for a holiday. This unexpected $20, with the $10 for my story (if I get it) and $5 for sewing, will give me the immense sum of $35. I shall get a second-hand carpet for the little parlor, a bonnet for you, and some shoes and stockings for myself, as three times round the Common in cold weather conduces to chilblains, owing to stockings with a profusion of toe, but no heel, and shoes with plenty of heel, but a paucity of toe. The prejudices of society demand that my feet be covered in the houses of the rich and great; so I shall hose and shoe myself, and if any of my fortune is left, will invest it in the Alcott Sinking Fund, the Micawber R. R., and the Skimpole three per cents.

Tell me how much carpet you need, and T. S. will find me a good one. In December I shall have another $20; so let me know what is wanting, and don't live on "five pounds of rice and a couple of quarts of split peas" all winter, I beg.

How did you like "Mark Field's Mistake"? I don't know whether it is good or bad; but it will keep the pot boiling, and I ask no more. I wanted to go and see if "Hope's Treasures" was accepted, but was afeared. M. and H. both appeared; but one fell asleep, and the other forgot to remember; so I still wait like Patience on a hard chair, smiling at an inkstand. Miss K. asked me to go to see Booth for the last time on Saturday. Upon that ravishing thought I brooded all the week very merrily, and I danced, sang, and clashed my cymbals daily. Saturday a. m. Miss K. sent word she couldn't go, and from my pinnacle of joy I was precipitated into an abyss of woe. While in said abyss Mrs. L. put the $20 into my hands. That was a moment of awful trial. Every one of those dollars cried aloud, "What, ho! Come hither, and be happy!" But eight cold feet on a straw carpet marched to and fro so pathetically that I locked up the tempting fiend, and fell to sewing, as a Saturday treat!

But, lo! virtue was rewarded. Mrs. H. came flying in, and took me to the Museum to see "Gold" and "Lend Me Five Shillings." Warren, in an orange tie, red coat, white satin vest, and scarlet ribbons on his ankles, was the funniest creature you ever saw; and I laughed till I cried,–which was better for me than the melancholy Dane, I dare say.

I'm disgusted with this letter; for I always begin trying to be proper and neat; but my pen will not keep in order, and ink has a tendency to splash when used copiously and with rapidity. I have to be so moral and so dignified nowadays that the jocosity of my nature will gush out when it gets a chance, and the consequences are, as you see, rubbish. But you like it; so let's be merry while we may, for to-morrow is Monday, and the weekly grind begins again.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.